The Chance of A Future

by Interstella

Summary

“You risked daemon attacks and left the city in the middle of the night, to watch a sunrise?”
Cor questioned, looking at each of the boys in turn.

Noct all but threw himself in a waiting chair with a soft sigh. Prompto dragged another chair
close to the prince and sat beside him, Gladio copying the action. Ignis wandered to the
cooking area they had set up and began to get to work.

“When you hear our story, you'll understand.” Noct said quietly, looking into the dying
embers of the fire.

“So tell me your story.”

OR: After the events of the game, the Chocobro's wake up in the Citadel. Four years before
they left.

Rating has been changed for E for later chapters.
I'm back with another longfic. I'm going to be a little slower with this one (probably won't be updating every day this time - more likely twice a week).

The first chapter is super short since it's a prologue, but I'm currently looking for expressions of interest - should I continue? I wouldn't be surprised if this concept has been done before, to be honest.
“It's time.” Ignis' quiet voice pierced the silence of the camp, and three of his companions stood.

Together, the four of them stepped forward, leaving the camp behind to stand on the edge of the cliff, overlooking their beloved city. The night sky was beginning to brighten, stars disappearing in the paling blue. Beyond the walls of the city, a glow could be seen.

From the camp, Cor Leonis watched on in mild confusion as the four teenagers took their places. Prompto stood to Noct's right, Ignis to his left and Gladio stood behind, between Noct and Prompto. The Marshal watched as their arms wound around each other, Gladio's hands resting on Noct's and Prompto's shoulders.

“Isn't that a sight to see.” Ignis spoke again, voice solemn. The others agreed with soft sounds, and then silence fell again.

Sensing there was some sort of moment, Cor kept quiet, simply watching as the four boys took in the sunrise as if it was the first they'd ever seen.

“We waited ten years for this boys.” Prompto spoke this time, voice just as quiet, barely heard over the distance. The words simply added to the questions that Cor had.

Eventually, the sun was high enough in the sky that the prevailing colours of orange and red became a steady blue, and the four young men stepped away from the cliff's edge to rejoin him at the camp.

“You risked daemon attacks and left the city in the middle of the night, to watch a sunrise?” He questioned, looking at each of the boys in turn.

Noct all but threw himself in a waiting chair with a soft sigh. Prompto dragged another chair close to the prince and sat beside him, Gladio copying the action. Ignis wandered to the cooking area they had set up and began to get to work.

“When you hear our story, you'll understand.” Noct said quietly, looking into the dying embers of the fire.

“So tell me your story.” Sensing it would be a long one Cor leaned back in his chair, accepting the can of Ebony Ignis offered.

Noct nodded once, also taking a can. He opened it and took a sip with a grimace. “Our story starts in the year M.E. 756.”

With a frown, Cor pushed down his urge to remind the young prince that that year hadn't happened yet. Instead, he decided to listen to what he had to say before dragging them back home.

Noct spoke of an ordeal. A trip to a wedding that never happened. The fall of Insomnia, Altissia and then the rest of the world. His retinue spoke of ten years of darkness, and the eventual return of their king. He told him of the Revelation of Bahamut and his eventual death. But the story didn't end there.

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Arrival

Chapter Notes

I'm very sorry for the long delay in this one. I'm having a hard time medically at the moment, so I might be a little slower to post.

See end notes if you're curious about my medical stuff :)

Blue.
Purple?
Pink?

Prompto tried to make sense of what his eyes were telling him, but he was failing completely. Blinking rapidly, he tried to clear his vision, but the colours were still there, blinding in their brightness. All he could do was float, body not obeying even the most basic of commands.

He should have been afraid - he couldn't move, he was in a strange place - but he wasn't. He was oddly calm, heart beating steadily as he floated in the warm place he couldn't describe, listening to what sounded like the soft singing of thousands of souls.

It felt like an eternity before something changed. Slowly, the light began to lose its brightness and Prompto felt himself turn, feet coming to rest under him so he could stand on an invisible floor.

And then everything happened all at once. The brightness dulled to a sudden blackness and the floor under his feet disappeared. He was falling, he could feel it even if no air rushed by him. The fear started now, adrenaline thrumming through his veins as he let out a wordless cry, arms reaching above him to try to find something, *anything*, to hold on to to stop his fall. There was nothing.

His back hit the ground, not nearly as forceful as he'd been expecting. He'd fallen a long way, but his landing suggested only a few feet. His senses slowly began to come back online, and he heard a soft, familiar groan from beside him. Instantly alert, his eyes flashed open and he force his aching muscles to push him to his hands and knees.

He didn't pay any attention to his surroundings, eyes locked on to Noct and Noct only. The king was lay on the ground, his Royal Raiment rumpled and dirty and a small pool of blood growing under his chest. “Shit.”

Pushing himself forward with the energy that could only be found in the most dire of times, Prompto ignored his own pain in favour of reaching his king. “I got ya buddy.” He muttered, pulling an elixir from the armiger with shaking hands and cracking it above his friend. After a second, he turned the king in his arms, checking his chest for a wound. The shirt was gaping, but thankfully the skin underneath was quickly healing.

“I got ya.” He muttered again, only now realising just how much he was trembling.
The last thing he remembered, before the strange colourful place, was rushing into the throne room just in time to see Noct pierced with his father's blade and then... and then a flash of light and then the strange world of colours.

Still trembling, Prompto lifted Noct, pulling him onto his lap, cradling his head against his chest. “C'mon dude. Open your eyes.” His fingers scrambled to reach for the man's neck. Finding a steady pulse, Prompto felt his body sag as tension left.

Only now that he knew that Noct was alive (!alive!) could he take in the rest of the situation at hand. They seemed to be in a room with large arches and intricate stonework. Above and behind him, he could feel the warmth of the crystal and still hear the soft sound that emanated from it, but what caught his attention was the blade pointed at his throat. Really, he should've noticed that sooner, but his attention had been completely devoted to Noct.

Slowly, as non-threateningly as he could, Prompto gently put Noct back on the ground, lifting a leg to stand over him without rising. He'd just got his friend back, there was no way in hell he was letting him get hurt now.

Continuing his slow motions, Prompto put himself between the blade and Noct. He kept his eyes on the sword until he had accomplished his small mission, then he followed it up to it's wielder. Confusion flickered within him when he saw the uniform of the Glaive threatening him.

“Stand down.” He spoke, trying to keep his voice as authoritative as possible. The Glaives tended to listen to him when he spoke like that. He was known to be one of Noct's men, and though he didn't technically outrank any of them, the Glaives would usually follow his orders because of that. It had come in useful during times of emergency, when they didn't really have the time to work out the hierarchy.

But this one didn't. Possibly because Prompto's voice was higher than it should've been, even to his own ears. He didn't sound quite as in command as he'd hoped. It was a curiosity that Prompto put aside for now – he could think on it when there wasn't a blade at his throat.

“Identify yourself.” The Glaive ordered and again, Prompto frowned. There were very few Glaives who didn't know him or the rest of the retinue by sight. Over the last few years, it had simply became a thing that almost everybody knew who he was. He hadn't had to identify himself in a long time.

“Prompto Argentum.” He had hoped that his name would spark recognition in the Glaive, but no deal. The weapon pointed at his throat never once wavered, and Prompto was starting to get a bad feeling about the whole situation. Noct still wasn't waking up, and while he wasn't bleeding to death anymore, they really didn't have the time for this.

Cautiously he watched as the Glaive regarded him. He tensed when the man's eyes moved to look at Noct, gun in his hand before he even realised he'd summoned it. “Back off.” He ordered, bringing his weapon up. He used the barrel to push the blade aside, keeping both weapons to his right, still attempting to be somewhat non-threatening.

“Prompto!” A familiar voice called out from behind the Glaive, but Prompto didn't take his eyes from his apparent foe. He heard footsteps of at least two people, Ignis and Gladio if his ears could be believed.

“Guys!” He called, “Noct needs help!”
“Stand down!” Gladio’s voice rang out as he stepped beside the Glaive, eyes dark with warning. After only a moment of hesitation, the Glaive stepped back, banishing his sword.

Now that Gladio was here, Prompto turned his attention back to Noct. He could trust Gladio to stop the Glaive from hurting any of them. Even if for whatever reason they weren’t recognised as Noct’s retainers, Gladio would be recognised as the son of Clarus at the very least.

Ignis was crouched over Noct, hand pushing back the tear in the king’s clothing, eyes running over the exposed skin. There was an angry red line that was slowly fading to white as the magic from the elixir did its work, but that wasn’t what caught Prompto’s attention.

“Iggy... you can see?” He questioned breathlessly, eyes widening as he watched the advisor. Ignis nodded. “I have no idea what’s happening, but we seem to be in Insomnia.” He paused, closing Noct’s shirt and crushing another curative over him. “Before the fall.” He added, voice quiet, and when he looked up at Prompto, the blond finally noticed how young Ignis looked. A glance down at Noct confirmed that the king also looked to be in his mid to late teens, not the thirty year old he’d just seen impaled.

“Right.” That just brought up more questions, but they could wait for now. Right now, his first priority was Noct’s safety, closely followed by the safety of the rest of the team. “Right. Okay. Cool. We can figure that out later.” He muttered, looking down at their still unconscious leader. “Why isn’t he waking up?” He asked, voice trembling slightly. Noct was breathing, and the colour was slowly returning to his face, but he wasn’t waking. Usually their curatives could wake any of them up from the most severe of injuries, and seeing his friend remain unconscious filled Prompto with dread. Had they been too late? The wound was healing, and the king was breathing, but why wasn’t he waking up?

“I don’t know.” Ignis admitted, looking around. “I have a few theories, but I’m not qualified to say for sure.” He turned his head, looking up at where Gladio was still stood with the uncertain Glaive. “Gladio!” He called, catching the attention of his friend instantly. “We need to get him to a doctor.”

Gladio gave a nod and stepped forward, leaning down to lift Noct into his arms. Prompto stood with him, intending on following. Nothing was going to keep him from Noct’s side right now. They pushed past the confused Glaive as they followed Gladio to where a doctor would hopefully be.

Gladio placed the sleeping king on a bed as Ignis rushed off to find a doctor. It was apparently late, and there were very few people around, but within moments Noct’s bed was surrounded. Nurses checking his vitals, hooking him up to machines, readying an IV. It didn’t take long for a doctor to hurriedly arrive and Prompto found himself being pushed aside.
He resisted until Ignis took him by the shoulder and gently lead him a few steps away. “I recognise every one of them.” The chamberlain muttered to Prompto. “They can be trusted.” He added and Prompto gave a hesitant nod, stepping back and letting the medical professionals work. He kept his eyes on Noct though, making sure that he was close enough to rush to protect him if he had to. There were too many unknowns for him to feel comfortable letting his friend out of his sight.

Not when Noct had been so close to death.

The medical staff fussed around Noct for a long while before things began to quiet. The doctor approached Ignis first, a clipboard held in his hand. “Lord Scientia.” He greeted him, giving a small bow.

“How is he?” Ignis asked instantly, his entire attention on the doctor.

“He seems to be in a state of deep stasis.” The doctor answered, looking down at his clipboard, reading his own notes.

“Then why didn’t the elixir work?” Prompto asked, joining Ignis, close enough that their shoulders brushed. “I gave him an elixir. It healed his chest...” Had he accidentally used the wrong item? A hi-potion maybe? Prompto was fairly sure he’d used an elixir – it was second nature to him now to be able to pick the right item in a hurry – but it was always possible that he’d picked up the wrong thing.

The doctor gave him a look for a moment, as if wondering who he was and why he was there. If they really had travelled back in time, that would make sense. Looking at the others, Prompto would guess that he was around sixteen – which meant in this time he’d probably known Noct for less than a year. It'd taken him years to get entry to the citadel the last time around, and even then, he’d only been allowed in certain areas. Definitely not the medical wing.

“It's likely that the elixir stabilised him. If his injuries were severe, the magic may have focused on that first.” The doctor eventually answered and Prompto found himself nodding.

“Then another-” Prompto was interrupted by the doctor, who gave him a soft smile and a shake of his head.

“It's best to allow him to rest and regain his mana naturally.” He told the youngest Glaive. “If he hasn't regained consciousness in twelve hours, we'll try another.”

“Thanks doc.” Gladio muttered, his tone making it clear that if the doctor didn't need to be there, he should leave. Thankfully, the doctor seemed to understand and left with a soft goodbye to each of them, and another confused look at Prompto.

When he was gone, Gladio let out a heavy sigh. “What the hell is going on?” He questioned, moving to sit on one of the uncomfortable chairs scattered through the room.

“It would appear that we have somehow travelled back in time, to a point before we ever left for Altissia.” Ignis copied Gladio's reaction and also sat on a chair. Prompto decided to do the same and sat himself as close to Noct as he could while not interfering with any of the various machines the nurses had hooked him up to.

“Oh.” He nodded, still not entirely convinced. “How?”

There was silence for a moment before Ignis let out another sigh. “I don't know.” He admitted. “But
given the level of interference the Astrals have had in our lives previously, that seems as good of an explanation as any. Other hypothesises include dreams, illusions, and hallucinations, either of our current situation, or of what happened in the future.”

“I don't think this is a dream, dude.” Prompto muttered, leaning forward and finally giving in to the urge to hold Noct's hand. He felt better as soon as their skin connected – Noct's hand was warm and alive. “Feels too real, and there was definitely pain when I first got here.”

They fell into silence then, questions still aplenty, but answers sparse. Each man was beyond exhausted, the events of the last few hours catching up to them. Now, in what was apparently a safe space, their energy was quickly depleting. None of them felt like they could sleep, but they all knew to rest when they could.

Their rest, however, was interrupted. Less than fifteen minutes after the doctor had left, there was a commotion outside the room and the three men were instantly alert again. Weapons in hand with brilliant flashes of blue, the three stood and surrounded the bed of their prone king, ready to protect him from any threat.

But instead of a threat walking into the room, it was a man. A king to be precise.

“Noctis.” Regis let out in a soft breath, relief thick in his voice. He all but ignored the others, instead pushing past them to reach the bedside of his son, not even noticing the blue lights as the other three in the room banished their weapons.

“Noctis.” The king dropped himself in the chair Prompto had abandoned, reaching out to take his son's hand. After satisfying himself that Noct was really there, and alive, he turned to face the other three. “Ignis, Gladiolus, it's good to see you again.” He said, prompting the other two to give small bows. Next, the king turned to Prompto, a slight look of confusion on his face. “I'm sorry, I don't think I know you.”

“Prompto Argentum, Your Majesty.” Prompto copied the others and gave a bow, hoping that the king didn't ask him too many questions and simply saw him as a Glaive. His silent prayers seemed to be answered as Regis simply gave a small nod. “It's a pleasure to meet you.” He then turned his attention back to Ignis. “Where have you been?”

“Noctis.” Ignis questioned, confusion flickering over his features.

“The three of you have been missing for a month.” The king's words were met with wide eyes and confusion as the three members of Noct's retinue shared glances. That hadn't happened in the original timeline.

“It is... a rather long story.” Ignis adjusted his glasses, glancing away from Regis and down at the unconscious prince.

“We're gonna take Noct's lead on how much we share.” Gladio added, making it clear that the king wasn't going to get any answers until Noct was up and around.

For a moment, it looked like Regis would object, but he was distracted by the arrival of another person.

“Your Majesty,” The young nurse looked like she would rather be doing anything else than interrupting them, but it was obviously important enough for her to stay there, awkwardly shuffling
until the king stood. He looked down at his son once more and stepped aside, following the young woman out of the room.

Prompto returned to the seat that Regis had left and once again took Noct's hand. “C'mon buddy,” He muttered, “Now's not the time for napping.”

Once again, they fell silent, each watching their sleeping prince and dropping into a restless sleep one by one. It had been a long day.

It must have been a few hours later when Prompto was awoken. It took him a groggy moment to realise what had woken him. Noct's hand squeezed his again and Prompto was suddenly alert, his eyes wide as they flew to Noct's.

“Hey.” Noct smiled tiredly at him. “Good nap?”

“Noct!” Prompto's louder than necessary exclamation woke the others, but he didn't care. In one moment, he was sitting in a chair next to Noct, holding his hand, and in the next he was standing, leaning over the bed with an amused man in his arms. “Noct!”

To his dismay, Prompto found himself bursting into tears. The feelings and fear that he'd felt, the despair at seeing Noct so close to death, the worry that he'd never wake up again, it all came out at once, flowing out of him and soaking the front of Noct's grubby shirt.

But Noct didn't seem to mind. His arms wound around Prompto and he held him close, moving him slightly so the blond was sitting on the edge of the bed instead of leaning over it awkwardly. Prompto felt a hand around his waist and another on his head, gently stroking through his hair. He could feel the others in the room move, and he realised that Gladio was behind him, joining in on the group hug. On the other side of the bed, Ignis was also leaning close.

They were together. And alive.

“It's okay.” Noct muttered quietly, “I'm okay.” He seemed to be reassuring everybody in the room, himself included.

After a long few minutes, Prompto's tears finally stopped, but he didn't move away. None of them did. It felt surreal, having Noct there, breathing and talking, and Prompto was sure he wasn't the only one afraid that it was a dream that would dissipate the moment the embrace ended. But eventually, it had to end, and everybody pulled away – if only a little – to look at their king.

“Dude, I have no idea what the hell's going on, but it's good to have you back.” Prompto muttered, managing a shaky smile.

Noct's hand raised to rub the back of his neck and he let out a soft chuckle. “Uh, I think I know.” He told them. “It's... hard to explain?”

“The explanation can wait.” Ignis reassured Noct, taking his seat at his friend's bedside. “How are you feeling?”

“Exhausted.” Noct answered honestly, leaning back on the bed.

“Doc said you were in an advanced stasis.” Instead of moving back to his seat, Gladio took a spot on the bed behind Prompto, his hand resting on Noct's leg. Prompto moved only a little to allow him to
do so, refusing to leave his position completely.

“Sounds about right.” Noct muttered, taking a deep breath and closing his eyes briefly.

“We appear to have travelled back in time.” Ignis sighed, adjusting his glasses. When Noct's only response was a tired nod, the advisor frowned at him. “This doesn't surprise you?”

“No. Kinda my fault.”

“Right. Totally gonna have to chat about that when you're feeling better, buddy.” Prompto chuckled. It was definitely a relief to know that at least one of them had some sort of a clue as to what was going on. But like Ignis, he was content to wait for an answer now that he knew there was one coming. “Uh, maybe we should tell the king you're awake?” He suggested.

Noct's eyes opened and he blinked at Prompto in confusion for a moment before giving a soft nod. “Probably a good idea.”

“He said we've been missing for a month.” Ignis told Noct. “We were unable to give him any answers.”

Noct nodded, eyes closing again as exhaustion crept up on him. “I'll explain later.” He murmured, voice trailing off as he began to fall back to sleep.

“I will inform His Majesty.” Ignis stood and made his way out of the room.

As it became obvious that Noct's journey into the waking world was a temporary one, Gladio moved off the bed to retake his previous seat. When Prompto moved to do the same, Noct's hand caught his in a wordless request for him to stay put.

Prompto was never one to deny his king, so he simply adjusted his position to be more comfortable.

When Ignis returned, it was with the doctor in tow. “He woke up?” He questioned, and Prompto nodded.

“For a little bit.” He looked down at Noct, who was once again sleeping soundly. “Said he felt exhausted.”

The doctor nodded, as if that was expected and stepped forward. He looked over some of the machines and performed a few basic checks on Noct before stepping back. “Do any of you have another elixir?” He questioned and Prompto summoned one without question.

“I can give it to him now?” He asked, wanting to make sure. When the doctor nodded, Prompto was more than happy to oblige and crushed the magical vial over his friend.

“He should wake up again soon.” The doctor told him, “There doesn't seem to be anything else wrong with him, so I'm happy to have him recuperate in his own rooms, so long as you remain with him.” The words were said to Ignis and Gladio, but Prompto nodded too. There was no way he was leaving Noct's side.
Chapter End Notes

This fic had a lot of different ways it could go. One of my thoughts was that the Crystal seems to always dump people on Angelgard, so I was tempted to put them waking up there. BUT I had this scene in my head and I really wanted it to go this way, so it did.

There are a lot of contradictory things in my head, so I might end up writing AU's for my fic in a series - if people are interested in that.

Also - if you're anything like me, you might come up with a few headcannons for this mini universe, feel free to send them to me. If I like them, I might even put them in xD.

Now for the medical side - if you're curious. I have four chronic illnesses (all invisible x.x) that act up at times. These last few weeks, I've had one after another. Starting with my migraines, followed by my chronic fatigue, followed by my endometriosis, all the while my chronic pain was playing up. For the most part, I've had to take pretty heavy painkillers that caused brain fog. Which isn't a great thing when I want to write x.x. I've literally been sleeping 16-18 hours a day, all while looking for a job that can accommodate my disabilities. So not fun.

This is also the reason why my updates will be a little slower than my previous stories.
Answers

Chapter Notes

Early update because I can! Enjoy :)

TRIGGER WARNING: Panic attacks and flashbacks.

Noct’s personal suite in the citadel was huge. Prompto followed his friends inside with wide eyes as he looked around. The décor wasn’t unexpected – mostly blacks with a few reds – but for some reason, Prompto hadn’t expected it to be basically an apartment. There was a living room, kitchen, two bedrooms. Through the open bedroom doors, Prompto could see that each had their own bathroom. It was even bigger than the apartment Noct had lived in during high school.

“Dude.” Prompto turned to face the still exhausted Noct. “Why do you need two bathrooms?”

Noct chuckled and shrugged, taking his ruined jacket off and throwing it in the general direction of the couch. “You know... I never questioned it.”

Ignis – possibly on autopilot – gathered Noct’s discarded garment and deposited it in a small basket. “When the child of the monarchy reaches the age of five, they are given their own suite for life. The second room is to accommodate a nanny, and then later children that are too young for their own suit.” He told them as he headed towards the kitchen. He rummaged through the cupboards for a while and Prompto heard the click of an electric kettle. “I used to live here.” He added.

“That’s right.” Noct smiled, as if remembering an old memory.

“For real?” Prompto questioned, sitting on the couch and watching Ignis pour boiling water into four mugs. “Why’d you move out?”

“After Noct was injured in the Marllith attack, he needed more care than I could provide. A medically licensed nanny moved in.” The drinks were ready now, and Ignis expertly distributed them.

“I’m gonna take a shower.” Noct put his cup on the bench as he headed towards the bathroom. “Pretty sure we all need one.” He added. “You should still have stuff in the armiger.” And with that, he disappeared into one of the rooms.

Thanks to Noct’s words, Prompto realised just how much he smelled. He grimaced and stood.

“Do try not to take too long.” Ignis called after him. “King Regis will be here shortly.”

He was happy to find that the bathroom was fully stocked with fluffy towels and toiletries. The bathroom was larger than he expected – bigger than the one he’d had at his parents home, and definitely better than anything he’d used in the last ten years – with a large shower, separate bathtub, a toilet and a vanity with two sinks. When he reached into the shower and turned it on, it didn't take
long for it to heat up, and steam began to fill the room.

He was a little disappointed that he wouldn't be allowed to spend as long as he liked in the shower, but it seemed like there might be more opportunities later. As he stripped his jacket, two things became apparent. The first was the familiar ache in his over used muscles, and the other was the blood on his hands.

Noct's blood.

The sight caused Prompto's breath to hitch, and he couldn't take his eyes away. This was Noct's blood coating his hands. Noct's blood. Sticky, crimson against his pale skin. Spreading and oozing. More of it than there should have been. Wetter than it should have been.

His hands began to tremble, then fully shake, and even though Prompto didn't notice, the tremor spread to his whole body. The world around him ceased to exist, the bathroom fading away behind him.

Breath still caught in his throat, Prompto sank to his knees. His eyes were still locked onto his reddened hands, but they could no longer see them. Instead, all he could see was Noct on the throne, sword through his chest. Over and over, the moment repeated itself and he could do nothing but watch as Noct was impaled again and again and again and again. Those five seconds played on repeat behind his eyes as he gasped for breath, chest aching as if he was drowning in a vacuum.

Noct's name tried to get past his shaking lips, but he didn't have enough breath to let it out. He couldn't speak, couldn't move. Couldn't stop seeing the most horrific thing he'd ever witnessed. He tried to reach out, but his muscles were locked as if he was under the petrification status, stiff and unmovable. Again and again, he watched as Noct grunted, again and again the blade buried itself deep into his chest and embedding itself into the throne, unable to do move, to breathe to do anything to help the most important person in his life.

He didn't hear the door swing open, or the footsteps that rushed to him. He didn't hear the voice of his friend, calling out to him. When the hands grasped his shoulder, he finally managed to move. His eyes slowly moved from his hands to look up, eyes eventually focusing on Ignis' concerned face.

“It's okay.” He said quietly, “It's me, Iggy. You're safe. We're in Noct's rooms.” The hands on his shaking shoulders were warm and steady. The words seemed to take an age, but eventually they got through to Prompto. Slowly, wordlessly, he gave a shaky nod, exaggerating the movement enough for Ignis to be able to feel it through the hands on his shoulder and Ignis continued. “We're here. We're safe.” Ignis repeated.

This wasn't the first time that Ignis had talked Prompto through a flashback. The last ten years had been hell, and Ignis had become adept in helping.

“Can you hear me, Prompto?” Ignis questioned, voice calm and steady.

Again, Prompto managed a slightly aggressive nod, trying to push away the memories and concentrate on his friend. It helped that Ignis was asking questions. It helped keep the image away.

“Do you know where we are?” Ignis asked, never wavering and never moving his hands.

Again, Prompto nodded, now vaguely aware of his surroundings.
“Can you tell me?” The question was spoken kindly, a genuine question, not a demand.

“B-bath – Bathroom.” Speaking reminded Prompto of the feeling of breath stuck in his throat, and he tried to compensate, breathing shallower and faster, making sure that it would reach his lungs. His breathing was faster. Faster. More. He had to bring in more air. More.

“Prompto, you're hyperventilating.” Ignis' words brought Prompto's attention back to Ignis, who took Prompto's hand and gently guided it to his chest. “Feel how I'm breathing.” He counselled. “Can you breathe with me?”

After a moment, Prompto nodded, focusing on the feeling of his hand moving up and down as Ignis breathed, trying his damnedest to match his friend's breathing. “That's it.” Ignis congratulated, keeping the silence at bay. “You're doing great, Prompto. Keep going.” Slowly, Prompto's breathing slowed and deepened, and the dizziness began to recede. He listened to his friend's voice, still focusing on the movements beneath his fingers, but he refused to look down at his blood covered hand.

Eventually, he began to feel a lot better, the bathroom coming into focus. That was when he realised that Ignis was gently wiping his hands clean with a soft cloth. “Don't look down.” Ignis ordered softly. “They're nearly clean.”

Prompto nodded, feeling oddly numb – which he knew from experience was not a good thing. Ignis continued to talk to him, telling him that he was alright, that he was safe, and that they were in Noct's bathroom. He kept his eyes on Ignis’ face, not willing to look down at his hand until Ignis told him they were clean. Even then, he hesitated before looking at his freshly washed fingers.

Seeing no marks on his pale flesh made Prompto let out a relieved breath. “Thank you, Iggy.” His voice came out as a horse whisper, and he realised that he'd been crying. Ignis hid the blooded cloth and reached for another, awkwardly dipping it in the warm water in the basin behind him before gently wiping Prompto's face.

“Of course.” Ignis responded. “Are you feeling better?” He questioned, and again Prompto nodded.

“Yeah. I..” He gently shook his head, “C-can you get Noct?” He requested, feeling drained and exhausted. He needed to see his friend. Needed to see for himself that he was alright, that it was truly over.

“Of course.” Ignis hesitated for a moment, “I'm going to go and get him now.” His voice was still quiet, steady and calm. “I will be back in a few moments, with Noct. Will you be alright on your own.”

“Yeah. I-I'm good.” Even so, the idea of being alone was somewhat terrifying. But if it brought Noct to him, alive and well, it was worth it. For ten years, that was all he'd wanted, and now he could have it.

Ignis disappeared for what was probably only a few seconds, but felt like forever. When he returned, it was with a worried Noctis. The prince all but warped to his side, moving quickly enough to cause Prompto to flinch away.

As soon as he did that, Noct froze, looking down at his friend with lost hesitation. Unlike Ignis and Gladio, Noct hadn't been around many panicking people, and probably had no idea how to handle it. “Slow movements.” Ignis spoke quietly, “Just be calm.”
Noct nodded and crouched down so he was face to face with Prompto – who was still kneeling on the floor. “Prom?” He questioned, voice quiet and small, trembling slightly.

“Noct.” Tears sprang back to Prompto's eyes and he dove forward, burying himself in his friend. His hands clawed at Noct's chest, trying to satisfy himself that it was solid and not ripped open from the Sword of the Father. “Noct.” He repeated, arms going around his friend. It was only then that he realized that Noct was mostly naked and still dripping, a towel draped around his waist. Ignis had probably pulled him out of the shower.

“Hey, hey.” Noct's voice rose in pitch, almost as if he was about to panic himself. “I'm here. I'm okay.”

Prompto's hand was still shaking, still scrambling over Noct's chest until Noct caught it. He gently flattened it against his chest, where Prompto could feel the intact skin and slightly elevated heart rate beneath it.

To Prompto's embarrassment, he realised that both his eyes and nose were leaking all over his king's freshly cleaned skin. “You're okay.” Prompto closed his eyes, and the vision wasn't there. The memory wasn't forcing itself forward. The blond slumped forward, his entire weight being held up by Noct, and he felt Noct's other hand rest softly on his back.

“Yeah.” Noct reassured Prompto, hand gently rubbing his back. “Thanks to you.” He added, gently pulling away from the hug so he could look into Prompto's eyes. He gave Prompto a soft smile. “You were quick with the elixir. You saved me.”

Managing a soft, trembling chuckle, Prompto sniffed and nodded. “Got your back, buddy.” He quipped.

“Yeah. You do.” The fondness in Noct's voice was matched only by the expression on his face. He moved his hand from Prompto's back to gently wipe away Prompto's tears. A damp flannel was handed to the prince and Noct began to gently clean off Prompto's face.

“Man,” Prompto sniffed, “I feel like a complete wimp.”

“You've been through a lot.” Noct reassured, still gently cleaning up Prompto. “It's okay. We're all here for you.”

“The King's here.” Gladio's voice came from the bathroom doorway, quiet and sympathetic. “Want me to send him away?” Prompto knew that he would. That his friend would literally tell the King to get lost if Prompto needed it. But Regis had a right to be there, to see his son that had apparently been missing for a month. There was no way Prompto could deny any father that, let alone the king.

He shook his head. “Nah. Just... gimme a minute.” With Noct's help, he stood on trembling legs, giving his friend a nod to let him know he was steady. Noct had one hand on his shoulder, and Prompto realized that his other hand was holding an overly fluffy towel over his crotch. Obviously, at some point it had come loose and Noct hadn't bothered to retie it.

Slowly, Noct dropped the hand from Prompto's shoulder and took a step back. “I'm just gonna put some pants on.” He told Prompto with an embarrassed smile. “You sure you're okay?”

“Yeah... Just... I really need that shower now...” He felt gross. Not only was the grime of the last day
still clinging to him, but now he was covered in more sweat (was that why he felt so cold?) and his shirt was sticking to his skin. He'd only managed to remove his overcoat before he'd noticed his hands.

Noct left the bathroom quietly, and Ignis made to follow. “Iggy...” Prompto stopped him, not looking at his friend. He'd told Noct that he was okay, but in reality, he didn't trust himself to be alone. He knew from experience that there was the chance that he would fall back into another panic attack, and the idea of being alone was almost enough to push him there.

He didn't have to ask, Ignis seemed to know what Prompto needed. “I'll be here.” He promised. “Do you need help?” There was no judgement in the question. There had been a time or three when Ignis had had to help Prompto bathe after an attack. His trembling and weakness had been enough to render him more useless than a toddler. But Ignis never complained, never said anything about it. He’d simply helped Prompto strip and clean himself with gentle hands.

But this time, Prompto knew that he probably could handle it himself. He shook his head, but habit forced words from him. “No. Not.. now.” He managed to strip completely without any problems and slowly made his way to the shower. Behind him, he could hear Ignis move, picking up his discarded clothes.

A flash of blue told Prompto that Ignis was busying himself by summoning clothes from the armiger, readying them for Prompto.

The blond did his best to shower quickly, not even taking the time to appreciate the fact that the water was still hot, and the pressure was probably better than it should've been this high up in a tower. He moved on autopilot, washing his hair and body in less than five minutes and finally shutting down the shower.

He stood there for a moment, watching the water flow down the drain, the swirly liquid distracting him somewhat. A warm towel was gently placed over his shoulders and Ignis' soft touch followed. He was guided out of the shower and was vaguely aware of Ignis gently drying him off. He caught on after a moment and shook his head, trying to clear it.

“Thanks.” He repeated, even though he knew that Ignis didn't need him to say it. He always knew that Prompto was thankful for everything he did for him.

He took the towel from the advisor and finished the job of drying himself before taking the folded clothes from the counter. He dressed himself quickly and looked up, offering Ignis a shaking smile, hand reaching out to squeeze his shoulder in reassurance. An old habit from when his friend couldn't see.

Silently, the two exited the steamy bathroom and went to join the others in the living room.

Noct, Gladio and Regis were seated around the room when Prompto and Ignis joined them. There were steaming mugs on the coffee table and the three were chatting quietly. With exhausted movements, Prompto sat on the couch beside Noct. He was probably closer than was socially acceptable, but Noct didn't seem to care. In fact, the newly young prince shuffled even closer, making sure their thighs were pressed together.

“Apologies, Your Majesty.” Ignis bowed slightly as he sat on the other side of Prompto. Unlike
Noct, he didn't press them together, but still sat close enough for Prompto to feel the warmth coming off him. It was comforting without being improper. “It has been a long day.”

The King nodded gently before regarding the people in the room. “Noctis,” He said quietly, reaching forward and taking his mug from the table. “You promised to tell me where you've been once Ignis and... Prompto joined us.” There was a small hesitation before the King said Prompto's name, as if he was making sure that he'd got it right. “Where have you been for the last month?”

“Yeah.” Noct also reached forward, but he took two mugs. He offered one to Prompto who took it with lightly trembling hands. “Thanks.” He all but whispered, leaning in to Noct when the prince sat back on the couch. He felt Noct's arm casually circle around Prompto's shoulder. It was just resting on the couch, but it was still a comfort.

The room fell into silence as everybody waited for Noct to speak. “That was kind of accidental.” He was looking down into his coffee. The first thing you have to know,” he said eventually, “Is that we're from the future.”

This wasn't news to Noct's retinue, but the King simply stared at his son, obviously not believing him. Still, he motioned for Noct to continue.

“I fulfilled my duty.” Noct continued, a weary smile on his face. “I used the power of the Ring, the Crystal, the Six... and I banished the darkness.” He looked up from his drink and met his father's eyes. “And then I died.”

Regis was still looking at Noct with disbelief, eyebrows raised. Still, he stayed silent, allowing Noct to tell his story in his own time, and holding his questions. For now.

“We all died.” Noct added, gesturing to the others with his head. “Iggy, Gladio, Prompto... they held the daemons back for long enough for me to... to do what I needed to.” At this, the King looked between the other three.

Prompto could understand the King's doubt. His son was spinning a strange tale of his own death, and of being backed up by a pair of young adults and a teenager. It was a little much to believe. If he hadn't lived through it, Prompto probably wouldn't have believed it either.

“I was in the Astral Realm.” Noct spoke again, “It was beautiful, and Luna was there.” There was a fond lit to his voice as he spoke about her. “But something that Bahamut said to me was stuck in my mind. The Providence.... 'A power greater than even that of the Six...'. For a moment, one, shining moment,” Prompto felt Ignis give a silent chuckle at Noct's unintentional pun, “I wielded more power than that of the Six. And I used it...”

“I had a choice. I could leave things as they were – to stay in the afterlife with Luna, where there was no more pain, no more sorrow... Or...” He shook his head and turned to look at his friends, one at a time. “I'm sorry.” He said quietly. “I made the selfish choice...”

He fell quiet then, silence blanketing the room. Nobody was sure what to say to that, until Gladio apparently got annoyed with the quiet. “What was that?” He questioned.

“I couldn't let you go.” Noct answered, and Prompto knew that he was talking about all of them. “But we were dead. We couldn't go back to the world we knew. Our bodies were no longer compatible with life but... But I could put us in other versions of our bodies.”
He paused to take a sip of his rapidly cooling drink. “Something you need to know about the Astral Realm, is that it all happens at once.” He told them. “Time has no meaning there, and from there, all times are accessible.”

“So you sent us back here?” Ignis questioned. “Into this time period?”

Noct nodded. “I wanted to send us far enough back that...”

“That we can change things.” Gladio finished for him, but Noct hesitated.

“No.” His word was almost final. Almost. If Prompto didn't know Noct as well as he did, he probably would've missed the small questioning tone. Changing things hadn't been Noct's intention when he had sent them back, but there was a part of him that was hoping they would. “I don't know if we can.” Noct continued. “Like I said... I was selfish. There's every chance that we have to relive everything...”

Prompto's breath caught in his throat again, and he forced himself to keep his breathing even. He couldn't afford to have another panic attack right now, not while they were finally getting answers, not when the king was there. Regis was a virtual stranger and it was never fun to have a panic attack in front of a stranger. Not that it was exactly fun in general.

“Every chance'...” Ignis repeated thoughtfully. “Then there is also the chance that we can change things.”

Noct gave a hesitant shrug, keeping his eyes on his mug. “Though mankind may not realise, everything in this world is preordained.’.” Noct muttered quietly, voice far off almost as if he was quoting someone.

“Even... Even if we only change a few things...” Prompto spoke up, “Even if we can only save a few...” He didn't need to finish his sentence. His friends knew what he meant. Even if they couldn't change the end result and they couldn't save Noct, or even prevent the ten years of darkness, if they could save even just a handful of people, that would be enough.

Yeah, the ending would suck, and knowing that it was coming would be heartbreaking every day until the end, but having that time with Noct? An extra five years to be by his side? They knew what was coming, they could prepare for it. They could evacuate people from Insomnia before it fell. They could stop the deaths of people they knew. Jarred. Luna. All the hunters and Glaives that they'd seen fall. They could begin moving people to Lestallum earlier, put up more barricades.

Even if they all died in the end, after living through ten more years of hell, they could help people. And that would be enough.

It would have to be.

Around him, his friends each gave a small nod of agreement. Ignis and Gladio were thinking the same.

Noct hung his head. “I'm sorry.” He repeated. “You might have to... go through all that again.”

“Not gonna lie...” Prompto forced some joviality into his voice in an attempt to brighten the sullen mood. “It really, really sucked.” He admitted, “But now we know what's coming. We know what to expect. We'll get through it.”
“It seems... you've missed a few things in your story.” Regis finally spoke, regarding his son with a strange expression. Prompto didn't know the king well enough to know for sure, but he did know Noct, and he knew what that look would mean if it was on his friend's face. It was a mix of curiosity and calculation.

Noct gave a soft nod, but didn't speak. So Prompto did it for him.

“Noct was stolen from us.” He told the King. “The gods took him away for ten years.” He couldn't help the venom in his voice when speaking of the six. It was probably a bad thing, but Prompto didn't care. “And when they did, the nights got longer and longer until the sun stopped rising all together.” That wasn't quite accurate. The sun had risen, but the thick miasma in the air blocked it out. But that was a little more in depth than he wanted to go into at that moment.

“For ten years, we were locked into darkness.” Ignis took up the tale, allowing Prompto to drink down his mostly cold drink. “The daemons came out in force, and it didn't take long for us to have to fall back. The majority of the world's population found safety within the new walls of Lestallum.”

“A lot of people died.” Gladio took his turn to speak. “Within the first year, Lestallum was the only place people could go. Hunters and Glaives kept the daemons away, but it was a losing battle. We managed to get a lot of people to safety but...” He shook his head.

Prompto could remember those first years. The heartbreak and sorrow they'd all felt every time they'd heard of people not making it. The pain was almost constant before their hearts had hardened against it. The calluses on their souls had protected them from a full breakdown, but it still hadn't been easy. So many people had died, and those that survived were almost worse off for it.

“But now we know what’s coming.” Prompto said, again trying to bring the mood up. “We can keep more people safe. Back Sania's findings. She figured it out early, remember?”

Gladio nodded. He and Sania had been close at one time, and she'd told him everything she knew. Gladio was smarter than most gave him credit for, and he'd taken it all in with fascination then explained it to Prompto and Ignis and anybody else that would listen.

The room fell quiet again, and eventually Regis gave a heavy sigh. “This... You must realise that this is a tall tale.” He said to Noct, who nodded. Prompto watched as Noct stood from the couch. He took a familiar stance, and Prompto knew what was coming.

A bright flash of blue and Noct was holding a weapon in his hand. It only took Prompto a moment to recognise it as the Sword of the Father. He felt his breathing pick up pace, but Ignis' hand on his shoulder grounded him and held off further panic as his brain tried to remind him of the last time he'd seen that particular sword.

Noct flipped the blade and offered the handle to his father, letting the king take it and examine it. There was recognition on his face as he regarded the Royal Arm.

“Noct took the weapon back before stepping away. He sat back down before summoning something
else from the armiger. In his palm sat Prompto's camera, a little more beat up than it had been for the majority of their trip, but still intact. Without words, Noct flicked the power on and loaded the last saved picture.

It was the four of them, older and exhausted, standing together in front of a monument in a ruined city. It was easy to recognise where they were standing. It wasn't all that far away from where they were now, at least not in space. In time, however, it was another story.

Noct proceeded to hand the camera over to his father, allowing the king to flick through the photographs.

“Even if you think we're in make up or something to look older, you know where that is.” Noct said quietly. “And if you go back further, you'll see our journey through Lucis, Altissia... Maybe even some in Niflheim.”

Prompto couldn't even remember if he'd taken any pictures in Niflheim. He vaguely remembered pulling out his camera shortly after he'd met up with Aranea in a cave, but he couldn't be sure if he'd actually taken any.

He'd been a little distracted by getting to play on an actual snowmobile.

Regis silently flicked through some of the photographs, his frown deepening. “I... see...” Slowly, he put the camera on the table, being oddly gentle with the device. “I need to think on this.” He told the four in the room, standing stiffly, favouring one leg. Apparently he wasn't wearing his brace, and Prompto wondered if it was before he had needed it.

Deciding not to think on it, he reached forward and picked up his camera. It had been left displaying a picture from the ruins of Insomnia, zoomed in on the hand that Noct had casually thrown over Prompto's shoulder. Prominently visible on Noct's middle finger was the Ring of Lucii.

He turned the machine off to save battery and sent it to whatever reality the armiger was.

“I would suggest that the four of you get some rest.” The King said gently as he made his way to the door. “The sun will be rising soon.”

With those parting words, the King left, the room falling again into silence. Silently, the four stood and made their way to the balcony.

Below them, the city of Insomnia spread out, whole and intact. There was no sign of the destruction that they had seen the last time they'd been here. The buildings stood, shining brightly in what was left of the night. From Noct's balcony on the Citadel, they could see almost all the way to the outer wall. Below them, the city was beginning to wake up, its citizens rising, ready for another day, with no idea how bad things would one day get.

“We walked tall.” Noct all but whispered, throwing the doors open and stepping outside. His retinue followed him, standing side by side with their eyes trained on the horizon. “We stood proud, and walked tall. Held each other up, and caught us when we fell.” It didn't really work in the past tense, Prompto realised, but the old saying still rang through their hearts.

After everything that they'd been through, it felt like they'd done an okay job. Noct was right, they had walked tall and done their best, they'd stood by each other and served their king.
Prompto shuffled closer to Noct, gently sliding his arm around his waist. Noct didn't even hesitate before curling his own arm around Prompto's shoulder. His other arm wound around Ignis' waist and Prompto felt Gladio's hand on his back. They stood together and watched the sky changed colour.

“One day,” Prompto said quietly, “We'll stand where we were when we had our last camp... and we'll finish that night like we should have done.”

“We'll stand just like this,” Noct nodded, adding to Prompto's idea. “Together.”

“And we will watch as the sun rises.” Ignis agreed.

“Just like it shouldda been.” Gladio finished what the others were all thinking.

With that in mind, they fell into another silence and simply watched the sun come up. The first sunrise that they had seen in ten years, and Prompto found tears falling from his eyes. He couldn't even be embarrassed about that. He was here. Watching the sun rise. With Noct's arm around his shoulder. This was all that he'd dreamed of for the last ten years. His heart was swelling with so many mixed emotions that Prompto almost felt overwhelmed, but he concentrated on the good ones. He let the joy and relief flood him, and used it to push away the pain and uncertainty.

Now was the time for good feels only.

A soft sniff to his side told him that Gladio was feeling just as emotional as himself, and Prompto reached out with his free arm, resting it on Gladio's bicep in an effort to comfort the big guy.

“Good morning, boys.” Noct's whispered words tugged at something in Prompto's eyes and his tears fell in earnest. Those were the words he'd wanted to hear from Noct for so very long.

Chapter End Notes

So for the first time in a long time, I actually mapped out *some* of this story. About two thirds of it has been planned. To give an idea of how long I'm expecting it to be, this chapter covered TWO bullet points (out of 75). Two. I also haven't planned EVERY scene, just the big ones (so there's a LOT of extra fluffy to be added here and there).

Feel free to add ideas for fluffy headcannons, or small things you'd love to see happen.

So far, I've planned most of the stuff that will happen during the brotherhood era, but I'm also looking at expanding it to Roadtrip era and Darkness era. Possibly even beyond. I know for sure that a lot of things will be vastly different in here than it is in the games, so it wont be like Choco-Butt where it was a re-telling of the big parts of the stroy...

Also, thank you so much for the support and kind words about my medical problems. I feel blessed to know that the people who enjoy my work are all so kind and understanding.
I'll write when I can, and update when I can. Which means that there isn't going to be a schedule per say, but I'm hoping to leave no more than a week or so between chapters. There may be times that this is updated twice in a day, or there may be five days between chapters. I'll try my best not to leave you guys hanging on a cliffhanger, or at least not for too long (there is at least one planned).

In an effort to keep my end notes shorter, I've started a Tumblr for what I'd normally balabber on about here. Feel free to check it out.
https://www.tumblr.com/blog/interstellafichub
“School...?” Prompto stared at Ignis for a moment, fork hanging in front of his face. “Are you for real, right now?” He questioned.

“Yes.” Ignis let out a soft sigh and sipped at his coffee. “I think it would be wise for yourself and Noctis to return to school on Monday. We have no plan on how to change things, and until we do, I believe it would be advisable to keep up appearances.”

Beside Prompto, Noct let out a long groan. “School sucked.” He grumbled, “The only good thing about it was that Prom was there, and now he lives here.”

“Uh... if we're keeping up appearances, doesn't that mean I should go back to my parents place?” Prompto asked, idly poking at his food. The idea of returning to his old home wasn't too bad. He'd spent enough time alone to be used to it, after all, but the idea of leaving Noct... that stung.

They'd only been back in the past for two days now and in that time, Prompto and Noct had only been separated by bathroom breaks. Every meal was had together, every waking moment was side by side, and they even shared a bed.

With the three retainers refusing to leave Noct's side, they'd wordlessly agreed to all stay in the one suite. Gladio and Ignis had taken the spare room, and Prompto and Noct were in the prince's chambers. They hadn't even had a chance to discuss it before Noct was dragging Prompto to his room.

It worked for Prompto. It was a hell of a lot easier to sleep when he knew he could wake up and see Noct beside him, breathing, alive and well. Suddenly, he was actually sleeping through the entire night, mostly soundly. He hadn't slept like that in over ten years.

But now... there was the chance that Prompto would have to leave. To sleep half way across the city in an empty house that had never felt like home. That was one of the last things he wanted.

“Perhaps only for a day or so when your parents are in town.” Ignis answered his question with a soft smile. “At least until we can come up with a plausible reason for you to move in with Noct.”

“But school?” Noct whined again, sounding every bit like the teenager he appeared to be, rather than the thirty year old king he had been a few days earlier. “What about home schooling?” He suggested, suddenly brightening at the idea.

“While it is certainly possible for you to be home schooled, I'm afraid that Prompto would be unable to join you.”
“He can!” Noct countered, “There's nothing saying he can't be home schooled. And we don't even need to go, we've already been!”

“Not without a significant financial commitment from his family.” Ignis pointed out. “An official tutor will be required, and they don't come cheap. And yes-” He cut Noct off before the prince argued again, “You do need an official education. You may have already completed high school, but that was in a timeline that most likely doesn't exist anymore.”

His words caused both Noct and Prompto to fall quiet. Didn't exist anymore? That wasn't something that Prompto had considered. The idea that everything they went through, that the world they'd lived in just wasn't there anymore....

Well. It made sense. Prompto gave a soft nod. “Depends.” He told Ignis. “I mean, it could exist still, and we've taken a step sideways. Or we could be overwriting it. There's no doubt that we're in a parallel world, one way or another, since we've already managed to change tiny things.”

“What?” Noct asked with a confused frown.

“Time travel is rarely a simple concept.” Ignis provided, nudging both the boy's plates forward to remind them to eat their breakfast.

“Yeah. Like, there's a bunch of possibilities.” Prompto spoke between forkfuls of food. “Obviously, nobody knows for sure, since I'm pretty sure we're the first people to actually time travel, and we don't really have any way of figuring it out. But there's a few thoughts on it.” He was beginning to get a little enthusiastic now. He'd spent a long time in his youth reading and watching science fiction, and for the first time ever, his nerdy knowledge was actually applicable in real life.

“Like, did we replace the timeline we came from? Or are we living in a totally separate reality? Does what we do now effect the future that we came from, or will that always be the same and we're just in a new branch of the time stream?”

Ignis was giving Prompto an amused look, and Noct was just looking confused. Prompto simply shrugged, deciding to drop it for now. It was an interesting concept that they could figure out later. Right now, they had a more pressing matter.

“But Iggy's right.” He started again, watching as Noct's confusion deepened. “About school.” He added. “We should go. Should be easy, right? I mean, we've already done it before. It'll be like a refresher course.” He grinned at Noct.

“You barely passed the first time.” Noct pointed out, “And you want to do it again?”

“I have no doubts that Prompto will do better this time around.” Ignis smirked slightly. “Especially in the sciences.”

“Huh?” Prompto tilted his head to the side, wondering what Ignis was getting to.

“You deciphered and understood Chief Besithia's life's work in less than a year.” Ignis reminded him, and Prompto felt his face heat up.

“Oh. That.” He shrugged it off as if it wasn't a big deal. “Was just curious.” He added.

“You did that?” Noct was once again ignoring his food, so Ignis sighed and tapped his plate again,
prompting the prince to resume eating.

Again, Prompto shrugged. “I mean, I wanted to know more about where I came from. I needed to know if I'm really human. When I finally figured out how to read it, I just couldn't stop. It wasn't actually that hard to follow, once I knew the big words.”

Noct was staring at Prompto now, as if he didn't quite know what to do with this information. After a moment, he simply shrugged, accepting that Prompto could just do that. After a moment, he sighed. “Fine. We'll go to school.” He grumbled, eating a few more forkfuls before pushing the plate away. Prompto did the same and Ignis took them to the sink and began cleaning.

“Where’s Gladio, anyway?” Noct asked, reclining in his seat. He looked around, as if expecting to see Gladio hiding behind a plant pot somewhere.

“Training.” Ignis responded simply. “He said that he wanted to see how much work he will have to put in to return to his peak.”

“I think our muscle memory's still the same?” Noct questioned himself, “I tried to keep as much of 'us' as I could when I sent us back. ‘S why we can still use the stuff in the armiger.”

“Yes, I was wondering about that. Like, when we showed up here, we were still in our Kingsglaive uniforms, and my guns are still there and everything...” Prompto muttered. “And I shouldn't even have access to it in this time period.”

Ignis had gone quiet and was regarding Noct for a moment, his thinking face on. “Do you still have the blessings of the six?” He questioned, curiosity in his voice.

Noct nodded, “Yeah. But I don't really wanna call them for anything.” He admitted. “Not really happy with them at the moment.”

The way Noct said that was almost like he was speaking of a friendly acquaintance rather than celestial beings, and something about that just made Prompto laugh. He giggled and shook his head. “You and me both, buddy.” He told him. “Pretty sure if one showed up, I'd probably want to just punch them in the face.”

“Agreed.” Ignis said with a sigh, abandoning the dishes for a later time. “Though I do believe that Gladio has the right idea. We should all put some time in for training. Even if we have retained our muscle memory and know how, we shouldn't allow ourselves to become rusty.”

Another groan from Noct, but it was obvious he agreed, because he didn't verbally object. Instead, he stood and stretched his arms. “Now's as good a time as any, right?”

“Uh...” Prompto hesitated. “I don't think I have clearance to even be here.” He pointed out, somewhat nervous. He was afraid that if he left the suite, he wouldn't be allowed back in. There was no way he was supposed to be allowed to be in the training room of the citadel, and unlike in Noct's rooms, he would be noticed.

Noct shrugged off his concerns and began to make his way to the bedroom, probably to change. “As Crowned Prince, I hereby give you clearance to go wherever I go.” He said casually.

“I, as advisor to the Crowned Prince act as witness to this decree.” Ignis added, also making his way towards the room he shared with Gladio. “I will make sure to file the appropriate paperwork when I
“What? That easy?” Prompto questioned bewilderedly, following Noct to their room to follow the prince's example and change. None of his clothes from the future really fit him properly, but he would make do until he could grab some of his own from his parents place.

“Do you seriously keep forgetting that I'm royalty?” Noct's amusement was clear in his voice. He reached into a draw and threw a pair of track pants at Prompto. “Wear those.” He offered.

Not one to complain about being able to wear clothes that fit while training, Prompto took the trousers. He wondered if he would get into trouble for wearing black, but decided that he didn't really care. He was a Glaive, even if it wasn't official in this timeline. Besides, as Noct just pointed out, he was royalty. He could probably get Prompto out of all sorts of trouble.

“Dude.” Prompto snorted, “I just realised we can get away with all sorts of shit.” He pulled a clean tank top from the armiger and threw it on, tucking the long ends into his tracks. “We really didn't take advantage of that last time...”

By the time they returned to the common area, Ignis was waiting for them, already changed and ready to go join Gladio in the gym. “Once we're done with training, I have a few errands to run.” He told the boys as he lead them out of the suite.

“Errands?” Prompto questioned, wondering what on Eos could've come up in the two days that they’d been there.

“Yes. We still have funds from our time in the future. I'll go to the bank and exchange the Gil for Yen.” He looked Prompto over, “Then, we can either return to your familial home and retrieve some clothing for you, or we can simply buy more.”

Prompto wondered just how much money they actually had set aside. Their entire wealth had disappeared into the Crystal along with Noct, so he hadn't actually thought about it for a decade. “I'll just grab my old stuff.” He shrugged. Even if they had enough for new clothing, it didn't make sense to him to replace things that were easily accessible. “My parents probably aren't home anyway.”

With that decided, they made their way to the training grounds. As Prompto had predicted, people were definitely noticing him, but he was actually kind of used to it. Being one of Noct's retinue had actually afforded him some level of fame in the future. If he hadn't been expecting it, he probably wouldn't have even noticed the attention people were paying to him.

It seemed that Noct's presence was enough to stop people from outright asking who he was and what he was doing there, but that didn't stop them from watching him closely. With a breath, Prompto just kept walking, forcing himself to not be bothered by it.

When they eventually made it to the training hall, Gladio was waiting for them with a grin. “Thought I'd have to come up and drag you down here myself.” He said in way of greeting.

Noct simply shrugged and started stretching. Prompto copied his movements and they warmed up together.

“So. What's on the cards today?” He asked, looking around the room. They weren't alone, there were a group of people training further in the hall, some regarding them in curiosity, others ignoring them completely. Prompto decided that it would probably be a good idea to keep his access to the
armiger a secret for now. The fewer questions about him, the better.

“Was thinkin' hand to hand.” Gladio answered as both he and Ignis joined in on the stretching. “Was always your weakest.”

Prompto wasn't sure if he was talking about himself or Noct, but either way he had to agree. He was a gunner, a distance fighter. Sure, he could hold his own at close range if he had to thanks to the machinery, but hand to hand was definitely not his forte.

“The usual?” He asked, finishing his warm up and casually heading towards the middle of the room, where there were already mats set up. When Gladio nodded, Prompto didn't hesitate before throwing himself at the big man.

Gladio seemed ready for him, stepping aside to dodge and throwing a punch towards the blond. Noct watched in surprise as Prompto expertly ducked under it, turning himself to aim a kick at Gladio's stomach.

The older boy sidestepped, but Prompto was fast. The gunner pushed forward under Gladio's next attack to get inside his guard. He spun, leg raising into a roundhouse aimed at Gladio's head that was barely caught in time. Using his momentum, Prompto leapt, his other foot leaving the ground as his body twisted to land a kick on Gladio's shoulder. It didn't look like it hurt too much, but it was enough to force Gladio to drop Prompto's ankle.

Noct was watching with growing awe as his friends sparred, seeing how well Prompto was doing and how well they were working together reminded Noct of just how much he'd missed. Of course Prompto would be better than he remembered – he'd had an extra ten years of training and fighting.

The fight didn't last much longer, but it was a lot longer than Noct had been expecting. Eventually, Gladio managed to pin Prompto to the floor and Prompto tapped on the mat three times to indicate his surrender. When Gladio climbed off him, the blond rolled backwards, landing with his left leg under his body and his right leg bent in a way that would make it easy to spring forward.

Both were breathing heavily and even from this distance Noct could see the sheen of sweat on their skin.

“Again!” Gladio ordered, and Prompto didn't need to be told twice. He leapt forward, and this time his movements included dives and flips as he dodged most of Gladio's blows. Those he couldn't dodge he blocked and parried with expert movements.

Eventually though, Gladio had Prompto back on the mat, pinned in a way that had to hurt his arm. Noct was expecting Prompto to give up again, but the blond surprised him. He watched as Prompto turned his head and sank his teeth into Gladio's ankle, using the distraction to flip their positions. Noct's awe grew when he watched Gladio tap out.

Prompto had defeated Gladio in hand to hand. Noct had never seen that before. In fact, the only people that Noct had seen beat Gladio had been well trained Glaives. Then again, Prompto was a well trained Glaive, even if only a hand full of people knew it.

Noct was startled by the sound of someone clapping and turned to see the Glaives that had previously been training watching Prompto and Gladio. With a grin, Prompto gave a mock bow before heading to the bench and grabbing a bottle of water.
“That was definitely impressive.” One of the soldiers said, moving to stand near Prompto. It took Noct a moment to remember the man’s name – it had been a long time since he'd seen him, and he only really knew him in passing.

“You must be a prodigy.” Nyx Ulric continued, grinning down at Prompto. “To beat an Amicitia like that.”

“Nah.” Prompto shook his head, putting the cap back on the water and leaning forward to regain his breath. “Just a lot of training.”

“Holy shit Prom.” Noct couldn’t help but add his own surprise to the mix. He moved to sit by his friend, openly staring at him. “You got good!”

Prompto just chuckled at that and shrugged. “Gotta be good if I'm gonna be your Glaive.” He pointed out. “Your turn.” The grin Prompto was giving him was mischievous now and he gestured to the mat where Ignis was now stood.

Noct's match with Ignis didn't take nearly as long as Prompto’s did. He’d never been really good at hand to hand, relying more on his sword than anything else. Once upon a time, he'd believed that the armiger made it so that he would never be unarmed. Experience had proven otherwise, and Noct knew that he needed to improve on his technique. He never wanted to feel that vulnerable again.

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After training, Ignis and Prompto disappeared to run their errands. It only took them a few hours before they rejoined Noct and Gladio in the suite, and when they did it was with the delicious scent of fried food.

“You stopped at the Crows Nest?” Noct asked, surprised by his excitement at the prospect. Ignis was the best cook that Noct had ever known, but every so often he needed a break from the gourmet food.

“Yup.” Prompto deposited the bags of food on the table and disappeared into the bedroom to drop off the rest of his gear. He came back as Ignis was pulling plates out of the cupboard. “Turns out the exchange rate between Gil and Yen is pretty good.” He sat down and took the plate offered to him, digging in with enthusiasm.

“I exchanged a third of our earnings.” Ignis told them as he sat down himself. “Which came to roughly two-hundred-thousand yen.”

“Two hundred K?” Noct asked, eyebrows raising.

“You have no idea how much money we had by the end, do you?” Gladio teased, chuckling. “It wasn't a small amount.”

Noct shrugged. “Not like I need it.” He pointed out. He was the Crown Prince, after all. Until they'd left Insomnia, he'd never wanted for anything, never been unable to afford things. Having that much money would probably make things easier for Prompto though. “You can have my share.” He told his friend casually, knowing that Prompto was the least well off of any of them.

“Eh.” Prompto brushed him off, “I got enough.”
Noct let it drop, knowing that Prompto was now mature enough to ask for help if he needed it. Besides which, living with Noct and being provided meals, he probably didn't actually need a lot of money.

There was one thing that occurred to him though. “Hey, with that money, you can afford a tutor.” He grinned, “We can be home schooled.”

Prompto thought on it for a moment before shaking his head. “I kinda wanna go to school.” He admitted with a smile. “I think it'll be fun.” Noct pulled a face and Prompto chuckled before continuing. “Don't you remember? Back in high school when grades were our worst problem. It'd be nice to feel like that again, even if it's only for a little while.”

“When we have a plan, we can always take you out of school if we have to.” Gladio seemed to be agreeing with Prompto and Noct sighed.

“Fiiiinnnneeee.” He agreed over dramatically. He wasn't actually upset about the prospect of returning to school, and Prompto was right, it probably would be fun. Especially now that they knew more of the material and probably wouldn't have to study as hard.

“Hey, so...” Prompto started, his voice serious enough to warrant the full attention of everybody in the room. “When we were sparring, I remembered something one of the Glaives told me once.”

“Oh?” Ignis prompted Prompto to continue.

“Yeah. Remember Libertus?” When Ignis and Gladio nodded, Prompto carried on, “He was in Insomnia when it fell. He told me something... not good. He said that Insomnia fell because there was an inside man – a Nif spy in a high up position.”

“He say who?” Gladio asked, leaning forward as he listened intently to Prompto.

“No.” Prompto said with a sigh, “But I think we should still warn the king. I just wish I had more information.”

“Never the less, the King can do more with this information than without. I will arrange an audience.” Ignis told him.

“What? With me?” Prompto asked, eyes widening, “You can just pass on that info, I mean, I don't have anything else to add -there's no need for me -”

“Why are you so scared of my dad?” Noct asked, and the ridiculousness of the idea caused him to chuckle.

“Dude. He's the king.”

“Dude. He’s my dad.” Noct was laughing harder now, finding it incredibly amusing that Prompto seemed to forget his royal blood so often. “And you already met him. I'll come too. You'll be fine.”

Prompto didn't look convinced, but Noct knew that he'd follow him if he went. His friend was nothing if not loyal.
They didn't get a chance to see the king before school started, but Ignis had assured both Prompto and Noct that the meeting was to be held soon. They were just about to leave the suite to head to class when Ignis' phone buzzed.

After accidentally checking the wrong phone first, Ignis relayed the message to the curious boys. “His Majesty is free for dinner this evening. He'll give you his audience then.”

Prompto's eyes bugged out of his head and Noct laughed, throwing his arm around his friend's shoulders as he lead him towards the door. “C'mon Prom. Dad doesn't bite.” He reassured him. “You'll be fine.”

“But you guys haven't had a chance to eat together in like a decade. You sure you want me there?” Prompto protested, following along side Noct automatically towards the elevator.

Noct paused at his friend's words, with a frown. “At my side?” He questioned rhetorically. “Always.”

It seemed that Prompto didn't know what to say to that, and the conversation tapered off a little, picking back up only once they were stepping out of the elevator and into the underground car park. Prompto, seemingly on autopilot, went to the drivers side door, apparently expecting that he would be the one driving. Ignis came up behind him with a raised eyebrow and Prompto took a moment to realise that the advisor was to be the one in charge of the vehicle.

“Right.” He muttered, stepping away with a light flush on his face. “Sorry. Keep forgetting.”

“Forgetting?” Noct questioned, climbing in to the back of the car.

“That I can see.” Ignis provided the answer.

“Well, I mean, after ten years, you kinda get used to it.” Prompto defended himself.

Once they were all in the vehicle, Ignis backed them out of the spot and they were on their way. “Don't worry,” He told his friend, “I understand. It still surprises me at times.”

“How's that going, anyway?” Noct asked, genuinely curious. He could only imagine what it would be like for Ignis. To be able to see again after ten years of blindness? That had to take some getting used to.

“How's that going, anyway?” Ignis pondered on the question for a moment. “I find it distracting at times.” He admitted. “After so long relying on my other senses, being able to see again... There's often too much information. Especially when sparring.”

Noct frowned at that, regarding his advisor for a moment. That was one possibility that he'd never even thought about, that having his sight back could be in any way a bad thing. “Have you thought of a blindfold?” He suggested.

“That's... actually a good idea.” Prompto agreed. “That way, not only can you fight how you're used to, but you'll also end up being underestimated.”

“Oh, perhaps offending my sparring partners?” Ignis pointed out. “It would seem arrogant, at the very least. Especially given my apparent age.”
“Well... even distracted, you're still better than you were last time you were this old.” Noct pointed out, “So why not try the blindfold when it's just us? At least then you won't be out of practice, and it could come in handy if we have to fight in a dark cave or something later.”

The small smile on Ignis' face was hard to read, but Noct had known him long enough to figure it out. It was a mix of pride, joy and ...something else that Noct couldn't identify. It seemed like his idea was approved of, and Noct felt a small bit of satisfaction at that.

After hearing bits and pieces of the things his friends had suffered through over the ten years of his absence, Noct had begun to feel like an outsider. His friends hadn't really needed his input anymore – they were all better fighters than he was, and knew more about the world than he ever did – so being able to bring even one good idea to them felt like a blessing.

When Noct looked at his friends, he could see a cohesive unit that had been together through thick and thin, that had grown together and knew each other well enough to fight side by side without a single misstep, and even though Talcott had told him that they hadn't been seen together all that often, Noct knew that they hadn't abandoned each other completely.

The way they stood by each other and took care of one another was nothing short of admirable, and even though he was feeling a little left out, Noct was nothing but proud of them. Especially Prompto, who had come so far in his combat capabilities.

Lost in his musing, Noct didn't realise that they'd arrived at school until he felt Prompto tug on his sleeve. “C'mon. No falling asleep until we're actually in class.”

In the front of the car, Ignis let out a sigh. “No falling asleep at all.” He ordered, even though he knew that Noct would ignore the command. “The king is expecting us by seven thirty.” He told them. “While the two of you are in school, I will be organising the apartment. It should be ready for you by the time school lets out.”

“For real!?” Noct's mood instantly brightened and he grinned at Ignis. The Citadel wasn't a bad place to live, by any stretch of the imagination, but being able to live in his old apartment again, being given that freedom... It was like going back home. No. It was going back home. It was something that he'd often dreamed about during their road trip.

“Yes,” Ignis chuckled, “For real. I will retrieve your belongings from the citadel today.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out two key cards. He handed one to each of the boys before bidding his goodbyes and pulling away from the curb.

After he'd watched Ignis drive off, Noct turned to Prompto in excitement. The grin slipped of his face as he looked at his friend, morphing from happy excitement to confused concern.

Prompto was wordlessly staring down at the key in his trembling hands and Noct couldn't read the look on his face. It wasn't a happy one, like Noct had expected, instead it seemed solemn, sad, maybe even heartbroken? The last time Prompto had looked like that...

Was Prompto having another flashback? Or an anxiety attack? Was he okay? Noct floundered, having no idea what he should do. He stepped closer and reached out, but didn't know if he was allowed to touch his friend. Was that something that would help? Or would that make things worse?

“Prom?” He hesitantly spoke, not sure if that was a good idea or not. What had Ignis done? Spoken to him, kept calm and... what had he said? Why couldn't he remember what Ignis had said? Surely it
shouldn't be so hard to remember what Ignis had said.

Noct could feel the panic rising in himself and he almost pulled his phone from his pocket to call Ignis back. He was stopped from doing so, only when Prompto spoke.

“Sorry.” The blond cleared his throat and shoved the key into his pocket, lifting his head to give Noct a soft smile. “Just.. got lost in thought.” He tried to reassure the prince, and Noct felt his heart rate calm down a little.

“You okay?” He asked, finally giving in to the impulse to touch. He let his hand rest on Prompto's shoulder.

“Yeah.” The smile that Prompto gave Noct was genuine, and Noct finally relaxed all the way. “It's just... Back then... last time... Being given this key would've been a much bigger deal.” He began to walk forward towards the school, slipping his arm around Noct's shoulders as he did so. Almost automatically, Noct's arm went around Prompto's shoulder. It seemed like the most natural position in the world.

“I would've gone from super flustered, to ridiculously happy, then terrified and anxious, then a mix of all of the above.” Prompto continued with a laugh.

“And now?” Noct asked, not sure what to make of his friends words. Wasn't Prompto happy to be given a key? If it would've meant that much to him back then, why did it make him so upset before?

Prompto shrugged, “Now it just feels... Right.” He admitted. “Like, it's a non-issue, because I was always gonna get one.”

“Well, yeah.” They walked together into the school, completely ignoring the looks that their fellow students were giving them, too absorbed in each other and their conversation. “I mean... you don't have to stay, if you don't want to.” He added, suddenly not sure what exactly was going on.

“Dude. Ever at your side, remember?” Prompto laughed, “At this point, I don't know if I can survive being anywhere but.” There was more to that sentence than Noct wanted to dig into. It was kind of terrifying to hear that, but at the same time, Noct knew it wasn't quite true.

Prompto had managed to live ten years without him, after all. Noct knew that the blond was stronger than he gave himself credit for.

Even though the words didn't sound like Prompto needed comfort, Noct felt the urge to give it anyway. He tightened his arm around Prompto and pulled him close, resting his cheek on his friend's head for a moment.

“Wouldn't have you anywhere else.” He said quietly, words only meant for Prompto.

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Chapter End Notes
I have two teenage children staying with me for the week, so I have a source of labour to help me around the house. This means that I'm possibly going to have more energy to write. Hopefully.

Please, feel free to let me know your theories on where this is going! I'm always curious.

If you want to hear some of my rambling, ask questions, or chat about this or any of my other works, feel free to find me on tumblr:
https://www.tumblr.com/blog/interstellafichub
“Okay, you were right.” Prompto sat down beside Noct heavily with a bone weary sigh. He dropped his book on the desk and leaned back in his chair, closing his eyes. “School kinda sucks.”

There was something about the tone of his voice that had Noct on edge. He looked up from his phone, ignoring the game he'd been playing all morning to regard his friend. Prompto looked exhausted, but it wasn't the physical exhaustion that came from overworking or training, instead... he looked upset.

“What's wrong?” Noct asked instantly, worried for his friend. He turned in his seat to regard him, waiting for the blond to speak.

After home room first thing in the morning, Prompto had been called to the principle’s office, where he'd stayed for two hours until first break. They hadn't got him a phone yet – the one he had from the future wasn't compatible with the current network – so Noct had been left to wonder what was happening. After the rest of their classmates had left for their break, Noct had stayed behind to wait for his best friend.

He hadn't expected Prompto to come back this upset. Prompto still hadn't spoken, but after a moment he let out another sigh and sat up in his seat, leaning over his desk. He didn't look at Noct, instead he kept his eyes on the wood of his desk. That wasn't a good sign.

“Prom?” Noct leaned forward, leaning on the desk too. “What is it? What did the principle want?”

Prompto was quiet enough that Noct was starting to think that he wouldn't answer, but after a moment, he spoke in a quiet voice.

“To discipline me for an unexplained, extended absence.” He mumbled.

“Well... we were gone for a month.” Noct pointed out, frowning, “But why are you in trouble for it?”

“They thought I was skipping.” Prompto's body language changed from upset to angry, “They thought that I just didn't want to come to school. They didn't even notice it until I showed up today.” Prompto took a shaky breath before finally turning his head to look at Noct.

His expression was one that Noct had never seen before. It was a mix of anger and despair. His blue eyes were narrowed, and shining from tears unshed. Noct's heart missed a beat then lodged itself in his throat. He had no idea what had got Prompto this upset, but whatever it was, he would do
whatever it took to fix it.

“I disappeared for a month, and nobody even noticed.” Prompto continued, voice low and dark. “Nobody bothered to try to call my parents, to figure out where I was, let alone call the police. My parents weren't home to notice. I dropped off the face of Eos, for an entire month, and nobody cared.”

Noct's mouth went dry as he stared at his friend. “I-” How had he forgotten? Just how alone Prompto had been before they'd become close. He hadn't had any real friends, his parents were never around, and apparently even the teachers didn't care enough to notice him going missing. “Prom, you know it's not like that any more. Right?” He questioned, a hand reaching out to rest on his friend's shoulder. “If you went missing now, there would be nothing in this world that would stop me from finding you. Me, Iggy, Gladio, we'd keep looking until we found you, no matter how long it took.”

They had, in fact, done something similar in the past. When Ardyn had tricked Noct into pushing Prompto off the train - Noct could still remember how that felt, to watch his friend fall, the look of surprise and betrayal in those blue eyes. He could remember the desperation he'd felt, the all consuming fear and desire to drop everything to search for his missing friend. He'd never felt so powerless before.

No. There was nothing in the world that would stop him from looking for Prompto if he went missing again. Nothing.

“That's...” Prompto shook his head, anger leaving him and his shoulders slumped. “That's not...” He let out another sigh, and the anger was completely gone. All that was left was the sorrow and pain. “You, and Iggy, and Gladio... You're the closest thing to family that I've ever had. But... I had other friends, you know...?” Prompto was looking at his desk again, eyes low and even from this angle Noct could see the tears threatening to spill. He squeezed his friend's shoulder, knowing him well enough now to know to let him keep talking.

“Before, I mean.” Prompto, continued. “But now... I've never even met Talcott. Iris is a little kid, and Cindy...” He paused there to take a deep, shuddering breath. “I lived with her for nearly a decade and she has no idea who I am.”

Wet spots began to fall on the desk now, and Noct felt powerless. He had no idea how to help his friend. All he could do was lean closer, to move his arm to Prompto's shoulder in a one armed hug. He didn't know what to do or say, all he could think of was making sure that Prompto knew that he was there for him.

“I guess... it just hit me.” Prompto's breathing was shuddering now as he tried to hold back the sobs that wanted to come. “That I'll never see them again.”

Prompto's words caused Noct to freeze, his blood running cold. “I'm sorry...” He'd dragged Prompto from his world, from the chance of living in an afterlife with the people he loved, and who loved him. He hadn't even thought of what his friends were leaving behind when he'd made his selfish decision to pull them all back there. “I-I didn't think about that.” He admitted, voice quiet, regretful. “I should've- I didn't even give you a choice- I'm sorry.”

How could he not have thought of that? He hadn't even considered that his friends wouldn't want to come back with him. He hadn't even thought of the possibility of them having a life outside of him. But they had. They'd had ten years without him. Ten years to make connections, friends, lovers, other people. Ten years to grieve him and move on.
And then he'd just plucked them out of their afterlife to shove them in a world where everything was going to go wrong again. “I'm sorry.”

“No.” Prompto shook his head, leaning against Noct. “Even if you gave me a choice, I'd have chosen this.” He admitted, turning his head to bury it against Noct's shoulder. He could feel Prompto's tears through his shirt. “In a heartbeat, without a second thought. I'd always choose you.”

Noct's heart skipped another beat, but for a completely different reason this time. Prompto would choose him. He took a breath and let it out slowly, lost for words. Instead, he decided to just wait for Prompto to keep speaking.

“I just... It's not like they're even dead.” Prompto wasn't bothering to keep his tears in now, simply letting them fall into Noct's shoulder, hidden from the world. “But... they're not them, you know...” He shook his head, hand coming up to grasp at Noct's shirt.

“It's okay to grieve.” Noct muttered quietly, his other hand coming up to gently take a hold of the one clutching at his shirt. He turned his head to press it against Prompto's, offering him what comfort he could. “You're right. They're not the people you knew.... And if we do manage to change things, they never will be.” It seemed he was saying the wrong thing. Instead of comforting his friend, he was just making it worse. Prompto was now sobbing quietly against him, and Noct was still at a loss. “It's okay to grieve that. To miss who they were....”

Ignis would be much better at this than him. The advisor always seemed to know how to help cheer Prompto up, and all Noct could do was make things worse. What kind of best friend was he?

But Prompto surprised him, nodding against his shoulder. “Thanks.” He muttered, as if he needed Noct's permission to feel the way he was.

Sometimes, emotions just confused Noct.

“Yeah...” Noct squeezed Prompto's hand gently, “Any time.” He added, still completely lost.

Eventually, Prompto pulled back and began to wipe his eyes on the back of his hand, causing the sleeve of his shirt to ride up. That was when Noct noticed something that he really should've seen before.

Dark lines peaked under Prompto's shirt, standing in stark contrast against his pale skin.

“You're not wearing your wrist band...” Noct muttered quietly, taking Prompto's hand in his own. He gently pushed his sleeve up to reveal the tattoo in it's entirety.

In the future, he'd barely had a chance to really look at it before he was pulled into the Crystal, and when he'd come out, there wasn't exactly time. He'd never actually seen it up close before.

His eyes took in the lines and numbers, a thumb softly ghosting over the skin. 05953234. The number that Prompto had been branded with as an infant. The brand that had marked Prompto as an experiment, as a sacrifice for a mad scientist. The brand that should have dictated his life, if he hadn't been rescued.

“Noct...?” Prompto gave a small tug, not trying to pull his hand away, but giving Noct an obvious hint that he wanted to.
But Noct didn't let it go. Instead, he ran his thumb over the mark again. “Y’know... this kinda gives me hope.” He admitted.

“How?” Prompto's tone was confused and mildly offended, but Noct kept going.

“This... meant that you were supposed to be something else. The heart of a machine... But-” Noct added, cutting Prompto off before he could say anything. “But you didn't. You were rescued, brought here. Your destiny was changed, and you became part of my life.” He leaned forward, to gently kiss the marred skin. “So many things could've been different. They could've taken a different kid, could've decided not to bother, could've left you with a family in Niflheim, or Tenebrae, or Accordo, or even somewhere else in Lucis, and I would've never met you.

“But they didn't. They brought you to Insomnia, and you grew up close enough to go to the same school as me.” He lifted his eyes to look at Prompto, giving him a soft smile. “And we ran into each other, became friends... Instead of you becoming what you were born to be, you became someone entirely different. Maybe I can too.”

Prompto covered Noct's hand with his own, his lower lip caught between his teeth. “I never thought about it like that.” He admitted in a quiet voice, looking down at their hands and the tattoo on his wrist. “There were so many things that could've gone differently...” He gave Noct a shaky smile. “Thanks buddy...” He gave let out a breath in a soft laugh.

Noct gently re-covered Prompto's wrist and leaned back. He reached into the armiger and pulled out a box of tissues and offered it to the blond.

“Thanks.” Prompto took a tissue from the box, wiping his face with an embarrassed chuckle. “Hey, I know it's our first day back but... wanna skip?” He suggested.

Noct didn't respond with words, instead he began to pack his gear into his bag and reached over to help Prompto do the same. “Lets go.” He smiled at Prompto and took his hand, pulling the blond to his feet and out the door.

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Noct, being such a public figure, couldn't easily skip school. Not without being noticed. So it was no surprise to him that after half an hour of sitting in a small cafe with Prompto that Ignis showed up. The advisor didn't say anything, simply slid into the seat beside Noct. He had a coffee in his hand, and he sipped at it quietly.

It was completely contrary to what he would've been like the first time around. Last time they'd been in high school, Ignis would've lectured them for hours about skipping school, and why it was important for Noct to stay in class, not only for his education, but also for public image. Now, however, he seemed to care a lot less. He simply sipped at his coffee and waited for them to speak.

“Sorry Specs.” Noct began, voice sounding tired even to him. “It... was harder than we thought.”

Ignis shook his head, putting his coffee down. “Our return was very unexpected.” He said, “Last week we were fighting for our lives, taking down hordes of daemons, and immortal beings. Now
we're in a world that is relatively safe, expected to live a mundane life.” He gave them a smile and shook his head. “It isn't going to be easy, and it will take time to adjust.”

“Thanks, Ig.” Prompto muttered, looking down at the table. He still wasn't completely back to his old self, but at least he wasn't crying anymore. Now he just looked tired. “Can we just.. go home?” He asked.

“The apartment is mostly ready.” Ignis told them, sliding off his seat and finishing his coffee in one gulp. “If you don't mind me coming and going, I'm sure you'll be comfortable enough.”

“Yeah.” Noct couldn't help the grin on his face as he followed Ignis’ example and stood, grabbing Prompto's hand as soon as the blond joined them.

It sounded perfect, actually. His apartment held a lot of memories, the vast majority of which were happy. From his first feeling of independence, to the joy the first time he'd brought Prompto back. They'd spent many nights staying up until the sunrise, playing games or watching movies. They would cuddle on the couch, surrounded by plush blankets and talk about everything and nothing.

He could remember the happiness that those days had held, and realised that they could have it again. Returning to the past had given them the opportunity to relive his most treasured memories.

For the year that they were on the road, and the timeless sleep he'd had in the Crystal, he'd dreamed of those times. There had been many times when all he'd wanted was to go back to that time, to the hugs on the couch, to the pizza deliveries hidden from Ignis, to the days and nights of studying together, side by side. For the entire time he'd been away, all he'd wanted to do was come back.

To come home.

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The apartment was almost exactly as he remembered it, save for a few small details. The little things that he'd forgotten after being away for so long. The small scratches on the paint on the walls, the spot on the carpet from where he'd spilled his hot chocolate on the day he'd moved in. These were the little things that convinced him that this really was real, that he really was back.

“Good to be home.” Prompto muttered, finally smiling with genuine happiness. There was still a tinge of grief behind his eyes, but the smile was real. “Even though I never actually lived here.” He added with a chuckle.

“You lived here.” Noct snorted, throwing his book bag down by the couch. “Just not officially.” He took a moment to look around, to reminisce.

Prompto laughed. “Yeah. Guess you're right. I really did spend more time here than anywhere else.” He sat himself down on the couch and looked around, the smile on his face softening to something slightly sad. “This was my first real home.”

Noct sat down beside Prompto, close enough for their shoulders to touch. “It never really felt like a home to me.” He leaned into Prompto, nudging their shoulders together. “Not until you moved in.” He turned his head to look at Prompto, only then realising just how close they were.

Their faces were only inches apart, Prompto's eyes taking up most of his vision. He couldn't bring himself to look away, or to even breathe properly. He swallowed thickly, his throat dry as his heart
pounded in his chest – just like it always did when Prompto was this close. Close enough to reach out – to lean in – to kiss.

He wanted to. Gods did he want to. But he stayed where he was, frozen and breathing shallowly, the scent of Prompto's lavender shampoo invading his senses. It was a genuine effort not to lean forward and take Prompto's lips with his own. The temptation was strong, Prompto's gravitational pull almost winning the war within him.

But Prompto sucked in a breath and turned away. He let out his shaky breath and then took another before clearing his throat.

“Remember when you tricked me into watching that weird thriller?” The blond asked, chuckling a little at the memory. “I didn't sleep for a week after that.”

And just like that, the spell between them was broken, and Noct was able to move. He leaned back against the couch, his arms resting along the back of it. He laughed a little, remembering that evening. “Yeah. Me either. Iggy was so mad.”

Prompto laughed, also leaning back on the couch. His head rested on Noct's arm, and the awkward tension disappeared completely, leaving them back to the comfort that had always existed between them. “Feels like forever ago.”

“In a way, it was.” This time, when Noct turned to look at Prompto, he made sure that there was enough distance between them. “But this time things will be different. I don't think there's a single movie ever released that could scare us now.”

“I dunno... Have you seen The Infernian's Fury?” Prompto quipped, letting out another laugh. “That shit was terrifying.”

“Dude... we know for sure that we can take him out.” Noct pointed out. “Done it once, we can do it again.”

“Let's just hope we never have to.”

They spent most of the afternoon reacquainting themselves with Noct's collection of video games. There were a few missing, thanks to the fact that they hadn't been made yet. It felt like old times, and they managed to lose themselves in the activity, literally re-living their youth.

It was probably the most relaxing few hours that Noct had ever had.

But as with all things good, the gaming session had to come to an end. They made sure to give themselves plenty of time to get ready before their dinner with the king, but eventually they found themselves back at the citadel.

Gladio and Ignis were already waiting inside and Noct tried to push down the memories of that night, the moment he'd shared with his friends before leaving them to finish his journey alone. He took a moment to look around, seeing the intact buildings and the orange tinted sky, the people milling around. Prompto at his side. This wasn't the ruined city he'd left in the future, but the bustling metropolis of the past. They had a long time before they would have to encounter that night again, and Noct hoped that they never would.
Seeing Prompto's brand really had given him hope. If Prompto could defy his fate, so could he.

The king's private dining room was situated behind the throne room and Noct lead the way. He still knew the citadel like the back of his hand – even the parts that his father hadn't particularly liked him to explore. A few floors below them were the gardens that he'd once followed Iris through. Above them were the Royal Suites, one in each of the four towers. The Crystal was also somewhere above them, powering the Ring of the Lucii and maintaining the shield that protected the city from the empire and daemons alike.

Noct was lost enough in thought that it took him a moment to realise that Prompto had stopped still. They'd arrived at the doors to the throne room and Prompto was staring at them, his eyes wide and skin pale.

“Prom?” Noct retreated the few steps between them and stood in front of his friend. “Prom?” There was something wrong. The blond was sweating, even though the weather was cool. His body was trembling slightly and his eyes never once left the doors in front of him.

“I can't. I can't go in there.” Prompto's body was shaking, that had nothing on his voice. He sounded so terrified, so small. Suddenly, he looked every bit as young as his sixteen year old body. “I can't- I just- Noct, I can't. I-” He began to shake, his tremors giving way to violent shudders that rocked his entire frame.

“I can't-I can't go in there.” Prompto was repeating, his words getting faster, his breath shallow and quick.

Prompto was having a panic attack, and Noct had no idea what to do. His own anxiety began to creep in, but Noct pushed it down. Now wasn't the time for that. Once Prompto was alright, he could have his turn, but right now, his friend needed him.

“Prompto.” He spoke quietly, kindly. He stepped in front of Prompto, blocking his view of the large doors. “Prompto, I'm going to touch your shoulders.”

After the last time Prompto had seemed to freak out on him, Noct had taken Ignis aside and asked him what he was supposed to do if it happened again. Now, his brain was scrambling, trying to remember the advice.

He knew that he had to stay calm, that he had to keep Prompto focused on something other than what he was seeing or remembering. He had to take control of the situation, but do it gently. Make sure that Prompto knew he was safe, that he was taken care of.

When Prompto didn't respond, Noct risked reaching out again. Slowly, his hands connected to Prompto's shoulders and he carefully began to move him, leading him away from the doors that had triggered his attack.

The journey to the nearby bathroom couldn't have taken more than a minute or two, but for Noct it felt like an eternity. Definitely longer than his time in the Crystal. But eventually they were locked in a large, single bathroom. Noct gently sat Prompto on the closed toilet and knelt down in front of him.

“Prompto.” He repeated his friend's name and tried to get him to look at him. He once again pushed
down his own fear to concentrate on his friend and tried to remember what Ignis had told him. “Prompto, it's Noctis.” Identify yourself. “We're in a bathroom.” Identify your location. “You're safe. We're safe.” Reassure him that your safe. “You're hyperventilating.” Try to get him to breathe slowly.

Noct reached out carefully, making sure that his movements were obvious and far from sudden. He took Prompto's hand and uncurled it from its tight fist to press it against his chest. “Can you breathe with me, Prompto?”

Promtto managed a tiny nod, and Noct made sure his breathing was slow and even. It took a lot of effort, his heart pounding under Prompto's hand. He was losing the battle on his own nerves, but he had to hang on. For Prompto.

“You're doing good, Prom.” Reassurance. “That's it.” Encouragement. Prompto's breathing was slowing. Slowly but surely, he was taking deeper, longer breaths. Noct felt a sudden burst of pride in his friend for being strong enough to get through this.

It took an eternity for Prompto's breathing to completely even out and for his friend to seem to snap out of his daze. When he did, Prompto was still shaking, but more present.

“Hey,” Noct reached forward, gently cupping his friend's tear-streaked face. “Hey, you're okay.” He tried to be reassuring again, gulping in a breath for himself. Prompto had stopped freaking out, and Noct was trying to do the same. Seeing his friend begin to recover from his attack was helping.

Even though he was feeling anxious, Noct made sure to not show it. The last thing that Prompto needed right now was to see Noct like that.

“Thanks...” Prompto managed, sounding weak and tired. “I just... The throne room...”

Oh gods. How could Noct have been so stupid? The last time Prompto had been through those doors, it was in time to see Noct die. Of course being there again would cause problems for Prompto. If the man had had a flashback from his hands having some blood on them, Noct could only imagine what going back to the throne room had done to him.

“I need move my hand.” He said quietly, and Prompto nodded.

With permission granted, Noct let go of Prompto's cheek to reach into his pocket to retrieve his new phone. He flicked a message to Ignis, explaining where they were and why before putting the device back in his pocket. He was glad that they'd arrived in a time when he, Ignis and Gladio had already been issued with phones. Ignis was working on getting one for Prompto too.

Once the message was sent, he returned his attention to Prompto. “Hey.” He said, smiling up at him again. “You with me?” He asked.

“Yeah. Thanks...” Prompto tried to smile, but it was shaky. “Sorry.”

“That's my line.” Noct tried to add a little levity into the situation and earned himself a little laugh from Prompto. “I'm sorry.” Noct said, voice falling quiet. “I should've realised...”

“No. I shouldn't be so pathetic that a door can make me break down.” Prompto interrupted, shoulders slumping as he tried to curl into himself.
Noct squeezed the hand that was still on his chest. “No.” Prompto flinched at his hard tone, so he took a breath and let it out slowly. “I'm sorry.” He shook his head, “I just- Look, Prom, I can't even imagine some of the things you've been through. You're not weak or pathetic to react like this. You're human.” He reached up with his free hand and began to wipe the tears away from Prompto's face with the pad of his thumb. “You're a survivor. You literally lived through the end of the world. I'd be surprised if you didn't go through this kind of thing.”

He reached into the armiger and pulled out the box of tissues again. He took one from the box and began cleaning his friend up. “Prompto, you are so strong. You go through this and you come out the other side, and you're still so optimistic. You make me so proud, Prom. Proud of the person you grew into, proud that you never lost what makes you you.” He leaned forward and pressed his forehead against his best friend's, both giving and taking comfort.

“I'm so happy that you're here with me, and honoured that you've let me in and that you're letting me help you with this. And I'm so relieved that you're not hiding it.” Noct continued, eyes closed as he held on to his friend.

“Noct...” Prompto's voice was quiet, barely a whisper. “If this was a movie, I'd totally kiss you right now.”

Noct held off for a moment before slowly moving back and offering Prompto a small smile and chuckle. “I know.” He admitted, gently pulling away completely. “Iggy'll be here in a minute.” He told him, standing with a grimace.

Spending so long crouching had done a number on his knee, and he took a moment to rub it. “He's better at helping with this kind of thing...”

“You were perfect.” Prompto told him, grabbing another tissue to wipe his face. “Really.” He added, when Noct made a soft sound of disagreement. “Even if you did look like you were ready to join me.” Prompto added with a wet laugh.

“I was.” Noct muttered, leaning back against the wall to give Prompto both physical and emotional space to clean himself up. “You scared the hell out of me.”

“S-”

“Don't apologise.” Noct cut him off, giving him a light glare. “Never apologise to me about how you feel and how you deal with this.” He ordered. “You have nothing to feel guilty about.”

Prompto looked like he was about to object, but after a second he let his shoulders drop and gave a nod. “Yeah. Okay.” He agreed, throwing the soggy tissue away. He stood from the toilet and made his way to the sink to look at himself in the mirror behind it.

“Damn... we have dinner with the king and I look like shit.” Prompto mumbled, hanging his head a little.

Noct couldn't help the chuckle as he stepped forward to join his friend. He stood by his side, shoulders brushing. “Why is my dad being king such a big deal for you?” He asked, still amused. “I was king, and you never worried about how you looked for dinner.”

“Because you're Noct.” Prompto answered, leaning heavily against him. Noct's arm automatically went around his shoulders to support him. “Yeah, you were king, but you're my best friend first. I
don't have to look good for you, there's no chance you'll lock me up if I say something stupid.”

“Dad wouldn't do that either.” Noct honestly didn't understand why Prompto was making a big deal about this. He really didn't. “I love you, which means he'll love you.” He turned Prompto in his arms and held him against his chest. “So chill.”

Prompto wrapped his arms around Noct's waist and let out another chuckle. “I guess you're right... but I'm still a mess.”

There was a knock at the door, and Noct stepped back. “That's why Iggy's here.” He joked, opening the door a crack to confirm that it was their friend behind the door. Once he was sure, he opened it enough for Ignis to join them.

“Hey Igs.” Prompto greeted him, snagging another tissue and dabbing his eyes.

“Prompto.” Ignis stepped forward in the now crowded bathroom, regarding his friend with a critical eye, checking him over. “Are you alright?” He asked.

“Yeah.” Prompto's smile wasn't so shaky anymore, and Noct decided to feel relieved rather than jealous. It made sense that Prompto would be at ease with Ignis here. Their friend had helped Prompto far more than Noct ever could.

“It really helped to have Noct here.” Prompto was still speaking to Ignis. “I look like shit though.”

“Nothing that a little make up can't fix.” Ignis gestured for Prompto to sit on the toilet as he summoned a small pack from the armiger.

Noct recognised it from when Ignis would help him clean up after tantrums when he was a child. He'd also used it when Noct's skin had broken out as a teen and been too embarrassed to leave the apartment. Or when Noct was making them run late for a banquet or party and they had to get ready on the fly.

Watching his advisor help his best friend in the same way was making Noct realise just how much Ignis had done for them all. No matter what happened in their life, Ignis was always there and would always help even to his own detriment.

“There.” Ignis pulled back from Prompto's face and put the make up kit back into the armiger. He gave Prompto a nod and the blond stood up to admire his work. “Fit for dinner with a king.” Ignis added.

“Yeah. Okay.” Prompto nodded smiling before hesitating. “But... is there another way in?” He questioned. “I don't...”

“We can go through the kitchens.” Noct offered. “No need to go near the throne room.” Noct offered his hand to Prompto and the blond took it, squeezing it gently before following the prince out of the bathroom.

“Thanks...”

“So you're telling me that there's a traitor in our midst?” Regis was frowning, and Prompto was
It had taken the blond almost half an hour to build up the courage to be able to get the words out, but when he did he sounded like a soldier giving a report. It was another small thing that reminded Noct that the blond had lived a hard life of combat and death. He'd obviously given reports in the past, probably to other Glaives or hunters. Noct had missed out on so much.

“Yes, your Majesty.” Prompto bowed with his head, desert untouched in front of him.

“And you trust this Glaive that gave you that information?” The king questioned.

“Yes, your Majesty.” Prompto repeated.

The king fell silent for a moment, considering the information he had been given. A traitor with no name, and no way to know for sure who it was. Noct could understand why his father was having problems with that.

“Do you believe this?” Regis asked Noct, voice calm and collected.

“If Prompto says it's true, then it's true. I trust him implicitly.” Noct answered right away.

Regis gave a small nod, expression serious. “Thank you for bringing this to my attention.” He said to Prompto, using his 'formal' voice. “I will take this matter into consideration.” He then turned his attention to Gladio. “Have you told your father?”

“No, your Majesty.” Gladio answered. “We... don't know how much you've told him about our situation, and we didn't want to complicate matters.”

“Understandable.” Regis agreed. He gave a sigh and leaned back in his seat, gently rubbing his beard. (Noct had never understood that gesture until he'd had a beard of his own.) “Unless you have told somebody, there isn't anybody outside this room that knows your story.”

“You didn't tell him?” Noct asked, somewhat surprised. Clarus was his father's shield. His most trusted person and friend. He couldn’t imagine not being able to tell that sort of thing to Gladio – or any of his retinue really.

Regis shook his head. “It's not my story to tell.” He told them, “And even if it was, it's somewhat unbelievable. I'm afraid I need a little longer to come to terms with it myself.” He took his glass and drained the last dregs of his wine. “Right. Now that that business has been taken care of...” He smiled at the people around him, “It is good to see you boys again.”

“Yeah.” Noct agreed, giving a shaky laugh. “That's... the feeling's mutual.” And it really was. Now that the reality of his situation in the past had sunk in, he was finally able to concentrate on the here and now. He was sitting at dinner, with his retinue and his father. His father, who had been dead for more than ten years, was alive and breathing. “It's really good to see you again dad.”

“Agreed.” Ignis said quietly, bowing his head a little, beside him Gladio was nodding.

Noct noticed Prompto sink into his seat a little, still staring at his plate. He was obviously trying to make himself fade away. Noct knew him well enough to know that he was feeling like he was intruding. He never wanted Prompto to feel like that, not around him.
Subtly, under the table, Noct placed his hand on Prompto's thigh, attempting to reassure him without bringing attention to him.

Unfortunately, the king had other ideas. “Mr. Argentum.” He began, and Prompto almost slammed Noct's hand into the underside of the table as he jumped, sitting up straight with a speed that was comical.

“Y-Your Majesty.” Prompto squeaked.

Regis gave a hearty chuckle, “Relax my boy.” He poured himself another drink while smiling at Prompto. “You were one of my son's retainers, were you not?”

“I still am sir.” Under Noct's hand, Prompto's thigh was shaking slight, so Noct gave it a small squeeze, making sure that his friend knew that he wasn't alone.

He still had no idea why Prompto was so nervous around his dad, but he would let it drop for now.

Regis nodded and turned to Noct. “You say you trust him implicitly?”

“Prompto followed me to the end of the world and beyond.” Noct replied, pride and gratitude in his voice. “He stood by my side the whole way and has never let me down. I trust him just as much as I do Ignis and Gladio.”

Regis gave another nod before turning to Gladio. “Gladiolus, has this young man proven himself in combat?”

Gladio chuckled. “He's not that young, your Majesty. He's pushing thirty-one.” He joked. “But yeah. He can take me on in hand to hand, and has crazy good aim. I trust him to watch our backs.”

Next, Regis turned to Ignis, but before he could say anything, Ignis gave a shake of his head. “There are no security issues.” He reassured the king. “Prompto's loyalty is firmly with Noct.”

“Well then.” Regis finally turned his attention back to the squirming blond. “Prompto Argentum, are these men correct? Will you protect my son, even should it cost you your life?”

“Yes, your Majesty.” Noct had expected Prompto's voice to be high pitched and strained, much like it had been earlier. But instead of the intimidated teen, he spoke with conviction like the adult warrior he once was. “Without hesitation.”

Noct remembered the times that Prompto had pushed him away during battle, the times that he'd risked his own like to protect his. Afterwards, he'd shouted at him, ranted and lectured, telling him that he wasn't to put his life at risk like that. Now, having matured, Noct could admit that his reaction had been born of fear, not anger. He had no doubts that Prompto would risk his life to save his, because he had. On many occasions.

“Will you follow him, wherever he may go, and walk tall by his side?” The king was continuing, and Noct realised what this was.

“Yes, your Majesty.”

“Will you put his needs before your own?”
His father was making sure that he could trust Prompto, making sure that his friend knew what was expected of him.

“Always.”

The king gave a warm, approving smile and clapped his hands once. “Then let me be the first to officially welcome you as Noct’s third retainer. Serve my son well, and keep him in your heart.”

Prompto’s nervousness was coming back, but he managed a determined smile. “Always.”

Chapter End Notes

I was originally going to split this into two chapters, but I decided that it actually worked together better than being split, so that’s why you got a slightly longer chapter than usual.

As always, I would love to hear any feedback, good or bad :)}
Meanwhile

Chapter Notes

This is a shorter chapter, and I would almost consider it a filler chapter, but there's actually quite a lot of character development in this chapter. No plot though, sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Iggy...” Gladio watched Ignis scrub at the immaculate stove top again with a frown. The advisor didn't seem to hear him, so he spoke again, a little louder. “Iggy!”

This seemed to catch his friend's attention as Ignis stopped his frantic movements and turned to look at Gladio with a raised eyebrow.

With a sigh, Gladio put his mug of coffee on the kitchen counter and leaned over it, regarding his friend with mild concern. They'd been back in the past for a few days now, and Gladio had noticed Ignis' cleaning had become more and more frantic, and more and more often. Now, he seemed to be scrubbing at things he'd already cleaned, as if he was expecting it to have become dirty in the short time between cleanings.

“You need to take a break.”

Ignis flashed him a tired smile and shook his head. “I assure you Gladio, I'm fine.”

That was a bold faced lie. Gladio watched as Ignis turned back to the stove top, scrubbing at imagined grime as if the interruption had never happened.

With a sigh, Gladio heaved himself from the stool he'd been sitting on and rounded the counter. He came to a stop beside his friend and took his hand to still it. “Bull shit.” He called him out. “I've known you for nearly thirty years, this is not you being 'fine'.”

Ignis was quiet for a moment, standing perfectly still. His eyes were closed and he gave off a small sigh. “I'll take a break when I'm done.” He tried to mollify Gladio, but it wasn't working.

“Iggy. It's clean. I don't think it's ever been this clean.”

His concern grew when Ignis didn't respond right away. Before he could say anything else, however, there was a rapid beeping from further inside the apartment and Ignis pulled his hand from Gladio's grasp. “The laundry is done.” He muttered, turning and waling away.

“Iggy...” Letting out another sigh, Gladio followed his friend. He leaned against the doorway of the laundry room, watching Ignis for a moment. “Ignis.”

In an uncharacteristic display of frustration, Ignis threw the clothing in his hand down into the basket. “Fine!” He snapped, “I'm not okay. But this-This is something I can do!” He took a breath, eyes closing again as he centred himself.
Gladio just waited, letting Ignis have his moment without interruption. There was an unnecessary apology coming, and he knew that Ignis wouldn't let him just brush it off, so he waited.

“I apologise.” There it was. Ignis let out another small breath, body seeming to slump slightly while still somehow maintaining perfect posture.

“I get it.” Gladio pushed himself off the wall and moved closer, stepping into the small room with his friend. He reached into the washing machine and began to pull the clothing out, helping Ignis with his task.

“It's how you're dealing with things.” He continued, loading the dryer, “We're all dealing in our own way. You clean, I spar, Prompto clings and Noct... Well I don't think he's ever listened to us half as much as he does now.” He gave a soft, barely there chuckle. “And it's okay.” He added, closing the machine and setting it to run.

Ignis was still standing, staring into the basket of clothes he'd already washed and dried. He said nothing, but Gladio could see his mind turning. Ever thinking.

“But if you keep going like you are now, you'll burn out.” Gladio took the basket from Ignis, which finally prompted the younger man to look up at him with tired eyes.

“Clings?” Ignis questioned with a raised eyebrow and slightly amused smile.

“Yeah. Don't think he's spent more than four hours away from Noct since we got back. Wouldn't be surprised if they were showering together at this point.” Gladio shrugged as he lead Ignis back towards the kitchen. He gently pushed him down onto a stool and set about making the man a coffee.

For once, Ignis allowed himself to be looked after. “I don't blame him.” He admitted. “It actually gives me some comfort – to know that Noct has backup even when we're not there.”

Gladio nodded in agreement, sliding the coffee to Ignis. He retrieved his own drink and sat down next to his friend. “For the first time in a decade, we're safe.” He leaned against the counter and gestured around Noct's apartment. “It's gonna take some time getting used to not always being on edge. We need to take it easy for a while, let ourselves recover.” He gave Ignis a pointed look. “That includes you. I'm not asking you to stop cleaning, I know it helps you to feel busy. Just... take a break sometimes, okay?”

This time, the smile that Ignis gave Gladio was less tense and more relieved. “There are times that your words betray your true wisdom, Gladio.”

There wasn't really anything that Gladio could think to reply with to that, so he stayed quiet and offered Ignis a smile of his own. They sat in comfortable silence and sipped at their drinks for a few moments before Ignis' phone let out a sharp beep.

With amusement, Gladio watched as Ignis checked the wrong phone before taking out the one that worked in this time. The advisor gave a soft sigh before placing the device back into his pocket.

“It appears that Noct and Prompto are also facing issues.” He told Gladio, finishing his coffee and standing. “They're skipping school.” He offered as explanation.

Gladio chuckled, “Some things never change, huh?”
“I fear that it's quite the opposite.” Another soft smile from Ignis, and then he was leaving.

Gladio took the time to wash their mugs before heading out himself.

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The house stood the same as it always had. Even in the future, the manor had managed to somehow stay mostly intact, but here and now... it looked like a snapshot of a memory.

The sun was shining down brightly, causing the green grass to stand out against the surrounding grayscape. A small garden of flowers swayed in the light breeze as Gladio walked past, footsteps slow and hesitant.

They'd been back in this timeline for four days now, but he had yet to visit this place. He hadn't been home in more than a decade, and now he was stood at the doorstep, afraid to go in. His father had been dead for ten years, his sister would never be the young woman he once knew. His family had changed and he wasn't sure if he was ready to face that yet.

But here he was, standing before a wooden door that felt more impenetrable than the stone entrance of a menace dungeon. With a deep breath to steady his nerves, he unlocked the door and took a final step forward.

“Dad?” He called out the now unfamiliar word as he closed the door behind himself.

He'd been back four days after supposedly being missing for a month. His father knew that he was back and safe, but hadn't seen him. Gladio had chickened out and used the excuse of having to take care of Noct in order to avoid having to face his father more than once. This visit was overdue, and he felt somewhat guilty that he hadn't been home.

“Gladiolus.”

Gladio lifted his head to look up. His father was standing at the top of the stairs, his hand clasping the railing tightly. There was a moments pause before the king's shield began his decent. He didn't stop until he was face to face with Gladio.

There had been many scenarios that had run through Gladio's head. Many different ways his reunion with his father could have gone. But this one... the one where Gladio became overcome by emotions, the one where he all but threw himself into his father's waiting arms, that wasn't one that Gladio had considered.

But Clarus' warm arms around him and solid chest against his did more to comfort Gladio than anything else could possibly have.

“I'm relieved you're safe.” Clarus whispered, holding tight to his son. “And that you have come home at last.”

Gladio finally broke down. His father had no idea how much he had wanted to hear those words. Ten years. Ten long, terrifying years, and he was finally home. Being held in his father's strong arms, just like when he was a child.

“I love you dad.”
The moment Iris caught sight of Gladio sitting in an armchair in their lounge, she burst into loud sobs. She dove at him, landing on his lap painfully, her bony body digging into Gladio's tired muscles. But Gladio didn't mind and he held her close as tightly as he dared.

She was tiny, so small and vulnerable. A far cry from the young warrior he had known just days ago. But she was still Iris. Still his baby sister and he loved her so completely. He let her cry against his chest, let her cling to him. He listened as she alternated between begging him to never leave again and shouting angrily that he was the worst brother in the world. He held her as she sobbed out apologies and went back to begging.

“Hey.” Gladio waited until she stopped crying before catching her attention. He smiled down at her tiny face and gently wiped away her tears. “No matter where I go, I'll always be with you.” He told her, gently tapping her chest. “In here. Just like you're in here.” He tapped his own chest. “I love you Iris.”

Iris started crying again, and Gladio knew that even though it was going to be a long day, he didn't want to spend it anywhere else.

Later, after their dinner with the king, the four gathered in Noct's apartment. There was a movie playing quietly in the background, but nobody was paying it much attention. Instead, they were simply enjoying each other's company and light conversation.

“When was the last time we all just sat around and talked?” Prompto questioned from his curled up position on the couch. Noct was beside him, head leaning against his shoulder in his own comfortable slump with his back against his shoulder.

“I mean, without the threat of death or the world ending?” Prompto continued.

Gladio chuckled and leaned further back in his armchair, his half finished beer held in a loose grip. “Years.” He answered.

“It's good to relax like this.” Ignis added. Of the four of them, he was the only one not sitting in some kind of sprawl. As always, he was sitting with almost perfect posture. If it wasn't for the fact that the top button of his shirt was undone and his jacket had been removed, nobody would've guessed that this was a casual meeting.

“So,” Noct nudged Prompto with his elbow. “You're officially my retainer.” He leaned back so he could tip his head and look at his friend, a smile on his face. “Told you my dad'd like you.”

Prompto snorted, looking down at his friend. “Pretty sure that was more for you than for me.” He countered. “Besides, I was already your retainer.” He pointed out. “Even if it wasn't official in this time.”

“Thanks.” Noct responded, his voice going quiet. He turned his head to the side to regard the others in the room. “All of you... for being here with me.” He looked at each of them in turn, smile slipping into something more serious. “I'm sorry I didn't give you a choice... I didn't think about what you'd be leaving behind. The people you knew and loved... I took you away from them, and I'm sorry.”
There was quiet for a moment, and the air around them felt like it had during their last camp together, solemn.

After a moment, Ignis cleared his throat and spoke. “Noct...” He began, taking a moment to think about his words before speaking them. “I believe I speak for all when I say we would have chosen to come with you.”

Beside him, Gladio nodded in agreement. “In a heartbeat.”

“Hey,” Prompto nudged Noct and moved to rearrange their positions. Noct found himself with his head on Prompto’s lap and the blond smiling down at him. “If you need us to say it again, we will. Over and over, as many times as we have to.” He ran a gentle hand through Noct’s hair, voice lowering to an intimate whisper. “We will always choose to be by your side.”

“In this time, or any other.” Gladio added, finishing off his beer.

“You will never have to doubt our devotion to you.” Ignis leaned forward, resting his elbows on his thighs as he regarded Noct. “As our king, and as our friend.”

Those words brought tears to Noct’s eyes, and instead of hiding them, he let them slowly drip down his face. The hand in his hair moved to gently wipe them away, but nobody said anything about it. He took a moment before speaking, his voice cracking lightly.

“I love you all.” He told them. “I’m sorry that I didn’t say that enough.”

“Didn't have to.” Gladio muttered.

“Youre actions spoke louder than your words.” Ignis reassured his friend. “You told us every day.”

Chapter End Notes

I have a LOT of trouble writing Gladio. Any tips? Feedback would be great :)}
Chapter Notes

Bit of a disclaimer: I've had a migraine for the last week or so, so if this isn't up to usual standard, please bear with me. I've only managed to go over it once, so there's probably still a lot of mistakes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Can anybody tell me any real world applications for what we've been over today?” The teacher asked, looking around the classroom of bored, confused teenagers. Her eyes caught one distracted student in particular, “Prompto?”

Said blond looked up from his doodling and glanced at the equations on the whiteboard. “Fuel efficiency.” He answered casually. “If you're ever stranded, being able to figure out how far you can get on how much fuel you have can mean the difference between life and death.”

There was a pause as the teacher stared at Prompto's somewhat dark example and frowned. She was about to say something when another student piped up.

“But if you know how far your car can go on a tank, you don't need to use math!” She seemed to be complaining about having to learn this stuff.

Prompto shrugged. “That only works inside the city.” He said, turning to the student. “If you're outside the city, you need to take into account the terrain, the environment, your speed, even the weight of the vehicle and what it's carrying. You might need to be able make those calculations on the fly.”

“But how likely is that?” Another student scoffed, and Prompto just shrugged, returning to his doodling.

Noct looked over his friend's shoulder and frowned at what he was drawing. It seemed to be some sort of schematic? The calculations on the side made Noct's head spin just from looking at them. It was definitely beyond what they were learning in class.

The teacher went through a few more examples with the class, but neither Noct nor his retainer were paying any more attention. Prompto seemed too engaged in what he was drawing, and Noct just really didn't care.

Later in the day, another teacher asked them the same question, and once again called on Prompto thinking that he wasn't paying attention.

The blond looked up from his drawing and glanced at the board before answering. “In an emergency, knowing what plants are edible and what ones are poison can be useful. Also, knowing what flora have medicinal properties can save lives.”
“You could always just go to a pharmacy...” One of the students who spoke up in the previous class spoke again, frowning.

Prompto just shrugged. “What if there's not one around?” He questioned. “Say we go on a hike, and you fall down and break your leg. I need to know what's safe to use to disinfect it and what kind of wood I can use as a splint.”

“Dude, when did you get so dark?” A second student asked, giving Prompto a disbelieving look.

Prompto just shrugged. “Okay, what about this: We're on that hike and you fall into a bush. A few hours later, hives start to appear. Knowing what you came into contact with means that the doctors can figure out what to use to fix it. And if there's a plant around that counteracts the effects, wouldn't it be better to use that right away?”

“Prompto is correct on all accounts, if not a little pessimistic.” The teacher said with a smile before turning back to the board.

Prompto just shrugged and turned back to his work.

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“I think you're freaking our classmates out.” Noct muttered during their lunch break. He pulled a packed lunch out of his bag, watching as Prompto did the same. Ignis had outdone himself, their lunch was far more fancy than either of them were expecting.

“They don't seem to realise just how important this shit is.” Prompto shrugged, digging in to his food with one hand, his other still sketching on his paper. This was at least the third page he was working on. “I had to learn the hard way.” The blond added. “There were a lot of times that I'd wished I'd paid more attention in school.”

Noct nodded, eating slowly as he watched his friend place graceful lines on the page. “You'll have to help me study.” He admitted, “I don't remember jack about this shit.”

Prompto gave a distracted nod, putting his food aside for a moment so he could use a ruler.

“What class is that for?” Noct finally asked, leaning around Prompto to look more closely at the diagram. He couldn't make heads or tails of it, not even the symbols around the edges – which he assumed was some sort of math.

“None.” Prompto admitted. “Just trying to remember where I was up to. Didn't keep the schematics in the armiger.”

“What is it?”

Prompto paused for a moment before shaking his head. “Dude, no offence, but it'd take me hours to explain it to you.” With a sigh, he rolled the pages up. With a quick glance around to make sure they were alone, he touched it and sent it into the armiger. “Just something I've been working on for a while.” He offered with a smile. “Don't know if it'll even work.”

Noct made a 'go on' gesture, but Prompto shook his head, instead returning to his food. “Next class should be easy enough for both of us.” The blond changed the subject instead. “Physical fitness and
Noct groaned and rolled his eyes, leaning back on his seat. “I always hated that class.”

Prompto snorted, “Yeah, only because they won't let you warp your way through a race.”

“Dude, they make us run. For an hour.” Noct was starting to sound like a true sixteen year old, complaining about being forced to be healthy.

“We climbed Ravatogh in two days. Pretty sure this'll be nothing compared to that.”

---

Prompto had been right about the class being easy compared to what they had both been through. Their track times had been halved and when the rest of their class looked ready to pass out with exhaustion, the boys were just starting to get winded.

The rest of the class were either looking at them with astonishment or irritation, but the boys didn't pay them any attention. It was the last class of the day, and in an effort to get things back to 'normal', they had planned to spend the afternoon in the arcade.

“I'll be right there.” Prompto promised after they changed back into their uniform. “Just gotta grab something.”

With a shrug, Noct took his time to wander to the front gate, happy to wait for his friend. When Prompto joined him he was shoving a heavy textbook into his bag. Noct barely suppressed a groan at the realisation that they had homework.

He was thirty years old. He shouldn't have to do homework.

---

They managed two hours at the arcade before they were interrupted by a member of the Crownguard. Noct recognised him as a messenger and frowned. Messengers were only really used when cellphones weren't an option – in low signal areas or during battle. Why was one approaching them in Insomnia? Whoever needed to get into contact with him could do so through his phone.

His confusion only grew when the Crownguard bypassed him with a hasty bow and walked straight over to Prompto.

“Mr. Argentum?” The Crownguard looked a little nervous, as if he wasn't quite sure who he was supposed to be speaking to.

“That's me.” Prompto turned from the game and noticed who was talking to him. He stood straighter and ignored the 'game over' splashed across the screen he'd just been concentrating on.

“Sir, I have a message from Marshal Cor Leonis.” The man handed Prompto a sealed envelope and the blond took it with a frown.

“Thank you, Arrius.” Prompto muttered in a tone that was obviously a dismissal. With a flicker of confusion over his features, the Crownguard gave a brief nod and was on his way.
“What is it?” Noct asked, stepping up beside his friend, not bothering to ask how he knew the name of the random Crownsguard. Instead, he decided to concentrate on the paper that Prompto was reading over.

“Cor wants to spar.” Prompto said with a frown, reading over the paper again. “Apparently he's not happy that I've been made a retainer without him seeing my combat capabilities.” He handed the pages to Noct who couldn't help but laugh.

“He has no idea what he's in for.”

The sparring match had been set for three days later, after school on Friday. Prompto and Noct went straight to the training grounds after school, not even bothering to change out of their P.E. gear. Noct took a seat at the edge of the room, watching as Prompto warmed up.

He'd only been sitting for a few second when something was shoved under his nose, a buttery scent hitting him. He blinked down at the packet before snickering. He reached in and took a handful before lifting his eyes to Ignis.

“You actually brought popcorn?” He questioned, not bothering to hide his amusement.

Ignis gave him a small smirk and nodded. “We're in for a show.” He explained.

Gladio sat on the other side of Noct and they all turned their attention to the middle of the room. Cor had joined them now, and was talking to Prompto in a quiet voice, probably informing him of the rules of the match. Prompto was nodding every now and then, listening intently. After a moment, they separated and stood ready.

Quiet fell in the room, and it was only then that Noct realised just how many people had gathered to watch. It wasn't often that Cor Leonis called for a spar, and even more rare that he would ask for it from someone so new.

“Go prodigy! Kick his ass!” A voice called out. Noct recognised him as the same Glaive that had watched Prompto fight Gladio. Nyx, wasn't it?

Prompto laughed and lifted a hand, gesturing with his forefinger and pinky extended to the ceiling. He was feeling confidant.

Which only confused Noct when the battle began. Prompto was holding his own, but he seemed to be struggling more than he should've been. True, Noct hadn't been around for much of the last ten years when Prompto was training, but even he knew that Prompto could do better.

“He's holding back...” Noct muttered to Ignis, frowning.

“I suggested he do so.” Ignis told Noct, “He is unknown to the Crownsguard. Having a virtual stranger display the combat skill that Prompto possesses could lead to more questions than we would like.”

“So you told him to hold back?” It made sense, kind of.

“For now.” Ignis confirmed. “Once this exhibition match has concluded, we can claim to be training
him. Which would account for a somewhat sudden leap in ability.”

They didn't want too many questions. Honestly, Noct agreed, but it wasn't something that he would've thought of himself. Not for the first time in his life, Noct wondered what he would have done without Ignis.

“Is that why he's wearing his wrist band?” He questioned. He'd noticed the green band on his friend’s wrist when they’d been in PE the other day, but hadn't really thought about it. It lined up so perfectly with his memories that it hadn't stood out.

But now, this was so far from his memories that the band was noticeable. It stood out on his friend's pale wrist and Noct couldn't take his eyes from it. As he watched, he realised that there was a heavy feeling in his stomach, almost as if he was upset at the idea of his friend feeling the need to hide a part of himself.

Beside him, Noct could feel Ignis nod. “There are some in the Guard that would recognise its meaning.”

“They're already having reservations about Prompto suddenly being your retainer.” Gladio pointed out, leaning close so that his words wouldn't be overheard. “Finding out where he's from wouldn't help.”

Noct nodded. Again, his friends were making sense, but that didn't mean he had to like it. He made a mental note to talk to Prompto about it later.

His attention was drawn back to the fight ahead of them as a loud crash sounded through the room. Prompto was lay flat on his back, Cor sitting on his chest in a hold. After a moment, Prompto tapped out, even though Noct knew he could've got out of it.

“Maybe he's holding back too much?” He questioned. “I mean, he beat you.” He added to Gladio.

Gladio gave a small nod in agreement before making a sign to Prompto. The blond gave a subtle nod before launching himself at Cor.

This time, it was Cor who ended up on the mats, Prompto casually standing with a foot on his back, holding Cor's hand in a painful grasp.

They fought three more times before Cor called an end. Prompto had won one more of those fights and another one had been a close thing. As soon as the match was over, Noct quickly made his way to his friend, catching the tail end of the conversation.

“Be more confident in your movements.” Cor was advising, “Once you stopped worrying about what was going on around you, and focused on the fight, your technique improved.”

Prompto was nodding, listening to the Marshal, even though Noct was sure he didn't really need the advice.

“Hey,” Noct greeted as he joined them. Prompto turned to him and a grin split on his face.

“You brought popcorn?” He questioned, giggling a little. Beside him, Cor rolled his eyes, probably at Noct.
“Nah.” Noct offered the bag to Prompto. There wasn't much left, but that didn't stop the blond from digging in. “Iggy did.” Noct admitted, offering the bag to Cor, who just gave him a look and walked away.

Noct just shrugged, not offended at the man’s curt behaviour. Cor could be nice when he wanted to be, but he wasn't one to stand on ceremony. It was one of the things both Noct and Regis liked about him. He didn't pander to them just because they were royalty.

Once Cor had gone, Prompto was suddenly surrounded by Glaives and Crownguard, all congratulating him on being able to actually beat Cor the Immortal. Noct grinned, getting caught up in the excitement. He threw his arm around Prompto's shoulder and slowly lead him away from the crowd.

“So. You know you're gonna have to actually go to training now.” Noct warned him.

Prompto laughed and shook his head, “Dude. Pretty sure I do more training than you do.” He pointed out.

“When?” Noct questioned, frowning. In the last week that they'd been in this time line, Prompto hadn't left his side for more than a few hours total. When had he had the chance to train?

“You sleep until like, noon, whenever you can.” Prompto pointed out, winding his arm around Noct's waist. “And you nap. A lot.”

“You train when I sleep?” Noct asked, finding the idea amusingly absurd.

Prompto shrugged before leaning in to their half embrace. They reached the locker room and Prompto disentangled himself from his friend to reach into the locker he was sharing with Noct. “Sometimes. Y'know there's a gym in our building, right?” He questioned.

“No.” Noct hadn't known that. It didn't surprise him, but he'd never looked into it. He'd never needed to. “Been working on your ‘guns’?” He questioned, teasing Prompto lightly, causing the blond to laugh.

“Actually, been working on my staff work.” He admitted. “Decided I can't always rely on my ‘guns’.” He gestured with both hands. One held as if he was aiming a firearm at Noct, the other moving forward in a punch, playing on the double meaning of the word ‘guns’.

Noct leaned against the lockers and regarded his friend as he changed clothes. “Why a staff?” He questioned. They had a lot of weapons at their disposal. Swords, daggers, crossbows, lances. So why was Prompto concentrating on the one weapon they didn't have?

Prompto shrugged, slipping his shirt over his chest. “Might not have a weapon handy.” He admitted. “Decided I can't always rely on my ‘guns’.” He gestured with both hands. One held as if he was aiming a firearm at Noct, the other moving forward in a punch, playing on the double meaning of the word ‘guns’.

Noct leaned against the lockers and regarded his friend as he changed clothes. “Why a staff?” He questioned. They had a lot of weapons at their disposal. Swords, daggers, crossbows, lances. So why was Prompto concentrating on the one weapon they didn't have?

Prompto shrugged, slipping his shirt over his chest. “Might not have a weapon handy.” He pointed out, subtly reminding Noct of the fact that the empire had a machine that neutralised their access to the armiger. “But there's usually a stick of some sort lying around.” He added. “If I can use a staff, then pretty much anything can be used as an improvised weapon.”

“Dude. You've gotta stop being so smart.” Noct complained, following as Prompto lead the way out of the locker room. “You're leaving me behind.” It wasn't a real complaint, not in the slightest, but it fit into their normal banter and Noct was happy that Prompto took it as such.

“Difference?”

“Wisdom comes from experience.” Prompto shrugged.

“But you did get smart.” Noct retorted, “Last time, you barely passed school, now you're acing it.”

“I just figured out how to learn.” Prompto admitted, climbing into the car that Ignis had waiting for them.

The apartment wasn't far from the citadel, but they were both relieved when Ignis had insisted that they drive home. After school, followed by training, Prompto was feeling a little drained, and Noct was just lazy enough to not want to walk.

The drive didn't take long, and before they knew it, they were walking into their apartment. “Imma take a shower.” Prompto excused himself and locked himself in the bathroom.

“Any requests for dinner?” Ignis asked, following Noct into the apartment.

Noct made a vague gesture, not actually caring what they had so long as it didn't have too many vegetables. He made his way to the bedroom to change into something more comfortable, listening to Ignis clatter in the kitchen.

Aside from Prompto's sudden scholastic and combat abilities, the last few days had been nice. Almost normal. It was starting to become easier for him to relax back into the swing of things that he had thought he'd lost a long time ago.

It still felt strange to be back here, to have Insomnia whole and intact, to have his father around, to see the sun shine high above the wall... It almost felt like something out of a dream and a part of Noct was afraid that he would lose it all again and wake up alone in the dark.

Even with his friends by his side, he didn't know if they could change things, if they could keep the world from falling into ruin. He didn't know if it was even possible but he knew that they had to try.

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The days turned into weeks, and slowly but surely the royal retinue relaxed into normalcy. Noct and Prompto fell into the routine of school and training, and Ignis quickly relearned how to do his job, including the red tape and paperwork that he hadn't missed. Gladio spent more time with his family than he had the last time around, and found himself in charge of training the newest recruits.

The biggest change from the past was that Noct had started to join in on council meetings. The rest of the council had been confused to say the least when Noct had shown up to his first meeting with Prompto in tow.

After a brief argument, Noct had insisted that Prompto was to join him anywhere he went, and with Prompto now officially being a member of his retinue, he had every right to do so. Their presence quickly became normal and the monotonous meetings soon became a part of their daily life.

They were on their way into the citadel with Gladio and Ignis when something caught Noct's attention. His eyes locked onto a stranger standing on the steps and he froze for a moment.
“Noct?” Prompto questioned from his side, a frown of concern sitting on his features. “What's up?”

Noct didn't reply with words, instead he gave a brief shake of his head before stepping forward, head held high as he approached the stranger. “Not here.” He ordered, continuing on his way into the citadel.

The stranger simply gave a small nod and followed him wordlessly. Noct's retainers shared confused looks before following along.

Instead of heading to the meeting, Noct lead the group into a smaller conference room, locking the door behind them. The rest of the group fanned out to his sides, watching the stranger with curiosity as he stood and faced them.

Noct turned to face the strange man, arms crossed over his chest. “Your tricks won't work on me anymore.” The prince's voice was low, holding a dangerous warning. His tone caused his companions to stand tense, ready to summon their weapons if they needed to.

Noct had only used that tone on one person before, and if this stranger was anywhere close to as dangerous, they needed to be on their toes.

The stranger didn't reply to Noct, instead he simply raised an eyebrow and tilted his head to the side in question. The silence stretched heavy, sitting thick in the room before Noct spoke again.

“Drop the disguise.” He ordered.

The stranger gave a smirk, lowering his head slightly. “As you wish, your majesty.” The mocking tone, the voice, the gestures. It was all too familiar to Noct's retinue. They watched with halted breaths as the stranger continued to bow, his body rippling as his appearance changed. Hair darkening into a deep red, body stretching to be taller. Even his clothes changed from casual to multiple layers, a hat appearing in his hand.

Even before he straightened his stance to look at them with piercing amber eyes, three sets of weapons had been summoned and pointed at him, ready for a fight to the death.

Noctis, however, didn't seem all that surprised, or even worried. He was standing straight, and ready for a fight, but he hadn't drawn his weapon. In fact, when his protectors did, he raised a hand to halt them.

“What do you want, Ardyn?”

Chapter End Notes

My migraine doesn't seem to be letting up, so the next chapter might be quite a bit delayed. I'm currently alternating between being blind and throwing up, sometimes both (which ends up with a messy situation x.x). Hopefully I won't end up in hospital this time, but it's always a possibility.
Please be patient with the next chapter. I'm sorry that this one sort of ended on a cliffhanger, and I don't know when the next chapter will be up.

Also, I notice I have a few guests leave kudos, hi and thank you~ But if anybody reading this wants an invite to join AO3, send me an email (address is in my profile) and I can send one out to you. I have about 8-9 sitting there ready to be used.

As always, comments and criticism are appreciated!
Hey, I'm so sorry that there's been WAY too long between chapters. Real life has been hectic recently (but in a good way xD).

Anyway, please enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What do you want, Ardyn?” Noct's voice still held the warning edge of steel, but it didn't hold the hostility that Prompto had come to expect. Not when talking to Ardyn Izunia of all people.

How had he got inside Insomnia's walls? How had he managed to make it all the way to the Citadel without being noticed? Sure, he'd been in disguise, but that shouldn't have mattered. People should've known who he was, what kind of danger he posed. It couldn't just be Prompto that felt that kind of aura from him, right?

But the hows and the whys mattered little. All that mattered now was that he was here, and so was Noct, and Prompto knew what he had to do.

Immortal or not, Prompto would fight until his very last breath to protect his king from the daemon in front of them.

Only Noct's gesture kept him still. If the prince hadn't held his hand up like that, Prompto had no doubts that he would've launched himself at their enemy, followed closely by Ignis and Gladio. They wouldn't have won, he knew that much, but at least they would've been able to give Noct time to get away. He didn't know why Noct had stopped them, but he had to trust in him. If Noct was holding them back, there was a reason. Still, Prompto intended on being ready to jump in with no notice.

Aborted movements on either side of him told Prompto that the others were facing the same feelings. They would trust Noct for now. At least until he was threatened.

Ardyn hadn't taken his eyes off Noct. He hadn't even spared a glance for the three seasoned warriors at his sides. His expression was unreadable to Prompto. After a moment of silence, his closed his eyes and let out a soft breath, features falling into a look of regret. He stepped one foot forward, the action causing the three royal retainers to tense even further, but for once Ardyn's movements weren't threatening, or even overly dramatic. He moved slowly, carefully, as he lowered himself to take one knee, bowing his head before Noct.

Well. That was unexpected. Prompto knew he wasn't the only one watching Ardyn with suspicion. Still, he didn't lower his weapon or back down, not even an inch. Ardyn was known for his tricks and Prompto was sure this was just another one. It had to be.

When Ardyn spoke, it was with a quiet voice. There was no hint of his mocking or teasing tone, not malice. Nothing but honesty. It made Prompto's skin itch with a slimy suspicion.

“I dare not ask your forgiveness.” Ardyn spoke, eyes trained on Noct, hat on the ground beside him.
“But I do ask your understanding.” As he said those words, he lowered his head, bowing fully to Noct.

“What...?” Prompto couldn't help but ask, looking at the man on the ground. Ardyn looked so... pitiful. Was this another ploy? Another way to lower their guard?

His attention was drawn to Noct as the prince stepped forward, ignoring the silent protests of his retinue. He was quiet for a moment as he regarded his enemy. “You have both.” He said quietly, slowly lowering himself to one knee in front of Ardyn and placing a hand on the ancient king's shoulder.

“What!” Prompto exclaimed again, moving to step forward. His friend had gone insane. How could he forgive Ardyn for everything that he had done!? For ending the world? For torturing him. For Luna? “Noct-”

Noct raised a hand, halting Prompto's movements and words both. “When I was in the Astral Realm... I saw it. I saw it all.” He stood, still holding Ardyn's shoulder. Together the two rose. Once they were on their feet, Noct took a step back – probably for the comfort of his friends more than his own.

“The gods had a plan for you, as they did for me.” Noct continued to talk to Ardyn, who was looking off to the side, refusing to meet Noct's eyes. “And you had just as little a choice as I did.” Noct spoke quietly, but with the tone of a king. “I saw you rebel.” He told Ardyn, “I saw you push against your fate and the punishment the gods bestowed.” There was sympathy in his tone.

Prompto didn't like this. Not one bit. He didn't like what Noct was saying, how he was saying it, or where it seemed to be heading. Noct really was forgiving Ardyn. Ardyn.

“Noctis...” Ignis spoke quietly from Noct's side, stepping closer to his once king, never once taking his eyes from the man that had forced him to lose his sight. He didn't need to complete his sentence, they all knew him well enough to know what he was saying. He was asking for an explanation, but agreeing to trust in Noct until he got one, willing to wait until the prince deemed it appropriate.

“Ardyn believed his calling to be that of a healer.” The explanation began, “But as it turns out, the gods had other plans for him. He was to spread the darkness that I was to defeat, and only when I did so... Only then could he rest.” His tone was still sympathetic, and it made Prompto's blood boil.

So what if Ardyn was supposed to do what he did!? So what if that was the only way he could rest? He had destroyed the world. Killed millions of innocent people in a bid to gain revenge on people long dead.

“He tried to resist.”

“Not hard enough!” Prompto objected, moving to step forward again, ready to take on Ardyn. Once again, the only thing that stopped him was Noct's hand on his arm, physically holding him back.

“Prompto!” Noct's warning tone made Prompto flinch and his arm hesitated before lowering slightly.

Noct was buying this, buying that Ardyn had been a victim in all of this. Prompto disagreed whole heartedly, but he couldn't do anything about it. Not yet. He needed to get Noct alone so they could talk it out, so that he could convince his friend that he was being foolish. But for now, he would play the soldier, he would follow the orders of his king.
The grip on his arm loosened a little, but the hand stayed there. “I saw his memories.” He said quietly, words meant for his retinue alone. “Watched his descent into darkness and insanity.”

“And then, you pulled me out.” Ardyn finally spoke again, looking at Noct through a darkened glare. “You stole my darkness, my power. You robbed me of my rest and shoved me back into a time of pain.”

“I know.” Noct muttered, letting out a soft breath. “If it helps any, I didn’t mean to.” He offered with a small shrug.

“And what would you have me do?” Ardyn questioned, “Follow my path once more? Reacquire the darkness and bend it to my will? Destroy the world on an endless loop until you are ready to move on!”

“We both rebelled against our destiny.” Noct spoke, “We both fought tooth and nail until we had no choice but to succumb to the will of the gods. Alone, our efforts were futile.”

“So we do it again? Simply bow to the 'wisdom' of the gods and allow our fates to be sealed?” Ardyn's tone was starting to get heated, but Noct remained relaxed, his hand still gripping Prompto's arm.

“The gods wish us to be enemies. To fight and destroy each other to put an end to a blight that their mistakes caused.” Noct's tone was... amused? With a frown, Prompto turned his attention to his friend, only to see a smirk on his face. “We end the dance, add in steps that they would never expect.”

There was silence, then bark of laughter from Ardyn that brought Prompto's attention back to him. The ancient man had a dark, amused look on his face. “Well then... It seems that we are on the same page, so to speak.” He offered a hand forward for Noct to shake. “An alliance then?”

Noct surprised his retinue by reaching forward and taking the offered hand, shaking it once. “To defy the gods.” Noct agreed.

Silence once again filled the room as Noct's retinue attempted to figure out what the hell was going on. Noct dropped Ardyn's hand and took a step back, bringing Prompto with him as they all watched the ancient man.

“Then. In light of our newfound agreement, I offer you my services.” Ardyn stepped back and lowered himself into a waiting chair, sprawling casually over it.

“I have rules.” Noct interrupted.

“Oh, I'm sure.” Ardyn smirked. “Allow me to guess. You object to my standard method of execution?”

“No eating people.” Noct agreed.

Ardyn rolled his eyes dramatically, “That's hardly what I do. But very well. Aside from the most dire of circumstances, I will refrain from using that particular ability. No daemonification.” He sounded a little put out about that, but Prompto could easily see through the ruse. Ardyn had expected this. “You are such a bore.”
"No civilian casualties. On either side." Noct gave his second rule, and Ardyn waved a hand in agreement. "And keep your darkness contained. I purged you of as much as I could, don't allow it to take you over again."

Ardyn gave a head tilt in agreement. "And in return?"

"I'll find another way." Noct promised, "Once the world is safe, I'll find another way to purge you of your curse."

"Still so optimistic." Ardyn sighed, "And what if you can't?" He questioned. "If there is no other way to end my suffering?"

"Then we'll end it as we did before. I'll use the ring again."

Yet again, silence fell heavy in the small room, nobody making even the smallest of sounds. If Noct used the ring again, he would die. He knew that. So why was he offering to do it? Why was he offering up his life for his enemy?

"Very well." Ardyn gave a small nod, sitting up straight in his seat to regard Noct. "Then in the spirit of our new alliance, I have some information that you may find... interesting."

There was a flash of crimson as Ardyn reached into his armiger to pull out a few sheets of papers. Prompto wondered for a moment why Ardyn's armiger glowed a different colour, but put the thought from his mind almost as soon as it had come. Now wasn't the time.

"The identity of the thief in the shadows." Ardyn offered the pages to Noct. "Or in your case, the traitor within your council."

He stood and gave a small bow to Noct's retinue before retrieving his hat and placing it on his head. "For now, I bid you adieu." As he spoke, his body rippled again and he wore the face of another man. He pushed through the other people in the room to let himself out.

"Oh, and Noct," He stopped as he reached the door, turning to speak over his shoulder. "I do believe it would in the best interests of us both if the empire were to... fall, no?" He didn't wait for a response before he left, closing the door behind himself, leaving the room in utter silence.

"What...?" Prompto asked again, staring at the door where they had just let their enemy leave.

"What the hell Noct!?" Gladio agreed with Prompto. Until now, he'd stayed silent, willing to follow Noct's lead, but now that they were alone...

Noct let out a soft sigh, handing the papers in his hand to Ignis, who looked over them with a frown.

"I really did see his memories." He told them, "And it made me realise that he was used by the gods just as much as I was. His role was to endanger the world, and mine was to save it. Our fates could've easily been reversed and neither of us would've been able to do anything about it." He shook his head, sitting on a chair heavily. He ran his hand tiredly over his face.

"Look, I didn't mean to bring him back. Didn't even know I had for sure until he showed up." He told them, "But I did, and it's better to have him on our side than not." He looked up at his friends, and for the first time since they'd arrived in this time, Prompto could see the exhaustion that had been
written all over his older face.

Noct had a point. Having Ardyn as an enemy wouldn't do any of them any good. They were here to change things, and this was one hell of a change. But still...

“I don't trust him.” Gladio voiced the same thoughts as Prompto, the blond found himself nodding in agreement.

“Good.” Noct gave Gladio a small smile. “I need you not to trust him.” He added.

“Because you do?” Ignis asked, looking up from the papers in front of him to regard his friend.

Slowly, Noct nodded. “After everything I saw...” He sighed and shook his head. “I don't know if I can be completely impartial.” He admitted. “When I saw his memories... I lived them. They felt as real to me as my own memories.”

“So... you want us to not trust him, so we can see any red flags?” Prompto asked, taking the chair beside Noct. As he did so, he realised that his weapons were still out and dismissed them, the action having become almost second nature to him by now.

“Pretty much.” Noct nodded.

“Okay...” Prompto agreed. “I don't like it, but... Whatever you need, buddy.” He gently nudged Noct's arm with his elbow and Noct gave him a grateful smile, leaning in to the touch slightly.

“Prompto.” Ignis handed the pages that Ardyn had given them over, “Can you read this?” He questioned.

“Huh?” Taking the paper, Prompto looked down at it, wondering why Ignis couldn't read it. It didn't take him long to realise. “Yeah. Hang on.” He flipped the paper around and studied the symbols for a moment.

“Is that written in Nif?” Noct asked and Prompto just nodded in response, concentrating on the pages. It wasn't a hard language, but Prompto wanted to be sure that he'd read it right. He read the words over and over until Noct nudged him. “Does it say who the spy is?” The prince questioned.

Slowly, Prompto nodded, reading the page one last time before lowering it slowly. “We need to talk to the king.”

The king hadn't been available for an audience right away – he was a busy man, after all – so Ignis had once again had to arrange things. The king would be able to meet with them over dinner again, and Noct was actually looking forward to it.

One of his biggest regrets after Insomnia had fallen had been that he hadn't spent enough time with his dad. Over the few years before Noct had left on his journey, he and the king had drifted apart as most fathers and sons do when the son grew up. But now, Noct had a second chance, and he wasn't going to waste it.

He was glad that he would get to spend more time with his father, that he would be able to rekindle the close bond that they had once shared. Not many people got to do that, not after it was already too
“Ignis,” Noct stretched and headed towards the door. “Please extend my apologies to the council. I won't be making today's meeting.” He knew that Ignis wanted to attend the meeting, and by giving him that order he was letting him know that Noct wanted him there, and that he would be fine without him for the few hours that it would take.

“Of course.” Ignis, of course, understood exactly what Noct was saying. He gave his king a soft smile in gratitude before leaving the room.

“C'mon.” Gladio slung his arm around Noct's shoulder, leading him to the door, “You look like you could do with some training.”

Noct gave him a tired smile and a slight nod. Even though he didn't completely distrust Ardyn, being around him still put him on edge. The idea of letting some of that out in mock combat was somewhat appealing. “Sure.” He muttered. “Coming, Prom?” He asked over his shoulder.

He didn't need to ask, he knew that. Prompto was already following them towards the training grounds.

Dinner with the king was a lot less awkward than the previous one. Noct was happy that Prompto seemed to be a little more relaxed. He was still tense, still jumpy, and still didn't talk until he was prompted, but at least he wasn't shaking this time.

“So, what was it that you wanted to discuss with me?” Regis asked, a small smile on his face. He put his cutlery down, having finished his first course.

“We found out some more information.” Noct told him, copying his father's actions. Beside him, he watched as Prompto looked to Ignis and Gladio, and it was only when he put his own fork aside that he realised that Prompto had been watching them for cues.

He made a mental note to have Ignis teach him etiquette. Maybe that would make him feel a little more comfortable in this sort of situation. Apparently even casual dining with the king put him on edge.

“Oh?” The king tilted his head, prompting Noct to continue.

“We have a contact within the empire. He gave us this;” Noct reached into his pocket and pulled out the pages that Ardyn had given him. “It names the spy.”

With a frown, Regis took the papers and looked down at them. “I'll have them translated.”

“No need.” Ignis gestured at Prompto. “Prompto is fluent in the Niflheim language, both written and spoken.”

This caused the king to turn his attention to the blond, who shrunk in his seat. It was obvious that the king was waiting for him to speak, but the words seemed to be stuck in his throat. After a moment, he cleared it and sat up straight.

It was like he'd switched personality from the timid, terrified boy a moment ago, to the proud, strong
warrior he had been in the future. This wasn't Prompto the teenage photographer anymore. This was Prompto the Kingsglaive, reporting to the king.

“The report is detailed, but there's only one part that concerns us. On the third page it describes the person we're interested in.” Prompto began.

“Does it give us a name?” The king interrupted him to question.


Chapter End Notes

I'm working on this slowly. Apparently planning too much wipes half my motivation x.x. I have learned from that now, and my next fic wont be planned so hard xD.

I'm determined to finish this one, so don't worry about that. It might just take me a little longer to get each chapter up. I have too many plans, so putting them all together is kinda hard x.x
The identity of the traitor in their midst had gone down as well as expected. Regis hadn't believed them at first, especially when Noct refused to disclose the identity of his informant. It was obvious that the king was torn, a large part of him not wanting to believe his son, but also having no reason to distrust him.

Eventually, the king agreed to watch Drautos, to keep an eye on him and take note of anything suspicious while the pages were officially translated in secret and he had the proof he would need to be able to do anything else.

After dinner, the retinue once again gathered in Noct's room, slouching on various chairs and couches in relative silence.

“So... Who's Drautos, anyway?” Prompto asked finally, curiosity getting the better of him.

“The captain of the Kingsglaive.” Ignis provided the answer without moving. For once, the advisor was actually slouched in a chair, his head resting on the back of it and his eyes closed. “One of the King's most trusted men.”

“Oh.” Prompto shifted in his seat a little to allow himself to lean against Noct, his head resting on his friend's shoulder.

“And my mother's brother.” Noct added after a few seconds of silence.

Prompto turned his head to look at Noct, frowning slightly. “Oh.” He repeated, this time in a quieter voice, looking at his friend for a moment before re-taking his place against his shoulder.

That would make Drautos Noct's uncle, right? That meant that even if it wasn't by blood, he was a part of the king's family. So the traitor wasn't just someone that the king trusted, but family.

No wonder the king hadn't wanted to believe it.

“Why would he...?”

“Turn on his own family?” Noct finished Prompto's question, and the blond just nodded his head against he prince's shoulder. “I dunno... but I think he blames my me and dad for my mom's death.”

Prompto had no idea how the queen had died – nobody really did, the media had just announced that
she had died peacefully in her sleep a few months after Noct had been born – but he was sure that Regis wasn't to blame. And he definitely knew that Noct wasn't.

“Why does he think that?”

Noct stayed quiet for a few moments, looking down at the mug he held in his hand. The liquid within had long since gone cold, but he took a sip of it anyway. He was quiet for long enough that Prompto started to worry that he'd said the wrong thing and offended his friend, but he held that worry back. The look on Noct's face was one of contemplation and sadness, not anger.

A glance at the other two told Prompto that they were waiting for Noct to say something, letting him tell the story if he wanted to. Eventually, he did, in a quiet, far of voice.

“When a baby is born into my family, there's a lot of magic involved.” He said quietly, and Prompto realised that he was trying to get his thoughts in order before letting them out. “If the mother isn't descended from the Caelum line, there's a good chance that it will overwhelm her. During the pregnancy, the level of magic steadily increases to massive amounts, and after the birth it all goes away. Most times, with rest, the mother can recover – kind of like stasis. But sometimes the toll on the body is too much.... In a way, it was our fault that she died.”

“But... I mean, she knew the risks, right?” Prompto questioned, frowning, trying to absorb the information he'd just been given. It wasn't exactly something he'd expected to hear, and he couldn't help but feel sad for the women who had had to go through that. Obviously they'd loved their kings enough to risk it, but Prompto had to wonder just how many queens had been lost in that way.

Noct nodded and let out a long sigh. “Apparently my dad even tried to talk her out of marrying him.” He said with a small smile. “But she decided that he was worth the risk.”

“She must've loved him a lot.” Prompto shared in Noct's smile as the king nodded.

“From all accounts, the queen was quite devoted to king Regis.” Ignis confirmed. “Their love was somewhat legendary.”

The room fell into a solemn silence for a few moments, each man contemplating things in their own way, thinking on the information they'd just received.

“It's expected that I put someone at risk like that one day.” Noct's soft words eventually filled the silence. He paused before speaking again. “I wont.” He said simply, determination shining in his eyes. “I wont put someone through that, ask them to make that choice.”

“The council-”

“Can go fuck themselves.” Noct interrupted Ignis' objection, turning his attention to his advisor. “We all know that the line of Lucis was supposed to end with me. Even if I survive this, I'm going to make sure that it does.”

“That's not gonna be a popular decision.” Gladio smirked at Noct, watching as the former king shrugged, obviously not caring.

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Things quickly fell into a routine of almost normalcy for Noct and his retainers. Prompto and Noct
attended school while Gladio and Ignis attended to their duties. In the evenings, they would gather for a meal together before retiring for the night.

Ignis and Gladio had even moved into the apartment across the hall – Ignis claiming to the council that it made his job of looking after Noct easier, and having his shield nearby couldn't hurt at all. It had taken a few days, but eventually the council agreed and the crown bought the entire top floor of their building.

Things became so routine that it was almost boring, but Noct refused to complain about something like that, not after all they'd been through. After years of fighting for every moment of survival, his friends finally got to relax.

Eventually, a new tradition arose, curtsey of a grinning, excited Iris.

“Movie night?” Noct questioned, frowning at Iris in confusion.

“Yep!” The eleven year old grinned up at him, bouncing on her heels. “Me and Gladdy used to watch movies every Saturday, but now he's here instead. So why not watch movies here!?”

“Why not?” Noct agreed, watching with amusement as the small child ran around the room making things 'ready'. After everything that the Iris in his timeline had been through, it was good to see her so carefree and able to simply be a child. Watching her reminded him of what he was fighting for, and well... It was kind of hard to say no to her.

So, week after week, the four were joined by a young Iris Amicitia and gathered in front of Noct's flat screen T.V. Over time, more and more mini traditions were added, from a pizza dinner to extra snacks, and eventually even specific attire.

It had taken Noct nearly a week to stop laughing at Gladio after he'd arrived dressed in a bright pink and purple, glittering, unicorn onesie. The warrior had just given Noct a smirk before stepping aside and allowing Iris to bounce into the apartment. Which was when she gave everybody else theirs.

It was really hard to say no to Iris.

Noct thought that he'd probably got the best deal of them all. His moogle onesie was warm and comfortable and the wings and pompom could be used to slap Prompto every time he started to comment on it.

Prompto himself had been more than ecstatic to find out that Iris had chosen a chocobo one for him. In fact, he'd refused to get changed even after Gladio had left to take Iris home, insisting instead on wearing it until it was time for bed (Noct had had to put his foot down when Prompto tried to make an argument for sleeping in it – he was not sharing his bed with a chocobo).

Ignis had worn his tonberry onesie with an odd sort of dignity. He hadn't seemed in the least put out when Iris handed it to him, and hadn't even waited for her to demand he put it on before slipping into it.

So the tradition was born. Every Saturday at six pm sharp, the four would gather in Noct's apartment with Iris, don their onesies and pig out on the most unhealthy food they could find while a movie (usually one of Iris' choice) played in the background.

There had been a few times that Noct had wanted to complain, but one look at the sheer joy on Iris'
face had shut him up instantly. So what if wearing a moogle costume was a little embarrassing? So what if it was actually kind of stuffy sometimes? It was worth it, just to see Iris being allowed to have a childhood. And really, it wasn't all that bad. After the first few weeks, Noct found himself actually enjoying their Saturday nights, looking forward to them even.

So when one Saturday night Gladio and Iris failed to arrive on time, Noct began to worry. It was already half passed six, and there was no sign from either of the Amicitias. He reached into the pocket of his costume and pulled out his phone, struggling to navigate it for a moment with his mittens.

Eventually (after having removed the glove component of his outfit), he managed to send off a text message. A reply arrived a few moments later, and Noct allowed himself to relax.

“Something at school upset Iris, so Gladio’s calming her down.” He told the others, reading from his phone. “They’ll be here soon.” He told them, pocketing the device.

“Unfortunate, but not entirely unexpected.” Ignis commented, placing the home made pizza on the coffee table in the middle of the room. After the first two weeks, he’d insisted on making the majority of their junk food, claiming that it was far more nutritious than the store bought. Noct knew that it was just Ignis’ need to be doing things, so he hadn't complained. Ignis’ cooking was better than their usual delivery.

“Iris is eleven, right?” Prompto asked, dropping himself on the couch beside Noct in his bright yellow onesie. He leaned sideways, indulging in his habit of resting his head on Noct's shoulder. “At that age, everything is drama.”

Noct nodded in agreement, laughing a little. “I wonder if it's boy trouble.” He snickered.

“I'm sure Gladio would be beside himself if that were so.” Ignis smirked as he sat down opposite them.

“I dunno...” Prompto shrugged, “I mean, he was cool when she and Talcott hooked up.”

“Wait, what?” Noct turned to look down at Prompto, surprised. That was entirely new information, and while Noct knew that both had aged ten years during the long night, he couldn't help but think of the fifteen and twelve year old children that he'd known.

“Yeah, about a year ago- a year before we left.” Prompto corrected himself, grinning up at Noct. “Surprised the hell outta Gladio, but he was supportive. Gave them the talk and told Talcott to not do anything stupid before they're ready.” Prompto was laughing now. “Iris was pissed.”

“If I remember rightly, she hit Gladio rather hard.”

“Gave him a black eye.” Prompto agreed with Ignis. “But after that, he was cool about it.”

Noct's phone chimed and he looked down, checking the message from Gladio. “Well, they're on their way now.” He told his friends.

Fifteen minutes later, Gladio and Iris walked into the apartment, joining the other three in the lounge. Iris had dried tear marks on her face, but was smiling brightly and just as bouncy as ever. Obviously whatever had upset her had been resolved and she'd bounced back.
“I hope the pizza’s not cold!” She chimed as she jumped on the couch, almost landing on Prompto’s lap. The blond caught her when her momentum threw her off balance a little and popped her onto the cushion.

“It should be the perfect temperature for eating.” Ignis assured her, smiling down at her. “I pulled it out of the oven a few minutes ago.” He offered her a plate and she dug in hungrily.

Gladio joined them after a moment, a beer in his hand. “Hey Noct,” He turned to his prince. “Need your permission to take on a new job.”

“You’re quitting?” Noct asked, frowning at his shield.

“Nah.” Gladio snorted, “Part time thing. Won't get in the way of my duty.”

“Then why’d you need my say so?” Noct asked.


“Was gonna.”

“Figured.” Noct shrugged again, earning a small noise of protest from Prompto, who was once again pressed against his side. From his peripheral, Noct watched as Iris excitedly told Ignis which movie to put on.

“So what’s the new job?” Prompto asked, adjusting his position slightly to look at Gladio without dislodging himself.

“Martial Arts Instructor.” Gladio sipped at his beer. “For Iris’ school. Apparently the guy who was gonna teach it got sick.”

“Is that what Iris was upset about?” Noct asked, eyes on the television that was showing the Disney logo.

“Yeah. She really wanted to join, but without a teacher...”

“So do we call you 'Sensei' now?” Prompto joked, grinning at Gladio who huffed in response.

“If you want.”

“Hey!” Iris nudged Prompto, pushing him into Noct for a moment. “No point in putting on the tv if you're not watching!” She scolded, “Watch the movie!”

“Yes ma'am.” Prompto responded, offering her a mock salute before turning his attention to the screen. “It's a sing along?”

“Yep!”

“And you're expecting us all to sing...” It wasn’t a question, not really. Noct knew how her mind worked, and he also knew that by the end of the night, his voice would be sore from over use.
It was really hard to say no to Iris.

Summer came quicker than Noct had expected, and soon he found himself on holiday from school. Which would’ve been fantastic, if it weren’t for the council meetings that took over his days. Luckily this time around, Prompto was allowed to join him.

It had taken a little convincing, but eventually the blond allowed himself to be dragged along to a meeting. As soon as they stepped inside the room, silence fell and all eyes trained themselves on Prompto, who started to shy away from the attention.

Noct wasn’t quite sure how to alleviate the tense atmosphere, but luckily Regis did.

“Ah, Prompto!” The king called warmly, smiling at Prompto. “Are you joining us today?” He questioned.

“Yes, your Majesty.” Prompto gave a small bow and Regis’ smile widened.

Noct offered his father a thankful smile as he gestured for Prompto to take the seat beside him. “This is Prompto.” He introduced him to the council. “My newest retainer.” He sat down, Prompto joining him after just a moment.

“Your highness...” One of the council members spoke in a hesitant voice. “This is highly unorthodox...”

“Yes.” Noct agreed, turning his entire attention to the councilman in question. “But there’s nothing in the rules against it.” He said casually. “Prompto is one of my most trusted men, and he has a unique insight into the every day lives of the average Lucian. Something that this council has lost sight of.”

“Noct?” Another council member questioned, sounding more than a little offended, but unwilling to say so.

Noct turned his attention to the woman, eyes narrowing a little. “Over the decades, this council has begun to care less and less about the common born citizenry, and those outside the wall in favour of nobility.”

Beside Noct, Prompto shifted his weight slightly, silently indicating that he had something to say but wasn’t sure if he was allowed. Noct turned to him and offered him a soft smile and a head tilt, gesturing for him to speak.

“The people outside the wall are feeling abandoned. Since king Mors scaled back the wall, support for the crown has been waning – most don’t consider the crown city as part of Lucis any more.” Prompto spoke clearly, voice strong and unwavering. “If Niflheim were to attack we would have little to no support from them.”

Before the council could respond, Noct spoke again. “A paradigm shift is required. We need to be there for all our citizens, inside or outside the city, remind them that they’re not forgotten. Regardless of whether or not the empire attacks, the people outside our walls are still Lucian, still our people. Prompto being here will remind us all of that.”

“You are from beyond the wall?” Another member of the council asked Prompto, the first to directly
address him.

Prompto looked unsure for a moment before speaking. “I grew up in Insomnia, but I've been beyond the wall. I've seen what it's like out there. The people are suffering and blaming Insomnia and the crown for it.”

“And what do you propose we do about it?” The same councilman asked, looking at Prompto as if he was assessing him, judging him based on his answers.

“End the segregation.” Prompto said simply, “Allow the people of Lucis to come and go from the city like they can anywhere else in Lucis. Open up trade routes. Send people out to help take out the stronger daemons and provide aid, send medicine and doctors. Fund scholarships for people from outside the city. Share the technological breakthroughs we've had in the last twenty years.”

As he spoke, the council were giving him more and more attention, some looking at him like he'd grown a second head, but some of them looked like they were in agreement, but Noct wasn't paying much attention to them.

Instead, he couldn't help but stare at Prompto, his heart aching with the pleasant warmth of pride and love. This was his friend, his best friend, who had been terrified to come to this meeting, to speak to the 'super important people', who was unsure of himself and his standing. This was his best friend who was putting that aside to speak up for the things he believed in.

If things were different, Noct knew that Prompto would be the one person that he would want to rule at his side – if he ever got to be a proper king.

“And how do you propose we go about doing that?” One of the sceptical councilmen asked.

Prompto made an aborted movement that looked like it was supposed to be a shrug that was stopped at the last moment. “I don't know.” He admitted. “I'm... not a politician, I don't know how these things work, not really. But I know that they need to be done. You're alienating a large portion of your population and something needs to be done about it before it's too late.”

“You speak passionately about this.” One of the more sympathetic council members commented.

“People are suffering. I would never forgive myself for not doing everything I can to stop it.” There was a determination in Prompto's voice that Noct had only heard a handful of times. A self assured confidence that he'd somehow grown during their decade apart. It suited him, and Noct wanted to see more of it.

“Very well.” Regis spoke again, addressing the council but looking at Prompto, the soft smile still on his face. “Please, write up a list of things you believe we need to address and we will do so in a future meeting.” He promised, “Ignis can help you file the paperwork, I'm sure.”

Prompto gave a nod of understanding and the king expertly took over the meeting, getting it back on track to the original topics the meeting had been called for.

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“Gladiolus...” Ignis' exasperation was evident in his use of Gladio's full name. The advisor let out a soft sigh as he followed behind his friend. “We don't have the space for more trinkets.”
It had been three months since Gladio had taken on his second job, and in that time the children had become quite attached to him. And it seemed that it was mutual, given the number of small, handmade, trinkets that Gladio seemed to come home with after every class.

“C'mon Iggy. We've got lots of room.” Gladio replied, finding a space on the now crowded shelf for the small... turtle? figurine that one of the children had made him. “I can't just throw this stuff out.”

“Of course not.” Ignis responded, hands moving to rest on his hips. “But we hardly need to display all of them.”

“Yeah we do.”

Gladio's tone was friendly, but final, and Ignis let out another sigh and shook his head. “Very well.” He acquiesced, sounding a little tired. “But perhaps you could ask the children to slow down on the gift giving?”

The laugh he received told him that him that Gladio didn't think it would work, but the large man agreed to try.

“Oh, they made something for you too.” Gladio quipped, grinning as he produced a folded garment and handed it to Ignis.

“They haven't even met me...” With a frown, Ignis took the item, which turned out to be a large cooking apron. “World's best chef?” He questioned with a raised eyebrow.

The apron itself looked store bought, but the words were obviously hand painted by someone young. In a bright pink that contrasted heavily with the electric blue of the apron and made Ignis' eyes hurt enough to make him almost wish he was still blind. Still, the look of pride and joy on Gladio's face made Ignis realise that he would make use of it anyway.

“Yeah, but they've heard about you. From me and Iris.” Gladio told him, watching as Ignis carefully took the apron and hung it in the kitchen. “They want to meet you.” He added.

“What ever for?”

“Because you're important to me and Iris.”

Another sigh left the advisor's mouth, but this time it was less exhausted and more amused. “Very well. I will arrange a time.” Maybe he gave in too easily, but it was a simple request, one that Ignis could easily fulfil.

Chapter End Notes

The fluffy things were almost entirely Squoosifersass' ideas. They've been super duper helpful with the fluffy happy side of things, and has been an amazing soundboard. (Also, you should see the look on their face when I come up with something heartbreaking. It's almost Iggy level of exasperated (dis)approval lol).
Also, with the structure of this fic, we're actually close to the end of the first 'arc' (Another chapter, maybe two). So far I have four arcs planned. I still don't fully have an ending... I've dubbed this arc 'Brotherhood Again'.
Quick update this time. I have the next chapter mostly written too, but I'm going to spread it out a bit so that if I get distracted or I get writers block again, it's not going to be weeks between updates xD. I think from this point on, I'll write a chapter ahead before posting - so that there'll always be something ready to go.

So this chapter will answer some questions about Promptis...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Prompto, do you know where Noctis is?” Regis questioned Prompto while the council gathered. It was just another routine meeting, but for the first time since Prompto began joining them, Noct had failed to arrive with him.

“Yeah,” Prompto gave Regis a small nod and spoke quietly, allowing the king to hear him but not the rest of the council. “He's taking a call from our informant.”

Regis frowned, looking at Prompto for a moment before glancing at the door. “I see...” He said slowly.

“He said not to wait for him.” Prompto continued.

Regis gave another nod before beginning the meeting. It took Noct a while to join them, and when he did he stood at the edge of the table, face grave. “I've just received word.” He spoke, cutting one of the council members off. “My contact within the empire gave me a warning.” This got everybody's attention and the room fell dead silent. For the council, this was the first time that they had heard of Noct having a contact within the empire.

“The empire is planning on an invasion.” He told the room, “They're intending on doing it slowly. Starting on the south western coast and making their way through Lucis. They're counting on the fact that the crown city doesn't have much to do with the outer districts. We need to protect our people – but subtly. If we show the empire that we know they're coming, it puts my contact at risk and they may change their plans to something more drastic.”

“Then what do you propose?”

“First, accelerate the plans for the trade routes. Especially the ones to the south west. Make sure that our people will have enough food and medical supplies. We should also arm and train the ones that want it so they can defend themselves and their homes.”

“Kinda hard to do that without letting them know why the crown city is suddenly interested in them.” Prompto pointed out, “If we're trying to be subtle, we can't exactly show up and be like 'hey, the empire's coming, free guns for all!’” His unique way of getting his point across earned himself a chuckle from Regis and a few of the council, and the blond flushed a deep red before continuing.

“And if it’s just the people in that area, the rest of Lucis’ll get suspicious. Maybe feel left out, and that wont help us gain their trust.”
Noct, and a few of the council nodded in agreement, each thinking quietly for a moment.

“Okay, then we'll do it two fold.” Noct decided, finally taking a seat at the end of the table, opposite Regis. “We'll have the Crownsguard sort out armaments for the citizens, we'll begin opening trade routes in all regions, even if it's just one or two to start with. And...

“And my retainers and myself will travel Lucis and meet with the people. Let them know that things have changed since grandfather's rule, and that Lucis is not forgotten. My contact said that the empire won't be moving for a few months, so we still have time to set down the foundations of trust that we'll need.”

Regis watched as his son took control of the meeting with an odd sense of pride. He could see the king that Noct would one day be – or the one that he had once been – who cared for his people. All his people. Regis had no doubt that Noct would go out of his way to help even the most insignificant citizen. He only hoped that that wouldn't come back to bite him.

“A trip beyond the wall will be dangerous.” He cautioned his son, who simply nodded in agreement. “Take Cor.”

His unspoken permission caused a stir in the council, many members voicing their objections. He let them speak for a few seconds before raising his hand to silence them. “Take no risks.” He ordered, “Stay safe inside during the night. And listen to your advisors and shield.” Noct nodded in agreement and Regis turned to Prompto. “Make sure to take a lot of pictures.” He requested with a fond smile. “I would quite like to see what has become of Lucis since my own trip outside the wall.”

Maybe it wasn't as subtle a reminder as it could have been, but his words _did_ remind the council that Regis himself had gone beyond the wall, and so had Mors. In fact, as far back as anybody could remember, it had been somewhat of a rite of passage for a young monarch to travel the lands beyond the city.

Of course, back then, the wall encompassed all of Lucis rather than just Insomnia. Things were far more dangerous these days, and if Regis didn't know about Noct's past, or future, then he probably would've been a little more hesitant about allowing them to go.

But the fact was that Noct would be surrounded by three people who had survived a literal apocalypse and a man who's nickname was 'the Immortal'. Regis was rather sure that Noct would be safe.

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Prompto leaned over the hood of the car, engine grease smeared on his nose. He wiped his forehead with a oily hand, slicking his blond locks back.

Behind him, Noct leaned against the wall of the royal garage, watching his friend with some amusement. “What are you doing?” he asked.

Prompto jumped and let out a small squeak before turning quickly and glaring at Noct. The glare was softened by the dirt on his young face, making him look kind of like a grumpy kitten. “Making sure she doesn't break down ten minutes outside of the city again.” He replied, sticking his tongue out at the prince before returning to whatever he was doing to the Regalia.
“You know what you're doing?” Noct pushed himself off the wall and stepped closer to his friend, peering carefully over his shoulder. He had no idea about engines, or cars in general, but that didn't stop the vague curiosity.

Prompto awarded him with a look. “I lived with Cindy for nearly eight years. I know what I'm doing.”

“Okay, okay.” Noct raised his hands defensively, amused at his friend's antics. “So how's she looking?” He questioned.

“A few tweaks here and there, and she'll be running perfectly. Could do with a few replacement parts, and I'd like to do a full service – oil change and what not – before we set off.”

“We're not due to leave for a few more days…” Noct pointed out, and Prompto nodded, adjusting something in the engine before stepping back and wiping his hands on his (once) light jeans.

“It'll take me a few days to get some of the parts.” He told the prince, “And it's best to check this stuff out before the last minute.”

“C'mon,” Noct threw his arm around his friend's shoulder, leading him away from the beloved car. “Iggy sent me to find you. Lunch's been ready for ages.”

“You didn't have to wait for me…” Prompto protested, but didn't physically pull away from Noct. Instead he allowed the prince to guide him away from the garage.

Apparently, you have a habit of skipping meals if you're busy..?” Or at least, that was what Gladio and Ignis had told Noct before sending him to find the blond.

Prompto's response was just to blush and look away with a non-committal grunt. That was enough of a confirmation for Noct who chuckled. “You can go back to... whatever you were doing after you eat.”

“What are you, Iggy?”

— — — — — — — — — — — —

“Hey kids.” Gladio greeted the ten pre-teens gathered as he walked into the room. He grinned at each one of them as they all stood to attention. “So we have a guest today.” He told them, gesturing behind himself to the glaive who followed him into the room. “I'm going away for a little while – royal business – So Nyx here's gonna sub for a while.”

“When are you going away, Senesi?” One of the kids – Lydus – asked, looking up at Gladio with big, sad eyes.

“I'll be leaving in a few days. One more class with you guys after this, and you'll be stuck with Nyx for a while.” Gladio gently ruffled the young boy's hair before gently nudging him to get back into line. “I'm gonna let Nyx take over for today and watch, make sure he does everything right.”

Beside him Nyx rolled his eyes. “Hey kids.” He greeted them, grinning down at them. “I'm Nyx Ulric.” He gave them a small bow before standing upright and looking at each of them. “So... who wants to try to hit me?”
With amusement, Gladio watched as Nyx worked with the kids one on one while still managing to engage with the entire class. He knew it would be hard to leave them all behind, but at least he could be sure that they were in good hands. He had no doubts that Nyx could teach these kids just as well as he could, and care for them just as deeply.

“How long you gonna be gone for, Gladdy?” Iris’ voice beside him almost made him jump, but he was far too well trained for that. He looked down at her and gave her a smile.

“I dunno.” He admitted. “Noct needs to visit lots of people outside the wall.” He knelt down so that he was on the same level as her, “It'll take as long as it takes. But I'll bring you back something nice, okay.”

“You better!” Iris responded, looking a little upset but not willing to protest. She knew the importance of Gladio’s work, and she was an Amicitia, she understood that duty came first. After a moment, she looked down at her feet and her voice fell quiet. “Are we still gonna do movie night? One more time before you go...?”

“Course we are.” Gladio reassured her. “Wouldn't miss it for the world.”

“You're awfully quiet today.” Ignis sat himself beside Iris, looking down at her with slight worry. It wasn't like her to just sit quietly while movie choice was discussed. “Are you upset that we have to leave?”

Slowly, the small girl nodded, not looking at Ignis, and the advisor realised that this was going to be a one-sided conversation, at least for a while until he could get Iris to open up. “I know that you understand why.” He said to her, voice calm and soothing, but not condescending. He refused to talk down to her just because she was a child. He knew just how damn sharp her mind was.

Again, Iris nodded sadly.

“Are you afraid for our safety?” Ignis guessed, and again Iris nodded.

“There's daemons and monsters outside the wall.” The girl spoke quietly and clearly, despite the tears gathering in her eyes. “And you and Gladdy and Promprom have to protect Noct and you might get hurt or even-“ Her voice broke, and she choked back a sob, “Or even killed.”

Carefully, Ignis gathered the shaking child into his arms, holding her close. “I cannot promise you that we won't get hurt.” He started, unwilling to make her false promises. “But I can promise you that we will do our best not to be.” He pulled back, a hand still on Iris shoulders. He looked down at her and gave her a soft smile, pulling a handkerchief from his pocket and offering it to her. “And I assure you, Noct will protect us just as much as we protect him.”

Iris wiped her face and blew her nose, eyes looking to where Noct and Prompto were half wrestling over their movie choices while Gladio ‘referred’. She gave a small smile and a nod. “Promise?” She questioned, and Ignis again offered her a smile.

“I promise. I happen to know that Noct would never allow any of us to get hurt if he could help it.”

Seemingly satisfied, Iris gave Ignis a smile and handed the handkerchief back before hopping up to her feet. “Moogles and chocobo’s are friends!” She called, marching up to where Prompto and Noct
had ended up rolling on the ground. “They don't fight!” She stood with her hands on her hips and gave the pair a steely look.

They separated and looked up at her, both with a sheepish expression. “Prompto wants to put on another chocobo movie!” Noct complained.

“And Noct wants to put on another plotless action film!”

Iris looked at them for a moment, eyes drifting from one to the other before she gave an exaggerated nod. “If you can't agree, then we'll watch a chick flick.” She decided and Noct and Prompto's faces fell.

It was rather difficult to say no to Iris.

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The romantic comedy that Iris chose wasn't actually bad. It had both chocobo's and action, keeping both Prompto and Noct happy. Though apparently the movie was relaxing enough for Prompto to fall asleep with his head on Noct's lap.

Iris looked at them with curiosity, watching how Noct's hand was idly stroking through Prompto's hair, and his other arm was casually flung over Prompto's side. If she didn't know better, she would think that they were together like the people in the movie. But they were both boys, and she'd never thought that two boys could be like that. It only took her a minute to decide that it didn't actually matter if they were both boys. Love was love, right?

“Are Promprom and Noct together?” She asked Gladio quietly, not wanting to disturb the two on the couch.

“Nah.” Gladio sounded a little sad and Iris looked up at him. Her big brother had a weird look on his face, like he was wishing for something he could never have. Did he like one of them like that? No, that didn't seem right. Iris knew for a fact that Gladio liked girls, not boys.

“They look like they are.” Iris commented and Gladio smiled.

“Yeah, they do. Act like it too.”

“They like each other a lot.” She continued, not quite sure she understood what was between her friends.

“Yep.” Gladio confirmed. He hesitated for a moment before letting out a soft sigh. “It's complicated.” He told her, “There're a lot of factors involved, and some of them are kinda depressing.” He added. “But don't worry. They're happy.”

“Does that mean Noct won't marry a princess?”

“No. I think... he wont marry a princess because he doesn't want to.” The movie was finishing, and Iris watched as Ignis spread a blanket over Prompto and tried to convince Noct to go to bed. The prince refused, shaking his head softly, careful not to disturb Prompto. They really did look like they were together like the people in the movie, and even though Gladio said that they weren't, Iris wasn't entirely convinced.
“C’mon kiddo,” Gladio nudged Iris, “Time to go home.”

With a nod, she got up off her seat and stretched. “Tell Promprom bye from me.” She ordered from Noct, who just gave her a nod and that funny little smile that they sometimes gave her. She didn’t know what it meant, but it looked a little sad. “And... make sure that you all come home, okay?”

“I’d say you don't have to worry,” Noct spoke quietly, obviously trying to not wake Prompto, “But I know you will anyway. So... Instead, I’ll say we’ll do our best to come home safe, and we’ll buy you something awesome while we’re out.”

Not entirely satisfied, but glad that none of them treated her like a stupid kid, Iris nodded. “I’ll write a big list of movies we have to watch when you come back.” She warned him, “The longer you’re gone, the bigger the list will be and the longer our movie night. It might even take days.” It was a subtle way of telling them to not be gone for too long, without actually telling them.

Noct seemed to understand, he gave her a happier smile this time, and lifted his hand from Prompto's hair to give her a small salute. “Yes ma'am.”

After extracting that almost promise, Iris allowed Gladio to usher her out of the door, glancing back once to see Noct leaning over Prompto and whispering quietly to the slowly waking blond.

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The day of their departure arrived, and Noct found himself sitting casually in his apartment lounge while Cor stared at him disapprovingly. He offered a shrug to the Marshal and returned his eyes to the television.

“Why?” Cor asked, arms folded over his chest as he all but glared at the teen on the couch.

“Because.” It wasn't an answer, and Noct knew that, but it was all he was giving him. Cor sighed and lowered himself onto one of the plush arm chairs, still looking at his prince.

“That's not an answer.”

Noct smirked and shrugged, playing up the teenager thing for a few seconds. “Because I said so?” He offered, chuckling slightly before shaking his head. “I have my reasons.” He told him. “You just need to trust me.”

Cor offered him a calculating look before rolling his eyes. “I don't have much of a choice. But once we're outside the wall, it's my job to protect you, and I'll need you to follow my orders in battle.”

Noct nodded, agreeing for now. He knew what Cor didn't – that he and his companions were fully capable of handling themselves in battle – but he'd go along with Cor for now. The Marshal was already pissed enough about them leaving in the middle of the night. But they had Regis' approval, so Cor really couldn't do anything about it.

“I'll meet with you in the garage.” Cor muttered, standing and heading to the door. “Don't be late.”

Without words, Noct just waved Cor off, waiting until he was fully gone before standing. He poked his head into the bedroom where Prompto was still packing a few things. “He's gone.” He told him
and the blond nodded.

“Finally.” He muttered. “When we get back, I'm gonna officially move in.” He followed Noct out of the room and made his way to the kitchen to make himself a drink. “That way, when you have important, unexpected visitors, I don't have to hide.”

“We'll have to come up with a reason that we're sharing a room. There's only one in the apartment.” Noct pointed out. “Can't exactly come out and say 'hey, after ten years of forced separation we're both paranoid about each other disappearing and have nightmares if we don't sleep cuddling'. Might raise more questions than it answers.” He joined Prompto in his chuckles and followed the blond's example – fixing himself a hot chocolate. He was almost tempted to make a coffee, given that Cor's arrival had woke him up at the stupidly early time of seven am. But his distaste for the beverage won out over his tiredness.

“How about – after x amount of time on the road sharing a tent, we got used to it, and with me literally by his side at night, we're ready for anything.”

“Still sounds kinky.” Noct shrugged with amusement as he poured the boiling water into his cup.

“Kinda true though.” Prompto once again lead them from the room, this time settling them into the lounge. “I could just say I sleep on the couch or something.” He offered.

“Maybe.” Noct shrugged, “We'll figure something out.”

“So what did Cor want anyway?” Prompto asked, taking his customary position of leaning against Noct's shoulder.

“To ask why we're setting off in the middle of the night, and not during the day like a sensible person.”

“What did you tell him?”

“Because I said so.”

At those words, Prompto burst out laughing, “Seriously?” He questioned, “I bet he hated that.”

“Yep.” The grin on Noct's face was somewhat satisfied, and the look just made Prompto laugh again. “But he can't do anything about it, since dad approves.”

“We should probably tell Cor everything though.” Prompto sat up and turned around to face Noct. “I mean, it's probably gonna be a bit obvious that things aren't adding up for him. Especially when it comes to a fight. I can hold back in sparring against someone I know, but I probably won't hold back when it's for real. Then there's the fact that we all know way more than we should about outer Lucis...”

Noct nodded, agreeing fully. “Yeah, but I don't think he'll believe us.”

“probably not right away. And he'll probably think we're all nuts when we tell him.”

“Which is why we'll tell him after we've left the city. That way he can't stop us from going.”

“Now you really do sound like a teenager.” Prompto chuckled, shaking his head slightly.
As the sun set over Insomnia, there was a knock at the apartment door. With a confused look shared with Prompto, Noct extracted himself from their intermingled position and went to answer it.

The only people who visited the apartment were his retainers and Iris. All of which either had a key, or would arrive with someone with a key. Cor had been the first actual visitor since they'd arrived back in this time, and Noct knew that he wouldn't be coming back. Noct had no idea who would be knocking at his door.

So with caution, he looked through the small peep hole to see who was waiting on the other side of the wood. What he saw only deepened his confusion, but he opened the door anyway. “Dad?” He questioned, stepping aside to allow the king into his residence. He poked his head out of the door and looked down the corridor, expecting Clarus to be with him, but it seemed the king was alone.

“Does Clarus know where you are?” He questioned, closing the front door to his apartment and stepping inside.

Regis chuckled and shook his head. “Clarus is not my keeper.” He reminded Noct. “And I hardly believe I need a guard to visit my son.”

“You know he hates it when you sneak off without him.” Noct muttered with a sigh, gesturing to the kitchen in a silent question. Regis shook his head, turning down the offer of a drink before wandering over to the lounge.

“Ah, good evening, Prompto.” Regis greeted as he took a seat.

“Your Majesty.” Came the slightly high pitched response.

Over the last six months, Prompto's fear of the king had decreased to more manageable levels – the fact that Prompto was now officially serving on the council probably helped – but the blond was still somehow intimidated by him.

Noct had asked Ignis about it once, wanting to know what his advisor thought. Ignis had simply responded by pointing out that Regis was possibly the only person who could have actually prevented Prompto from being allowed to spend time with Noct. Which had made Prompto afraid of the king – which he had never had the chance to get over.

Now though, Prompto was almost capable of having a casual conversation with Regis. Almost. He still seemed unsure of what to do and what he was allowed to say, but he was slowly gaining more confidence.

“I uh- Sorry, I should -” Prompto was stammering and Noct looked at him with a small frown. It appeared that Prompto was only as comfortable with the king as he had been when he'd been prepared to see him. An unexpected visit turned him back into the babbling mess he had been as a real teenager.

“Prom?” Noct asked, vaguely amused at his friend's antics. Ignis had suggested that Noct leave it be, and allow Prompto to develop a relationship with Regis in a way that was natural for him. It was slow going, but Noct was happy to let it just happen.
“I uh- Need to finish my work on the Regalia. Make sure she's ready...” With that, the blond all but fled from the room.

“Do I offend him in some way?” Regis asked, watching as the door almost slammed closed behind Prompto's hasty retreat.

“Nah.” Noct shook his head, also looking at the door. “He's just a little intimidated. He's not sure how to act around you.”

“Why not?” Noct was thankful to find amusement in Regis' voice rather than offence. The king seemed genuinely baffled and Noct finally turned to face him.

“You're the most politically important and powerful man in the country.” Noct reminded him, “Back when we were really teenagers, Prom was terrified that you would forbid him from being my friend, and he never really got over that. That, and you're royalty and he's common born.”

“You're royalty too.” Regis pointed out, making himself comfortable on the arm chair.

Noct shrugged and laughed. “He actually forgets that sometimes. To him, I'm just Noct. A guy who just happens to be a prince. He's the only person I've ever met to treat me like that off the bat. It took years for either Iggy or Gladio to treat me like a normal guy. And sometimes they still don't, even after almost three decades.” He chuckled again and shook his head. “But Prom...” He couldn't help the soft smile on his face. “Unless it's politically necessary, Prom never treats me like a prince. I'm just a nerd who still can't beat him in fighter games, and who'll stay up all night arguing about comic books with him. When I'm around Prompto...” He trailed off for a moment, lost in thought. “When I'm around Prompto, I feel like I can be me.”

There was quiet for a few moments, comfortable enough that it took Noct a few seconds to realise that he'd basically just gushed about his best friend to his dad, and for a blush to settle on his cheeks. He was about to interrupt the silence and back-pedal when his father spoke first.

“There are times...” He said slowly, the warm fondness in his voice tinted with an edge of sadness, “That you remind me very much of your mother.”

Well that was a completely unexpected tangent. Noct blinked a few times in confusion, wondering where his father was going with this. “Huh?” He questioned.

“The way you speak about that boy, the way you look at him... Your mother used to be like that with me. She wore the same look on her face as you do.” Regis gave Noct a small, saddened, smile – the same smile he always wore on the infrequent occasions he spoke of Noct's mother. “How long have the two of you been together?”

Noct spluttered a little at the unexpected question before letting out a sigh and shaking his head. “We're not.” He answered.

“Oh.” Regis' smile turned sympathetic. “He doesn't feel the same way?”

“No. He does.” Noct leaned back on the couch and looked up at the ceiling, shoulders sagging in defeat. “I know he loves me, just as much as I love him. But...”

“But?” Regis prompted when Noct fell quiet for too long.
“But we can't.” Noct finally answered, eyes still looking up. “It's illegal, and if we got caught, the council could banish Prompto... or have him executed. Friendship is enough. It has to be.”

“I changed the same sex marriage laws when I first took the throne.” Regis reminded Noct, and the prince finally moved his head to look at his father.

“Yeah. For the citizenry of Lucis.” Noct nodded, “But the wording of the law doesn't include the monarchy. I had Ignis look it over years ago. Apparently there's an old law that takes precedence. It was to make sure the bloodline continued.” Noct ran his hand over his face, rubbing at his suddenly tired eyes.

“Ah.” Regis was quiet for a moment, and the air grew a little tense, neither man sure what to say now.

Eventually, Noct let out a sigh and shifted on the couch, trying to get comfortable without Prompto's presence. “So, I don't think that's the reason for your visit...” He prompted, and the king smiled at him, obviously glad for the change in conversation.

“No.” Regis agreed. “I came to wish you well, remind you to take care, and to request that upon your return, we all gather for an informal meal. Perhaps make a routine of it. You are not the son I knew six months ago, and I would like to get to know the new you.”

“Yeah.” Noct smiled at his father, “I'd like that too.”

Chapter End Notes

This is officially the end of the first arc! The next chapter catches up with the Prologue xD

So - Now we know why Noct and Prompto are so close without being a couple....

Also, would people be interested in a discord server to chat to me (and others) about my work/FFXV in general? It's always fun to have feedback from the people who read my stuff...

Also also, I noticed that I have a lot of guests give Kudos on this. I have a few invites left to give out, so if you want one, send me an email. First come, first serve. (My email is on my profile).
Ok, so first, I want to apologise for any mistakes. I got myself a chromebook so that I can take my work with me wherever I go (great theory. Took me four hours to learn how to use googledocs, and then another two to figure out the spellcheck x.x). I'm still learning a new OS (which I haven't REALLY had to do since I tried using a mac almost two decades ago, since Windows is mostly the same whichever one you use). It's a bit slow going.

SO there may be mistakes in here. There may be a lot of them. I hope not. But if you see some, let me know. The next chapter was half written on my new machine, and the one after that will probably be fully written on it (since this laptop actually has a working battery).

Anyway, welcome to Arc 2 of The Chance of a Future - Road Trip Take Two!

The sun had set several hours ago, and Noct's retinue finally gathered in the royal garage. Cor was already waiting for them, his face showing his perpetual irritation. Noct chanced a quick look down at his watch just to make sure they weren't late. They were actually a few minutes early.

"Ignis drives." Noct ordered, taking his old seat in the back of the car. "Prom's up front – he gets motion sickness."

"Nah, I can handle it." Prompto protested, gesturing around to the people gathered. "Makes more sense to get Gladio in the front. Means more room in the back."

Prompto had a point. It had been a tight enough fit with Iris in the back with them, and Cor was quite a bit larger than the petite teen. If they tried to fit Noct, Gladio and Cor in the back, nobody would be comfortable.

"Works for me." Gladio shrugged, climbing into the passenger seat. He reached forward and secured something to the rear view mirror.

"What is that?" Prompto asked, moving to sit in the middle seat of the back. He leaned forward between the two front seats to take a closer look at the stuffed... animal? that Gladio was hanging from the mirror. It was an odd shade of green, and Noct could see that it appeared to have floppy ears – which Gladio used to hang it. If Noct didn't know any better, he'd say that it was a weird caricature of Carbuncle. It even had a little horn on its head.

"I have no idea." Gladio admitted.

"Another trinket from your children?" Ignis asked, adjusting the seat so he could be more comfortable while driving.

"Yup."
“Children?” Cor asked, an eyebrow raised.

“Gladio teaches martial arts at Iris’ school.” Noct told him with a shrug. “They seem to like him.”

Cor looked like he wanted to say something more, but he didn’t. Instead, he simply sat back in his seat and Ignis set off. Their journey had finally begun.

They arrived at their destination less ten minutes after leaving the city limits. Ignis pulled the car over and switched the engine off, but left the headlights on for a moment, closing his eyes. “There are no daemons between us and the camp.” He told them.

With Ignis having given the all clear, Noct and his retinue climbed out of the car, nobody questioning Ignis’ hearing. Cor looked less than impressed, but held his tongue. The entire way to the campsite, he held his hand over his katana, as if expecting an ambush.

Noct couldn’t blame him. Not really. Cor had no idea that Ignis spent an entire decade unable to see-relying on other senses to make his way through a ruined world. There was no way he could understand just how sensitive Ignis’ hearing really was.

When they eventually made it to the site, they busied themselves pulling equipment out of the armiger and setting up the tent. It only took them a few moments – even ten years couldn't undo the months of practice they'd had during their first travels. Each and every one of them knew what they had to do, and seamlessly worked together.

There was an odd feel to the atmosphere. A heavy, slightly sad, but also hopeful air. The four future warriors couldn't help but remember the last time they had camped in this spot. It had been what they thought was their last night together as a group. There was still the feeling of finality hanging around and even though they knew that it was no longer the case – that the sun would rise on time tomorrow – none of them could really get past it.

They had eaten an early meal in preparation for their departure, so for once Ignis wasn't busy cooking for them, and instead joined them as they sat around the fire in silence.

“The last time we were here...” Prompto spoke quietly, but he knew that everybody could hear him. He was in a camp chair, leaning forward with his arms braced on his knees. He didn't need to finish his sentence for the others to understand. Everyone except for Cor.

“It's different this time.” Noct also sat staring at the fire. He wasn't just speaking to Prompto, but to Gladio and Ignis too.

“The sun will rise soon.” Ignis added.

“And we'll get to see it.” Gladio agreed. “Together.”

They fell into silence again, each quiet in their own thoughts and memories. It felt like an age had passed since they had last been here, but in reality for them it had only been six months.

“It's time.” Ignis' quiet voice pierced the silence of the camp, and three of his companions stood.
Together, the four of them stepped forward, leaving the camp and Cor behind to stand on the edge of the cliff, overlooking their beloved city. Together, just as they had promised six months ago on their first night back in the city.

The night sky was beginning to brighten, stars disappearing in the paling blue. Beyond the walls of the city, a glow could be seen. Noct felt tears gather in his eyes, tears of hope, of love. He was right. This time, it really was different. Here he was, standing in the place that had once felt like a good-bye, welcoming in a new day.

For the first time since they had arrived back in this time, Noct felt like they really could change things. With his companions at his side, he was confident that they could accomplish anything they put their mind to.

Look at what they had already changed. Insomnia was reaching out to the rest of Lucis, the king knew that Drautos was a traitor, and Ardyn was somewhat on their side.

For the first time since he had last stood in this place, Noct felt a sense of hope.

From the camp, Cor watched on in mild confusion as the four teenagers took their places. Prompto stood to Noct's right, Ignis to his left and Gladio stood behind, between Noct and Prompto. The Marshal watched as their arms wound around each other, Gladio's hands resting on Noct's and Prompto's shoulders.

“Isn't that a sight to see.” Ignis spoke again, voice solemn. The others agreed with soft sounds, and then silence fell again.

“We waited ten years for this boys.” Prompto spoke this time, voice just as quiet. He leaned his head slightly to rest it on Noct's shoulder, his arm tightening around his king.

“Good morning.” Noct greeted, whispered voice all but lost in the light wind.

Eventually, the sun was high enough in the sky that the prevailing colours of orange and red became a steady blue, and the four young men silently stepped away from the cliff's edge to rejoin Cor at the camp.

“You risked daemon attacks and left the city in the middle of the night, to watch a sunrise?” The Marshal questioned, looking at each of the boys in turn.

Noct all but threw himself in a waiting chair with a soft sigh. Prompto dragged another chair close to the prince and sat beside him, Gladio copying the action. Ignis wandered to the cooking area they had set up and began to get to work. It was almost time for breakfast.

“When you hear our story, you'll understand.” Noct said quietly, looking into the dying embers of the fire.

“So tell me your story.” Sensing it would be a long one Cor leaned back in his chair, accepting the can of Ebony Ignis offered.

Noct nodded once, also taking a can. He opened it and took a sip with a grimace. “Our story starts in the year M.E. 756.” He could see the look of disbelief flicker over the man's face, but knew that Cor wouldn't interrupt him. Not yet. He was going to hear them out before deciding if they were insane or not.
“Tensions between Niflheim and Lucis were the highest they'd been since the great war. It was only a matter of time before the ceasefire broke down and we were thrown back into an all out war. So when the empire came forth with the offer of a peace treaty, dad jumped on the opportunity.

“One of the terms of the treaty was that I were to be wed to Lady Lunafreya of Tenebrae. So a few days later, the four of us set off for Altissia, where the wedding was to take place.

“When we got to Galdin Quay, we found out that the ferry's had been stopped because of the empire. We'd managed to secure another means of travel when...” Noct shook his head and let out a soft sigh. While it had been a while ago now, the pain of that morning still felt fresh. To find out that everything he'd ever known was gone...

“We received word that the empire had attacked, and that Insomnia had fallen.” Ignis completed Noct's sentence for him. “We decided to return – here -” the advisor gestured around them, indicating that this was the exact spot where they had come. “To see for ourselves.”

“Everything was in ruins.” Gladio took over the narrative. “The city was on fire, and the empire had soldiers everywhere. Refugees were leaving on foot, heading to Lestallum.”

“At first, we didn't know that Luna was with them. She'd been in the city when it fell.” Noct spoke again, wanting to tell the story. “We met up with you – or the Cor in that timeline – and you-he- told us about the Royal Arms. We travelled around Lucis and found most of them, and I also received the blessings of Titan and Ramuh. Eventually, we managed to make our way to Altissia using the Royal Vessel. Once there, we found out that Luna was there too. She began the rite to summon Leviathan so I could get her blessing but...” He took another breath but found that he couldn't say it. Even now, years later and years before, he couldn’t say it.

“Luna was killed.” Prompto spoke quietly, a hand moving to rest on Noct's thigh in comfort. “By the Accursed Immortal. After that, we went to Niflheim to find the Crystal – the empire had stolen it when they took out Insomnia. We found it, but Noct was pulled inside.”

“In order for me to get the power needed to banish the darkness, I had to 'enter into reflection'. “Noct couldn't help the bitterness in his voice. Not when he was talking about how the gods had robbed him of ten years and informed him of how he was to die. “Turns out, that to fulfil the prophecy and to banish the darkness, I had to die.” He chanced a look up and saw that Cor didn't look surprised.

Which didn't surprise Noct nearly as much as it should have. He had always had an inkling that his father had known more about the prophecy than he'd told Noct, and it made sense that Cor would know about it too. It was likely that a handful of people within the city knew about this before Noct did.

“Noct was out for ten years.” Gladio continued, and Noct sat back, allowing his companions to tell the parts of the story that he couldn't. He hadn't been there for the dark times, but they had. “After six months, the sun stopped rising and the night became constant.”

“Daemons began to spawn more and more, and many people became ill with the Starscourge. An illness that we found out to be the cause of daemonic activity. When one is infected, the end result is daemonification.” Ignis spoke with his back to them, busy making their breakfast.

Noct's stomach told him in no uncertain terms that he did not want food, but he knew enough to know that he would have to eat. Outside the city, he needed to keep his strength up.
“For ten years, we fought daemons. We ferried survivors and protected them until they reached Lestallum – the last safe place on Eos.” Prompto's hand on Noct's thigh tightened slightly as he spoke, taking just as much comfort as he was giving. “We knew that Noct would come back, and when he did, he'd banish the darkness. We didn't know... what the cost of that would be.”

“But I did it.” Noct finally spoke again. “We returned to Insomnia and defeated the Accursed, and I performed the Dawn Rite.”

“You said that that would kill you.” Cor pointed out, and Noct nodded.

“It did.” He admitted. “I woke up in the Astral Realm. But something that Bahamut said to me stuck in my head. With the Ring, the Crystal and the blessings of the gods, I wielded more power than that of the six combined. So I used it. I sent our minds back in time. Then... we woke up in Insomnia. Before the fall.”

“That was the most confusing day of my life.” Prompto muttered. “One minute I'm dying in the throne room, next I'm waking up in the Crystal room fourteen years earlier.”

“You died.” Cor's expression was pure disbelief, and Noct didn't really blame him. It was somewhat unbelievable story, after all.

Noct nodded, and decided that the same demonstration he'd given his father would probably work on Cor too. Cor was the only person to have the key to the Royal Tombs, and Noct knew that he'd had it since before he was born. So he stood and summoned the weapons from the armiger, letting them dance around him in a shining blue light. With Cor being the only person to have the key, Noct having those weapons leant some credibility to their story. “When I sent us back, I tried to send as much of ‘us’ back as I could. Anything we had on our person, or in the armiger came back with us, along with most of our muscle memory.”

Cor shook his head, still not believing what he was hearing – and seeing. It didn't really matter, Noct was expecting him not to. But he had no doubt that Cor would eventually realise what was going on – that he would figure out that they were telling the truth.

“You don't have to believe us.” Ignis said what Noct was thinking as he handed out plates of food. “But it will answer many of the questions that you will no doubt have as we travel.”

“No more holding back!” Prompto exclaimed, sounding relieved.

“Nope.” Noct grinned at his friend, returning his royal arms to his armiger and sitting back down. “How about tonight we find you a daemon and you can let loose?” He suggested.

“Hells to the yes!”

“I dare say nothing around here will pose much of a challenge.” Ignis warned, taking his seat once he’d passed the food around. “Perhaps we should see what Takka has to offer in the way of hunts? It would be nice to stretch our legs a little.”

“Taking on something at a lower level isn't a bad idea.” Gladio pointed out between mouthfuls of food. “Make sure we're not rusty. Only so much you can practice against other humans.”

“Hey, think we'll run into that Zu again?” Prompto asked, sounding seriously excited at the prospect.
“Maybe.” Noct shrugged, unable to help the grin at his friend's enthusiasm.

Ignis was right. It would be nice to see a bit of real combat again. It was an odd thing to have missed, but it had been a part of their lives for so long, that Noct found he did miss it. What he didn't miss, was Cor's look of disapproval, to which he simply shrugged.

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“Home sweet home.” Prompto said with a wistful sigh. He stepped out of the car behind Noct and stretched his arms over his head.

“Home?” Cor questioned, looking around at the small garage.

Hammerhead wasn't much, but it definitely held a place in the hearts of Noct's retinue. It had been their first and most frequent stop during their journey, and was the home to some of the friends they had made along the way.

Obviously those friends wouldn't recognise them now. None of them had actually met them yet.

“Yep. Lived here for eight or so years.” Prompto answered Cor with a shrug, trying not to show how upset he actually was. “But that was.. y'know... in the future.” He sighed again and dropped his arms, looking around.

“Looks different.” Gladio muttered, and Prompto nodded. Noct remembered what Hammerhead had looked like the very last time he'd been here. The fences around the perimeter, the weapons strewn about Takka's where the hunters had taken over. He remembered the bright stadium lights that kept the daemon hordes at bay.

But now, in the bright morning light, Hammerhead was just how he remembered it being before. Open, friendly. The garage door was open and Cindy was working on someone's car. Cid was standing from where he'd been lounging on his reclining seat.

“Aint seen you around here before.” He said in lieu of a greeting. Noct managed a smile at Cid's familiar gruffness. “But I sure do recognise the car.” The old man bypassed them in favour of approaching the Regalia. That was when he noticed Cor. “Well well, if it isn't The Immortal.” He leaned forward, regarding Cor for a moment. “What brings you out to these parts?”

“Escorting the Prince on his mission to reconnect with the people of Lucis.” Cor said simply, a smile playing at the corner of his lips. After a moment, he offered his hand to Cid, who took it with a chuckle.

“It's been too long.” Cid grinned up at Cor for a moment before stepping back.

“Cid..?” Noct stepped forward, trying to not show his familiarity with the old mechanic.

“Ah, you must be that prince I've been hearin' about.” Cid looked at Noct with a familiar disapproval that made Noct feel oddly nostalgic.

“Yeah.” Noct nodded, reaching into his pocket. “Dad said to give you this.” He offered the letter to Cid. After Regis had listened to Noct's story the day before, the king had handed him a sealed
envelope and requested he give it to Cid - which Noct was more than happy to do.

He still remembered the look of regret on Cid's face when he'd found out that Regis had died. He hoped that whatever was in that letter would lead to the two meeting again. Before it was too late.

Cid wordlessly took the envelope and looked down at it with a frown before putting it in his pocket. “So. You're out here to 'reconnect' with people, huh?” He questioned.

“Yeah. Insomnia's been isolated for too long. I intend to change that. Didn't want to wait until I got to the throne to start.”

“What are you, sixteen?” Cid questioned, eyes looking up and down Noct.

Noct nodded. “Old enough to know that abandoning my people isn't right.” Noct countered, “I intend on opening up Insomnia's gates, to all Lucians. Inside or outside the city, we're all Lucians, and it's time to start acting like it.”

He knew that coming from his mouth as he was now, the words seemed like youthful optimism, but they were true. It was only part of the reason why they were doing it now, but it was something that he had always intended on doing. Until the empire and the darkness had got in the way.

Cid was still looking at Noct appraisingly, but after a moment he gave a nod. “Good luck to you.” He offered, approval in his voice.

“In the meantime,” Noct added with a smile, “it looks like you want to look over the car.” He gestured to Prompto, “I'm sure my mechanic can tell you all about her.”

“What, I'm your mechanic now?” Prompto questioned, amusement evident.

“You volunteered.” Noct shrugged and Prompto rolled his eyes.

“Because I didn't want the damn thing breaking down again. All I did was flush the radiator, change the oil and filter, checked the tires.”

Noct shrugged at Prompto, these words meaning nothing to him. He gestured at Cid and stepped back, obviously meaning to walk away. “Talk to him, not me.” He said as he began to walk backwards.

And so Prompto did. Noct made his escape and joined Ignis and Gladio at Takka's, sliding into the booth -just like old times. Ignis had even ordered for him. “Thanks.” He muttered to Ignis, smiling at his advisor.

They hadn't spent too long in Hammerhead once they learned that Takka didn't have any hunts available – deciding that sleeping in the hotel in Longwythe was far more preferable than the campervan. Once they left, Noct noticed that Prompto was a lot quieter than usual. While he was taking photographs, he wasn't doing it with his old enthusiasm.

Had Prompto just lost his love for photography? That didn't sound right, but it was possible. From what Noct had learned, Prompto didn't take many photos during the long night, so maybe he just wasn't as enthused about it as he used to be.
It wasn't until they arrived at Longwythe, and Prompto quickly isolated himself to the motel roof that Noct realised what it was.

He gave Prompto some time to himself before joining him, sitting himself down beside his friend without a word, knowing that Prompto would start talking when he was ready.

After a while, Prompto did speak. “I ran into Cindy.” He said quietly, staring down at the concrete below him. “She didn't know me. It was like talking to a stranger...”

Noct leaned sideways to bump his shoulder against Prompto's in a show of solidarity, silently telling Prompto that he was there for him. “I'm sorry.” He said quietly.

Prompto shook his head. “Don't be.” He leaned on Noct, and Noct wound his arm around Prompto's waist in response. “If we pull this off... if we can change things, then we'll make her life better. Easier.” Prompto pointed out. “That will make this worth it.”

They were quiet again, Noct trying to figure out what to say to reassure Prompto, to make him smile again, but his mind came up blank. Instead, he went for addressing his curiosity.

“You never told me. Were you and Cindy....?” He left the end of his question deliberately vague, but knew that Prompto would understand what he was asking.

“Nah.” Prompto shook his head. “We tried once.” He admitted, “Turns out, not as bi as I thought.”

“What do you mean?” Noct asked, confusion simply growing.

Prompto lifted a hand and held one finger out, drooping it, and Noct understood. “You couldn't get it up?” He questioned, laughing at not only the idea, but also at the direction the conversation was taking. It wasn't like he and Prompto had never discussed things like that – Noct was sure that most male friends did – but Prompto had never been so.... open about it before.

“Nope.” Prompto confirmed, chuckling. “As soft and floppy as Gladio's cup noodles.”

Noct couldn't help but laugh at the analogy, unable to imagine anything other than Gladio's cup noodles. He'd never be able to see Gladio eat his favourite food the same way again. “I'm sure Gladio'll be happy to hear what you think of his noodles.”

Prompto laughed too, sounding a little happier than he had just moments ago, but still a little sad. “I've used that analogy before.” He admitted. “He found it hilarious. Started calling it 'floppy dick dinner'.” He let out a soft sigh.

“You remember the last time we were up here?” Noct questioned looking up at the sky.

“Feels like forever ago.” Prompto admitted, following Noct's gaze. “I was so awkward.” He laughed, “I mean, we'd already talked about things, but I was so sure I was gonna do something stupid. And for a while there, I thought you were gonna kiss me.”

“I wanted to.” Noct chuckled. “’S why I kept my distance.”

Prompto nodded in understanding. They sat like that for a while longer, silently indulging in their closeness while they could. Here, they were away from prying eyes, and while they couldn't risk
doing anything more than simply holding each other, for a while, they could pretend.

It had taken them a while to get to this. Where they were both comfortable with the closeness between them. It wasn't until their reunion in Zegnautus Keep that they'd decided that just because they couldn't be together, didn't mean they couldn't be affectionate. Since being back in this time, their physical touches had become more and more frequent until it was the most natural thing in the world.

Eventually, they made their way back down to the ground and joined the others in the diner for dinner, ignoring the disapproving look that Cor was giving them.

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“Dude, let me do my job.” Prompto's irritation was clear in not only his words, but his expression too. The blond was ready to run off, gun drawn. The only thing stopping him was the marshal of the crownsguard.

“Your job is to protect the prince. Not to run off and fight every daemon you see.” Cor scolded, still standing in the gunners way.

Cor still didn't believe them, about their past, and it was at times like these that it was most obvious. They had been about to turn in for the night when the unmistakable sound of daemons spawning had come from a few hundred meters away from the rest stop. Prompto had jumped to his feet, intending on taking it out before it could come any closer, but Cor had objected.

Standing beside his friend, Noct could see the creature in the distance. Ignis had already identified it as an iron giant – something that any one of them could take out on their own – and even from this distance Noct could see that he'd been right.

But Cor was steadfast on preventing the party from leaving the relative safety of the anti-daemon lit area, and Prompto was not happy.

“I was a daemon hunter. For ten. years.” Prompto's eyes never left the meandering daemon and his gun was already in his hand.

“And now you're Crownsguard and a retainer. You are here to protect the prince.”

“You know...” Noct said, stepping forward to stand directly beside Prompto. He looked at the distance between himself and the daemon and ran a few calculations. “He has a point.” He added, turning to Prompto with a grin. “Your job is to protect me.”

With that, he summoned his Ultima Blade and lifted it, not sparing Cor another glance before throwing it towards the daemon. Now, Prompto and the others would have no choice but to follow him and fight the daemon.

It only took two warps for him to reach it, his friends hot on his heels. He dodged the slow attacks from the giant and the moment his friends arrived he fell back. The daemon wouldn't last long, and his friends needed this more than he did.

So he found a rock, warped to it and took a seat, watching the battle below him unfold.

To say that Cor was not happy about his actions was an understatement. Once the quick battle was
over, the retinue began their trek back to the settlement at a casual pace. As soon as they were within the radius of the lights, Cor turned to them, obviously about to begin a lecture.

Noct beat him to it. He turned on his heels and faced Cor, expression locked into a steely glare.

“You don't believe our story. Fine.” He tried not to be too angry at Cor, he was just doing his job after all. But he didn't need to stop his friends from engaging in battle. Not when they could probably do it better than he could, and especially not when it seemed to help them cope with whatever traumas they had been through.

He could see that it had helped. One look at the extra bounce in Prompto's steps, the grin on Gladio's face, the reduced tension in Ignis' shoulders. He knew without a doubt that taking on that daemon had helped them more than Cor would understand.

“But don't stand in their way.” Noct warned. “They know what they're doing and taking out daemons is part of their job. Part of our job. I am the King of Light, it is my duty to destroy daemons. One at a time or all at once, it makes no difference. I will do my job, and they will do theirs. If you have a problem with that, then go back to Insomnia. I don't need you slowing us down.”

“I was sent with you for a reason.” Cor's expression was just as dark as Noct's, and Noct could understand it, he really could. Cor had been told to protect Noct from the dangers outside the wall, had been instructed to keep him safe from daemons and monsters alike.

“Yeah. Because it would've looked irresponsible for the king to send a bunch of teenagers out on their own.” Noct countered. “But we're not teenagers. My men have been fighting daemons for ten years and survived a literal apocalypse. They are more qualified than anyone to take out daemons before they can come too close to settlements like this. Stopping them from doing that is a great way to lose their respect. And if you lose theirs, you lose mine.”

He took a breath and let it out slowly, reminding himself that Cor wasn't really at fault here. “Look,” He spoke again, voice much less angry now. “I get that it's going to take you a while to realise that we're not as young as we look. I understand that. Hell, it took me months to come to terms with it. But out here, we can't be worrying about having to fight you as well as the daemons and whatever else comes. I'll make it a royal order if you need me to, but I hope it won't come to that.”

“You put yourself in danger so your friend could seek out an adrenaline rush. You could've been hurt and it's my job-”

“Do I look hurt?” Noct spread his arms out, showing Cor that he was perfectly fine. “It was an Iron Giant. They're slow and stupid. It didn't land a single hit on any of us. We know what we're doing.” Cor looked like he was going to protest again, so Noct lifted his hand to stop him. “I'm done arguing about this.” He told him firmly. “You are dismissed. Return to your room and rest, we leave at dawn.”

With that, Noct turned and walked away, making his way into the diner. It was possible that the Iron Giant had been a mark, and if it was, he wanted to let the tipster know that it had been taken care of.

“Of all the irresponsible-”

“Noct is correct.” Ignis cut Cor's rant off before it could really begin. “We are fully capable of
defeating such daemons. Iron Giants pose little threat to us. Especially one as low a level as that one was."

“He purposefully put himself in danger to engage an enemy that didn’t need engaging.”

“Marshal.” Gladio caught the man's attention and let out a sigh, gesturing for him to take a seat on the small chair in their shared hotel room as he himself sat on one of the beds. “We were fighting daemons for ten years straight. Barely any time to stop and breathe. We spent every day fighting for our own survival, and the survival of the people around us. That was the first daemon we’ve seen in six months, and every single one of our instincts was telling us all to take it out before it could do any damage.”

“If Noct hadn’t have found a way to allow us to do so,” Ignis continued, “it would have been quite detrimental to our mental well-being. We would have felt as if we had failed someone, perhaps even put somebody in danger. Prompto especially would have become anxious and unable to sleep. On some level, Noct understands that, and while he may have been quite harsh with you, I do agree with him.”

“My job here is to protect him.”

“Then follow his lead.” Gladio said with a shrug. “Butting heads with him isn't going to do anything but make him more determined. He missed out on those ten years, and I don't think a single day goes by that he doesn't feel guilty about that. So when he sees something he can do that might help any of us, he'll jump on it with both feet. No matter who's in the way.”

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Chapter End Notes

So I made a discord server. ( https://discord.gg/esGdEpD ) Feel free to join!

I'm going through a lot of stress at the moment (plus side, clean house, down side, emotional breakdowns every day or two) that is unlikely to resolve for a few months. What this means for you, is that I will either disappear completely, or I'll update like crazy, or I'll flick between the two. Please bear with me.
Galdin Quay

Chapter Notes

So I'm kinda super sick at the moment, so I'm spending my time either sleeping or writing since I can't do anything else xD. I've written two chapters in the last two days, so I thought I'd upload this one a little early :)

For some reason, google docs doesn't seem to be saving my formatting, specifically italics... I'm hoping that I kept everything, but eh. I might go back over it later and double check again, but right now I just want to get the chapter posted.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It took Cor by surprise when they really did leave at dawn, lead by the famously sleepy prince. It was all but unheard of for Noct to get out of bed before nine am at the earliest. Yet here he was, bright and early, gathered with his retinue. At six am.

“It appears it only took the end of the world to get you up by dawn.” Ignis commented as the group gathered around the car. He handed the groggy prince a can of ebony – which Noct guzzled down all at once with an almighty grimace.

“I could get used to it.” Prompto grinned at Noct, bumping their shoulders together. “Watching the sunrise together... Day after day, morning after morning.”

“Piss off.” Noct muttered, shaking his head. “Mornings suck.” He crumpled the can in his hand and stowed it in a bag in the car before climbing inside. The others followed quickly and they were soon on their way.

“What's our itinerary for today?” Gladio asked as Ignis pulled out onto the road.

“Our next stop is Galdin Quay.” Ignis answered, “As it's a popular holiday destination, we are all but guaranteed to run into some influential people. It would also be a good idea for us to take the time to relax, I'm sure that Noct would appreciate the time to fish.”

“Damn. I haven't fished in forever.” Noct muttered, slumped down in his seat. He looked moments away from falling back to sleep. “You guys never let me fish as long as I want to.”

“That's because fishing is boring.” Prompto complained with a sigh, not even looking up at Noct as he fiddled with his camera.

“So go kill some crabs or something.” Noct shrugged. “Coctura usually has some decent hunts available.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Gladio agreed.

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Once again, Cor was aghast to Noct's retinue's complete lack of regard for the Prince's safety. Almost as soon as they had arrived at Galdin Quay, the group disbanded and each went their own separate ways. Gladio and Ignis made their way towards the resort, while Prompto wandered off
somewhere claiming the need to ‘take photos’, leaving Cor no choice but to follow Noct to the
fishing pier.

“Do they often leave you alone like this?” Cor asked, face trained in a scowl as he stood beside
Noct.

“I’m not alone.” Noct pointed out, casually pulling his fishing reel from the armiger (was there
anything that this group didn’t store in there?). “I’ve got you. And even if I were alone, I’m fine. You
don’t need to worry so much.”

“It’s my job to worry.” Cor felt like a repeating record. How many times did he have to tell Noct that
he was literally here to protect him before the young man understood?

Even if their story was true, which Cor still had troubles believing, it was still a supremely stupid and
irresponsible idea to leave the sole heir to the crown unguarded outside the city. Anything could
happen.

“And do you think, that there is anything here that is stronger than a god? Or an immortal being hell
bent on my destruction?” Finally, the young prince looked to Cor, “I felled three gods.” He told him,
“Defeated them in battle - one of them more or less on my own. Do you think that there’s a creature,
daemon or assassin around here that poses more of a threat than that?”

Cor simply stared at Noct for a moment. This was yet another reason for him to disbelieve what the
three were telling him. He couldn't figure out why they would lie about this, but that was a damn
ight more plausible than they came from the future after dying.

“And if something took you by surprise?” Cor questioned. “Even if I believed that you felled a god -
which I don’t - they are big, they are loud, and very obvious. An assassin is silent and stealthy. A
single moment of distraction and they could slit your throat before they knew you were there.”

“Honestly, I'd like to see them try.” Noct's tone wasn't his usual disinterest, instead, he sounded
genuinely amused. “Whenever I've come close to being taken out, I've always had backup. Even
when I was alone. I may not have the ring of my ancestors anymore, but I do have the blessings of
the six.”

“Aren't you trying to tell me that if you're in too much, a god will come to your rescue?”

Noct shrugged, finally casting his line into the tranquil waters of Galdin Quay. “They usually do.”
He spoke casually. “Sometimes they even do it without me having to summon them.”

“You can summon the gods?” Their story was getting less and less believable. Nobody even knew
where half of the gods were, let alone how to contact one without the Oracle.

Again, Noct simply shrugged. “I don't care if you believe me or not.” He told Cor. “If you want to
be my shadow, be my guest. Just don't get in the way.”

That seemed like a compromise. Cor wasn't sure how - since Noct had basically just told him to do
only half his job - but it was a compromise that Cor would take for now.

So he settled down beside the bait shack and watched as the prince fished.
For hours.

And hours.

And as the sun was finally setting, Cor realised just why his companions had fled almost as soon as they'd arrived. Prompto was right. Watching Noct fish was most definitely boring. But Cor wouldn't complain. It would be unprofessional to say the least. Instead, he simply waited until the waters had grown orange and the sky was darkening before standing again.

“It's getting dark.”

“Yes.” Noct agreed, but didn't make any move to leave. “The Glowing Barrel fish'll be out soon.”

“You intend to keep fishing?”

“You intend to stop me?” Noct turned his head to look at Cor, smirking at him over his shoulder. “The others will come get me when it's time for bed. But if you wanna join them early...” Noct shrugged and gestured towards the resort, obviously meaning that Cor could leave any time he wanted to.

Honestly, the more he acted like this, the less Cor was able to believe his claim of being over thirty years old.

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“How long do you think before Cor tries to kidnap Noct back to Insomnia?” Prompto questioned, looking out of the window. From his position in the restaurant, he could just make out Cor and Noct on the pier.

Gladio snorted and shook his head. “They're both just as stubborn as each other.” He pointed out. “I think it'd probably take Noct actually getting hurt for him to try.”

“Though I very much doubt that he would succeed.” Ignis added, reaching over the table for the pepper pot. “Noct feels he has a mission to do, and nothing short of disaster will dissuade him.”

Prompto nodded, remembering how Noct had still intended on marrying Lunafreya, even after the treaty had been rendered null and void. He'd been given a task, and he'd done his best to see it through.

“So...” Prompto turned back to the table, picking at his fish dinner. He'd offered to go and get Noct, but the others had pointed out that he'd come inside once he got hungry - not unlike a cat. “What's our itinerary?” He questioned.

“Well.” Ignis subtly pulled a map from the armiger, careful not to draw attention to themselves. He lay the map on a clear spot on the table and spread it out for the others to see.

“It's a puppy!” Prompto exclaimed, looking incredibly happy with himself, despite the strange looks that both Ignis and Gladio were giving him. “See, see!” He pressed his finger down on the map, right over Galdin Quay. “Follow the line, all the way around...” He traced his finger over the path that Ignis had drawn out, from Galdin Quay up to Cauthess Rest Area, past the Chocobo Post and then on to Coernix Station Alstor.

He continued to trace the line to Lestallum, Old Lestallum and finally down to Cape Caem. “See!” He gestured to the page. “A puppy.”
The outline totally looked like a dog. If Prompto didn't know any better, he would've thought that whoever decided the boundaries of Duscae probably did it on purpose. Either way, he was happy.

“Right...” Gladio just shrugged at Ignis, both of them used to the strange way his mind sometimes worked.

“This where we're going?” Noct's voice behind him caused Prompto to jump a little in his seat. His companions were already moving to create space for both Noct and Cor to sit down.

Noct gestured for a waiter and turned his attention back to the table. “Hey, it's a dog.” He grinned at the map.

“Told you!” Prompto couldn't help but exclaim.

He was pretty much ignored at this point. Everybody else was looking at the map. “How long would it take to do this?” Noct questioned Ignis.

“If it were simply a matter of travel, then we could complete the route in less than a week. However, our mission is to reach out to the people, which will add on significantly more time.”

“I want to stop at the Chocobo Post. For a few days at least.” Noct commented, turning as a waiter arrived. He gave his order, and Cor did the same.

“I knew you loved me.” Prompto swooned, grinning at Noct.

Noct simply shrugged. “I promised you we'd go racing, right?” He reminded Prompto, “We never got the chance before.”

Prompto's grin only grew. Even when Cor protested - pointing out that this wasn't a leisure trip or a holiday, it was a mission. It could be dangerous for them to spend too long in one place, lest the empire's advanced scouts find them and decide to end the line of Lucis.

Which had Prompto thinking. He frowned for a moment before pushing his plate away and gathering himself some paper and a pen. Thinking deep, he wrote down the numbers that he needed and after ten minutes pulled back from the page.

“Hey guys...” He was still looking down at the paper with a small frown. After a moment, he put it on the table. “Something Cor just said reminded me of something...” He gestured to the paper.

“Uh... Prom...” Noct's voice finally took Prompto's attention from his work and he looked up to the amused face of his best friend. “We can't read Nif.” He reminded him.

“Oh!” Prompto looked back down at his work and realised for the first time that he had written it in Nif. “It's an easier language to think in.” He muttered with a shrug, completely ignoring Cor's suspicious frown. “Okay, so I can translate. Or just give you the end result.”

“The end result will do to start.” Ignis gave Prompto a reassuring smile, and the blond nodded.

“It's a timeline. Of Besithia's research.” Prompto gestured to the beginning of the line, “Starting with the conception of cloning, and ending...” He gestured to the other end of the timeline, “with his death and subsequent upload into the Immortalis.”

“Okay...” Noct, to his credit, did seem to be trying to work out the squiggly symbols on the pages in front of him, but he looked just as lost as everybody else.
“Well. Besithia was one paranoid son of a bitch. He wanted to make sure that there was no way the empire could consider him replaceable. So he kept most of his research to himself. Contained in one facility. The Second Magitek research facility wasn't completed until February '53.”

“That's next year...” Gladio muttered.

“Yep. Which means that the entire project, and all the research and equipment is housed in one place.” He didn't have to tell them which research he was talking about. They knew. At least, his friends did. It was possible that Cor understood what they were talking about, but one look at him told Prompto that he was completely lost, but holding off on his questions.

“So if we take out that facility...” Ignis began, but Prompto couldn't help but finish the sentence for him with a grin.

“Wham, bam! No more MT's!”

“How many have already been made?” Noct questioned, moving Prompto's paperwork so that the waiter could place his food down. He gave a smile and a nod of thanks to the server before turning back to Prompto.

“Well...” Prompto had to think for a moment. He referred back to his notes and did a little mental math. “The first batch was basically a bust.” He told them. “It wasn't until he decided to start making his own rather than taking volunteers that the units became viable. I'd say... maybe three batches?”

“How many soldiers?” Gladio questioned.

“Maybe three thousand?” Prompto hazarded a guess. “Probably a little less, if you take into account the failure rate.” He added.

“So we take out the base, and suddenly there's only three thousand MT's total?” Noct double checked, and Prompto nodded to him with a grin.

“And they won't be able to make more. Not for a long time.”

“Then we go to Niflheim.” Noct decided, finally allowing himself to dig into the meal.

“Absolutely not.” Cor finally spoke, his objection clear, and expected. “We'll inform the king of your findings, and after verification he will send a team of Glaives.”

“Won't work.” Prompto told Cor with a sympathetic smile and shrug. He felt bad for the guy, he really did. Cor was definitely thrown into the deep end, and he was barely managing to keep afloat. “Like I said, Besithia is a paranoid son of a bitch. In order to destroy the base completely, you'd have to do it from inside. There's only one way to force the self destruct to bypass the safeguards, and you have to do it from the central terminal on the lowest floor.”

“You can brief the Glaives.”

Again, Prompto shook his head. “Like I said, Besithia was paranoid. You can't get within five floors of the central terminal. Every door has a biometric lock keyed to his DNA. Only he can get through.”

“That's stupid.” Gladio snorted, “Given his line of work.”

“I know right.” Prompto agreed, sharing in Gladio's amusement. “Guess he didn't expect it to bite him in the ass.”
“So you can get us in?” Ignis questioned, looking like he was deep in thought.

Prompto nodded “Duh. Like I said, biometric lock.”

“You're making very little sense.” Cor had turned fully to Prompto, causing the blond to shrink back slightly. While he knew that he could take on Cor if he really had to, it didn't make the man any less intimidating when he wanted to be. “You claim a lock that only Besithia can use, yet you also claim that you can use it too.”

“It's a biometric lock.” Prompto repeated himself before he realised that Cor had no idea who he was. He was so used to his friends knowing, that it had completely slipped his mind that he was travelling with somebody who had no idea where he had come from.

Oh how the times had changed. Prompto still remembered just how paranoid he'd been, and when he’d obsessively covered his arm. Now, he covered it because it was more convenient that way. Fewer awkward questions.

He'd got back into the habit of wearing his wristband anywhere other than home now. As soon as he got back to the privacy of his and Noct's apartment, Prompto had all but thrown the thing off.

“About fifteen years ago, you were on a team sent to Niflheim, weren't you?” He questioned, even though he already knew the answer. “You found a bunch of babies in a lab, and you brought one home with you. You and that kid were the only survivors of that mission.” With a deep breath, Prompto lifted his right wrist and pulled the band off, offering his arm to Cor. “You and me.” He corrected.

Cor's face, while usually somewhat expressionless, was completely blank for a moment. It was something that Prompto had long ago (and with another Cor) learned what it meant. Cor was speechless - astonished even.

“I suppose that explains that. Though it doesn't explain why you know so much about his work, or how you read and write Nif.”

“Speak it too.” Prompto added with a shrug. “After the darkness came... I wanted to know more about myself. I went to Niflheim, broke into the lab we're talking about now, and stole every piece of paperwork I could find. Copied as much of the servers information as I could, and blew it sky high.

“When I came back to Lucis, I moved in with Iggy and started to learn.” He finished with a shrug.

“Thought you lived in Hammerhead?” Noct questioned.

“Mhmm. After you were gone for like, two years. Before that, I stayed with Iggy. Y'know. To help out.”

Ignis had been struggling more with his blindness than he had admitted, and Prompto hadn't really taken no for an answer. It had taken them a little while to get their dynamic sorted, but eventually they had fallen into a routine.

“Starting to believe us yet?” Gladio asked Cor, eyebrows raised.

“Perhaps.” Cor admitted with a tired sigh, “But that aside, from what you've told me, only Prompto need to go to Niflheim. He is the one with the 'key' after all.”

Noct's response was instant, and it warmed Prompto's heart. “Where he goes, I go.” Prompto couldn't help but grin at Noct's words. He knew it was true - knew it before Noct had even said it -
but it was always nice to hear that sort of thing.

“Prince Noctis, it’s time that you grow up.”

“I did grow up!” Noct hissed, managing somehow to keep his voice down. “Very quickly, thank you very much. And if there’s one thing I learned through those years, is that I’m nothing without my friends by my side.” He took a breath and let it out slowly, keeping himself calm. “If you want to protect me, the last thing you should do is take them away. Because I will fight tooth and nail to get back to them. I will defy gods, defeat death, to get them back and there is nothing that you can do to stop me.”

Okay. So everything Noct had just said was clearly true, because, well, he'd done it before. Prompto had known that Noct would do all that to get his friends back, but to hear it... That was something else.

Prompto had to take slow, deep breaths, in order to keep his emotions in check. He was sure that if he didn’t, he would break down and cry. Blubber like a baby at the thought of his best friend going through that again. Willingly. Just to see Prompto again.

“Hey,” Noct's quiet voice spoke from across the table. It was soft, comforting, and meant only for Prompto. “I mean it, okay... I will always come for you.” He waited until Prompto nodded once before turning to the others. “All of you.”

“As would we.” Ignis offered with a small smile.

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Much to Cor's distress, the group had eventually agreed that they would travel to Niflheim to take care of the MT's before they could become a real threat to Lucis.

They still had several months before the second research facility was completed, so at Noct’s insistence, they continued their original mission. When the morning sun rose over Galdin Quay, Ignis began to gather the people. By the time the sky had lost its orange glow, there was a sizable group of people standing in the car park.

Noct was stood above them, on the steps leading to the long dock. He looked down at the people with a small, almost shy, smile. He suddenly looked very much a teenager, and Cor was actually surprised at the difference he could see.

That surprise was doubled in just a few moments, when Noct took a deep breath and stood up straight, correcting his posture and regarding the people before him, not as a prince, but as the king he would one day become.

Cor was in the crowd, keeping an eye out for any potential threats. Somewhere in the throng of people, Ignis was doing the same. Gladio and Prompto stood with Noct, slightly behind and on either side of him.

“Lucians…” Noct began, his young voice somehow seeming deeper, more commanding. “I come before you today to fix a wrong that has been done to you. Thirty years ago, my grandfather made a choice to protect himself and the people of in the Crown City at the expense of the rest of the kingdom. I know that what he did, he did in a fit of desperation - an attempt to save those he could at the expense of those he couldn’t. What I also know, is that he was wrong. My father continued in his
footsteps, protecting those close to the throne while ignoring the rest.”

There was a gasp through the crowd as Noct slowly moved, leaning forward to take a knee. “I come to you today, not to ask for your forgiveness, but to beg that you allow me to begin to repair the damage my forefathers have done to you. I, Noctis Lucis Caelum intend on doing everything I can to make things right. As we speak, my council are arranging for trade and aid to be disseminated throughout all of Lucis, and should peace still not reign when I ascend to the throne, the king’s wall will be expanded to cover all of Lucis.”

The prince lifted his head to regard the crowd. “I may be young, but I am old enough to know when to correct a wrong. To know that abandoning our people was wrong, and that it needs to be put right. “I humbly ask you to allow me to try.”

There was quiet in the crowd, at least until everybody realised that the young prince had finished speaking. Then, one person began to clap, followed quickly by another, and then another. Soon, the crowd were giving Noct an applause, and Cor couldn’t help but join in.

Maybe their mission wouldn’t be a complete disaster after all.

Chapter End Notes

So it's not really active at the moment, but I do have a discord server - https://discord.gg/3BxaU46 - please do join. The people on the server even get a bit of a say in my story when I can't decided between two things xD.
They left Gladin Quay quite late into the afternoon, which prompted Gladio to suggest they camp at Oath’s Haven. With little choice, the retinue agreed, and soon they were sat around yet another campfire.

This time around, they had packed two tents. Gladio, Ignis and Cor shared one, leaving Prompto and Noct with the other. While Cor had put up a token disagreement, it seemed that the older man was starting to understand that he was very unlikely to get his way once Noct had made his decision.

Whether or not that meant that Cor had begun to believe them was still up for debate, but after seeing his speech to the people of Galdin Quay, and after having found out that Noct had written it himself, he seemed to be becoming a little more lenient. Or at least, a little less hesitant when it came to trusting Noct’s men.

“Man. Camping. Totally didn’t miss this.” Prompto sighed out a complaint as he slouched on his Coleman camping chair.

“You did, a little.” Noct teased, nudging Prompto with his elbow. He’d pulled his chair close to Prompto’s, mostly from habit, but also from a need to feel close. The last time they had camped a full night together, it had been what they believed to be their last.

“Okay.” Prompto admitted. “Just a little.”

“What’s not to miss?” Gladio questioned, grinning at the group surrounding them. “Nice night, warm fire, good company, Iggy’s camp food.”

Almost as if on cue, Ignis began handing out plates to the team, receiving quiet thank yous from them all. After he’d served everyone, he joined them around the fire. “I must say,” He commented, “It is somewhat nostalgic.”

“Right. We had some good times camping.” Prompto happily agreed, digging into their meal of grilled wild traverlly with gusto matched only by Noct.

“Some bad ones too.” The prince pointed out. “Remember in the Vesperpool? When it didn’t stop raining for a week?”

“What I remember, is a certain young prince insisting that he was going to fish anyway.” Ignis
chuckled.

“Yeah, and then sniffling and coughing for a week after that.” Gladio grumbled.

The others laughed, almost drowning out Noct’s reply of “Worth it.”

“How long were you on the road?” Cor asked. This was the first time he’d asked about their past in the future, and Noct hoped that it was a good sign, that the marshal was finally coming around.

“I dunno. A year maybe?”

“It was rather difficult to keep track of time sometimes.” Ignis agreed, “But I do believe we were on the road for a little over ten months.”

“Why so long?”

“We had a lot to do.” Noct leaned back in his chair and regarded the man casually, his plate all but empty. “I had to gain the blessings of the gods in Lucis, and gather as many of the Royal Arms as we could find. We had no idea where they were, so we had to do a lot of asking around. We also did a lot of hunts that took a while, but paid well.”

“Damn, remember the Zu on the top of Ravatogh? Totally thought we were gonners.” Prompto sighed and copied Noct in leaning back on his chair, if only so he could swipe at the lettuce still clinging to the prince’s plate.

Noct handed the plate over without a fuss, and Prompto traded with him, offering him the bit of fish still on his plate. ‘Dude, that was after we took down Titan.”

“Didn’t mean it wasn’t still scary.”

“You know where the Royal Arms are this time?” Cor questioned again, and Noct’s attention returned to him.

“Yeah. But we don’t need to go looking for them. I already have them.”

“Might be an idea to write it down.” Cor told him, “For future generations of your line.”

“Not gonna be any.” Noct said, even knowing that Cor would object. “I’m the last of my line. Was always supposed to be.”

“Are you not trying to change what’s ‘supposed’ to happen?”

“Yeah. But not that. I won’t ask someone to go through that.” Noct countered, hoping his tone conveyed the fact that Cor would not be changing his mind.

It seemed to work, or at the very least, Cor dropped the subject. There was always the chance that he would pick it up again later, when he deemed Noct ‘mature’ or ‘old’ enough to deal with the subject.

Noct was in his thirties. Even if he’d been locked in a crystal sleep for a lot of that time, he’d still been somewhat aware. Aware enough to adapt to a destroyed world, aware enough to understand what it was that he was giving up to fix it. Even if he hadn’t lived every one of those 3600 odd days, he had still grown up.
He was old enough to know the reasons he didn’t want children. And mature enough to make that choice.

“You know,” He said, trying to get away from that subject completely, “I always wished we had like.. Campfire songs or something.”

“Funny you should say so,” Prompto grinned at Noct, putting the now empty plate aside. He waved his arms in front of him and from the armiger pulled out a classic guitar. “I picked up a few tricks in the last ten years.”

“You play?” Noct asked with a frown. How had he not known that? Even if Prompto had learned while Noct wasn’t around, they’d lived together for the last six months. Surely this was something that he would have heard about.

“Not much else to do for fun when the world’s ending.” Prompto shrugged casually, leaning over the instrument and gently pulling at the strings. Noct didn’t know much about instruments, but he thought that maybe Prompto was tuning it? “Photos don’t come out so great when there’s no light.” Prompto added, finally looking up from the guitar.

He seemed to pause for a moment before playing a few notes, and Noct couldn’t help but burst into laughter as Prompto’s voice filled the camp.

“Let’s gather round the campfire, and sing our campfire song, our C.A.M.P.F.I.R.E.S.O.N.G. Song, and if you don’t think that we can sing it faster than you’re wrong. But it will help if you just sing along.”

Noct was surprised when Gladio joined in, offering a ‘Buum buum bumm” and Noct couldn’t help himself. This was the first song that they’d sang together when completely drunk. They didn’t have the guitar backing then, but it had been one of his most cherished memories for a long time. It had been much like this night, the retinue gathered around the fire. They had just left a destroyed Insomnia behind them, and Gladio had had the bright idea of drinking their woes away. Prompto had randomly started singing this song, and didn’t let up until everybody joined in. It had been his way of trying to bring everybody’s spirits up, and it had worked. By the time they’d stopped drinking, they’d all been falling about laughing from the absurdity and the alcohol.

Even Ignis had drunk with them that night.

So this time, Noct joined in without hesitation. Singing as loudly and as off key as he could without fear of attracting some sort of creature.

“C.A.M.P.F.I.R.E.S.O.N.G. Song-” They sang it with increasing speed over and over until they couldn’t sing through their laughter any more.

Cor was looking bewildered, but amused - probably more so since Ignis and Gladio had also decided to sing. It wasn’t often that people outside of the retinue saw Ignis truly relax, after all.

“Man, almost as fun sober.” Prompto commented, idly strumming at the strings of the guitar.

Noct had to disagree. This time, it had been better. This time, they hadn’t just left their home behind
forever. This time, his father was still alive and waiting for him. This time, they were going to change things.

They stayed up a lot later than they should have, listening to Prompto play and sing all manner of songs, sometimes accompanied by various members of their group. It had been a good night, and Noct fell into his sleeping bag with a smile on his face.

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It was a good night. A little bit chilly, but Prompto didn’t mind. The moment he crawled into the tent beside Noct, he thanked his lucky stars for having a best friend that put out heat like a furnace.

It didn't take him long to fall asleep, Noct’s soft snores lulling him.

He had no idea how much later it was when something woke him up. In his arms, Noct was restless, an arm reaching up towards the roof of the tent, tears falling down his cheeks.

“Hey,” Prompto said gently, moving so that he could sit up and hold Noct against his chest. “Hey buddy, it’s a nightmare.” He tried to wake him gently, knowing from experience that if he startled him awake, he could end up looking down the wrong end of a sword.

“Aera!” Noct called out. It was the only thing that Prompto could make out, and he had no idea who that was - or if it was even a person. It definitely sounded like a name.

“Noct!” Prompto called a little bit louder as Noct continued to reach out, repeating that name over and over with harsher and harsher sobs. “Noct, buddy, you gotta wake up.”

But Noct was having none of it. So, preparing for the worst, Prompto reached down and pinched Noct’s side where he knew the prince was ticklish.

It had its intended result - and expected side-effect. Noct’s eyes shot open and he phased out of Prompto’s grip, the Ultima Blade appearing in his hands in a bright blue spectacle.

Prompto put his hands up in a peaceful gesture as Noct took a few breaths to calm down and look around. Realising what happened, Noct dismissed his weapon and slumped, sobs still wracking his body. “Promp - I’m-”


“It was- She was-” Noct was babbling, and Prompto began rocking them, continuing his gentle utterances and making it clear that Noct didn’t have to talk about it now.

After several long minutes, Noct slowly stopped crying. Eventually, he just sat slumped against Prompto, breathing heavily and sniffing every now and then.

“Sometimes I have dreams that... aren’t mine.” Noct admitted quietly, “My mind… it’s still processing Ardyn’s memories.”

“So Aera was…” Prompto trailed off, understanding dawning on him. The reason why he didn’t recognise the name, was because he’d never heard of her before. She wasn’t someone from their
past, she was someone from Ardyn’s.

Against his chest, Noct nodded and sniffed again. “She was his fiance.” He told Prom. “When I dream about her, I’m dreaming as him, you know.”

“So you feel everything that he does?” Prompto questioned out of curiosity. Again, Noct nodded against his shirt, moving so that he could press himself closer.

Prompto again manipulated their positions, this time so that they could lay down together, with Noct still clutching to his chest. He covered them with the sleeping bags as best he could to stop the night chill from reaching them.

“It’s weird,” Noct spoke again after they settled, his voice quiet. “When I’m dreaming, I’m so in love with her. It’s just as strong as what I feel for you. When I wake up, that’s all gone. I never met her - she died two thousand years before I was born - but… But sometimes bits of it lingers.”

Prompto kind of understood. Kind of. And while ten years ago, Noct’s admission would have filled him with bitter jealousy, now all he felt was sympathy. Noct’s mind was trying to figure out how everything fit together when pieces of memory weren’t Noct’s to begin with.

No wonder he was having trouble.

“So what happened?” Prompto questioned, “To Ara, I mean.”

“Aera.” Noc corrected quietly, “She was the first Oracle.”

“One of Lady Luna’s ancestors?”

“Not directly, no. She was killed before she could have kids. She was protecting Ardyn from Somnus.”

“The founder king?”

“Yeah. He was a dick.” Noct admitted with a bitter laugh. “He won big time with the history books.”

“So is that what you were seeing? When she died to protect Ardyn?” Prompto asked in a gentle voice.

Noct shook his head, somehow managing to snuggle even closer to Prompto. “No. I was seeing what happened when Ardyn tried to resist his fate.” Prompto was quiet for a minute, letting Noct think. He knew that the other would know that he was curious, but he also knew that this was probably hard to talk about. But he didn’t ask. If Noct wanted to volunteer the information, he would.

And he did. “When Ardyn refused Bahamut in the astral realm, Aera was summoned to them. Ardyn was chained by Bahamut, and Aera- Aera used the trident of the Oracle to pierce his heart over and over, never stopping until Ardyn changed his mind.”

Prompto felt a shudder go through him at that. Noct had once said that Ardyn had tried to resist his fate, and had even said that he’d seen the consequences. Prompto had known that it had to have been something heavy for Noct to by that sympathetic towards his literal nemesis.
But to think that it had been that… To be tortured and hurt by your love, over and over again… No wonder he gave up in the end.

It wasn’t enough for Prompto to forgive him, definitely not, but it was a start to understanding him. Prompto was sure that if it had been him, with Noct attacking him over and over, that he wouldn’t have lasted a few minutes.

“How long did that take?” He questioned.

“Weeks.” Noct moved, his legs curling around Prompto to pull him closer, and Prompto allowed him to, wanting to give him as much comfort as he could.

“I’m sorry,” Prompto kissed the top of Noct’s hair, his hand still stroking through the black strands. “I’m sorry you had to see that.”

Silently, Noct nodded, cuddling close to Prompto.

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The next morning once again had them leaving near dawn. This time, Prompto had to help Noct get to the car. Their late night and interrupted sleep left Noct less than fully awake. Still, they piled in the car and had made it to the Chocobo Post just before lunch.

As they grew closer, Prompto couldn’t help it. His grin grew wider and wider, as he became more and more excited. “I want to ride my chocobo all day~” He found himself singing, almost bouncing in place.

His movements woke Noct, and the prince watched him with amusement for a few minutes before idly summoning Prompto’s camera from the armiger.

The blond took the camera, and even though he thought it wasn’t possible, his grin widened. “Say fuzzy pickles!” He ordered, aiming the lense at Noct.

“Really?” The prince questioned, almost laughing.

“Why not?” Prompto questioned, lining up the shot and taking it. He awkwardly turned around, trying not to kick Cor as he did so, so that he could get a selfie with the two of them.

“You should take pictures of the scenery.” Ignis suggested, in a not so subtle way of asking Prompto to stop messing around in the back of a moving vehicle. “The king did ask you to show him what Lucis looks like now.”

“Yeah, can’t see much of Lucis if my head’s in the way.” Noct pointed out, shifting down in his seat so that Prompto could have a better shot of the world outside the car.

“Okay, okay.” Prompto muttered with a fake pout. “I just hope your dad likes chocobos!”

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Wiz greeted them warmly, even if he’d never met them before. They were ushered towards one of the small tables and waited by the man himself.
“You boys wouldn’t happen to be hunters, would you?” Wiz asked, as he served them their lunch.

“That obvious?” Gladio questioned, making Prompto laugh. Of course, he was the most obvious of them, seconded by Cor who was still openly wearing his katana.

“Well, call it blind hope if you want.” Wiz responded with a small laugh. “Got us some trouble. Nothin’ major yet, but somethin’ spooking my birds. If it carries on, I might have to keep them here to protect them.”

Prompto shared a look with his friends, having a feeling that he knew exactly what beast was to blame for this. With a small nod of agreement between them, the retinue agreed. “We’re on it!” Prompto announced.

“Thanks, boys. You figure it out, an’ I’ll pay you good.” With that out of the way, Wiz returned to whatever it was that he usually did when he wasn’t sitting with them.

Prompto missed the Wiz he’d known. He’d been so friendly and happy with them, even sitting down to join them for meals, or sometimes even card games. It had been a dark day indeed when the man had died - not just because of the lack of rising sun.

Wiz had been protecting the last of the chocobo chicks when it had happened. Nobody knew about it for days afterwards, not until a group of refugees from Gralea had come by. The lights had still been shining, and they’d decided to take refuge in the one bright place they could see on their way from Galdin to Lestallum.

That’s when they’d come across the carnage.

Prompto had been told about it about a week later, and the grief had been bad. Wiz was one of the kindest people he’d known, and the most fiercely protective. If Wiz was gone, then there was a good chance the chocobos were too.

Which was one of the reasons why, after he’d finished eating, Prompto all but fled to the Chocobo pens, reaching out and stroking and cuddling all the ones that would let him. One of them even curled it’s long neck around his own, holding him in the closest thing to an embrace the bird could do. “Awww, who’s a good chocobo!?”

Dimly, he heard a click behind him, and realised that he’d left his camera on the table. It had been so long since he’d used it, he’d apparently lost his habit of always keeping it on him, or at least knowing where it was.

He turned around with a watery grin, facing Noct - who simply took another photo, a small smile on his own face. “Look Noct,” Prompto said, awe in his voice, throat tight with mixed emotions. “Chocobos…” He thought he’d never get to see one again, that they were all extinct.

Now he was surrounded by them, and their distinctive smell. There was no way this was a dream, right? The chocobos were really there, they were really real, and they could be saved this time, right?

“Hey, you okay?” Noct found Prompto a few hours later. He joined the blond to sit down on the edge of the cliff, overlooking the Disc of Cauthess. He leaned forward to see what kind of drop they were facing if they fell, and then sat back.

“They were wiped out… in the future.” Prompto told him eventually.

Given Prompto’s reaction to seeing the chocobos, and the following reaction when he interacted with them, Noct had kind of expected that to be the case. Still, that didn’t stop the pang of regret that ran through him.

“I mean, most animals were, by the end.” Prompto was saying, eyes still trained on the blue sky. “There was only so many we could keep inside the lights, y’know… Anything else… well, they were left to their own defenses. We had enough trouble keeping ourselves alive…

“But that didn’t stop Wiz. He stayed here, maintained the lights so that the chocobos could have just one more day. And then another.” Prompto took a moment to take a breath and clear his nose. It was obvious he was in emotional distress, but Noct had no idea what to do about it, except to let him keep talking.

“Until one day, the daemons came anyway. Refugees found him shielding one of the chicks. Both of them were dead. They were all dead.” Finally, Prompto’s voice hitched, but the blond didn’t cry. He simply took a deep breath, and turned his attention to Noct. His eyes were burning with determination and resolve.

“We won’t let that happen again, right?” It was less of a question, more of a need for assurance. Prompto knew that Noct would be there for him, that he would gladly help him in this task.

“We’ll keep them safe.” He promised, “We’ll do everything we can.”

“Yeah.” Prompto agreed, returning his attention to the scenery before them. “Not just the chocobos.” He said quietly, “All the others. Friendly or not. They deserve to be saved - to have a chance at least.”

“We’ll keep Luna safe.” Noct told Prompto, “Keep Ardyn on our side. I don’t know if that will stop the darkness completely, or just slow it down. But it’ll give us more time.” He moved a little closer so that he could slip his arm around Prompto’s shoulder.

The blond took a hold of the hand on his shoulder and leaned into Noct. “We’ll find a way to stop it before it comes. I know we will.”

“I hope you’re right.”

They spent five whole days at the Chocobo Post, sleeping at Killiam Haven since they all agreed that having five people in a four man camper van was a bad idea. It had been crowded enough with just the four of them.

Prompto had the time of his life. After their little conversation on the ridge, Noct had made a point to try to cheer him up - and to remind him that the chocobos were still around. So they’d spent the end of the first day scouting out the chocobo race tracks and the next day and a half racing.
Noct couldn’t tell you which one of them won the most, or even what the final score was. It didn’t matter. They were competitive while on the track, but after that… after that it made no difference.

What did matter, was the massive grin on Prompto’s face every time they finished a race, win or lose. The blond looked happy, happier than Noct had seen since they’d come back. It was almost as if he had no worries in the world, as if all the trauma of his past was temporarily gone.

Noct wanted to do whatever it took to keep that smile on his face.

On the fourth day, the group finally moved on to check out the threat to the chocobos that Wiz had told them about. As expected, it was a Behemoth. They followed it to its lair and crouched down behind some rocks to discuss strategy.

“Deja Vu.” Prompto muttered with a grin, summoning his gun to his hand. “Think that’s actually Deadeye?”

“Could be. Hard to tell.” Gladio didn’t look at Prompto as he spoke, his eyes trained on the beast. The creature was lay on some rocks, basking in the afternoon sun. “If it is, it’s before its eye was taken.”

“You sure you can take it on?” Cor spoke for the first time since they’d set off for the day.

Noct had expected an objection from him - a token one at the very least - but he had been strangely quiet. Maybe he was starting to believe them, or at the very least, trust them.

“I doubt it will pose more danger than the things we’ve defeated in the past.” Ignis, like Gladio, was also peering over the boulder to watch the non-existent movements of the beast. “And we’ve taken out this particular beast before.” He leaned back, turning around so he could rest against the rock.

He reached into his pocket and pulled a long black strip of fabric before taking off his glasses and securing it over his eyes. Noct was used to this by now - over the last six months, he’d seen Ignis do this countless times. After the suggestion had first been made, Ignis had made a point of training blindfolded at least once a week, claiming that it made things easier for him. Noct had had enough bruises to know that he was right.

Cor, however, had never seen Ignis do this. There hadn’t been a need so far - the biggest thing they’d fought had been the Iron Giant that was very low level. But a behemoth? That was a little tougher.

“What are you doing?” Cor hissed, obviously not approving of Ignis blinding himself. “You don’t need to be reckless to try to prove your battle prowess to me.”

Ignis offered him a smile and shook his head. “This is not for your benefit.” He told Cor, facing him easily even through his blindness. “I assure you.”

“Iggy spent ten years blind.” Noct explained. “He fights better without his sight.”

“What?” Cor didn’t sound convinced, and the look his was giving them made it clear he thought they were insane. “You have your sight. Use it.”

“I adapted. I relied on my other senses for long enough that using my sight distracts me. It simply
provides me with too much information and slows my reactions as I interpret it. Blinding myself allows me to focus.”

Again, Cor looked like he wanted to object, but something made him bite his words back. Noct frowned but decided not to comment. If Cor was actually listening to him and keeping himself out of the way, then Noct wasn’t going to object.

“So- same plan?” Prompto questioned, leaning over the rock to look at the battlefield. “The barrels are still there. Oh!” He ducked back behind the rock with the others and looked over his gun. He pulled something out of it - Noct really should’ve paid better attention to his firearms lessons since he couldn’t identify the part - and handed it to Noct.

“When you do your elemancy-when you capture the magic in the flask… Think you can put it in here?” Prompto questioned, and Noct frowned, thinking about it.

Unlike his father and the rest of his line, Noct had always had problems with elemency. He couldn’t easily spontaneously cast magic like his ancestors, and had to rely on the containment of the flasks to hold the element. He had never tried to put it anywhere else.

“I can try.” He offered, “But… I don’t know what’ll happen if it goes wrong. It could explode.”

“Like we’ve never got caught up in your magic bombs before.” Prompto rolled his eyes and shrugged. “C’mon. Gimme fire.” He ordered.

“Okay.” Noct trusted Prompto. If the man thought that he could do this, then he probably could. Prompto knew Noct better than he did, after all. “Guys, be prepared.” He warned the rest of the party. They nodded - Cor more hesitantly than the others - and Noct took the gun part into his hand.

He closed his eyes, concentrating on the tattered threads of magic that ran through him. He pushed past the shocking and freezing strands to touch one of the burning ones. It took a little more effort than it would have for a magic flask - the gun part being smaller and more intricate - but after a moment the connection had been made.

He held it open for as long as he could, filling the item with as much fire as he could spare. Eventually he opened his eyes and handed the part back to Prompto. “What is it? He questioned.

“Spent years wishing that I could use elemental weapons.” Prompto told Noct. “Thought maybe if you could put fire into this-” He held up the part before putting it back into his gun, “My bullets might be able to use the element. Magic bullets baby!”
“Worth a shot.” Noct shrugged, Ignis smirking at Noct’s pun. Gladio just rolled his eyes. “Just be careful. Can’t guarantee it won’t blow up in your hands.” Noct warned the blond. He’d never done this kind of magic before, and had no way of knowing if it would actually work. But if Prompto thought it would… Well, then Noct was ready to give it a try.

Prompto nodded in understanding, and Ignis spoke again. “Remember. When the beast gets close enough, use fire on the barrels.” He reached into the armiger and distributed magic flasks. “Keep your distance.” He warned Cor, “They’re rather explosive.”

Cor gave a nod, and then the group moved. As one, they launched themselves over or around the boulder, fanning out and making their way to where the beast was. Almost right away, Noct realised the problem with their plan.

The behemoth was asleep. It wasn’t going to move, and wasn’t going to get close to the barrels until it was awake. But if anybody woke it, it would attack right away, leaving very little chance to avoid its attacks.

Except for Prompto. Prompto could hit it from a distance. “Prom,” Noct called out as loud as he dared without waking the beast. From across the field, Prompto turned to glance at Noct, giving him a soft nod.

No more words needed to be exchanged for Prompto to know what he was doing. Years of training and their experience working together made for seamless teamwork. Without hesitation, Prompto raised his arm and aimed, firing a single shot that hit its mark with deadly accuracy.

The beast howled, rearing up and swiping around with it’s tail and blindly striking with its claws. Noct was glad that he hadn’t been close by when it awoke.

As the beast calmed slightly, it looked around for a target before charging. The battle was over a lot faster than Noct had expected - over at least twice as fast as the last time they’d defeated Deadeye. He’d expected the fight to draw on a little given that the beast now had the use of both eyes, but he’d forgotten to take into account the skills they had gained and honed in the months and years after that battle.

In truth, the behemoth was an easy fight and the four actually took longer to return to the outpost than they had spent in battle.

“Did you see, did you see!?” Prompto was bouncing around, almost skipping as the others walked casually back. “It worked!” As if to prove his point, he summoned his gun and made a shooting motion into the forest. “It actually worked!”

“You sound surprised.” Cor commented, frowning at the excitable blond.

“Well duh.” Prompto grinned, finally stopping with his odd dance around the group to walk beside Noct with an arm flung over his shoulder, his gun back in the armiger. “Totally experimental. There was a really good chance my gun would explode.”

“Yet you did it anyway?”

“Can’t get answers without a little risk.” Prompto shrugged, dismissing Cor’s concerns.
This time, Noct kind of agreed with Cor. It had been a hell of a risk, and there wasn’t really any need for it. Sure, Prompto’s Fire Shots had been useful, and had probably sped up the battle quite a bit, but they would’ve been fine without them.

It wasn’t really worth the very real risk of Prompto getting hurt. When the blond had asked him to use his magic like that, it had seemed like he was confident that it would work. But now..

“Hey-” Noct pulled Prompto closer with the arm around his waist, “No unnecessary risks.” He scolded. “I didn’t defy the gods and defeat death just for you to blow yourself up recklessly.”

“Dude, chill.” Prompto leaned into Noct’s side, the two of them somehow managing to keep their footing without stumbling at the movement. “I was like 99% sure that it would work.”

Noct simply gave him a look that made it clear just how little Noct believed that. There was also a warning behind his eyes. Prompto let out a sigh and a nod. “Okay, okay.” He finally agreed, pulling away from Noct very slightly.

“Promise?” Noct pulled Prompto back to his side and stopped their motions. He turned them, so that Prompto was in his arms and he was looking directly at him. “I can protect you from a lot of things, but I can’t protect you from yourself.” He lifted a hand to gently stroke Prompto’s cheek, allowing the fear he felt to become apparent on his face. “If anything were to happen to you…”

Prompto lifted his own hand to cover Noct’s, a soft smile on his face. “I get it.” He said quietly, reassuringly. “I’ll be more careful.” He promised, leaning forward to rest his forehead against Noct’s.

Somebody cleared their throat and Noct and Prompto pulled apart. They turned to face the others. Ignis and Gladio were looking vaguely amused, and Cor… well, astonished, disbelieving, confusion seemed to be his new default. At least it was more interesting than the resting bitch face he usually wore.

“Okay.” Noct nodded at them and they all started walking again.

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By the end of the fifth day, Gladio and Cor managed to convince Noct that they needed to move on from the chocobos, and if they wanted to reach their destination before nightfall, they would have to set off early in the morning again.

So the group retired early, Prompto pouting in disappointment but not voicing his objection. As fun as the last few days had been, they really did have a job to do.

Before they left the post for their camp site, Noct took an hour or so to speak to the people there. This time, instead of addressing everyone at once, he decided to do it on a one on one basis - or at the very least, in small groups.

Afterwards, he invited everyone at the post to join him for dinner - his treat - and they pushed all the tables away so that the large group could gather. It was a long, fun filled meal, the large group getting along like old friends rather than virtual strangers.

After, Ignis commented on how it seemed to work - the people had a new opinion of Noct, if not the monarchy in general, and they seemed to be beginning to have hope.
It was just seeds at the moment - nothing large or concrete, but these were the first steps. And they were taking them together.

Their next stop was the Coernix Station in Alstor. They didn’t spend too long there - just long enough to speak to the people milling around. It was a little before lunch when they’d arrived, and a little after when Noct had finally spoken to everybody around. He joined the others in the Crows Nest with a soft sigh.

Somehow, it was exhausting talking to that many people. Even if it was one by one rather than in a large group. Noct wasn’t sure which one was easier. On one hand, he hated public speaking - he was always afraid he’d stumble over his words or forget what he was supposed to say - but talking to people one on one… well… that took longer.

“Ordered you your favourite.” Prompto told Noct as he slipped into the booth. The blond was flicking through pictures on his camera, probably checking the ones he’d taken that morning.

He’d taken the king’s words to heart. After he’d been reminded that Regis had asked for photographs of Lucis as it was now, he’d made a point to take as many photographs as he could - especially the outposts.

“Thanks.” Noct leaned back in his seat tiredly. “Doing it this way, we’re probably not going to get to everyone.” Noct told his group. “So I was thinking of talking to the Tipsters when we’re in an outpost. They’re good at getting information out there.”

“Kinda what they do.” Prompto agreed, putting his camera away and looking up at Noct with a smile.

“That sounds like a good idea.” Ignis agreed, sipping on his drink.

“Maybe talk to the hunters too.” Gladio suggested.

“Yeah. We’re going to Meldacio next, right?” Noct questioned. He’d only briefly looked at the map Ignis had, but he had a pretty decent grasp of their route. It had looked like a dog on the map, and that stuck in his mind.

“Yes.” Cor answered this time, having studied the map in greater detail. “Bit of a long trip though.”

“Lingagh Haven is the last haven between here and Meldacio.” Ignis said, “I would suggest making camp there to split the journey somewhat, then spend the day at the Headquarters. From there, we then continue on to Lestallum - where we may need to spend a few days in order to reach everyone.”

Noct nodded his agreement just as their food arrived. Together, the five of them ate, casually conversing and simply relaxing.

Realizing that it would only take them a short while to get to the Haven, Noct pulled Ignis aside and asked if they could possibly stay for a little while. Without having to be told, Ignis guessed what Noct wanted and with a sigh, simply waved the prince off towards the slough.
“Fishing, again?” Prompto whined with a sigh, but followed Noct anyway.

“You can stay behind if you want.” Noct replied with a shrug, stopping by the chocobo rental stand. The slough wasn’t that far away, but the trip was always easier with chocobos.

Predictably, the moment he paid for the bird rental, Prompto grinned. “No way.” He said, waiting with barely concealed excitement as Noct blew on the whistle with a smirk.

The birds arrived promptly - which Noct had never before questioned, but now wondered how they always did that - and the two climbed their respective mounts and they were on their way.

It took them less than fifteen minutes to reach the pond, and though Noct dismounted his chocobo right away, Prompto stayed where he was. His camera was out again, and he was taking pictures of anything and everything that caught his eyes.

Noct didn’t bother hiding his fond smile. It was good to see Prompto back to the hyper, photography loving, blond that he had been during their first trip. Nightmares and depressing memories aside, leaving Insomnia had seemed to do a world of good for his friends, and Noct couldn’t be happier about that fact.

“What?” Prompto brought Noct out of his musing and the prince looked up at his friend, still not bothering to stop smiling.

“Nothing.” Noct shrugged, “It’s just good to see you… y’know, taking photos and stuff.”

“Yeah…” Prompto agreed, giving Noct a soft smile. “So! Are you gonna fish, or what? Time’s a wastin’! Chop chop!”

“Yessir!” Noct gave Prompto a mock salute and turned to the lake, summoning his fishing gear with practice honed efficiency.

As he settled down to fish - trying to remember the best lure for this area - he was vaguely aware of Prompto guiding his chocobo around to find places for better shots. The blond never wandered too far away, no matter how loudly he complained that Noct was taking too long. They both knew that Prompto wasn’t really upset.

Eventually, Prompto did dismount his ride, and the chocobo wandered around, joining its companion to casually graze at the longer blades of grass. Prompto joined Noct on the dock, sitting beside him with his camera in his lap.

“Its kinda nice to be on the road without the empire breathing down our necks.” Prompto commented, leaning back and resting his weight on his hands.

“Yeah.” Noct agreed, tugging at the line slightly to try to entice some fish.

“Remember last time? Whenever you wanted to fish, we all had to be there, just in case. It was really boring.”

“Yeah.” Nothing was biting, and Noct let out a soft sigh, reeling in his line to try a different bait. “But now you don’t have to.” He pointed out, fishing the end of the line out of the water. “You can go back to the outpost if you want.” He offered, even though he knew that it was unlikely.
“Nah.” As expected, Prompto just shrugged. “I mean… I’m pretty sure that someone technically has to be here with you - and even if not, Cor’d have an aneurysm if you were here alone. And it’s not so bad. Not really. And it’s not like you object to my company.”

“Never will.” Having finished placing the bait on the line, Noct recast it, relaxing as he waited.

They sat together, side by side, in a quiet comfort. Occasionally, Noct would change bait and recast, and Prompto would sometimes lift his camera to take pictures of something that caught his eye. It was all in all, a nice day.

It had probably been about two hours when they were interrupted. A loud, vaguely familiar, bark pierced the quiet, causing both boys to jump slightly. Noct turned around, expecting to see Umbra - it had been a while since he’d gotten word from Luna, after all - but instead it was a different dog.

“Tiny?” Prompto squeaked, his voice excited. “Tiny! What’re you doing here!?” He questioned, as Pryna bounded her way forward to happily bounce around him. She put her paws on his lap to reach up and lick his face, causing the blond to giggle and pet her enthusiastically.

After a moment of that, the dog pulled away and moved to Noct, leaning down for him to retrieve the journal from her back.

It was odd that Luna would send Pryna, rather than Umbra, but Noct wasn’t sure if he should question it. Even though it hadn’t happened often, it did on occasion - usually when Umbra was busy or not feeling well.

When he took the journal, something fell out. He managed to catch the envelope before it fell into a puddle and lifted it to take a look. It wasn’t addressed to him, and with a frown of confusion, he handed it to Prompto.

Prompto had long ago told him about the letter he’d received from Luna when he was a kid, so the fact that he knew Pryna wasn’t a surprise - but as far as Noct knew, Luna had never sent Prompto anything else,

“Huh? For me?” Prompto questioned, tone equally as confused.

“Apparently.” Noct shrugged, and opened the journal.

What he saw made his breath stop, and his heart miss a beat before trying to make up for it with twelve at once. He stared down at the page, mouth going dry as his mind tried to comprehend what he was seeing.

“Dude.” Noct was vaguely aware of Prompto’s warm arm on his shoulder, but he couldn’t tear his eyes away from the paper in front of him.

“Dude.” Prompto’s hand shook Noct’s shoulder, “What is it?” Prompto was starting to sound a little worried now, but Noct wasn’t sure how to explain. Instead, he simply turned the book so that Prompto could see the photograph inside.

“Isn’t that…” Noct finally looked at Prompto.

Pryna was sat securely sitting in his lap, his letter from Luna still unopened in the hand that wasn’t
idly stroking the dog. All of that forgotten in light of what he was seeing. Prompto’s eyes were wide, his mouth hanging open slightly as he too tried to figure out what was going on.

“Yeah.” Noct finally managed to speak, swallowing to wet his suddenly dry mouth.

On the page between them was a simple photograph. A picture of Noct and his retinue, surrounding a newly fixed Regalia in Hammerhead. It had been one of the first photographs that had been taken on their journey the first time. And it had been the last photograph Noct had ever seen - when he’d handed it to Luna in the Astral Plane.

Chapter End Notes

“How?” Prompto finally managed to voice the question that they were both thinking, eyes lifting to look at Noct.

“I- I don’t know.” Noct answered honestly, wishing that Luna had sent him more than just the photograph. “What—what does your letter say?” He questioned, hoping that Luna had given some answers.

“R—right.” With shaking hands, Prompto opened the letter and began to read out loud.

“Dearest Prompto,
It feels like so many years have passed since I last wrote you, and for that I apologise. I had feared that I had missed my opportunity, yet now I have one anew. This time, I will not waste it.

Now that I have this chance, I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart, for all the things that you have done for Noctis. You were there for him when I could not be. I know that I need not ask you now, in light of what we all know, to continue to stay by his side. I have never known a more loyal and devoted soul than yours.

Though the world is not yet dark, I believe that you brighten his days more than any sun ever could. It is my hope that one day we will be able to meet in person, when I can give you the thank you you deserve face to face. Noctis is a man with a heavy burden, and I find comfort to know that he is not alone to carry it. I also find comfort in the fact that I know you will not rest until you find a way to protect him from his cruel fate.

In the meantime, I do have one request of you. Pryna has missed you dearly, and I know that she wishes to spend time with you. Should it be convenient for you, I ask that you would keep her with you for a little while. I know that it would mean the world to her.

Ever in gratitude,
Lunafreya.”

By the end of the letter, Prompto’s voice was waver, and he’d had to pause a few times in his reading to swallow, but he didn’t stop until he was done. When he was, he lifted his eyes from the page and looked directly at Noct.

“She—she remembers.” The prince whispered, barely able to believe it. No wonder he hadn’t received anything from Luna for a while. She had probably been just as confused as the rest of them -
probably more so since Noct wasn’t there to explain it to her.

Noct wasn’t sure what to think about that. On one hand, it could make things easier to get her to safety, on the other…

Luna remembered her own murder at the hands of a man that Noct had forgiven. He knew that Luna, one of the most kind hearted people he’d even known to exist, was unlikely to fault him for it - she would probably forgive Ardyn herself - but Noct couldn’t help but feel guilty.

“Did you know she would?” Prompto questioned, and Noct shook his head.

“I only wanted to bring the four of us back. Ardyn was an accident, but kinda expected. But Luna…”

“You think that maybe she brought herself back?” Prompto questioned, “Or maybe it’s because she’s the Oracle?”

“I don’t know.” Noct admitted, “But maybe she does?” He questioned. “Let’s… let’s get back to the outpost. Iggy might have more ideas.”

Prompto nodded in agreement, carefully standing so that he could hold the letter, the dog, and his camera without problems. He sent the letter and the camera back to the armiger and held Pryna securely while he climbed back onto his chocobo.

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Noct was used to Cor’s look of disapproval by now, but he wasn’t used to getting it straight away without saying a word. The moment they walked into the diner, Cor had turned that look on him, and he was left to wonder what he’d done now.

It wasn’t until he realised that the man was looking at the dog that he understood.

“You went fishing.” Cor raised his eyebrow, eyes still trained on Pryna. “And came back with a dog.”

Noct shrugged and slipped into the booth, Prompto following quickly with Pryna still in his arms. They received a dirty look from the tipster, but Noct ignored it. He knew that he wasn’t supposed to have dogs inside, but he also knew that it would be pointless to try to leave a dog that was probably capable of some sort of teleportation outside when it wanted to be inside.

“I believe that dog belongs to Lady Lunafreya.” Ignis said, tone slightly questioning.

Noct nodded and put the journal on the table. “She sent me something…” He wasn’t quite sure how to finish that sentence. Something weird? Strange? Unexpected? Instead of trying to figure it out, he simply opened the book to the latest page.

“Well…” Ignis leaned forward to look at the photograph, eyebrows raised.

“Ain’t that a blast from the past.” Gladio muttered, his own eyes narrowed in minor confusion. “Isn’t this the picture you took with you?”

Noct nodded, and saw that Cor was again looking confused. “I took it with me when I performed the
Dawn Rite.” He explained, “I gave it to Luna. In the Astral Realm.” That didn’t seem to help Cor’s confusion, but that was fine. Noct and the others were just as confused. “I think Luna remembers.” He added. “I think she came back with us.”

“Shouldn’t you know?” Gladio asked, eyebrows raising now. He picked a piece of bacon fat from his plate and subtly reached under the table to feed it to Pryna. The dog gobbled it up greedily with a happy wag of her tail.

Noct shook his head and shrugged. “I thought I’d only brought us back.” He admitted, wanting to remind them of Ardyn without having to tell Cor. He didn’t need the extra questions right now - not when he had too many of his own to deal with.

“This could be advantageous.” Ignis pointed out. “If Lady Lunafreya is aware of what is to come, she could be an invaluable ally in changing things.”

“She’s still in the hands of the enemy.” Cor pointed out, and Noct nodded in agreement, swiping another piece of bacon from Gladio’s plate to feed to the happy dog.

Noct had a plan, but it wasn’t one he was going to share with Cor. Not yet. He needed the others and Luna to help him pull it off. Which meant he had to send a letter back to Luna - which meant sending Pryna away.

He looked down to the white dog on Prompto’s lap. She was happily wagging her tail and licking at Prompto’s trousers where a small stain indicated that there had been bacon there very recently. He looked at the way Prompto was still idly stroking her, petting her head and ears, and grinning for it. He didn’t want to send Pryna away yet, but he desperately wanted to talk to Luna.

He could think on it later. As far as he was aware, Luna was in no danger right now. Sure, her living situation wasn’t the best, but he knew that last time she had been kept in relative comfort. He only hoped that it was the same now.

“Well, it’s getting dark, so we should probably head to the haven now.” He told his group, “We can figure out the rest later.”

Ignis made a quick trip to the store to pick up some food appropriate for Pryna and then they were off, on their way to their next stop.

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Pryna had spent the majority of the ride on Noct’s lap rather than Prompto’s. It seemed that a car didn’t have to have a top for a dog to want to stick their face out of the window.

As soon as they pulled over and got out of the car, she started circling Prompto’s legs. It wasn’t until they were all within the runes of the Haven that the dog ran off.

“Pryna!” Prompto called, and was about to give chase when Noct held his arm to stop him, a soft smirk on his face.

“Prom, we don’t follow you to the bathroom…” He pointed out, trying not to laugh when it occurred to Prompto that was what Pryna was most likely doing. “She’ll be back. She’s not a normal dog, remember.” He gently pulled Prompto back into the haven’s glow. “She’s not going to run away if she doesn’t want to, and if she does you can’t exactly stop her.”
“Right…” Prompto's cheeks were slightly red in a cute blush, and Noct found himself chuckling.

“C’mon. Let’s give everyone a hand.” He gestured to where Gladio and Cor were already beginning to put the tents up.

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“What’s going on between those two?” Cor sat with Ignis, watching Noct and Prompto with a frown. The two in question were sitting close to the fire, talking and laughing. Every so often, one would nudge or push the other, seeming to take ‘friendly’ to a whole new level. The white dog sitting with them only added to the picture.

“What do you mean?” Ignis asked, feigning ignorance.

“They’re all over each other.”

“You need not worry.” Ignis tried to placate the marshal. “There are laws that forbid them from being more than they are.”

“Which is?”

“Friends.” Ignis’ tone took on a warning quality. “Comrades. Brothers in arms. Veterans with a shared trauma. You would do well to leave them alone.” There was no denying the threat there, and Cor looked at Ignis for a while.

It was obvious that the advisor meant it. Cor was no stranger to Ignis’ loyalty to Noct, and it was becoming quite clear that he was just as protective of the others. Since the beginning of their journey, Cor had felt like an outsider, and it was never more apparent than when they were setting up for camp.

The other four had in jokes, shared experiences, and a comradery that only came from years of working together. He’d seen this level of friendship before, but never in anyone under the age of forty.

With every day that passed, he was given a new reason to start to believe their story. It was a difficult one to believe in fully, but there was no denying the evidence they had provided him. Not only the Royal Arms and their battle prowess, but also simply the way that they were together.

Taking his eyes from Ignis, Cor again looked at Noct and Prompto. He could see something there too, but if Ignis was to believed, it was something that could never be.

Noctis was not the type to give only half of himself to his wife. He was an all or nothing kind of man, that much was obvious. And it was also obvious that Prompto already had all of his heart.

No wonder Noctis didn’t want any children.

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Meldacio was exactly how Prompto remembered it. Oddly dusty and very busy. Hunters were milling around, some having just returned to camp, others on their way out. Everybody had somewhere to be.
There were so many familiar faces. He hadn’t visited here often after the dark, but neither had many of the hunters. After the sun faded, it didn’t make sense to keep all the hunters in one place - they were far more valuable out and about where they could protect people at a moments notice. Between patrols and rescue missions, no hunter was ever in the same place for long.

But in this time… In this time, this was their headquarters. This was where many of the hunters lived, where their families lived. There were at least two dozen people in the main street, and Prompto recognised them all.

It was like walking into a ghost town. A ghost town where the people were still moving around, not even aware that they were ghosts yet.

As more and more people passed, more and more people gave him a friendly wave, Prompto felt his heart drop and his stomach churn.

Seeing Cindy had been one thing. The woman had always been so full of life, and still alive. But these people… some of these people he’d watched die years ago. Some of them he’d only heard of their passing.

A young man walked past, and like so many others gave Prompto a friendly smile and wave, and Prompto felt his heart breaking. That was Zack. There was no mistaking it. Prompto had only known him for a week, and had only seen him at his worst. But it was definitely Zack. The same dark hair, the same bright eyes and friendly face. A few years younger, and a damn sight healthier. But definitely Zack.

“Please. Please Argentum. You can make it stop. Before it’s too late. Please.” He could still hear him, as clear as day. Asking him, no begging him to-

The gun was shaking in his hands, loose in his grip even as Zack moved it to hold it against his own head. “Please.” The black was starting to ooze out of Zack’s mouth, his eyes. His chest was shaking, barely moving enough to bring in air.

It was too late to help him. Too late to ease him through this. Any moment now and a daemon will be born. Crawling from the skin of this man, ready to feed. To kill.

“I don’t- I don’t want to turn into-” It was hard for Zack to talk, Prompto could tell that. He understood what he was asking, he knew that it would bring comfort to a man who was dying anyway. He could understand, even agree. If it were him, he would want someone to-

Someone to-

Tears fell from his eyes, splashing down, merging with the rain that was falling from the sky. He knelt over Zack, looking down at his torn black shirt, eyes wide with understanding and fear.

“Don’t let… A daemon become my legacy.” Zack managed to get out, pushing the gun to remind Prompto that he was holding it to his head. To his head. This kid was what… twenty-four? Twenty-five? And he was asking Prompto to-

He was asking Prompto to save who he was. To save him one final time.

Taking a deep breath, Prompto centered himself, forcing himself to hold his gun steady. “Good
night. Zack.” He whispered before his finger gently squeezed the trigger.

“Prom- Prompto.” There was a quiet, worried voice speaking, but all Prompto could hear was Zack, begging him to kill him. To end it before he could be taken. All he could see was the gun in his hand, his friend lay on the muddy ground, his chest trembling in laboured breaths.

“Please.”

“Prompto.” The voice was still trying to reach out to him, and there was a gentle touch on his shoulder. “Prompto. It’s me, Ignis.” Ignis spoke quietly, calmly. “I need you to look at me. Can you do that?” The question was soft, no pressure, but Prompto knew that he had to obey.

But Ignis wasn’t there. He was in Lestallum. Not here. Not with him. No. It was just him and Zack. They were alone. Just him- “Please.”

“Prompto.” Slowly, shakily, he moved his head, trying to pull himself away from the image in front of him. He tore his eyes from Zack, finding Ignis directly in front of him. The world around him swam, changing, morphing from the past to the now. The sky was bright and there was no rain. People were wandering around, going on with their daily business. Alive. He wasn’t alone.

He locked his eyes onto Ignis and tried to take deep breaths, reminding himself of where he was.

His heart was racing, his body aching, tense, as if ready to sprint away. He knew what was happening - it was the start of a panic attack. Or maybe the end of one? He knew it wasn’t too bad. It couldn’t be, if he could breathe. He was copying Ignis, breathing with him, his hand on his friend’s chest, an old routine.

“That’s it.” Ignis was still speaking gently. “You’re doing well, Prompto.” Prompto managed a weak nod and Ignis spoke again. “Can you tell me where you are?” He questioned quietly.

“M-Meldacio.” His voice was mostly working, that was good. He swallowed and tried again. “Meldacio HQ.”

“Please.” Closing his eyes, Prompto tried to get rid of the voice in his head, to push it away.

“Promt. Stay with me.” Ignis’ voice drowned out Zack’s and Prompto managed to open his eyes, keeping them on Ignis.

Breathing was easier now, and he allowed himself to slowly blink. Zack was no longer dying behind his eyes, by his own gun. His voice gone, the quiet pleas disappearing into memory. He gave Ignis a small nod, pulling himself out of the panic.

“Back with us?” Ignis asked, a small, comforting smile on his face. Prompto nodded again. “Alright. Do you think you can walk?”

Prompto nodded, leaning more of his weight against Ignis than he was proud of, but letting his friend guide him anyway.

Ignis sat them down at one of the tables outside the small diner. He put Prompto in a corner, where he could keep an eye on all of his surroundings and know for sure that there was nobody behind him. He scooted his chair back a little until he was closer to the walls. More protected.
“You okay?” Noct sat beside him, but not as close as he normally would. He was giving him his space, the look on his face telling Prompto that he still had no idea what he was supposed to do.

So he gave Noct his best, reassuring smile. It was a little watery, and a little shaky, he was sure, but it was enough for the prince to relax slightly. “I… Knew a lot of hunters.” He told Noct quietly.

A look of understanding crossed Noct’s face and he gave a small nod. “Hey, I’ll order for you.” He offered, “So you don’t have to talk to anyone else.”

Prompto nodded in thanks, feeling a little relieved at that. He watched as his friend stood, obviously hesitant to leave his side, but having a mission to do. He moved to the food stand but made sure to never truly leave Prompto’s sight.

As much as Noct doubted himself, his instincts seemed to be on point. He treated Prompto carefully, but not like an invalid. He made sure that Prompto was feeling safe.

“Here.” Ignis appeared at the table, taking a seat beside Prompto and offering him a bottle of water. He was quiet while Prompto took it and sipped. Prompto held the bottle in his lap and looked down at it, not wanting to look up and see another walking memory.

“Zack?” Ignis questioned quietly, and Prompto nodded. Ignis knew all about it. With no Noct around, Prompto had turned to Ignis for emotional support, and Ignis had leaned on him in return.

Ignis didn’t say anything else, he didn’t have to. Instead, he gently placed a hand on Prompto’s shoulder, keeping him grounded.

Soon, Noct came back and slid into his seat on the other side of Prompto. “Hey.” He greeted, a shaky smile on his face.

Prompto returned that smile, suddenly feeling guilty. Noct always looked so shaken after Prompto had had an attack, and he never asked for any support for himself. He made a mental note to talk to Noct about it later - when he was on firmer footing.

“Sorry.” He told his friends, “I didn’t think being here would hit me so hard.”

“I assure you, it’s fine.” Ignis soothed, and it was then that Prompto noticed that Ignis wasn’t looking overly comfortable either. And another thing-

“Where’re Gladio and Cor?” Prompto asked, “And Pryna?”

Noct pointed to the exit of the small town, a little further back from where they’d parked the Regalia. Prompto could just make out Gladio sat with his back to the wall, sipping from a water bottle. Beside him, Cor was on his feet, leaning against the same wall with his arms crossed over his chest. They looked like they were deep in conversation.

After looking for a few more seconds, Prompto felt a smile crawl on his face when he saw Pryna sitting under Gladio’s free hand, pushing up for pats.

“He’s having trouble too.” Noct said quietly, looking very unsure of himself.

Prompto nodded. “We knew pretty much everyone here. At one point or another.” He looked back down at his lap, fingers twiddling with the water bottle. “Most of them died. It’s just… seeing them
all here... “He shook his head and took a breath before lifting it and offering Noct yet another smile. “We’ll be okay.”

Noct nodded, but looked a little unsure. Still, he took Prompto’s word for it, and didn’t ask questions that Prompto wasn’t ready to answer yet. The prince was watching Gladio and Cor while slowly leaning closer to Prompto. After a moment, the blond leaned against Noct’s shoulder.

The effect on him was almost instant. The warmth and soft scent coming off his friend relaxed him in a way that nothing else ever could. He let out a soft breath and closed his eyes for a moment.

A soft smile graced his mouth as he felt Noct’s arm circle his waist and his head gently resting against his. “Thank you.” He whispered, and Noct’s arm squeezed him slightly.

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The hours after a panic attack were always draining. Prompto felt exhausted as he watched Noct interact with everyone. The prince had told him to wait this one out, and for once, Prompto didn’t object to that order. Instead, he remained seated at the small table and simply watched.

Noct would spend five to ten minutes with each small group, conversing casually for a while before telling them who he was and what he was there for. Unlike Galdin Quay, the people here didn’t seem immediately impressed.

He watched for a little longer before standing and heading to the Tipster. “Hey,” he greeted him with a smile.

“Hey there, what can I get for you?” The man questioned with the typical customer service smile.

“What hunts you got?” Prompto asked, watching as the tipster pulled the papers out of his apron. “Thanks.” Prompto gave him a small smile before leafing through them.

Most of them were actually low level - something that most of the hunters wouldn’t bother with unless they became a danger to other settlements - and he took four of them and handed the rest back to the tipster.

He would’ve loved to have taken them all, but he knew that they didn’t really have the time for it. That, and Cor would get pissy at them for wasting time and putting Noct in too much danger. Prompto really didn’t have the energy to deal with a pissy Cor right now.

He took the papers and returned to the table, joined moments later by Ignis.


“Why not?” Ignis agreed. “I’ll let the others know that we’ll be gone for a short while.” He put one of the pages on the table between them. “This one seems to be the closest.”

Prompto nodded and took the paper, looking it over. The Mark was just outside of town, to the east, and an easy enough target. Either one of them could do it alone without a problem, but it would be nice to work together again.
It would be nice to know that he’s not alone.

After Ignis returned from speaking to the others, they set out.

The hunt took a little longer than expected, and by the time Prompto and Ignis limped back in to town, Noct had finished talking to the people. They joined him again next to the small eatery - it was time for lunch.

“Hey,” Noct watched them approach with a worried frown. “You’re injured?”

Prompto shrugged, limping lightly to keep the weight off his sore ankle. “I’m all good.” He waved off Noct’s concern as he sat down, letting out a soft sigh of relief as he took the weight off. “Just twisted it.” He reassured him.

“You need a potion?” Noct offered and again Prompto shook his head.

“Nah. It’s not that bad.”

The tipster arrived then, grinning down at them with a few menus in his hand. They ordered their food and Prompto handed in the sheet for their completed bounty.

“Hey.” Gladio greeted as he and Cor joined them at the table, Pryna bouncing along behind them. As soon as they arrived, the dog jumped up on Prompto’s lap.

“Hey there Tiny.” The blond grinned down at the dog and gently ran his hand through her white fur. “Miss me?” He questioned, grinning when the dog leaned on his chest to lick at his face.

“So our next destination is Lestallum.” Cor spoke as soon as he sat down, “It’s a bit of a journey. We should stay here tonight.”

Ignis nodded in agreement. “There aren’t any Havens nearby.” He told the group, “While it may be a tight fit, I believe it would be best for us to rent out the camper for the night.”

There was a chorus of groans from Noct and Prompto both made their displeasure known without actually protesting. The campervan was definitely going to cramped with the five of them.

“You sure you’re alright?” Noct slid into the chair beside Prompto before shuffling it slightly closer to his friend.

Prompto was about to answer with ‘yes’, but he hesitated. Noct was there for him, he’d made that clear over and over again. So he let out a soft sigh and shook his head.

“Not really, no.” He answered, leaning back in his seat. “I didn’t think it’d be this hard.” He admitted. “I knew like… everyone here.”

Noct leaned to his side slightly to rest his shoulder against Prompto’s, his usual go-to show of solidarity. It wasn’t quite enough and Prompto shuffled their chairs even closer so he could fully rest his head on Noct’s shoulder. The prince’s arms instantly circled his shoulder and Prompto felt
himself relaxing.

“Gladio said that you’d probably seen a lot of these guys die.” Noct’s voice was quiet, almost as if he didn’t want to say anything.

Prompto nodded, hesitating once again before speaking. If this were anybody else, he probably wouldn’t say anything - let sleeping dogs lie - but Noct was Noct, and Prompto knew that he would feel better after talking about it.

“There’s a guy here.” He started quietly, eyes trained on Noct’s shirt instead of his face. “His name is Zack. A couple of years into the darkness, he got infected.” He felt Noct stiffen slightly, but the arm around his shoulder tightened, letting the blond know that he could continue.

“He didn’t tell anyone.” Prompto muttered, taking the silent command. “He just kept fighting until he couldn’t… We were on a hunt and he got hit - injury can trigger the end stages.”

“He started to turn…?” Noct asked, and Prompto could hear the horror in his voice.

Slowly, Prompto nodded, swallowing thickly. “Yeah.” He whispered, “And he didn’t want to go down like that. He didn’t want-” It was starting to get hard to talk, but Prompto pushed himself through it. “He didn’t want a daemon to be his legacy so…” He trailed off, and once again, Noct tightened his arm around his shoulders. “So he asked me to-”

“Oh,” The horror was still in Noct’s voice, but there was also sympathy, and empathy. “Oh Prom.” Noct moved, sliding off his seat to kneel before Prompto. He looked up at the blond, eyes bright with unshed tears. “I’m so sorry.”

Noct’s hands went to rest on either side of Prompto’s face, thumbs gently wiping away the tears he hadn’t even realised were falling. They looked at each other for a moment before both leaned forward.

The moment Prompto’s forehead pressed against Noct’s, the emotions began to leak out. First the tears began to flow more freely, then a soft sob sounded. Soon, Prompto couldn’t hold any of it back, and he was gathered into Noct’s arms to be held against a strong chest.

Neither said anything while Prompto let it all out, content instead to just take comfort in the company. Prompto clung to Noct, his hands fisted in the black fabric of Noct’s shirt, and Noct simply held him.

Chapter End Notes

Discord: https://discord.gg/esGdEpD
“O! M! G!” Prompto’s exclamation right beside his ear caused Noct to jump and wake from his doze. He frowned, looking around wildly for whatever it was that made Prompto so excited this time. On his lap, Pryna also jumped at the loud voice. She looked around for a moment before curling back up. At least she could fall back asleep.

They were passing through the tunnel on their way to Lestallum, and Prompto was eagerly reading the many signs that they passed.

“Iggy! Iggy! Do you see it!?” Prompto questioned, all but standing as he leaned between the two front seats. “Maria and Draco! Tonight! Can we go! We can go right? Please tell me we can go.”

“As we were planning on remaining here for a few days anyway, I don’t see the harm.” Ignis replied, and even from behind him, Noct could hear the smile in his voice. Whatever this thing was, Ignis was into it too.

“Uh,” He reached forward and yanked on Prompto’s belt, pulling the blond back into the seat where it was safer. “What is it?” He questioned.

“Only the most heartbreaking and amazing thing ever!” Prompto replied, not actually answering Noct’s question at all.

Instead, the prince just waited, knowing that Ignis would provide more answers. “I believe Prompto just invited me to the opera.” The advisor explained.

“The...opera?” Noct’s confusion only grew, and he turned to Prompto. “Since when did you like the opera?” He asked, grimacing at the idea of subjecting himself to an entire opera.

“Dude. It’s like. Super beautiful.” Prompto was talking to Noct as if it was definitely something that he should be into. “You should come!”

“I’ll pass.” Noct answered, still making a face. “But you guys go have fun.”

“Yes!” Prompto made a reverse fist bump, bringing his arm down in front of his face in a show of excitement.

“I suppose this calls for a shopping trip.” Anyone who knew Ignis could tell that he was just as excited as the exuberant blond, and Noct was baffled. Who could enjoy people all but screaming barely understandable lyrics at each other for hours at a time?
“Totally!” Prompto was even agreeing to go shopping. What the hell?

“Uh, why?” He questioned, not sure if he even wanted to know the answer now. This was just too unexpected.

“Not like we packed for something as fancy as an opera.” Gladio provided the explanation as Noct pulled on Prompto’s belt to stop him from leaning over the front seats again.

“You’re going too?” What in Eos was even happening right now? Since when did any of his friends enjoy the opera? Well… Ignis wasn’t really surprising. It seemed like the sort of thing that he’d enjoy. But Gladio? Prompto?

“Not a chance.” Gladio laughed as he shook his head. “Gives me a headache. No fun if I can’t understand what they’re saying.”

“It’s in Nif.” Prompto preempted Noct’s next question with a casual shrug. “They never bothered to translate it from its original form.”

“You don’t necessarily need to understand the words to enjoy the story.” Ignis tried telling Noct, but he wasn’t buying it.

“What about you?” He asked Cor instead. “You gonna go with them?”

“I would rather not.” Was the quick reply. The Marshal didn’t even look up from the book he’d been reading on his phone.

At least some people had taste.

The car fell mostly silent for the last five minutes of their journey, Noct having to keep his hands on Prompto’s belt to keep him from falling overboard when he tried to take photographs of the posters.

Eventually though, they made it and while it was not from a lack of trying, Prompto managed to not fall out of the car. As soon as they pulled to a complete stop, the blond was ushering Noct out so that he could follow, Pryna once again circling their legs. “C’mon! I wanna find out the when and the where!”

“You’re really excited about this…” Noct hadn’t seen Prompto this excited about an event since… forever?

“Yeah dude!” Prompto grinned at him, throwing an arm around his shoulders and dragging him towards where he saw posters. “I haven’t seen Maria and Draco in forever.”

“Was the opera something you used to do a lot?” Noct was content to allow Prompto to lead him around - he never complained about having Prompto’s arms around him.

“Not a lot.” Prompto shrugged, dropping his arm as soon as they reached the posters. The blond peered at them, reading the information. “But like I said before, there wasn’t much to do for fun after the sun set. The electricity had to be rationed. Used mostly for the lights. So no tv, no video games. Concerts and plays became a big thing. I’ve never actually seen the opera with proper lighting and stuff.” He seemed satisfied with what he had read on the poster and turned around to grin at Noct. “It’s gonna be so cool.”
“If you say so…” Noct was still not entirely convinced, but if Prompto was going to enjoy himself, Noct was the last person that would stop him. There was a soft bark from somewhere by his shin, and Noct looked down. Pryna was looking up at Prompto, her tail wagging fast enough to cause a small breeze in the oppressive heat.

“What is it girl?” Prompto asked, bending down to pet the dog. She let out another soft bark before bounding up to the wall. She lifted her front paws as if she was trying to reach for the poster. “You wanna come too?” Prompto questioned, amused as he watched the dog’s antics. “I don’t think they let dogs in the opera house…”

Pryna seemed to deflate at that, and Prompto knelt down to gently pat her head. “But later, I can tell you all about it, and even sing you some of the songs, if you want?” Pryna let out a little happy bark, and Prompto chuckled.

Noct watched them interact with a small smile on his face. It was nice to see Prompto so happy with the dog - Pryna’s inclusion in their little group seemed to be doing the blond a world of good. Noct made a mental note to thank Luna as soon as he was able to. Whether she knew it would help or not, sending Pryna had brought a smile to Prompto’s face, and Noct could never be anything but happy about that.

Ignis soon joined them at the poster, and after peering at it for a moment, he stepped back with a smile. “We have several hours yet.” He told them, “We should check that there are still tickets available.”

“You go do that.” Noct muttered, pulling his jacket off. He’d forgotten just how hot Lestallum was. “I’m gonna check in at the hotel.”

“Then we can go to the market to find something for Iris.” Gladio clapped Noct on the shoulder, making sure the prince knew that they still had that mission to do, and no amount of complaining about the heat would get him out of it.

But if it was for Iris, Noct wasn’t about to put up more than a token protest. He let out a groan, but didn’t speak up. “What about you?” He asked Cor instead.

Cor rolled his eyes, as if Noct should have already known the answer. But if he had Gladio with him, there was no need for Cor, even by Cor’s own logic. So instead, the prince shrugged. “Take the day off.” He told the Marshal. “I’ve got Gladio.” He pointed out when Cor looked like he was going to object. “I promise, we won’t leave the city without letting you know.”

That seemed to mollify Cor, and the man nodded, not even hesitating before wandering off. As soon as he was gone, Noct felt himself relax a little. Having Cor around was strange and different, and Noct felt a whole lot more comfortable with it being just the four of them (and Pryna).

“Well then,” Ignis smiled at Noct before gesturing at Prompto, “Shall we?” He questioned. The blond gave a happy nod and moved to follow Ignis. Gladio and Noct started heading in the other direction - Noct noticed the Cup Noodle van that they were apparently approaching - but they were all stopped by a soft bark.

Everyone turned to see Pryna, still standing where the group had been gathered. The dog was looking between the two groups, as if she wasn’t sure which way to go.
“Go with Prompto.” Noct told the small dog, “He’ll let you know when you can’t follow. Then you come find me.”

The dog let out another, happier, bark and bounded her way to the blond, standing at his heel. When nobody moved again, she let out another bark and gently pushed the back of his leg.

“Okay, okay,” Prompto chuckled, “Let’s get going then!”

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Lestallum was hot. Stupidly hot. Noct decided that while he liked the city itself, the heat definitely made it his less than favourite place. After stopping at the Cup Noodle van, Gladio led them to the Leville, and Noct couldn’t help the sigh of relief when the air conditioning hit his overheated skin.

“Do you have any pet friendly rooms?” He asked the clerk.

“We do, but we charge extra.” He warned, and Noct nodded. It wasn’t surprising. Most pets weren’t messengers of the astrals, after all, and damage was to be expected.

“We need one of those, and a regular room.” He paid for the rooms and took the keys, handing one to Gladio and keeping the pet friendly one for himself.

As soon as they had their keys, Gladio was again leading them - this time out of the blessed cool that was the hotel. “Can’t we wait for the heat to die down?” Noct complained, but followed Gladio anyway.

“C’mon. It’s gonna take us a while to find the perfect gift for Iris.” Gladio pointed out, “If we wait too late, we might not find anything.”

“We’re here for days Gladio.” Noct pointed out, “If we don’t find anything today, we can come back tomorrow.” Okay, so his voice had definitely taken on a whining tone. But it was hot.

“You’ve got a job to do.” Gladio pointed out. “You’ll be busy from tomorrow on. Need to get this done today.”

“Fiiinnesss.”

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The sun had long since set when Ignis and Prompto joined them in the hotel room. Pryna had appeared several hours ago, and Gladio and Noct had finally found the perfect gift for Iris.

“What’s that?” Prompto asked as he walked in, gently kicking the giant white plush that sat on the floor. He bent down to greet Pryna who rushed at him as he waited for his answer.

“For Iris.” Noct muttered from where he was lay on the bed. He’d found a fan and was half naked in front of it, letting the airflow add to the cooling properties of the air conditioner. “Some sort of Moogle?” He questioned, not entirely sure what it was himself.

“It’s a backpack.” Gladio provided, and Prompto picked the thing up. It was about as big as his torso, and when he turned it around, he could see the big black eyes and the bright red pompom. The
wings had been styled into straps. It was ugly as sin.

“Iris is gonna love it.” Prompto decided, putting it back where it was and venturing further into the room.

“We also found something for Iris.” Ignis said as he joined them, following Prompto to sit on the bed. He pulled from his pocket a box containing a small doll. It looked almost like one of the ones Iris had - the ones that she was always changing the clothes on - but was wearing something that Noct had never really seen before. He wasn’t exactly a fashion guru, but even he knew that the outfit was awful.

“It’s Maria!” Prompto told Noct excitedly, “A collectable!”

“So I take it you enjoyed the opera?” Noct finally turned away from the fan and put his shirt back on.

“It was the best!” Prompto, as energetic as ever, flopped down on the bed, head landing by Noct’s lap. “Seriously, you missed out!”

“It was simply the best production of ‘Maria and Draco’ that I have ever seen.” Ignis said with a smirk, and Prompto rolled his eyes.

“That’s dark, dude.” He muttered, chuckling a little.

“Everything was dark.”

Noct had absolutely no idea what to say to that. He never did when Ignis made jokes about his previous blindness. Beside him, he was aware of Gladio’s groan at the bad joke, and from the corner of his eyes could see the shield with his head in his hand.

“You can’t tell me you didn’t see that joke coming.” Ignis continued, and this time Noct couldn’t help his own groan at the joke.

“But for reals,” Prompto spoke again, idly lifting a hand to pet Pryna, who had jumped up onto his lap. “It was great. Still makes me cry. Like, every time. It’s just so sad!”

Pryna barked at him, and Prompto sat up to regard the dog. “That’s right! I said I’d tell you all about it!” He shuffled to make himself more comfortable, which somehow ended up with Noct pressed up against his side and a dog in his lap.

“Right. So there was this war, right? And the two main characters, Maria and Draco, are on opposite sides, but totally in love and all that. When the war comes, Draco has to fight in it, and everyone thought he died. Then Maria had to marry some other guy and she didn’t like that. But it was politics, right, so she had to.

“But then, the night before the wedding, Draco comes back and fights the other guy. It’s all epic with swords and magic and stuff, and then Draco wins, and he and Maria live happily ever after!”

Noct looked at Prompto. While the blond was energetic, his story seemed to be lacking something. “You suck at telling stories.” He snorted. “You telling me that that took four hours?”

“Dude. There’s a lot going on, that’s just the main story!” Prompto protested. He rolled his eyes and pulled his guitar from the armiger, “But! I promised the doggo I’d sing something!” At that, Pryna
perked up, tail wagging excitedly.

“You gonna sing us the whole thing?” Noct asked, eyebrows raised. While he had no interest in the opera, that apparently had a very common story, the idea of Prompto singing to them for hours at a time didn’t seem so bad. The blond wasn’t exactly a bad singer, though Noct had no idea if his voice would work with an opera style.

“Not all of it.” Prompto shook his head, smiling as he tuned the instrument. “But I was actually working on a translation of part of it. Took some artistic licence to make it fit, but I think I’ve got a pretty good handle on it…”

“I would be interested to hear it.” Ignis commented, making himself more comfortable on the bed.

So the four of them, and one dog, sat in a sort of circle on the far too small bed, and Prompto began to sing. He didn’t sing in an operatic manner, instead, he sang it normally - but passionately. He almost sounded like he was feeling what he thought the characters were feeling.

“Oh my hero, my beloved, shall we still be made to part?
Though promises of perennial love yet sing here in my heart.
I’m the darkness, you’re the starlight, shining brightly from afar.
Through the hours of despair, I offer this prayer, to you, my evening star.”

As Noct listened, he couldn’t help but lean into Prompto, careful not to get in the way of the man’s quiet strumming on the guitar. He listened to the words, and couldn’t help but feel a pang in his heart. The words, Prompto’s voice, it all seemed to speak to him.

If this was what Prompto felt like when he watched the play, then maybe Noct could understand why he enjoyed it so much.

“I am thankful, my beloved,
For your tenderness and grace.
I see in your eyes, so tender and wise,
All doubts and fears erased!

“Though the hours take no notice,
Of what fate might have in store,
Our love, come what may, will never age a day.
I’ll wait forever more!”

By the time Prompto had finished singing, and slowly put his guitar down, Noct had tears in his eyes. He couldn’t say why, but he knew that it had something to do with the deep longing in his bones. He wanted nothing more than to take Prompto into his arms, to hold him close and shower him with promises of a love that would never have to wait.

Instead, he simply did what he normally did when overcome with these feelings. He reached forward, his hand gently gripping the back of Prompto’s neck as he pressed their foreheads together.

Prompto had unshed tears in his own eyes too, but he leaned into the touch. “That bad, huh?”

“It was beautiful.” Noct managed to whisper, and Prompto gave him a soft smile.

“You should come next time.”
“I might.” Noct answered, completely truthful.

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Zegnautilus was cold, when Noct joined Prompto in the bunks. He sat on the other side of the bed from the blond, having absolutely no idea what to say. How did he apologise for what he’d done? How could he even start? He hesitated for a moment, trying to find the words, before deciding to start simple.

“Hey… I’m… Sorry.” He tried, his words coming out a little halting and hesitant, but they came out anyway.

Prompto’s response was almost instantaneous. “For what?”

How could he sound so okay with this? With what Noct had done? Could it be that he didn’t know what Noct was talking about? Prompto had definitely had other things to worry about over the last however many days, so it wouldn’t be too far fetched for him to not have been thinking about it as obsessively as Noct. But still…

“For falling right into his trap… and for hurting you like that.”

The few seconds it took for Prompto to respond felt like an eternity to Noct. He stayed where he was, hands wringing around each other. He wished he could see Prompto’s reaction, but he didn’t have the guts to face him. Not yet.

“I know right?” Prompto’s tone sounded… sarcastic? Noct was confused. “How could you possibly do such a horrible thing…?” Now he sounded almost like he was mocking Noct. Noct was even more confused. “After everything we’ve been through.”

Noct’s confusion stopped him from speaking. For the first time in years, Noct had no idea how Prompto was feeling. He couldn’t make sense of the tone, and didn’t know how to respond. Luckily, Prompto spoke again, this time, his tone normal.

“Nah, it’s okay. You’re not the only one who fell for it.”

That... didn’t seem like enough. Prompto sounded sincere, but for Noct... Even if Prompto forgave him, there was no way Noct could. Not for doing that to Prompto.

“After this is over,” He found himself speaking, telling the plans he’d been slowly building up in his mind, “I say we break down the borders -- come together as one nation.”

“Huh?”

Prompto’s utterance caused Noct to finally turn his head, before quickly looking forward again. He wasn’t quite ready to look at the blond, not yet. “I mean, what does it matter where you’re from anyway?” Feeling a little self conscious, he folded his arms across his chest and leaned against the bars on the bunk.

The bed moved as Prompto stood, but Noct kept his eyes forward. At least until Prompto spoke.

“You know, I never thought I’d say this; but you sounded like a real king there for a second.”
Noct finally turned his head to look at Prompto. The blond was leaning against the top bunk and looking down at him. For the first time since they’d found this small safe haven, their eyes met, and Noct remembered what he was really fighting for.

“Better late than never…” He let his arms drop, finally letting himself relax. Prompto really did believe in him, really did forgive him. Prompto was too good for this world, too bright, too honest, too perfect. The world needed a lot of work before it deserved him. “I’m gonna make this world a better place.” He vowed, “You with me?” He asked, finally looking up at Prompto.

The look on the blond’s face almost broke his heart with how much it swelled. The boy - the man, was giving him such a tender look before he bowed his head. “Uh-huh. Ever at your side.”

Noct turned even further in the bunk, looking up at the blond for the longest time. “I’ll hold you to that.” He told him, watching confusion flicker in Prompto’s eyes. “I mean it.” Noct shuffled across the bed and sat up on his knees. He almost hit his head on the underside of the bunk, but somehow managed to stop himself in time.

He looked up at Prompto, a hand slowly, hesitantly reaching out. He placed it on Prompto’s cheek, a gentle and tender touch. “When this is over, I want you to be. At my side.” He swallowed, wondering why this was suddenly so difficult. They’d already talked about this. About how they felt. About how it just couldn’t be.

“I’ll break down the borders, I’ll make new rules, wipe out old laws.” He took a breath, lifting his eyes from where they had fallen to look into Prompto’s. “And I’ll ask you to stay at my side. Officially.” He really hoped that Prompto understood what Noct was saying, he didn’t know if he had the nerve to say it out loud. Not yet.

There was a little hesitance before Prompto ducked his head in a nod. He leaned into the palm on his cheek and let out a breath. “I’ll be waiting for you.” He promised.

“Un-Until then…” Noct moved so that he was stood beside Prompto and guided the blond forward. He pressed their foreheads together. “I’ll do this.” He said quietly, “Any time I want to tell you… any time I want to tell you that I…” He took another breath. He’d only said these words once before, and never directly to Prompto. But they were such important words.

The eternity of the last few days had told him just how much he cared for Prompto, just how much he needed him to be by his side. These words, these small, massive words, were the least he could do.

“Any time I want to tell you that I love you.” He managed to get out in a soft whisper. “Any time I want to kiss you. Any time I want to be by your side in a way I can’t… Until it’s all over and I can make it so we can… This is what I’ll do.”

There was silence for a moment, and Noct began to panic. Had he said the wrong thing? Was this as cheesy as he thought it was? Did Prompto not like it? It was a bad idea, right?

He was about to pull away, when he felt a hand on his cheek. “Okay.” Prompto sounded like he was having trouble speaking too. “I-I’ll do the same.” He said quietly. “But Noct…” He pulled back so they could look at each other properly. “Let’s hurry up and make the world a better place. I’ll wait forever if that’s what it takes, but I uh… Don’t want to wait that long?” Prompto chuckled, his cheeks going red and his free hand going to scratch at the back of his head.
Not knowing what to say, but having an action he could do instead, Noct simply placed their foreheads together again.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it took so long again. That migraine I talked about in chapter 7? Still here. Got every symptom but the headache itself. It's like it's almost here, but waiting for something, and I know I won't feel better until it actually hits x.x Four weeks and counting. Hopefully it hits soon.

Discord: https://discord.gg/esGdEpD
Feel free to join us! We don't only talk about my fics, but about pretty much anything really xD. We even share pictures of our cats :)
They took three days to reach all the people of Lestallum. Noct was super busy, moving from one group to another, then another with the other four trailing after him. On the eve of the third day, they all gathered in the hotel and relaxed in the cool air.

“So we’ll probably end up having to go to Steyliff Grove.” Gladio pointed out as they rested. “Might want to get extra supplies.”

“It couldn’t hurt.” Ignis agreed, pulling a can of Ebony from the armiger. “I’ll head to the market in the morning.”

“What’s in Steyliff?” Cor questioned from his usual perch against the wall.

“Mythril.” Prompto answered, flopping down on the bed and pulling Noct with him.

Normally, Noct had no problems with the cuddling. In fact, he rather enjoyed it, and liked the fact that they were finally in a place in their relationship where it comfortable rather than awkward. But in Lestallum, it was just too damn hot. So he lay down beside the blond, but left a small gap between them, hoping that the airflow would still be able to keep them both cool. His hand reached across the tiny space to link his pinky finger with Prompto’s.

“And we need Mythril because…?” Cor sounded like he was trying to remind Noct that he didn’t have all the information.

“The Royal Vessel is in need of repair.” Ignis answered, reaching for a magazine that had been left on the coffee table. “It requires Mythril. We’ll need to call Cid to negotiate the repairs.”

“Man, I hate that place.” Prompto muttered with a groan. “Too many bugs.” Noct grunted in agreement.

“When do we leave?” Cor questioned, looking like he was already ready to go.

“Steyliff is a few hours from here,” Ignis told him, “But the dungeon doesn’t allow entry until after nightfall. I would suggest tomorrow afternoon.”

“Saves us hanging around for hours waiting for the sun to go down.” Gladio agreed.

“I only hope that Cid is amenable to assisting us.” Ignis was already pulling his phone from his
pocket, ready to call him. “He hardly knows us in this time.”

“We could always take the ferry.” Prompto suggested, “It’s still running this time.”

Noct shook his head, “There’s no space for the Regalia.” He pointed out. “We might not end up using her across the ocean, but I’d rather not leave her here.” The others nodded in agreement. The Regalia had become an unofficial member of their party, and none of them felt right leaving it where it could be stolen or damaged. While they were making headway with the local populace, there were still those that were opposed to the Crown City and royal family and that car was as distinctive as they got.

“It also allows us to travel on our own terms.” Cor pointed out, “With fewer risks of interference from the public.”

“Translation - nobody to bother us on the boat.” Gladio provided with a smirk. Cor was still doing whatever he could to protect them from threats that weren’t all that threatening. “Least nobody can throw us overboard when Prompto gets too enthusiastic with his camera.”

The Vesperpool was just as gross and bug riddled as they remembered it, but they had made surprisingly good time and arrived a few hours before sunset. Despite the groans and eyerolls that it prompted from the others, Noct took it as an opportunity to fish.

Once again, Cor found himself accompanying the prince at a pier while the rest of his group wandered off to do their own thing. Ignis had said something about gathering ingredients before they left the continent, and Prompto had insisted that he needed to take more photos before they left.

Gladio had simply shrugged and pointed out that he just didn’t want to watch Noct fish for hours. Once again, none of them seemed to care for protecting Noct. Not even the prince himself.

“I told you, you don’t need to hover.”

“And I told you that it would be irresponsible to leave you alone.” Cor countered for the third time.

Beside Noct, Pryna gave a sharp bark, as if pointing out to him that she was still there. Even if she was a messenger of the gods, Cor wasn’t convinced that she would be much good in a fight.

Noct just shrugged and turned his attention back to the water and Cor took a seat beside him.

It was going to be a long three hours.

“I remember this place being harder.” Prompto muttered with a soft sigh as he fired his weapon almost lazily, watching as the skellington disappeared in a puddle of miasma.

“We have faced many challenges since we were last here.” Ignis pointed out, a dagger leaving his hand in a flash of steel. Another daemon fell. “It stands to reason that the enemies here are more lackluster.”

They arrived in an open room, and Noct reached out to stop Cor’s advance. “Floor’s gonna give
“Don’t think there’s another way around.” Gladio was looking around in consideration, and Noct realised that Gladio had never actually been here before.

The last time they’d been in Steyliff, Gladio had been off doing his own thing with the Cor in their time. The complete look of surprised awe when he saw the watery ceiling made a little more sense to him now.

“If I remember right, the floor’ll collapse and an Iron Giant’ll be waiting for us.” Prompto inched his way forward, as if testing to see how far he could get before the stone gave way.

“Least we’re ready for it this time.” Noct shrugged and took a few steps forward, realising that Gladio was right - there wasn’t another way around. “Iron Giant’s aren’t that scary.” He flashed the rest of his group a grin as he felt the floor give way.

This time, they really were ready. Instead of being taken by surprise, Noct knew what was coming and he was able to control his fall into a downward strike on the forming Iron Giant.

The creature never had the chance to fully spawn before Noct’s blade took it out. He landed carefully, managing to avoid the pool of miasma that hadn’t dissipated yet. “Well that was disappointing.” He muttered, as the rest of the team jumped down to join him.

“Sometimes, I just feel we’re just way too OP.” Prompto agreed, “Kinda takes the fun out of things.” He let out a sigh and leaned against Noct. “C’mon. We’re nearly there, right?”

Cor was looking at them with that strange expression again. “You’re complaining.” He raised an eyebrow, “That the enemy is too easy to defeat?”

“No challenge.” Gladio was agreeing with Prompto on this one. “He’s right, it takes the fun out of things.”

“Don’t get too cocky.” Cor warned, “Letting your guard down is one sure way to become overwhelmed.”

Noct just shrugged before picking his way over the rubble and continuing onwards, Pryna sticking by his heels.

While Cor’s warning was sound advice, nobody had faced any hardships during their dungeon crawl - Noct had been hit once, but it turned out that Pryna could heal minor injuries with a simple lick and they hadn’t had to use even a single potion.

It had only taken them a few hours, and by the time they reached the surface, the moon was high in the sky.

They made their way to the closest haven without any trouble and settled down with quick, practiced ease. “That was a lot easier than I remembered.” Noct admitted, watching the flames lick at the night sky.

“We didn’t even need Aranea’s help.” Prompto agreed, “Though it would’ve been nice to fight with
her again.” He sounded almost wistful, and Noct shoved away a surge of jealousy.

He knew for a fact that there was nothing between Prompto and Aranea - Prompto himself had confessed that he was as gay as they came - but that didn’t stop Noct remembering the way that the blond had always seemed to swoon for her.

Even if there was something between them, it wasn’t Noct’s place to interfere. He and Prompto couldn’t be together - not until he was king and able to change the rules, and even then it might not be able to happen - so Noct couldn’t really stand in Prompto’s way if he found someone else. Someone that could make him happy.

“Dude,” Prompto’s voice broke into Noct’s thoughts, and he turned his attention to the blond. Prompto was frowning at him, obviously concerned. “You okay?” He questioned, voice quiet. Noct noticed that the rest of the group were doing their own things and not paying attention.

He tried to smile, but the reaction he got from Prompto told him how unsuccessful he was at reassurance. Instead, he let out a breath and shook his head. He glanced at his team again before standing and gesturing for Prompto to follow.

At the back of the Haven was a cliff. It was close enough to the haven that they were safe from daemons, but far enough away that they could feel like they were alone. In silent agreement, they climbed to the top and took a seat overlooking the haven.

“What’s up dude?” Prompto asked, almost as soon as they sat down.

Noct gave a soft sigh and shook his head. “Nothing major.” He admitted, “Just sometimes I…” He shook his head and turned to Prompto. He didn’t say anything else, instead he reached for his friend and pressed their foreheads together.

“Yeah.” Prompto spoke quietly, his own hand reaching up to rest on Noct’s cheek. “Me too.” He admitted.

They sat like that for a moment before pulling back to lean against each other’s sides in a soft silence. Eventually Prompto let out a quiet breath. “When we get back, I wanna look at the law.” He said quietly, “I mean, obviously I trust Iggy, but I wanna see it for myself.”

Noct nodded. Technically, Prompto had the right to look at that sort of thing, now that he was Noct’s retainer - especially if Noct officially asked him to. While Noct also believed that Ignis had looked into everything and tried to find any loophole, it never hurt to have another person look.

There probably weren’t any loopholes - Ignis would have almost certainly found them if there were - but Noct wouldn’t complain about Prompto double checking.

“There is one law…” He turned his head to offer Prompto a soft smile. Prompto raised an eyebrow, prompting Noct to continue, “Once per reign, a monarch can modify or remove one law, without any input from the council. I need to check to make sure it would work but…” Noct turned fully to look at Prompto, to meet his eyes. “But I’m gonna use that to make it so that we can be together.”

Prompto was quiet for a moment, the smile on his face fond. “You sure there’s nothing else you want to do? I mean, I’m sure there’s a lot of rules that suck.” The tone the blond took told Noct that he knew what his answer would be, but for some reason, he was giving him an out. It took Noct a moment to realise that the blond probably thought that he wasn’t worthy - that Noct’s one freeby
should be used for something else, something that Prompto deemed more important.

There was nothing more important than Prompto.

Again, Noct pressed their foreheads together. “I want to be with you.” He said quietly, “It might make me a selfish king, but there’s nothing more that I want.”

Prompto snorted a little, chuckling, “Dude, you literally sacrificed yourself. Ten years, then your life. I don’t think anyone could call you selfish.”

Prompto took a breath and pulled back, putting a little distance between them. Noct didn’t take offense - the air between them was starting to get sexually tense, and Noct understood why Prompto needed to back off. He needed the space too.

“Oh I just can’t wait to be king.” Noct sang a line from one of Iris’ favourite movies, causing Prompto to burst into laughter and the tension fell away.

By the time they arrived at Caem the next day, Cid was ready and waiting for them. He took the mythril without a word and shuffled away towards the port. Cor followed behind, and the rest of the group headed towards the boarding house.

Noct hung back, offering a soft apology to Prompto before bending down to pet Pryna. “Hey pup,” He greeted her, reaching into the armiger to pull out a small envelope. “I need you to take this to Luna.” He told the dog, who gave him a soft bark and a wag of the tail.

He attached the letter to her collar, and stood, stepping back to watch her run off in what seemed like a random direction.

When Noct turned around, Prompto was stood on the steps waiting for him. “Everything good?” The blond questioned, cocking his head to the side.

“Well, when I’m king, we can adopt a puppy, if you want.” Noct offered.


“Why not both?”

Their stay at Caem was short. It only took a day for Cid to fix the boat, and Prompto was somewhat glad about that. His memories of Caem were all happy ones, but in this time period the house just felt far too empty.

Instead of the large collection of people that had been there last time, this time it was just the five of
them and Cid. There were too many empty beds, and the dinner table felt far too big and lonely, so he was happy when Cid pronounced the Royal Vessel ready - at least until he remembered that they were going to stop at Altissia along the way.

The closer they got to the floating city, the more anxious he felt, and looking around he could see his emotions echoed on the faces of his friends. Cor seemed to have noticed, his own expression becoming more and more concerned.

“What are we walking into?” He questioned as Altissia appeared on the horizon. From his posture and tone, it was obvious that he was readying himself for a fight against some unknown evil.

“Hopefully nothing.” Noct answered, eyes locked onto the city as it quickly grew. “We just… don’t have many happy memories from this place.”

“This is where it all turned to shit.” Gladio commented.

“This is where it all happened.” Prompto muttered, voice quiet and sombre. “Luna died, Iggy was hurt… We nearly lost Noct…” He shook his head, “The beginning of the end.”

Noct turned to Ignis, finally tearing his focus from the city before them. “I won’t let it happen again.” He swore, “This time, I’ll make sure you get to see what comes next.”

Ignis simply nodded, face pale and hands gripping at the back of the pilot’s seat. It was then that Prompto realised that while Iggy had so far managed to keep himself together and retain a sense of normalcy, this was going to be hard for the advisor.

Until now, Ignis hadn’t really shown his reaction to the traumas they had suffered. Prompto knew that he was just as messed up as the rest of them, but the tactician had managed to deal with it surprisingly well - focusing instead on helping the rest of them and dealing by simply being more… Iggy. The obsessive cleaning had faded, but his mothering had not.

Now it was Ignis’ time to freak out.

Silently, Prompto stepped forward and placed a hand on his friend’s shoulder, silently vowing to be there for him in any way he needed. Ignis had been instrumental in Prompto’s ongoing recovery, he only hoped that he could return the favour.

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Once they had disembarked, the group slowly wandered the streets, all of them wanting to remind themselves of the beauty of the place while forgetting the disaster that had happened. The city was, of course, untouched by said disaster, but their minds couldn’t help but see it how they had left it.

“We should keep moving.” Gladio said gently, never once straying from Ignis’ side. “If we move now, we should be on the train before nightfall.”

Noct and Prompto silently nodded in their agreement, not wanting to stay any longer than they had to. This city, in all her splendor, had become a place of nightmares for them. For Ignis especially.

Prompto watched, but didn’t comment, as Ignis reached out and closed the small distance between
his hand and Gladio’s to clasp them together. Gladio didn’t resist or say anything as he took the hand and gave it a squeeze.

Noct strode up to Ignis’ other side and copied his friend’s actions, taking Ignis’ other hand in his own. “C’mon.” The prince spoke softly and gently lead them towards the station where the train was waiting.

Ignis managed to hold it together until they were situated within the trains’ compartment and the door had been closed behind them. It was cramped with the five of them, to say the least, but to Prompto it actually felt somewhat comforting.

“Remind me not to go onto the roof.” He commented in an attempt of humor. He took a seat on the bed across from where Ignis, Gladio, and Noct were sitting, hands still clasped together.

Noct grimaced at his words and flashed him an apologetic look, which Prompto shrugged off. He never blamed Noct. Not really. In fact, until he had realised what had actually happened, it had made sense to him. His self-esteem was low enough for him to convince himself that it was what he deserved for imposing himself on the team.

He knew better now, of course. He knew his place, and it was right here, with his friends, helping them in any way he could.

And right now, Iggy needed some help.

The advisor was shaking - Prompto could see that from across the small room - and the men on either side of him looked lost. Noct’s arm went around Iggy’s shoulder, and Gladio shuffled ever so slightly closer. There wasn’t any room for Prompto to physically comfort his friend, so instead he did something that had always helped in the past.

He began to sing.

He kept his voice soft, the lullaby falling from his lips with practiced ease. It was a song he’d written within the first year of darkness, and had sung it countless times to comfort his blind friend once Ignis had confessed to him that it helped soothe him.

“When the world is ending, darkness drawing near,  
Reach out for my hand I’ll take you to the light.  
The battle’s just beginning, but we can hold no fear,  
We will show the world we’ll fight.”

The small, shaky smile that Ignis gave him let Prompto know that he really was helping, and that their old coping mechanisms still worked. The rest of the room was quiet, allowing Prompto’s soft voice to permeate the air.

“Hate will not guide us  
Hope will not leave us  
Walking tall side by side  
We’ll survive.”

Once he’d finished, Ignis gave a small nod of appreciation and took a breath. He slowly let it out, then repeated the action. Keeping himself calm. Holding his emotions back. Another deep breath.
“It’s okay.” Noct said quietly, “It’s okay to let it out.” He tightened his arm around his oldest friend, “We want to help you.”

Unable to just sit by and do nothing while all his instincts were telling him to reach out and offer physical contact, Prompto slid from the bed and knelt before his friend. He gently lay his head on Ignis’ lap, his arm circling around the advisor’s legs in a strange hug.

“You were there for me.” He said quietly, “When everything was wrong and my world was falling apart. When I thought I wasn’t strong enough to push through to the next day, you were always there. You never let me down, you never judged me and you were always there to help.” He lifted his head to look up at Ignis, his own eyes feeling a little wet. “Even when we came back, you kept doing that. You were the one that stayed strong that held us all together…

“But it’s okay for you to feel it too. It’s okay for you to let things out, to let us be the strong ones for once. You helped us all so much, so let us help you.”

Slowly, Ignis’ face crumpled. His eyes filled with tears and his shaking intensified. The usually composed man leaned forward, hands coming up to cover his face as he curled in on himself, finally letting the tears fall.

Prompto wouldn’t deny that it hurt to see Ignis like that, to hear the sobs that wracked his body, but he knew that it was a good thing. Bottling up or ignoring emotions was never a good idea, and while it was hard to witness it, Prompto was glad that the other man was finally letting them out.

Beside the advisor, Noct moved to curl around him like a cat protecting its young. On the other side, Gladio leaned in, holding himself close to the other man while still giving him room to breathe.

Prompto put his head back on Ignis’ lap and tightened his arms around his legs. “We love you.” He told his friend. “You’re not alone in this. You don’t always have to be the strong one.”

“We got you.” Noct added.

Behind him, Prompto was vaguely aware of Cor leaving the compartment, but he paid the man no mind. He probably felt out of place and was giving them their space - that’s what Prompto would’ve wanted to do ten years ago.

Instead, now all he wanted to do was help his friend. The man was slowly coming apart, and Prompto felt like he couldn’t do anything except hold him like he was. But somehow, he knew that it was enough.

It took Ignis a surprisingly short time to calm down, but even after the sobs subsided, he remained exactly where he was. Hands still covering his face, body still slumped and resting heavily against Gladio. It took him a few minutes longer to drop his hand and gently rest them on Prompto’s head.

“Thank you.” The advisor’s voice cracked slightly, and Prompto reflexively tightened his grip for a second.

“Any time.” Gladio muttered quietly.

“Here.” Cor had apparently returned at some point, a cup of steaming liquid in his hands. “It’s not the best, but it’s all they had.”
With a shaky, grateful smile, Ignis took the offered beverage and sipped it. “It’s perfect. Thank you.”

They stayed like that for a while, nobody wanting to pull back from giving comfort until they knew that Ignis would be okay. They were there long enough for Prompto’s butt to go numb, but he didn’t complain. He would never complain about the cost of helping his cherished people.

Eventually, long after he’d finished his tea, Ignis fell asleep leaning heavily against Gladio. Slowly, Noct and Prompto pulled back, handing over Ignis’ care to the shield, who dutifully took Ignis’ glasses off and moved so that they could lay side by side as the advisor slept, never once letting go of his hand.

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Ignis slept for a few hours, curled against Gladio in an exhausted slumber. Not once did the shield even attempt to leave, not even when his bladder tried to protest. He had enough control over his body that he knew he could wait several hours more if he needed to. Right now, Ignis was more important than anything.

Eventually though, Ignis did stir. If Gladio hadn’t known him so well, he might have missed the signs. Ignis didn’t move away, even after he was fully awake, choosing instead to remain where he was curled up against Gladio.

“Hey,” Gladio spoke gently, his hand moving slowly up and down the advisor’s arm. “You feeling any better?”

“Some.” Ignis said quietly, still making no moves to pull away. “How long was I asleep?” He questioned.

“Couple hours.” Gladio shifted a little. Now that Ignis was awake and apparently feeling better, his bladder was beginning to double down on its protests. Ignis noticed, but seemed to take it the wrong way. The advisor began to pull back, but Gladio’s grip tightened fractionally and Ignis settled down again.

“Is this… okay?” For the first time in a long time, Ignis sounded unsure. Gladio simply nodded, moving a little.

“Yeah. Just need to pee.” He admitted.

Again, Ignis attempted to pull back, but Gladio held tight. “Go to the bathroom.” Ignis scolded, “Holding it is not good for you.”

Gladio knew that, and he really did need to go, but having Ignis in his arms wasn’t something that happened every day, and he was mostly convinced that if he moved now, it wouldn’t happen again. But Ignis was right, and now that he was thinking about it, he really did need to go. Still, he hesitated.

Ignis sighed against him and lifted his head enough to look at Gladio. “Gladio.” His voice held the edge of warning concern that was mirrored in his expression.

Finally, Gladio’s arm left it’s grip around Ignis, but only to reach up and gently stroke the advisor’s cheek, wiping gently at the dried tear marks. “You sure you’re okay?” He questioned, voice hardly above a whisper.
The soft smile that Ignis gave him was fond to say the least. The look he was giving Gladio was one that melted the shield’s heart, and when Ignis leaned into his touch, he found himself leaning forward.

The kiss was their first, but it felt like their millionth. Soft and gentle, it felt completely natural like it was something they did every day. There were no sparks, no heat, just a sense of perfect belonging. When they pulled apart, Gladio found himself in a position he’d seen Noct and Prompto in more times than he could count - their foreheads were resting against each other, and his hand was still on Ignis’ cheek.

“Go pee.” The advisor commanded, gently pushing at his shoulder, and Gladio’s choice in the matter was swiftly taken from him when his bladder began to cramp.

“Yeah.” He slowly extracted himself from their embrace and regretfully left the room.

Almost as soon as he was alone, his mind began to spin with the implications of that kiss. The fact that Ignis hadn’t pulled back and had in fact kissed him back. The fact that it just felt so right. The fact that Ignis was definitely male, and Gladio had never been interested in men before.

Yet with all these thoughts, he had expected to feel dizzy, to feel confused and overwhelmed. Instead, he felt calm and relaxed, like he somehow knew that this was always going to happen.

After he’d finished his business, he returned to their small compartment. He let himself in and stood by the door, finding himself hesitating a little.

Just because it felt right to him, that didn’t mean that Ignis felt the same and while he suddenly knew what he wanted, he had no idea what his friend was thinking.

As if sensing his thoughts, Ignis shuffled over in the bed and raised an arm in silent invitation. As soon as Gladio lay back down beside him, Ignis curled up against him, resting his head on Gladio’s shoulder.

They lay like that for a few moments, a mostly comfortable silence between them. But Gladio knew that they would have to talk about it sooner rather than later - the last thing he wanted was for this to become one of those things that they just didn’t talk about. So he turned his head, intending on looking Ignis in the eyes while he spoke.

The words never got out. Instead, they were kissing again - this time initiated by Ignis. It didn’t give Gladio all the answers he wanted - they would still have to talk after this - but it definitely made him realise that they were probably on the same page. Or at least reading the same book.

Again, it was soft. A gentle caress of tender lips as the two men tried to pour their feelings into one another. After they pulled back, Ignis was smiling up at him. “I believe that was long overdue.” He admitted, and Gladio found himself smiling back.

“Yes.” He agreed.

They hadn’t talked about it. Not really. But for now, it was enough.
So... Gladnis happened... Not quite how it was supposed to go, but this just seemed too perfect not to use...

I've decided to skip some of the fluffy things that I was going to write in favour of getting to the parts that my inspiration is the strongest. Also, I don't think we need any more filler...
Infiltration

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They had almost made it to Tenebrae when Noct gathered the group together. They were again situated in one of the private compartments. The prince waited until everyone had settled - Gladio and Ignis sat on one of the beds, Prompto and Cor on the other while he himself stood by the door.

“I need to tell you guys my plan.” he told them, and instantly everybody was more alert. All eyes were on him, and Noct fell into his regal persona. His posture straightened and he stood taller, they way he did when addressing people as the prince rather than just another person. This was the time that he needed to be in command rather than simply another member of their party. “Before we left Caem, I sent Pryna back to Luna with a message. Hopefully, by the time we arrive, she will have read it.”

Everyone was still watching him, listening intently. He could see Prompto’s head tilt minutely to the side, and knew that the blond had questions that he was holding on to, hoping that they would be answered with what Noct had to say next.

“If she did, she’ll be waiting for us. We go in and extract her.” Noct turned his attention to Cor. “Your job is to escort her safely back to Insomnia. The car and the boat are at your disposal. We’re going to be making a bit of a mess in Niflheim, and I don’t know how the empire will respond. I want her somewhere that I know she’s safe.”

“If you’re making a mess, you’ll need backup.” Cor objected, obviously not liking where this was going.

Noct nodded. “I have some.” He pointed out, gesturing to the others in the room. “The best that I could ever ask for. Even if you don’t believe our story, you can’t deny that we are an effective team and fully capable of taking care of ourselves.”

Cor fell silent, and Noct knew that the marshall begrudgingly agreed. They hadn’t had many opportunities to truly show off what they were capable of - Noct hadn’t even had to use the full power of the armiger, let alone summon a deity - but Cor had seen enough.

Next, Noct turned his attention to Prompto. “Once we arrive in Niflheim, you’ll be in charge.” He told the blond, “You know the terrain and what we’re going up against. We’ll infiltrate the base under your command.”

Prompto seemed to go a little pale, but he gave a nod, determined. After a moment, the blond turned to look at Ignis, who nodded, silently agreeing to advise when he could. This wasn’t the first time that Prompto had been in charge of a team, but it was the first time he’d been command of this team.

Noct knew that he could do it. He trusted him completely.

“What’s your extraction plan?” Cor asked, eyebrows raised. “If I take the car and the boat, how are you intending on returning to Lucis without getting taken by the empire?”

Noct nodded at his question, knowing that it was a good one. He turned to Prompto, “They have
ships at the base?” He questioned, and Prompto nodded, “Can you fly them?” He asked, and again, Prompto nodded.

“I mean, I’m not great at it…” The blond admitted, “Pretty bumpy, and landing’s a bitch, but yeah. I can get us home.”

Noct nodded and turned back to Cor with a shrug. “Extraction plan.”

 Cor looked to be trying to come up with any reason for him to stay with the group, but didn’t voice any of them. Especially when they pulled up to the Fenestala station.

As soon as they disembarked, there was an excited bark and Pryna bounded up to them. She circled Prompto’s legs until the blond bent down to pet her with a grin. “Hey there Tiny. Miss me?” He questioned, only for the dog to jump up and lick him on the face. Prompto giggled and ruffled her fur.

Another bark caught Noct’s attention, and Umbra joined them, followed soon by a woman. He had to do a double take when he realised who it was.

Luna had forgone her usual white attire and was dressed in a modest outfit - pale blue jeans and a dark blue shirt, topped off with a long brown coat. Her hair was hidden under a brown beanie hat, a few blond hairs coming out the front. If it hadn’t been for the dogs, Noct probably would’ve never given her a second glance.

He smiled at her, and gathered her in his arms in greeting. “It’s good to see you.” He whispered, as she returned the embrace, her delicate arms holding him close in a surprisingly strong grip. After a moment, he pulled back to look down at her, a grin on his face. “Got my message then?” He questioned.

Luna nodded and gave a soft laugh, “I will admit, it took me a while to understand what ‘O. M. W. meant.”

Noct felt himself blush a little at that, but didn’t comment. He’d forgotten that Luna hadn’t really been exposed to internet and texting culture and he made a silent promise to make sure she had that freedom afforded to her in the future.

“No to interrupt,” Ignis spoke, obviously meaning to interrupt, “But we’re attracting attention.” He gestured to where Prompto was still playing with the dogs, and to where Noct was still holding onto Luna’s shoulders.

Noct nodded, disheartened by the fact that his reunion with Luna would be a short one. They had things to do, and as soon as they were done, he would be able to catch up with her properly.

He turned from his advisor to look at his childhood friend. “Cor will take you back to Insomnia.” He told her, shaking his head when she went to protest. “We’re gonna take down Niflheim from the inside. I don’t know how they’ll react and I need to know that you’re safe.”

“Noctis,” Luna gave him that soft smile and shook her head, “The empire knows better than to harm me.”
“I don’t care.” Noct admitted, “If I can only change one thing this time around, it’s going to be to keep you safe.” He told her, “Please. Go with Cor…” He wouldn’t force her. No way. She’d had enough of her freedoms taken from her, and he wasn’t about to take another.

It took her a moment, but Noct let out a sigh of relief when she gave a soft nod. “Very well.” She agreed, turning to Cor. “I am in your care.” She gave a small bow, which was returned by Cor. He gestured for her to join him and they headed forwards to the second train without a second glance back.

Noct watched them leave, his eyes glued to them until they embarked, the dogs following at their heels. “We should go.” He said as he finally pulled his attention back to his team. “Get this over with.”

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The next leg of the train ride was quiet. Ignis had insisted that they eat, even though nobody had much of an appetite. It was easy to pretend to Cor that they were completely confident, but in reality, they knew how dangerous their mission was.

“What’s the plan?” Noct asked, joining Prompto at the table he was sitting at.

The blond was still looking out the window, his camera in his hand. Noct realised with a start that Prompto had never seen this part of their journey. They had long ago passed the point where they’d been forced to separate - where he’d been tricked into betraying Prompto.

He took a breath at the realisation, the reminder, and pushed it aside for now. They had a mission to do, and Noct wasn’t about to let his old guilt distract him.

“Huh?” Prompto pulled his eyes from the scenery and turned to Noct with a frown.

“We’re in Niflheim.” The prince grinned at Prompto, “You’re officially in charge.” He added, holding back a laugh at the grimace that came over Prompto’s face.

The blond let out a sigh and nodded, sitting up straighter in his seat. “Uh- There’s a back entrance. It’s a bitch to get to - supposed to be an emergency exit - it’s half way up a cliff. It’s unguarded, so it’s probably the best place to start. Just trying to figure out how to get up there.”

“Could I warp up?” Noct questioned, glancing up as Gladio and Ignis joined them.

“Yeah.” Prompto nodded, “There’s a ledge. You can get up, but you won’t be able to get in.” He lifted his wrist, letting Noct know that there would be a scanner lock.

“I can warp up and throw down some rope.”

Prompto nodded, thinking about that. “That… could work.” He nodded again. “Once inside, we’ll head down to the lowest level. Stick close to me - the doors don’t stay open for long. It’ll take me maybe five minutes to rig the self destruct, and we’ll have a maximum of ten minutes to get out and away.”

“Cutting it close.” Gladio pointed out with a frown.

Prompto just shrugged, “We’ve got through worse.”
The infiltration of the base did not go to plan. It turned out that Prompto’s information wasn’t quite up to scratch, and while there were no guards outside the back entry, there was one waiting for them just inside the doors. They hadn’t seen her at first - she was hiding in the shadows, watching them, waiting. But as soon as they went through the second set of doors into a large open room, she spoke up from behind them.

“This is as far as you go, boys.”

The voice was familiar and Prompto had to take a deep breath, realising just what was about to happen. Slowly, the group turned around to face her.

Aranea Highwind looked just as imposing as she always had, even if she was a little younger than they’d ever known her. She stood tall - though Prompto knew that that was mostly due to the ridiculous heels she wore - and faced them with muscles taught, poised for battle.

“I’m afraid this facility is off limits to civilians.”

It was strange, having her not recognise them. Even stranger still for her to regard them as the enemy. While they were enemies in this timeline, it had been a long time since Prompto had thought of her as one. For the last ten years, she’d been an invaluable ally, and now…

Now they were probably going to have to fight her.

“Don’t worry,” He gave her a grin, trying to defuse the situation with words. It probably wasn’t going to work, but it was worth a try. “We’re just passing through. Be in and out before you know it!”

It didn’t work. Aranea’s eyes narrowed and she made a subtle movement designed to bring attention to her weapon.

“It’s my job to keep unauthorised persons out.” She warned them. “Leave now, and you can do so with your lives.”

“Well, you see, I am authorised to be here.” Prompto tried for a new tactic. He lifted his arm and showed her the tattoo on his wrist. It was a gamble, and a long shot, but if it meant they didn’t have to fight… “See?” He tried to grin at her again. “I’m just here for a chat with daddy dearest.”

That was apparently the wrong thing to say. While her expression still held confusion, Aranea’s eyes narrowed even further and her grip on her weapon tightened. She didn’t say anything more, but Prompto knew what was coming.

He desperately didn’t want to fight Aranea. She’d been a great help for him during the long nights, both in battle and out of it. Even before then, when he’d first come to Niflheim, she’d helped him figure out the churning emotions of his mind.

His hand was shaking when he summoned his weapon, and apparently his team understood his feelings. Gladio stepped in front of him, silently offering to take the lead in this fight.

“We have no intention of fighting you.” Ignis spoke from behind them, stepping forward and
adjusting his glasses. Unlike the others, he hadn’t drawn his weapon yet. Instead, he stared her down. “You would do well to leave us be.” He told her, “And to leave here as soon as you can.”

“I can’t do that.”

The fact that she hadn’t already jumped at them told Prompto differently. Aranea wasn’t one to stand and talk when there was fighting to be done, not if she knew that she had to do it. But here she was, engaging in a conversation with them.

He knew that in the future she had left the empire - that she had disagreed with where things were going, and what the empire was doing. He also knew that she’d been feeling that way for a while before she actually left. Maybe, just maybe, she was already starting to think like that.

Apparently, Noct had the same idea. Like the others, he stepped forward, leaving Prompto at the back of the group. “If you stand down now, I can offer you political asylum in Lucis.” He told her, standing to his full height and using his kingly voice. “You and I both know the dark path that the empire is taking. The experiments that they’re running. I’m pretty sure that you don’t agree with them.”

Aranea let out a huff of laughter. “So what. Stand down and join you?” She questioned. “You want me to turn coat and work for Lucis?”

Noct shook his head. “No. I think being a mercenary would suit you.” He told her with a bit of a smile. “If you stand down now, I will ensure that you’re allowed to move around freely within Lucian borders.”

“And who are you to make such a promise?” She questioned, though Prompto had a feeling that she already knew.

“Noctis Lucis Caelum CXIV. Crowned prince of Lucis and heir to the throne.” Noct introduced himself.

From the corner of his eye, Prompto could see Ignis grimace and had to agree. This was supposed to be a covert operation, after all. Nobody was supposed to know they were here, and they definitely weren’t supposed to know it was them that was here. If Aranea didn’t join them, they’d have to take her out or kidnap her. Neither of which would be easily done.

“Really?” Aranea asked, tone disbelieving and sarcastic. “And what brings the prince of Lucis to a backwards facility such as this?”

Prompto didn’t know what Aranea was up to. She had to understand that now she knew, she couldn’t be allowed to go. Was she just playing for time? Trying to find out their motives so she could tell the higher ups if she made it out alive?

“You know what brought us here.” Noct countered. “The empire are breeding children as nothing more than sacrifices.”

“And stopping that, has the added benefit of reducing our army.”

“That too.” Noct admitted truthfully. “I want to put an end to this war, but more than that-” He regarded Aranea for a moment, “What they’re doing, using daemon miasma like they are…” He shook his head, “They’re breeding daemons.” He told her, “And the more they do this, the more
daemons will spawn. I can’t stand by and let that happen.”

“Regardless.” Aranea moved again, bringing her weapon forward. “I can’t just let you in.” She told them.

If Prompto hadn’t known her so well, hadn’t gone through hell with her on more than one occasion, he would’ve missed the look of regret on her face. It was subtle, and only momentary, but he saw it.

He didn’t have much of a chance to think on it though, because the moment she had stopped speaking, she launched herself at them. She was working at a disadvantage though. While she was a formidable warrior, so were the four Lucians, and they all knew her fighting style.

Prompto realised that he wasn’t the only one holding back. He watched as he took aim, noting that nobody was dealing her a fatal blow - they were all doing their best to subdue rather than kill.

The battle raged on, a series of parrys and dodges, and it didn’t take long for Aranea to work out what was going on. Instead of pressing their reluctance to her advantage, she backed off, jumping to land on one of the catwalks above them.

“We don’t want to hurt you!” Prompto called out, keeping his gun trained on her. With her at this distance, only himself and Noct had any chance of reaching her. He didn’t want to hurt her, but he would if that meant protecting his friends.

“Obviously.” She countered, still regarding them warily. There was no doubt that she’d noticed that they weren’t giving it their all. She was trained well.

“Do you really believe in what the empire are doing?” Noct asked, voice level. “Can you honestly tell me that you agree with what they’re doing?”

“It’s not my place.”

“Then who’s is it?” Noct questioned, lowering his weapon. “If everybody thinks like that, nobody will stand up and the empire will be left free to do as it pleases.” She seemed to be wavering, and Prompto decided to try another approach.

When he spoke up this time, he did so in Nif. The words flowed easily from his tongue with practiced ease. He could see that he was getting through to her, and kept going, not even fully thinking about the words as he spoke them.

She responded to him, and he gave a small nod, banishing his guns.

Beside him, his companions were tense, having no idea what was going on but willing to take his lead. One by one, they slowly banished their weapons. Only after they were all disarmed did Aranea nod and jump down from her perch.

“Full immunity.” She said to Noct, who nodded. “In writing.” She added.

“As soon as we get back.” The prince promised. “I’ll get the paperwork done.”

“Not good enough.”

Ignis pulled a notebook from the armiger and quickly scribbled on a page before handing it to Noct.
The prince read and signed it, and Ignis ripped the page from the book. He stepped forward and handed it to her. “Will this suffice?” He questioned.

She took a moment to read it before giving a sharp nod, taking the page and pocketing it in her cleavage. Then, as quickly as she’d arrived, she left and the retinue found themselves alone.

“What did you say to her?” Noct asked once he was sure they were alone.

“Told her about me.” He answered with a shrug. “Where I came from. How I came from.”

“What did she say to you?” Gladio asked, curious.

“Uh… loosely translated?” Prompto chuckled, hand scratching the back of his neck. “Kill the fucker.”

Gladio snorted in amusement and Ignis simply rolled his eyes.

“C’mon.” Prompto gestured to the door at the end of the room. “We’ve got a mission to do. Let’s mosey.”

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The base was oddly empty. Only occasionally did they come up with resistance - the odd MT unit prowling the corridors. It was odd to Prompto, that they hadn’t come across any scientists yet - he was sure that they would be milling around - but a part of him was glad.

He knew from the reports that many of the scientists that had worked in the facility hadn’t known exactly what they were working on. They’d been the ones who were working on cloning for food, having no idea that their equations were being used for more nefarious means.

He hoped that the reason they weren’t seeing any, was because they weren’t there. The fewer people caught in the blast, the better he would feel. He knew, of course, that there would be collateral damage. That there would be some people who wouldn’t get out in time, and people would lose their lives because of their actions. Prompto wasn’t naive enough to think that they could save everyone.

It wasn’t easy, to come to terms with that, but he managed to justify it to himself. Yes, people would die today because of something he did. Because of something that was his idea. Yes, that blood would be on his hands. But if they didn’t do this, then more people would die. Countless more, in a war that would go on for years until the darkness took everyone. These people were being sacrificed for the greater good.

That didn’t make it any easier.

They weaved their way through the facility, Prompto in the lead as he navigated the identical halls. It didn’t take them long to reach the central elevator, or for him to open the way for them. They gathered inside the elevator and the moment it started moving, Prompto let out a long breath.

He knew that Ignis and Gladio had already come to the same realisation as him, and he only hoped that Noct’s inexperience with the actual horrors of war would keep him from the same conclusion. He didn’t want Noct to have to feel the same guilt that was already building within him.

They stood in silence as they descended further into the facility, waiting for the elevator to reach their
destination. Once it did, they moved out, following Prompto to a large set of doors.

“It’s through here…” He muttered, turning to face them.

“The elevator took four minutes and thirty seconds.” Ignis told them.

“How far away do we need to get?” Gladio questioned.

“We should be safe if we can get to a ship.” Prompto answered, “I can get us out of here quickly, and the hull is reinforced. I saw some in the hanger on the way through. It’ll be tight, but we can make it.”

The others nodded, still more than happy to follow his lead, and for once, Prompto didn’t feel self conscious about it. He really was their expert on this, and he was the best choice.

Still, he took a deep breath before unlocking the door before them. They had no idea what could be waiting for them on the other side, and they had to be ready.

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The room was mostly empty as they stepped foot inside. It was bigger than Noct had been expecting, but he resisted the urge to look around, instead simply allowing himself to glance at the corners to make sure that there was nobody waiting for them.

There was nobody in the rafters, but as they followed Prompto further into the room, a figure stepped out from behind a bank of computers.

“How did you get in here?” Versteal Besithia growled at them, his voice deep and grating like gravel. Noct shuddered.

Seeing the man up close for the first time, he could see the resemblance to Prompto, but even though they had the same eye shape, the same mouth, the way the old man held himself made him look completely different. While Prompto was soft soft and bright, somehow the person he’d been cloned from looked dark and dangerous, his features giving no sense of the warmth he’d come to know from Prompto.

He was glad that he could see the difference. Glad that while they were physically similar, they looked so completely different. It was easy for him to get past the similarities and not see Prompto standing in front of him.

Which was a good thing, because if he had seen Besithia as Prompto, the sudden hole exploding in his head might have given him more nightmares than he was already going to get.

With wide eyes, he turned his head, facing Prompto beside him. The blond was standing straight, gun still pointed at where Besithia had stood and a determined look on his face. He was deadly still, eyes hard and trained on the crumpled body of the man that had made him.

After a moment, he lowered his arm. “Let’s go.” He ordered, voice hard in a way that Noct had only ever heard from hardened military commanders.

Without waiting for their response, Prompto stepped forward, now completely ignoring the form of the man he’d just murdered in favour of placing his attention on the computer banks.
The room was deadly silent as Prompto began to work. Nobody else moved a muscle, and Noct couldn’t help but stare at the man on the floor. He knew that Prompto had been hardened by the ten years of darkness, that he’d had to do awful things to survive and help those around him. But to be able to just kill a man like that...

Noct wasn’t sure what to make of it, or how to feel about it, but he knew that now wasn’t the time to think too hard about it. Now was the time to be ready, to guard Prompto’s back as he worked, and to be prepared to run once it was done.

“What the…?” Prompto’s voice broke into the silence and snatched Noct’s attention from the body. He frowned and moved to join his friend, giving Besithia a wide berth.

“What is it?” He questioned, peering over the blond’s shoulders as if he could actually understand the scribbles on the computer’s terminal.

“Shit!” Prompto sprung into action, moving faster than Noct had ever seen him do before. He started slamming on buttons, flipping switches in a hasty panic. It almost looked random to Noct.

He was about to ask what was going on when there was a sudden, piercing wail. Noct slammed his hands over his ears as alarms blared and the lighting in the room turned red. “What’s going on!?“ He shouted over the noise.

“Fucking dead man’s switch!” Prompto responded, running from the console to the doors, only for them to slam shut just before he reached them.

The blond tore the panel off the wall beside the door and began to frantically try to do something. Noct had no idea what, and the shrieking alarms didn’t help him think any.

“Cover your faces!” Prompto called, lifting his shirt to do exactly that. Without questioning, the others did as they were told.

They joined Prompto at the door, Gladio attempting to pry them open with brute force. “Did you rig the explosion?” They needed to know how much time they had.

Prompto shook his head, still working at the controls of the door. “Can’t!” He told them. “But-”

He cut himself off when a new sound filled the room. A hissing sound. Not a good sound. Noct lifted his head, trying to figure out where the noise was coming from.

Above them the vents had opened up, and pouring from them was a thick, black gas. A familiar sight to anyone that had ever seen a daemon die. The room was quickly filling up with miasma, and there was no way out.

It didn’t stop them from trying. Gladio was still trying to pry the door open, his broadsword wedged into the tiny space in the middle. Ignis’ daggers were joining the fray. Prompto had abandoned the door controls to run back to the computers and Noct joined him.

“What can I do?” He questioned.

“But-”

He cut himself off when a new sound filled the room. A hissing sound. Not a good sound. Noct lifted his head, trying to figure out where the noise was coming from.
“I can try. Is there a release on the other side?” If he could get through the doors, then he could pull whatever lever or press whatever button he had to. He had no idea if it would work, but it was worth a try.

Behind him, he could hear Gladio and Ignis coughing as the miasma worked its way into their lungs, even through the cloth barriers around their faces. He could feel his own lungs burn, but held the coughs back wanting to hear what Prompto had to say.

The blond shook his head, finally lifting his eyes from the computer to look at Noct. “There’s no way out.” He told him, starting to cough himself. “The doors won’t open until the miasma dissipates.”

“How long will that take?” Noct couldn’t hold the coughing back any more, his lungs were burning. His nose was burning. No matter what he did, it felt like he couldn’t get a clear breath. Even before Prompto responded, Noct knew the answer.

The blond shook his head, looking up at the vents and then around the room before his eyes settled back on to Noct’s. “The air is clear outside the door.” He told him, pushing him towards the door. “It’s thick, but I’ve seen you phase through a catoblepas’ foot.” He managed to get his words out with wheezing breath, having to pause here and there for a cough.

“I’m not leaving you here!” Noct objected, knowing what Prompto was suggesting. He was still being pushed towards the doors, Prompto not giving up.

“Don’t be an idiot.” Gladio growled, slumping down against the door as he fought for breath. “No point in you dying too.”

“Go.” Ignis managed, following Gladio’s example and sliding down the wall. “Please.”

“No!” Noct couldn’t, wouldn’t leave his friends to die. There was no guarantee he could even phase through the door. He’d never even thought to try something like that before.

Hands on his shoulders roughly turned him so that he was facing Prompto. The blond was leaning heavily onto his shoulders gasping for breath. The room was getting darker, the red lights becoming more of a haze as the miasma in the air thickened. But Noct could still see Prompto, could still see the look on his face, the tears in his eyes.

“Please.” The blond panted before his eyes rolled into the back of his head and his legs gave way. He collapsed, caught in Noct’s arms.

He looked around, Gladio and Ignis were still awake, though barely, as the dark tendrils of smoke wrapped their way around them. There was no way out. His friends were going to die in here. They would all die in here.

There had to be something he could do.

He looked down at Prompto, the man he loved so dearly, who was literally dying in his arms - about to be killed by an organism that would turn him into his worst nightmare. Because that was what would happen, wasn’t it? This miasma, it wasn’t just a thick gas, it was the starscourge. The parasite that morphed creatures into daemons.

It was ironic, he thought as he lowered Prompto to the ground, that the king of light would become
that which he was supposed to fight. That he would become a daemon as the world was plunged into darkness.

No. He couldn’t let it end like this. He couldn’t let his friends die. He was the King of Light. There had to be something he could do.

“You are the Light Bringer.” An unfamiliar voice spoke in his head, and Noct frowned. He fell to his knees, coughing more and more as he tried desperately to pull air into his lungs. “Bring the Light.”

He had no idea what that meant, or how to do what was asked of him. He was getting dizzy, he couldn’t think, couldn’t breathe. The darkness crowding his vision wasn’t only from the miasma, and he knew that his end was coming.

He felt the burning in his every cell, his body feeling like it was on fire as he fell forward, the darkness finally taking over.

Chapter End Notes

Yay! A cliffhanger! Said no-one ever...

And here we wrap up arc 2 - Roadtrip 2.0.

It might take me a little while to write the next part. You guys are just lucky that today I felt well enough to write... Turns out, I had a caffeine imbalance. Either too much, or not enough. Both send me into hypersomnia and chronic headaches. Now I just need to figure out how much I need, and how to get it without using dairy, soy or almond milk (also, coconut milk is WAY too expensive for me).

Feel free to join our Discord server! Where we chat about anything and everything and share pictures of our kitty cats!! https://discord.gg/esGdEpD
What We've Been Waiting For

Chapter Notes

Super excited about this chapter. PLEASE let me know what you think xDxD

Fair warning: Many of you may have somewhat loud reactions to this...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Awareness came back to him gradually. The darkness faded and he became aware of movement underneath him - an almost violent rocking coupled with the hum of what sounded like an engine.

Confused, he blinked his eyes open to find himself in an unfamiliar room. He was thankful that it was dark - the moment he opened his eyes his head felt like it was splitting open. He closed them again with a groan, his hand reaching up to cover his face.

“Ah, you’re awake.” Ignis’ voice came from beside him, and though the advisor spoke softly, it still pierced into his brain like an icepick.

“Loud.” He managed to whimper.

There was silence for a moment, then the sound of shattering glass and the familiar warmth of healing magic. The pain in his head receded into a more tolerable thudding.

“What happened?” He asked when he was finally able to remove his hand from over his face. He blinked his eyes open, squinting in the dim light. It looked like they were in a Nif airship.

“What’s the last thing you remember?” Ignis asked quietly, and Noct turned his head to look at his oldest friend.

“We were in the Nif base…” He muttered, frowning as he tried to piece together the events. “The room was filling with miasma…”

Ignis nodded and when Noct shrugged, he spoke. “We were almost gone.” He admitted. “Prompto had already fallen unconscious, Gladio and I weren’t far behind.”

Noct nodded. He remembered that. He remembered the fear and horror as he realised what was happening, and the pleas of his friends for him to save himself. He just had no idea what happened next.

“How did we get out?” He questioned, struggling to sit up. Ignis helped him, a warm hand on his back. His head pounded at the movement, but he ignored it for now, wanting to know their situation.

“You.” Ignis was watching Noct carefully, as if he was making sure that the prince was alright. “I thought I was hallucinating.” Ignis admitted, “You began to emit a golden light. It became too bright to look at you, and when it faded the miasma had dissipated and you were on the floor.”

“What?” Noct frowned, leaning back against the bulkhead. There was a sleeping bag and camping
mat under him, but the rest of the room looked completely empty. That kind of made sense. If it was a ship designed to carry MT units, they didn’t exactly need seating.

“My question exactly.” Ignis gave a soft sigh and moved, sitting down beside Noct. “You gave us quite a scare.” He admitted, “We couldn’t wake you.”

“Feels like stasis.” Noct muttered, closing his eyes as he tried to relax. His entire body ached as if he’d warped ten times as much as he usually could. He felt weak and drained. The last time he’d felt like this was when they first arrived in this timeline.

Beside him, he could feel Ignis nod.

“What happened to the base?” Noct asked, hoping that their entire mission hadn’t failed.

“Exactly what we intended.” Noct let out a soft breath of relief at Ignis’ words. At least their danger hadn’t been in vain. “Lucky for you, Gladio is more than capable of carrying you while running.”

Noct chuckled and gave a nod, making a note to thank his shield when he saw him. “Where are we now?” He questioned.

“We should be arriving in Lucis soon. We had planned on settling somewhere in the outskirts until you awoke, then contact the Citadel before approaching Insomnia.”

“I’m awake now.” Noct muttered, though he was exhausted enough that he knew it wouldn’t be for long. The elixir Ignis had given him helped, but there wasn’t much that could combat this level of stasis exhaustion.

“Barely.” Ignis chuckled, “Are you well enough to walk?” He questioned.

Noct tried to move his limbs. They ached, and he let out a soft grunt, but he they worked. He gave a small nod, and with Ignis’ help rose to his feet. He watched as the advisor swiftly put the sleeping bag and mat into the armiger and then took the offered arm. Together, they shuffled out of the cargo hold and up to the flight deck.

Prompto was sat behind the controls, concentrating intently on the console in front of him. The ship shook a little, and Prompto cussed under his breath before reaching for another switch. He wasn’t a great pilot, but they were airborne and seemingly safe. For now. Noct wasn’t quite sure how the landing would be, but he trusted Prompto not to kill them. Gladio was standing off to the side, watching the scenery pass by.

“Hey,” He greeted, allowing Ignis to guide him into the co-pilot’s seat. It was the only other chair in the room.

“Morning, sleeping beauty.” Gladio teased, his voice relieved.

Prompto stayed silent, obviously trying not to get distracted from his task.

Noct reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone, ready to contact the citadel and let them know that the Nif ship approaching was friendly.
They ended up having to park their stolen ship behind Hammerhead. There just wasn’t any open space in Insomnia big enough to land - at least not with an amateur pilot in charge. The landing wasn’t great, and Noct had been very close to losing his lunch, but they made it to the ground in one piece.

“I’m never doing that again.” Prompto declared from the pilot’s seat. He was pale and trembling, a fine sheen of sweat clinging to his skin.

“You did good.” Noct reached out to rest a hand on Prompto’s shoulder. The blond closed his eyes for a moment and let out a breath before turning to Noct. There was something in his eyes that Noct wasn’t used to seeing directed at him. Anger. And behind that anger, fear.

Prompto didn’t say anything to him. He just stood and made his way out the back of the ship, shrugging off Noct’s touch as if it meant nothing. With Ignis’ help, Noct followed him, frowning and confused about Prompto’s behaviour. Was he upset because Noct paid him a compliment? Didn’t he believe him? Prompto really had done good. He’d got them out of Niflheim and landed them safely in Lucis - that was more than Noct could have ever done.

By the time they arrived in Hammerhead, Noct was feeling well enough to walk by himself, and he slowly pulled away from Ignis. The advisor gently squeezed his shoulder before stepping back completely. “I’ll rent out the campervan.” He told the prince. “You should speak with Prompto.”

The sun was low in the sky, and they were stuck in Hammerhead until the crown sent a car for them, so Noct gave a nod. The campervan would be cramped, but at least it had beds. They would be somewhat comfortable.

Noct wanted nothing more than to fall into one of those beds and sleep until the car came for them, but the way Prompto had acted… Noct knew that there was something wrong, and he also knew that he needed to at least try to fix it. At the very least, he had to know what was going on.

So he followed the direction that Prompto had wandered off in, and quickly found him sitting on top of Takka’s diner. He wanted to warp up there to get to him sooner, but he knew for sure that he didn’t have nearly enough magic reserves for that. So instead, he slowly and carefully climbed up the ladder that was propped against the side of the building.

“Hey.” He greeted, sitting down next to the blond. There was a grunt in reply and silence fell between them.

Noct wasn’t used to uncomfortable silences between them, and it set him on edge. He didn’t know how to react to this, how to act when Prompto was mad at him. He could count on one hand the number of times that Prompto had actually been angry with him.

But for the life of him, Noct had no idea what it was that he’d done. He sat there, wracking his brain and trying to figure it out while the silence weighed heavily on him. Eventually, he couldn’t stand it any longer, and he couldn’t come up with an answer.

“What did I do?” He questioned, looking at the blond beside him.

Prompto was staring out over the desert, eyes locked on to the horizon. After a few more seconds, he took a deep breath and finally spoke.

“Next time,” He began, his voice quiet. Serious, “Next time there’s an out. You take it.” He ordered.
“Don’t let yourself die just because there’s no hope for us.” Prompto’s voice was oddly steady and deadly still.

This was so far from the angry Prompto that Noct had seen in the past. Previously, when Prompto had been upset with him, he had shouted, trembled, paced. He hadn’t been able to keep still and his emotions had come spilling out. This time… This time Prompto was terrifyingly calm.

The fact that Prompto had never been this angry at him scared him a little. But not enough to stop him from trying to defend himself.

“I won’t leave you to die.” He protested, his own voice low.

“You were the only one who had an out.” Prompto responded hotly, “The only one who could’ve survived.” Here, his voice started to waver, trembling slightly from it’s previous solidity.

“We all survived.” Noct pointed out, watching Prompto carefully.

“We shouldn’t have!” Finally, Prompto turned to look at Noct, and for the first time in his life, Noct wished he hadn’t.

The look on Prompto’s face was a mixture of fear and anger, one that Noct never wanted to be responsible for. He opened his mouth to reply, but Prompto beat him to it.

“There was no way we could’ve seen that coming! No way we could’ve known we’d be okay! You were an idiot for staying behind!” Prompto had reached up, his closed fist colliding with Noct’s shoulder. It wasn’t hard enough to hurt, but it was enough to let some of Prompto’s feelings out.

Noct took the hand, trying to do whatever he could to calm his friend down. He was feeling a little irritated at Prompto’s anger, but he knew that it wouldn’t help to get into a shouting match with him. He took a breath to calm himself down, and tried to keep himself from shouting right back at Prompto.

“I’ve never phased through something like a door. There’s no telling what could’ve happened - it could’ve killed me.” He tried to pointed out.

“At least you would’ve tried!” Prompto’s face crumpled and the anger gave way to fear. He weakly tried to hit Noct again, but the prince kept a hold of his hand. “You could’ve tried.” Prompto repeated, his voice losing it’s volume and falling to a whimper. “It would’ve been better than you just waiting to die with us.” He was gasping now, head hanging low. The hand that Noct was holding grasped the prince’s shirt tightly, as if holding on for dear life. “At least you had a chance. You could’ve survived.”

Still completely out of his depth, and trying to figure out exactly what kind of comfort his friend needed from him, Noct floundered. He hesitated for a moment and reached out with his other arm, pulling Prompto against his chest.

Given the blond’s reaction, Noct still wasn’t sure if he made the right call or not. Instead of pulling away and shouting more, Prompto burst into tears. “If you can get out, you get out. Even if we can’t.” Prompto’s words were muffled against Noct’s shirt, but he understood them. “You get the hell out of dodge.”

“I won’t leave you.” Noct repeated, voice quiet and shaking. Apparently it was the wrong thing to
say, because Prompto pulled back and gave him a watery glare, trying again to hit his shoulder.

“No! That’s exactly what you do!” He was back to shouting now, his voice cracking. “If there’s still hope for you and none for us, you go. You don’t- You don’t-” Prompto dropped his head, sobbing as more tears came. “You don’t die just because we have to.”

Once again, Noct gathered Prompto in his arms. With sudden clarity, he understood why Prompto was so upset with him. If had been the other way around, had it been Prompto who would have been able to escape, Noct knew without a doubt that he would want him to do whatever it took to survive - even if it meant leaving him behind.

“I’m sorry.” Noct muttered into blond hair as he held his sobbing friend close. “I can’t promise I’ll get out on time,” He whispered, knowing that his friend could still hear him. “Because I’ll always be looking for anything to save you.” He gently laid a kiss on the crown of Prompto’s head. “If there’s even the smallest chance of us all getting out alive, I’ll take it. But…” He pulled back, holding Prompto by the shoulders so he could look him in the eyes. “If there’s no way. If we can’t find even the trace of hope… I’ll get out.”

That was the best he could do. He wouldn’t make any promises to Prompto that he knew he couldn’t keep, and the other knew that.

After a moment, Prompto nodded. “I guess I can’t ask for more than that.” He said quietly, wiping his eyes with a sniff. “I just… Don’t let me be the reason you die.” He looked back over the darkening desert as he spoke, hand still wiping the odd tear away.

Noct had no idea what to say to that, so he said nothing at all. Instead, he simply sat by his friend watching as the final light of the sun died on the horizon.

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“I’m sorry.” The sun had well and truly set by the time either one of them spoke again. Prompto’s quiet words sounded loud after their long silence. “I just-” He sighed and shook his head, still looking out towards the desert.

Noct gave a soft hum in acknowledgement, “I know.” He responded, and somehow he did. He knew what Prompto was trying to get at, what he was apologising for. He knew, and he understood. Prompto had been afraid - terrified - and that had given away to anger. He’d needed someone to blame, and Noct had been the logical choice.

It was something that was easily forgiven.

“We should…” Prompto gestured to the ladder, and Noct nodded in agreement. With difficulty, he pulled himself to his feet, holding back a groan at the ache in his body. He really needed to sleep.

As they approached the campervan, Prompto’s hand on his arm stopped Noct, and he turned to face his friend. Prompto pressed their foreheads together, one hand on Noct’s cheek, the other on his hip. Noct mirrored his position and they stood like that for a moment, communicating their emotions silently.

“Don’t scare me like that again.” Prompto whispered. “In this life, or in the next - I can’t do it without you. Not again.”
Noct wanted to give into the urge to kiss him, to hold him and comfort him and promise that he would never have to be alone again. But he couldn’t. Not yet. Not until things could change. This was their way of saying things that shouldn’t be said, but for the first time, it wasn’t enough.

“I love you.” The words were whispered barely loud enough for the blond to hear, but the tightening of the hand on his hips told Noct that they were loud enough.

And if he heard Prompto repeat those words… well, nobody else would ever know.

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The beds in the campervan were among the most uncomfortable that Noct had ever slept on, beat only by the ones available in Zegnautus Keep. He should have remembered just how hard and lumpy the mattresses were, and just how tiny and cramped the spacing was. It should have meant that he had a bad nights sleep, but as soon as his head hit the pillow, Noct had been out like a light.

His stasis induced exhaustion barely let up the next morning, when Ignis woke him to tell him the car had arrived. He was only vaguely aware when his companions poured him into the vehicle, and as soon as they were moving, he was once again asleep.

He was allowed to sleep, right up until the car pulled into the parking lot of their apartment. As soon as the vehicle pulled to a stop, Prompto was shaking him awake, an amused smile on his face. “Just a little further, buddy.” He told the prince, “And we’ll have you wrapped up all snuggly in your own bed.”

That sounded like the best idea that Prompto had ever had, and Noct told him as much as he climbed out of the car. He stretched a little before blearily following Ignis and Gladio to the elevator.

He was vaguely aware of Ignis stopping to check the mail, and Prompto’s familiar shuffling when they entered the elevator. He smirked at the blond, who blushed a little and shrugged. “It was a long drive.” He muttered, squirming a little more and Noct’s smirk turned into a chuckle.

As soon as the elevator stopped on their floor, Prompto was off running towards their apartment, seeking out a bathroom. Noct and the others followed at a slower pace, Ignis idly flipping through the mail.

By the time they got inside Noct’s rooms, Ignis had a frown on his face. “Noct…” His eyes were still trained on the paper in front of him, and Noct watched him curiously. “You might want to read this…”

He took the paper from Ignis and read, his eyes going wide and his heart pounding in his chest.

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When Prompto exited the bathroom, he wasn’t expecting the silence that had fallen over the livingroom. He frowned, looking at his friends with concern. Something had happened.

Noct was standing in the middle of the room, his trembling hands clutching tightly to a piece of paper that he seemed to be reading again and again. “Iggy…” Noct’s voice was a breathless, shaking whisper. “Does- does this say what I think it says?” He questioned, as if hardly able to believe it.

“Indeed.” Ignis responded, a soft smile on his face.
“Noct… What happened?” Ignis’ smile calmed Prompto a little, but Noct looked well and truly freaked out. He was pale, his mouth hanging open as he read through the document again, eyes growing wider. “Buddy… what’s wrong?” Prompto questioned, taking a step further into the room.

Noct took a small breath and without looking thrust the paper back into Ignis’ hands. The advisor passed the page to a curious Gladio and Noct took a step forward.

“Prom…” Noct was staring at him, eyes still wide. “Prompto…”

“What is it?” Okay, so Noct’s freak out was definitely starting to affect Prompto. He felt his own heart rate begin to pick up and his anxiety rise. If Noct was this badly thrown by whatever it was, it had to be something big.

Noct closed the distance between them in three fast steps, and suddenly he was standing close. Very close. His hands went to Prompto’s cheeks, holding them gently before tightening and pulling him forward.

Prompto’s brain short circuited when Noct’s lips met his in a passionate, almost bruising kiss. His mind blanked for a moment before kicking in full gear. They shouldn’t be doing this - couldn’t be doing this. But they were. Noct was kissing him like his life depended on it, and Prompto was giving as good as he got.

If this was the only time they made this mistake, the only chance he would ever have, he was going to take as much of it as he could.

Noct’s hands shifted. One remained on his face while the other went around his waist, and Prompto’s arms found their way around Noct. After a far too short moment, Prompto had to pull back to suck air into his aching lungs. He pressed their foreheads together and closed his eyes, refusing to relinquish his grip on Noct’s hips.

“Noct. Please. Don’t do this.” He begged. He sucked another breath in, noticing that he was trembling. “Don’t make me be the one to say no.” He was close to tears, he knew it. Because if Noct tried that again, there was no way that Prompto could say no. None at all.

“Don’t say no.” Noct whispered back, and Prompto could feel him shaking. “My dad-he- He used his freeby.” The prince continued, and Prompto could scarcely breathe. Regis had used his freeby? Did that mean what he thought he meant? He couldn’t hope - he refused to. If he held on to the hope bubbling in his chest, then there was no way he could let it go again. Not without breaking completely.

So he waited. Waited for Noct to tell him what he meant, waited for Noct to give him that hope - or to crumble his world to ashes.

“He changed the law.” Noct’s voice was trembling. “So that I can- So that we can-” He seemed unable to finish his sentence, and Prompto found himself lifting his head to glance over the Prince’s shoulder.

Ignis nodded in confirmation and Prompto’s world stopped.

He didn’t breathe, afraid that if he did, this dream would shatter and reality would come crashing back down upon him. His head was still trying to wrap itself around the concept, the knowledge that
the one last thing stopping them from showing their affection was gone.

After a second that stretched on, he turned his face back to Noct, giving in to the desires that he had pent up for so long. He pressed forward, aligning their bodies closer than they had ever been before and found Noct’s lips again.

Their second kiss turned into a third, then a fourth, breathless and wet as they clung together, whispered words of love and all the things they had never been allowed to say finding their way between them and when they finally did pull away from their frantic kissing, they once again rested their foreheads together.

“Is this a dream?” Prompto had to ask, only then realising that he was crying. So was Noct. He was feeling overwhelmed, but in a good way. Like all his birthdays and Founders Days had come at once.

“Fuck I hope not.” Noct replied, and Prompto couldn’t help the strained laugh that came from him. “If it is, don’t wake me up. Ever.”

Prompto couldn’t agree more.

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Chapter End Notes

So what did you think? What did you think? Lemme know!!!

I was going to wait to post this for a while - let the cliffhanger hang for a bit, but once it was written, I couldn’t help myself.

This was in my head from the very beginning of the fic.. I’m so happy it finally happened xD

Feel free to join our Discord server!!: https://discord.gg/esGdEpD
Important Conversations

Chapter Notes

The story rating has been changed because of this chapter. There is NSFW content at the end.

This chapter is kinda filler, but there are some important character interactions here, and some very important conversations.

I swear, there is plot coming. Next chapter might be a bit fillery too. And I have no idea how much more stamina I have for writing over the next few days -I'm starting to get tired again x.x. I'll post when I can

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Citadel was just as magnificent as always, but Noct didn’t notice as he made his way through the halls. The marble fixtures passed by without a second thought as he took the familiar route to his father’s study.

For once, the King wasn’t in meetings, or the throne room. In fact, it was one of the very rare days that Regis had nothing official to do, and could take the time to relax. A long time ago, those were the days that they had taken their father son fishing trips.

This time, however, Noct was seeking him out for a different reason.

The door opened on his second knock to reveal a grinning Regis. “Ah, you got my letter then?” He questioned in greeting.

Noct’s answer was simple and instant. He surged forward and threw his arms around his father, burying his head in the king’s shoulders. “Thank you.” He all but sobbed, his arms tightening around the man.

Regis chuckled softly and returned the embrace, holding his son close and gently placing his face against Noct’s soft hair. “All I have ever wanted for you, was for you to find whatever happiness you can.” He told him gently. “And if there is something I can do to help with that… well, then I’ll do it.”

He pulled back from the embrace, hands holding on to Noct’s shoulders. “Does this boy make you happy?” He questioned.

“More than anything.” Noct admitted, ducking his head shyly to wipe away the tears that had gathered. “I just- Thank you.” He repeated, and Regis chuckled, gently guiding Noct inside the room.

“How about a cup of tea?” He suggested, and Noct nodded, his smile never fading.
“Hey,” Prompto shyly greeted Noct as the Prince returned to their apartment. Their dynamic had shifted over the last day, and they both knew that it would take some time to settle.

“Hey,” Noct replied, almost as shyly. They were both grinning, redness tinging both their cheeks.

The prince threw himself down on the couch next to Prompto and pulled him into his arms, holding him close. “I still can’t believe this.” He muttered, earning a chuckle from Prompto.

“And you think I can?” He questioned, lifting his head to look Noct in the eyes. “It’s going to take a bit to get used to the idea that I can just kiss you now.” He admitted, laughing a little more.

Noct nodded, completely in agreement, but instead of answering with words, he lifted Prompto’s chin to place a gentle kiss on the blond’s mouth. The kiss was returned and it didn’t take long for it to go from chaste to something deeper.

After a moment, Noct pulled back and cleared his throat. “But uh… we should probably talk?” He suggested, “Uh, about this-” He gestured between them, “What we want and-uhm- make sure we’re on the same page?” He hated how unsure he sounded, even to his own ears, but he knew that he was making sense.

Prompto seemed to know it too, and the blond nodded. “I want it all.” He admitted. “The puppy, the house full of cats,” Noct chuckled at that, and Prompto’s grin widened, “The kissing, the intimacy, uh, sex?” The last word raised in pitch, a question along with the statement. “I mean, I’m pretty sure you don’t have any experience with that, right? So it’s okay if you don’t want to right now, or if you want to go slow, or y’know, don’t want it at all. I mean I’m cool with whatever, but you know, I’d like to do that…stuff…”

Noct smiled fondly at Prompto, letting him ramble a little nervously for a while before leaning forward and kissing him softly, just to shut him up. That was a new trick he was sure would never get old - and would probably get him into trouble one day.

Noct wasn’t entirely sure what he wanted out of a physical relationship with Prompto, but he did know that he wanted to at least try to have one. Prompto was right, he had literally zero experience with anything sexual beyond his own hand, but he trusted Prompto, and he knew that together they could be amazing.

“I’m not against sex.” He told him gently, reassuring him. “I dunno how good I’ll be.” He warned, “But I’m sure we can figure it out together.”

“Don’t worry.” Prompto grinned at Noct, giving him another kiss, “I’ve been told I’m a pretty decent teacher. I’ll walk you through it.”

The fact that Prompto apparently had experience didn’t really surprise Noct. Ten years was a long time, and Prompto was very attractive. He felt a fleeting spike of jealousy, but then realised that he didn’t actually care. What happened in the past, happened in the past. Prompto was with him now, and that was what mattered.

“Sounds good.” He agreed, leaning in for yet another kiss. He would never get tired of kissing Prompto.

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“Ah, welcome home.” Ignis greeted Gladio as the warrior entered their apartment. The smell of a good home cooked meal filled the air and Gladio couldn’t help but take a deep breath.

He always loved Ignis’ cooking - even when the man refused to let him eat Cup Noodles - and coming back to a home that smelled like his food…? That was just heavenly. He stepped further into the room, finding Ignis washing the dishes he’d used.

Instead of speaking right away, he waited until he was pressed against Ignis’ back, his arms around his waist. He leaned forward and dropped a soft kiss on Ignis’ neck as the advisor leaned back into his embrace.

“Smells good.” He muttered, mouth still against that skin.

Ignis let out a soft sound and finally abandoned the dishes in the sink, leaving the chore for later. He leaned closer to Gladio’s mouth, a silent request for more. Gladio was more than happy to oblige, and he found himself gently nibbling on the side of Ignis’ neck.

The younger man was making some sinful sounds, and Gladio found himself responding very quickly. He let his hands wander, gently stroking their way up and down Ignis’ torso, revelling in the fact that the man was leaning into them.

“Gladio…” Ignis sounded somewhat breathless as he turned around and captured Gladio’s lips. He pushed himself against the shield, his own arms reaching around his neck to pull him even closer.

They devoured each other’s mouths for a while, hands roaming and grasping, breath gasping. Eventually, Ignis pulled away, his hand snatching Gladio’s and pulling him towards the bedroom.

“Why is it that every time I feel the need to talk about our relationship, we end up having sex?” Ignis questioned after, when they were curled together in a blissed out haze.

Gladio laughed, gently tightening his grip on Ignis. “No idea. Happens to me too.” He nuzzled forward to lay a soft kiss on his lips. “Got at least five minutes before I can go again though.” He half joked.

Ignis rolled his eyes, but chuckled. “Very well. Obviously we’re sexually compatible.” Gladio snorted in agreement, but didn’t say anything. “Our lives are very easy to intermingle and we already cohabitate.” He took a moment, as if trying to formulate his words, trying to figure out exactly what it was that they needed to talk about.


Ignis smirked up at him. “You don’t wish to shout of our relationship from the top of the citadel?” he joked.

Gladio just shrugged, “Don’t care who knows, just don’t see the need to share our business with random people.”

“We’ll need to inform the king, at the very least.” Ignis told him, “There is paperwork involved,
given that we work together.” Gladio nodded in understanding. That wasn’t too hard of an ask.

“And we should probably inform your father.” Ignis added.

“Damn.” Gladio chuckled, trying not to grimace, “That’s gonna be a hell of a conversation.”

“Sorry, Iris. Not tonight.” Gladio smiled down at his sister. She was overly excited and more than happy to see him again after their long absence. She was rocking on her feet, all but begging for them to host their movie night, her hands on her hips as if she was scolding him.

“You promised,” She pointed out, thrusting a finger into his chest.

“It’s a school night.” Gladio shook his head, highly amused at the situation.

The truth was, he was pretty sure that Noct and Prompto would be far too busy to host anything tonight. He had no idea what had happened between them after he and Ignis had made their (somewhat) hasty retreat, but if he had to guess- well, it wasn’t something that he wanted Iris to be exposed to, that was for sure.

Even if they weren’t otherwise engaged, Gladio was all but sure that they wanted to spend time alone in each others company. It was unlikely that they would want to deal with a hyperactive eleven year old.

“Saturday.” He told her. “We’ll get all sorts of junk food, and spend all night watching movies.” He knew that she would fall asleep before midnight, but the offer seemed to placiate her, at least for the time being.

“Fine.” She agreed. “But I get to pick the candy. And Iggy can’t tell me no.”

Gladio laughed and nodded, “Sure.” He agreed, ruffling her short hair. She glared up at him and folded her arms over her chest.

“Why don’t we host for a change?” Clarus suggested from his seat on the arm chair. “It would be nice to spend a little more time with you.”

“Can’t see why not.” Gladio shrugged, finally sitting down on the couch. Iris bounced next to him and he gently ruffled her hair again, earning a huff from the pre-teen. “I’ll talk to the others when I see them next.”

“Make sure they don’t forget their clothes.” Iris was talking about their onesies, of course, but Gladio couldn’t help the snort of amusement given how they had left Prompto and Noct the day before.

“Don’t worry. I’ll make sure they’re dressed.” He told her.

“So, as much as I would like to believe that this is entirely a social visit,” Clarus began, eyeing his son, “I assume there was something else that brought you home today?”

Gladio felt a little guilty about that. Ever since they had returned to the past, he hadn’t really spent a lot of time with his family. It was difficult with Clarus not knowing about his history, and he still
hadn’t figured out how to tell him. A large part of Gladio believed that Clarus was better off not knowing about the trauma he and the others had faced. Who would want to know that their son had suffered so much for so long?

“Actually…. But Clarus was right, there was a reason that he was here. “I need to officially tell you about the change in my relationship status.” He had no idea how to phrase it so that Clarus knew that he wasn’t just doing this because he had to, but also because he was happy and his father should know simply because he was his father.

“Oh?” Clarus sat forward, looking at Gladio with curiosity. “And who is the woman that has finally tied you down enough that you have to tell?”

“Uh… Igns. Actually. So. Not a girl.” It probably wasn’t the most dramatic of coming outs, but it was a coming out. The look of surprise on Clarus’ face could be excused by the fact that at no point in his life had Gladio ever shown an interest in men. Not even a passing glance. And yet here he was, suddenly declaring that he was serious enough about Igns to warrant an official announcement.

“Well. That is a surprise.” Clarus admitted after a moment. “Have you informed the king?” He questioned.

“Iggy’s doing that now.”

“But Iggy’s a boy…” Iris wrinkled her nose in confusion. “I thought you liked girls.”

“I do.” Gladio shrugged, “But I like Iggy too.” He told her, watching for her reaction. She seemed to think about it for a moment before shrugging, apparently okay with the concept of her older brother suddenly being interested in men.

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“I seem to be very popular today.” Regis commented as he opened his study door to reveal yet another visitor.

“Um.. I’m sorry to bother you, your Majesty.” Prompto found himself bowing down, probably deeper than he was supposed to, but he still wasn’t quite sure how to act around the king.

When he’d asked how to make an appointment to speak with the king, Noct had just lead him into the citadel. The Prince had walked him all the way to the king’s door and knocked before ditching him. Prompto was a little salty about that.

“Prompto. Come in,” Regis gave the man a smile and gestured for him to join him inside. “I’ve just made some tea. Would you care for a cup?”

Prompto shuffled inside the study, still completely lost. It was bad manners to say no to tea, right? If the king was offering him some, then he should take it, right? “Uh, yes please?” He found himself bowing again, fumbling for the correct course of action.

“Prompto. Come in,” Regis laughed, and Prompto lifted his head enough to see the man shaking his head. “I hear that you and my son have grown close. There’s no need for such formalities.” The king gestured for him to take a seat, and Prompto dutifully did as he was commanded.

“I-” Prompto cleared his throat, doing his best not to squirm nervously. The king placed a cup of tea
on the desk in front of him and took the other seat. “I wanted to thank you.” Prompto continued, looking down at the warm drink. “I know that you did it for him, to make him happy… And I would’ve thanked you for that, even if it didn’t mean he could be with me but..” He was squirming now, regardless of how hard he tried not to.

Prompto was a thirty year old man. A warrior hardened by death and darkness, loss and despair. Yet when he sat here in front of the king, he couldn’t help but feel like he really was the teenager he appeared to be.

Finally, taking a breath and reminding himself that he wasn’t in fact sixteen, he lifted his face to look Regis in the eyes. “Thank you, your majesty.” He told him, hoping that the man could see that the gratitude came from every fibre in his soul.

Regis was smiling at him, a kind, fatherly smile. For the first time, Prompto saw Regis as not the king, but simply a man with a heavy burden. Seeing him like that made things a little easier.

“You care deeply for my son.” There wasn’t a question there, but Prompto nodded anyway.

“He means everything to me.” He said quietly. “I love him.” It wasn’t a hard thing to admit - he knew without a doubt how he felt - but it was hard to actually say the words. For more than half his life, he hadn’t been allowed to say them at all, let alone to the king.

“Can you tell me why?” Regis’ question was a little left field, and Prompto blinked at him for a moment before formulating his answer.

“He’s the best person I’ve ever met.” He began, “He cares, so much about everyone. It doesn’t matter to him where you’re from, who you are. If someone needs help, and he can give it to them, then he will.” He chuckled a little, “Human or not.” He added, “You know he once spent twenty thousand gil on cat food for a stray that followed us to Caem?”

Regis raised an amused eyebrow and let out a chuckle at that one. He didn’t get a chance to speak though, because Prompto wasn’t done. Not yet. Now that he was talking about it, he just couldn’t seem to stop.

“He’s loyal to his friends. No matter what happens, he’s always there for us. He’d do anything for us, even if it hurts him. He’s a dork. He can make me laugh even when I’m having one of my worst days, and he’ll go out of his way to do it. And when he starts talking about something he’s passionate about- his whole face lights up, he gets all animated and it’s the most precious thing in the world.”

Regis listened, his soft smile never leaving his face. Eventually, when it seemed like Prompto had said enough, he spoke. “You realise…” He said, gently placing his teacup down. “That while you have a lot to say on the subject, not once did you mention his title.”

“Why would I?” Prompto frowned, feeling a little confused. “Being the prince, that’s just something that he is. It’s not who he is. I mean, sure, being prince probably shaped a lot of his personality, but that’s not all he is.”

“And yet, many people would be infatuated with the fact, should they find themselves on the receiving end of his affections.” Regis pointed out, and he was looking at Prompto with scrutiny.

Prompto shrugged, “It doesn’t matter to me.” He told the king, honestly. “Prince or not, King or not,
I’ll still be by his side.”

“Standing by him, no matter what may come?” Regis questioned and Prompto didn’t even need to have to think to answer.

“Always.”

“And if your relationship was to fail?” Regis asked.

“It wont.” Prompto spoke with conviction. “I’ve been in love with him for fifteen years.” He told the king, “I’ve waited for him, for a day that might never come. But now it has, and there’s nothing that can be thrown at us that I won’t fight to keep it.”

“And if it’s Noctis that decides to end it?”

“Unlikely. But if he does…” Prompto shook his head, again looking down at his tea. “Then I’ll figure out what went wrong, and I’ll find a way to fix it. And if I can’t - if that’s what he really wants…” It hurt to even think about it, even though Prompto knew that the likelihood was remote. “Then I don’t need to be with him to stand by him.”

They fell quiet again. After a moment, Regis stood. He circled the desk to come and stand beside Prompto. The blond lifted his head to watch him, unsure if he was supposed to stand too. He floundered for a moment, but when Regis put his hand on his shoulder, Prompto found himself looking in to fond eyes.

“Then I am glad that you are the one he has chosen.” Regis said quietly.

“T-Thank you, your majesty.” This meeting hadn’t at all been what Prompto had been expecting. He was finding himself off kilter, unsure and feeling very small.

“Please. Call me Reggie,” Regis grinned down at Prompto, “After all, from the sounds of things, we will one day be family.”

If Prompto had been drinking his tea at that point, he probably would’ve choked on it. His eyes went wide, both at the request and the implications, and he had no idea what to say to that. He couldn’t exactly refuse the request, so he gave a shaky nod, agreeing to call the King by a nickname.

“Now,” Regis finally let go of Prompto’s shoulder and returned to his side of the desk, “You look quite like you’re about to pass out cold. Would it help you if I told you I had paperwork to deal with?” The king - Reggie questioned.

A glance at his desk told Prompto that it was a complete lie - he was quite obviously playing a game of solitaire. “Do you?” He found himself questioning, in the same tone he had used on Noct a few times - usually asking if he was sure he didn’t have homework.

“No.” Regis shrugged, “You’re welcome to remain here all night, if you wish. I would certainly like the chance to get to know you better. You simply looked like you needed an ‘out’, as they say.”

“I uh…” Prompto was a little stuck. One the one hand, Regis had given him an out. He’d made it clear that if Prompto was uncomfortable, he was allowed to leave without offending him. But on the other hand… the king was right. It was possible that one day they would be legally family (because there was no way that Prompto wasn’t hoping to marry Noct one day), and at the very least, were likely to
be in each other’s lives for a long time to come. He had to get over his nervousness at some point, and now seemed like as good a time as any.

“Do you know how to play Crazy Eights?”

“I was getting worried that you’d run away or something.” Noct said in way of greeting when Prompto finally returned home that evening. The blond threw himself onto the couch beside Noct and leaned against him.

“Your dad cheats at card games.” He muttered, snuggling his way under the blanket covering Noct.

“Card games?” Noct paused the game he’d been playing to peak down at his partner. The blond was shuffling to get the blankets right so he could lay his head in Noct’s lap without taking them away from the Prince.

“Mhmm.” Prompto finally seemed to manage to get into a position that suited him, and he looked up at his lover. “Asked me to call him ‘Reggie’. ” He added, making a bit of a face, as if he wasn’t sure what to make of that. “Then I stayed for tea and card games. Kinda expecting you to show up at some point, since you ditched me.” He jabbed an elbow into Noct’s ribs when he said that, apparently still a little annoyed.

“Ow.” Noct laughed, retaliating by poking Prompto’s ribs with his finger. “I thought you wanted to talk to him alone.”

“When have I ever asked to be left alone with the king?” Prompto huffed, grabbing a hold of the hand Noct had used to poke him and holding it tight. “I was terrified.”

“What, the great daemon slayer Prompto afraid of a crippled old man?” Noct teased, putting the controller down so he could use his other hand to tickle Prompto’s unprotected side and causing the blond to yelp.

“A crippled old man with magical powers and the ability to have me thrown in the dungeon, yeah.” Prompto squirmed, laughing as he tried to get away from Noct’s hand while refusing to relinquish his hold on the other. They wrestled for a few minutes, both laughing as they tried to get the upper hand, the carefully placed blanket landing on the floor not far away from them.

Eventually, they also ended up on the floor. Noct was flat on his back, Prompto leaning over him and pinning his arms above his head. “Hah!” Prompto grinned down at him, obviously believing that he’d won.

Noct didn’t care about their little sparring match anymore. Instead, he found himself staring up at the blond, breathless. He didn’t resist the hands that held him in place, and instead found himself laying there and fully submitting, waiting for Prompto to make the next move.

The grin on Prompto’s face changed to something a little more predatory and he leaned forward. Their faces were millimeters apart, and Noct found himself sucking in a breath, understanding where this seemed to be going and very much enjoying it.

“Prom…” he went to lean up and kiss his new lover, when Prompto moved, pressing their foreheads together.
“Noct, you kiss me now and we’re gonna end up naked and sweaty.” He warned, “Preferably in a bed.”

Yep. That sounded - oh, that sounded very good to Noct. He let out a soft hum that sounded suspiciously like a moan and his hips bucked up into Prompto’s. “Yeah- okay.” The air seemed thick with tension, and he couldn’t seem to speak in more than a whisper, but that was okay. Somehow it was a good tension. One that had been building up for years and was finally going to amount to something.

Prompto pressed his own hips down against Noct’s, almost as if he couldn’t control them. “You sure? ‘Cause dude, teenage body. I’m like, super horny. All the time.” Prompto asked, breathing a little heavier than he really should’ve been.

“Dude.” Noct snorted, happy that Prompto was making sure, but also starting to become impatient. He lifted his chin and kissed Prompto deeply, swallowing the soft moan the blond let out.

The kiss rapidly became more and more heated as Prompto rocked them together and Noct began to feel a little overwhelmed by the feeling. He had to pull back to lift his head so that he could breathe - that seemed to work for Prompto who took that as an opportunity to attack his neck with small bites. The sensations went straight to Noct’s groin and he let out another breathy moan. “Bed.” He ordered but didn’t make any moves to push Prompto away.

Prompto hummed in agreement, giving Noct’s neck one final nip before letting go of Noct’s hands and sitting back on his heels. He looked down at Noct, panting a little as his eyes raked over the prince’s prone form. “Damn you look good.” He muttered.

Noct felt his cheeks heat up even more than they already were at the compliment, “Right back at ya.” He lifted his hips, trying to remind Prompto that they were supposed to be moving somewhere more comfortable. Unfortunately, he’d forgotten to take his current state into account, and instead of pushing Prompto to move, it just made them both groan at the beautiful friction the movement caused.

“All right.” Prompto closed his eyes and sucked in a breath. “Hope you’re not expecting too much.” He muttered, finally swinging his leg over Noct’s so he wasn’t straddling him anymore. He reached down and helped Noct to his feet. “No way I can last long enough to prep.”

Noct snorted at the candid confession and allowed Prompto to all but drag him towards the bedroom. Once they were inside, Prompto was pressing him against the wall and - well Noct liked that. He bucked his hips forward and Prompto pinned him harder against the solid wood.

“Huh,” Prompto pulled back to smirk at Noct, keeping eye contact as he slowly pressed their hips together. “You like me being in control..?” He circled his hips into Noct’s in a painfully slow way and Noct tried to push into the touch, wanting more. Needing more.

“Yes.” Noct answered belatedly, realising that Prompto had asked him a question. His head was fuzzy, his brain feeling like it was filled with mush while the rest of him was on fire. Every nerve ending was tingling, and all he wanted was more. “Yes.” He answered again, repeating himself on breathless lips. “Please.” He didn’t even know what he was asking for now, but Prompto seemed to understand.

“All right.” The blond muttered, pressing their hips together again.
They were still fully clothed, a fact that Noct hadn’t realised until his shirt was suddenly gone. He opened his eyes to find Prompto gently touching his own shirt - which disappeared into a haze of blue crystals.

“Did you just-” Noct asked, eyebrows raising. That wasn’t a use he’d thought of for the armiger.

Instead of taking his shirt off, Prompto had simply stored it in the armiger, essentially stripping himself with magic.

Prompto grinned at him, “Wasn’t sure it’d actually work.” He admitted, reaching for Noct’s trousers. He hesitated for a moment, looking into Noct’s eyes as his fingers touched the top hem. “Can I-”

“Fuck Prom, stop asking and just do.” Noct pressed his hips forward, wanting more of that sweet, sweet friction.

Prompto laughed, and Noct’s trousers were gone. Quickly followed by his boxers and the rest of Prompto’s clothing. Then, they were mostly naked, left standing in only their socks and slippers. Noct was still pressed against the door, Prompto’s skin feeling deliciously warm where it touched his. “Prom... “ Noct had no idea what he was asking for, but once again, Prompto seemed to have it all figured out.

Teeth tugged at the sensitive skin on Noct’s neck and a warm, hard pressure pressed against his throbbing erection as Prompto took them both in hand. It was almost enough to end things right away, but Noct somehow managed to hold himself back - at least until Prompto’s other hand reached into his hair and pulled .

That, of all things, was what caused Noct to lose it. He let out a cry as his hips thrust forward, spilling himself against Prompto’s torso while his hands clutched tightly to the blond’s shoulders.

“Shit.” He heard Prompto swear and a new gush of warmth spread between them. He didn’t know which one of them was shaking - it could’ve been them both - but he did know that standing up right wasn’t something they could keep doing. Slowly, he slid down the door, taking Prompto with him to sit on the floor.

Noct didn’t actually care where he was right then. The floor might have been hard and unyielding, the panel on the door pressing awkwardly into his back, but the where didn’t matter as much as the who.

He was holding Prompto in his arms, the blond still trembling and panting a little as he came down, and Noct knew that as long as he was with Prompto, the where would never really matter. Still, as he caught sight of the bed further in the room, he couldn’t help but laugh.

“So much for ‘bed’.” He muttered, and Prompto joined him in his laughter, placing a sweaty forehead against his shoulder.

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Chapter End Notes
As always, feel free to join our discord: https://discord.gg/esGdEpD where we talk about everything from Promptis to cultural definitions of food.
Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry for the long delay in this one. I've been having both physical and medical problems recently, and haven't had the ability to concentrate.

This chapter hasn't been as edited as I usually do, but I decided to post it any way, so that you guys actually got something.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A council meeting had been organised for the first monday after their return, which gave the small group four days to reacclimatize to being back in the city. The first two days were spent doing their own things, but when Saturday came around, they all piled into a car and made their way to the Amacitia residence.

“Y’know, I don’t think I’ll ever get used to this…” Prompto commented as they pulled up to the large house.

“What’s that?” Noct questioned, turning to face his lover beside him. “Being in the back seat?”

Prompto shook his head and gave a small laugh, “No - being invited to the homes of super important political figures.”

“You’re dating the prince…” Noct pointed out with a raised eyebrow.

“Yeah,” Prompto grinned at him, “But that doesn’t mean I’m used to other important political figures actually knowing who I am. Let alone inviting me to their homes for movie night.”

“Need I remind you,” Ignis spoke as he put the car into park. “That you yourself are now considered an ‘important political figure’.”

“What, ‘cause I’m dating Noct?”

Ignis turned around and gave Prompto the look. The one that said that Prompto was being particularly obtuse about something, or missing something completely basic. “Because you’re a member of the ruling council.” Ignis reminded him slowly.

“Oh.” Prompto thought about that for a second, “But, I mean, I’m only there because Noct asked me to come with… It’s not like I’m really on the council.”

Again, everyone in the car just looked at him, and Prompto found himself blushing slightly. Obviously he’d missed something somewhere.

“Prom… you’re the Minister of Citizen Relations…” Noct said slowly, “Do you even look at your paycheck?”

“No?” Prompto shrugged, “That many zeroes is kinda intimidating dude. I mean, nobody needs four
“Zeroes on a weekly check…”

“You signed a contract…” Gladio added.

Again, Prompto shrugged, “Iggy hands me a piece of paper to sign, I sign it.”

“While I’m flattered at that level of trust, you really should read things for yourself before signing legal documents.” Ignis said with a sigh. He shook his head and rolled his eyes before climbing out of the car, quickly followed by the others.

“You honestly didn’t know?” Noct asked, smirking.

“No?” Prompto was definitely starting to feel a little embarrassed now. He’d assumed that he was only on the council because Noct had practically bullied the other members into letting him be there. He honestly didn’t think that he was actually on the council. “Does that mean I get to vote on laws and shit?” He questioned.

“Yeah. You can even submit suggestions for changes or new laws…” Noct chuckled and put his arm around Prompto’s shoulder, pulling him into a one armed hug as they walked towards the impressive house. “You should probably read your contract some time.”

“Yes. I think I will.” Prompto had to laugh a little at his own blunder, and decided that he’d think about the whole ‘being a member of the ruling council’ thing later.

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Seeing Jarred again had been strange, and stranger still was seeing Talcott as a little kid. He was so small and young, and Prompto had trouble with the fact that this was the boy he would one day take under his wing and train to be a goddamn daemon hunter.

Prompto had been so proud of Talcott when the young man had learned how to fight. When he’d taken down his first daemon and had been deemed strong enough to venture out on his own.

But now he looked at the barely knee height toddler, and found himself vowing to make sure that the world he grew up in wouldn’t be the one of pain and suffering that they had known. That this boy would never be in a place where he was all but forced to become a daemon hunter, fighting for life and limb every damned day.

If Talcott became a hunter, it would be because he wanted to. Not because he felt he had to, or because the world was literally ending.

“Hey kiddo,” Prompto grinned at the kid and crouched down so he was the same height as the young boy, who moved to hide behind Jarred’s legs. “You’re Talcott, right?” He questioned, offering a hand to the boy. “I’m Prompto! Nice to meet you!”

This time, things would be different. This time, Prompto would protect this innocent kid, and make sure he didn’t have to grow up early.

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Movie night was a little awkward to start with. Prompto had never actually been to Gladio’s familial home before, and it felt more than a little overwhelming. The fact that they were decked out in their
onesies didn’t help the embarrassment - at least not until Clarus had come down the stairs to join them wearing one of his own.

Obviously Iris had picked that one for him too, because Clarus came down the stairs trailing a tail and large wings behind him, making loud roaring noises towards Iris to mimic the ruby dragon he was dressed as.

Prompto was curled on the couch beside Noct, watching with amusement as Iris giggled, caught up in Clarus’ grasp as one of the most powerful men in the country pretended to ‘gobble her up’. Was this what it was like to have an actual dad?

Prompto barely had any memories of his adoptive parents. They had never been home for more than a day at a time starting from when he was around ten. Even before that, they had never been particularly close. Prompto had no idea why they decided to adopt him.

“Did your dad ever do anything like this?” He found himself asking Noct quietly.

Noct snorted and shook his head, “Nah.” He grinned at Prom, “But we did have spontaneous warping races across the citadel.”

Prompto burst out laughing at the ridiculous image that came to his mind of a young Noct warping away from Regis while the king followed. It was a cute image. “How old were you?”

“I dunno. Six maybe? Dad said it was a good way to learn warping. Used to scare the shit out of his retainers though.”

“Your father was trying to send me into an early grave, I swear.” Clarus muttered as he joined them in the living room, still carrying Iris like she weighed nothing. He sat himself down on one of the chairs and adjusted Iris so she was sat on his lap. “Though I’m sure some of the training he gave you stuck.”

There was a glint in Clarus’ eyes, that Prompto wouldn’t have noticed if he hadn’t spent nearly a decade training with Gladio. He was up to something.

“Like what?” Noct questioned innocently, falling right into the older Shield’s trap.

“Bloom.”

The reaction to Clarus’ word seemed to be instinct, and Prompto felt himself letting out a small yelp as the warm body he had been pressed against suddenly phased out of existence. He fell down onto the couch with a flump before sitting up and looking around in confusion.

“The fuck?” Noct’s voice came from behind the couch, and Prompto lifted himself up to peer over it. Behind the couch, Noct looked more than a little confused, sprawled on his ass and staring up at the couch.

“Noct said a bad word!” Iris protested as Gladio all but doubled over in laughter, watching as the prince stood up, still looking a little dazed.

“You first started phasing when you were about two.” Clarus told Noct. “But you couldn’t control it. At all. You’d phaze when you sneezed, coughed or were just being a grumpy little shit. So we trained you with the pavlovian response. You used to get a cookie if you phased on command.”
“And the command was ‘Bloom’?” Ignis asked, watching with amusement as Gladio finally calmed down from his fit of laughter. “That could have been helpful to know.”

“Didn’t think it would still work.” Clarus admitted with a chuckle, earning a weak glare from Noct as he vaulted his way back over the couch to sit next to Prompto. The prince huffed and folded his arms across his chest.

“It won’t work again.” He muttered.

Prompto grinned at Noct, causing the prince to groan. It was Prompto’s ‘challenge accepted’ grin, and Noct knew it well.

“Where’s my damn cookie.” The prince muttered instead.

Ever at the ready, Ignis retrieved a cookie from the armiger with a smirk. Still cranky, Noct all but snatched it from Ignis and began grumpily eating it, huffing slightly as he pouted. Everybody there knew him well enough to know that he wasn’t really all that upset - a little embarrassed if anything - so the demeanor didn’t have the effect he was going for.

“Awww, Noct’s being all cute!” Iris called from her seat on her father’s lap. She was grinning at him, watching as he ate his cookie. “Can I have a cookie too, please Iggy?” She asked, and gave a squeak of happiness when one was produced for her.

“You really are being cute.” Prompto muttered quietly in Noct’s ears, enjoying the way the prince flushed pink. “Like a grumpy kitten.” He couldn’t help but continue with the analogy, and he reached up to gently pat Noct’s hair like he would a cat. The prince leaned into the touch, still giving Prompto a half-assed glare, but enjoying the touch. “Yep. Totally a cat.”

“I’m gonna put the movie on!” Iris called out and jumped off Clarus’ lap to run to the television. “We have ten movies to watch, and nobody gets to leave until we’re all done!” She demanded, much to the amusement of the adults in the room.

“Iris…” Prompto said slowly, “A movie is on average two hours long.” She nodded, “And you have ten of them…” Again, she nodded. “That’s twenty hours. Not counting pee breaks…”

Iris rounded on Gladio - ignoring the fact that it was Prompto who had objected - and pointed an accusing finger at him. “You said we can watch movies all night, and that when you came back I could have a list and we’d watch them all!” She was pouting in an adorable way. It was hard to remember that this girl could one day grow to be the formidable warrior that Prompto had once known.

“We did say that.” Gladio said with a nod before gesturing to the television set up. “We’ll see how long you stay awake, shall we?”

“I’ll be awake all night!” The young girl announced, not a single person in the room believing her.

Iris wasn’t actually the first one to fall asleep, but the fact that she was beaten to it by Noct surprised absolutely nobody. The prince lay with his head in Prompto’s lap, taking up the rest of the couch. It was definitely adorable to Prompto, who couldn’t help running his hand through his dark hair.

When the first movie was finished, and Iris was setting up the second, there was a soft knock at the
door and Jarred announcing a new visitor. Prompto couldn’t see the door from where he was, and he had no intention of jostling Noct from his lap, so he just waited with curiosity as the new person was let into the room.

“Ah, Regis,” Clarus greeted warmly, “Glad you could make it.”

Prompto found himself freezing momentarily, having not expected the king at all. He had no idea what he was supposed to do, or how he was supposed to act, but he knew one thing for sure. He had to wake Noct up.

“Noct, buddy,” He gently shook the prince’s shoulder, leaning forward so that he could speak quietly to his partner. He didn’t want to startle him awake - that was always a bad idea - but Noct’s feet were taking up the only seat left available, and there was no way Prompto was going to ask the king to sit on the floor. “Time to wake up.”

“No.” Noct muttered, still clearly mostly asleep. The boy nuzzled closer to Prompto’s lap in a way that would have been fun in another situation.

“Your dad’s here.” Prompto was definitely starting to feel a little on edge. He never really knew how to act around Regis, but right now, he knew he needed Noct to move. “Needs a pace to sit buddy.” He gently tapped Noct’s legs, as if to remind him that he was taking up most of the couch.

Noct grumbled a little and curled his knees, bringing them up to clear a space on the couch. It wasn’t nearly enough for an adult to sit on.

“Nice try.” Prompto commented dryly. “I’m afraid you’re gonna have to get up.”

Noct grumbled again and tried to curl tighter onto himself, but still failed to make enough space. Prompto found himself looking up to see Regis watching them with amusement. He too seemed to have fallen into Iris trap of dressing up for the night - he was decked in a onesie that Prompto couldn’t recognise the animal for. It was an odd shade of blue-green and had a tail. He decided to think about that later. Right now, he needed to wake up Noct and not have an anxiety attack about seeing the king dressed like that.

With a sigh, Prompto leaned further over Noct, managing to whisper in his ear. “Bloom.”

The effect was instant. Noct once again phased through the back of the couch, landing with a dull ‘thud’ and a muttered curse.

“That still works?” Regis questioned with a raised eyebrow and a chuckle.

“Apparently?” Prompto shrugged, twisting in his seat to look over the back of the couch. “You awake now buddy?”

“That’s cheating.” Noct muttered, glaring up at him.

“Well, you were taking up the whole couch and wouldn’t move. Your own fault.” Prompto shrugged. “Gonna sit there all night?”

Noct’s glare didn’t soften, but he stood with a quiet mutter and made his way back around the couch to sit beside Prompto, arms folded over his chest. After a moment, he held his hand out, palm up, and Ignis dutifully placed a cookie in it, much to the amusement of everyone else in the room.
The couch now having a free space, Regis finally took his seat, still chuckling a little. He raised his hand and ruffled Noct’s hair, earning himself a glare as the prince continued to chew on his cookie.

Noct eyed his father for a moment before swallowing the chunk of cookie in his mouth. “Haven’t seen that outfit in a while.” He muttered, reaching one finger forward to prod Regis in the arm. “Iris got to you too, huh?”

Regis laughed, settling back into the couch - he had to adjust the tail to do so, and Prompto tried to not think that maybe he’d hit his head somewhere and was now hallucinating. The king of the entire country was sitting on the other side of a couch wearing a fluffy onsie.

If Prompto truly had been his sixteen year old self, he probably would’ve had an aneurysm from the anxiety that produced.

“Clarus suggested it may be an idea to wear it.”

“You just didn’t want to feel left out.” Clarus pointed out with a roll of his eyes and a smirk.

Prompto finally found his voice, and enough courage to speak up to satisfy his curiosity. “What-What is it?” He questioned, gesturing to the outfit that Regis was wearing.

“Carbuncle.” Noct spoke up, giving Prompto exactly zero answers that actually helped.

“Isn’t that like, a medical thing?” He questioned, “Blisters and stuff?”

His question earned a chuckle from the king, and a grimace from Noct who pulled out his phone - probably to look up what Prompto was talking about.

“Unrelated things can share a name.” Ignis pointed out, his ‘I’m going to teach you about something, you adorable uneducated child’ look. “In specific, this is an example of a homonym, a word that-”

“I know what a homonym is.” Prompto replied with a roll of his eyes and a fond chuckle.

“I don’t!” Iris called out, abandoning the dvd player to sit at Ignis’ feet and look up at him. “What’s a homo-neem?”

“Homonym.” Ignis corrected her pronunciation. “Is the word used to describe the situation where two or more unrelated objects have the same name, with the same spelling and pronunciation. An example would be the word ‘bow’. Which can either be the action -” He leaned forward into a small bow to demonstrate, “or the front of a ship. Another example would be ‘bark’. It could either mean the outer layer of a tree, or the sound that a dog makes.”

Everybody was paying attention to Ignis during his little lesson - it was hard not to. Ignis was one hell of a teacher, and probably the only reason that Prompto had passed high school the first time around. After he’d finished his explanation, Prompto turned back to the king, hoping that the man would give him more information on his outfit, but being too anxious to ask again.

Spending time with the king was something he was going to have to get used to.

Apparently, Regis understood, because with another chuckle, he provided an explanation. “One of the messengers of the astrals that has taken a particular liking to our family.” He told Prompto.
“Carbuncle is the protector of dreams. I gave Noctis a charm when he was younger, and Carbuncle reduced the severity and frequency of his nightmares.”

“Remember that little fox thing that photobombed us sometimes?” Noct asked, finally finishing his cookie and wiping his hands on his legs. “That was Carbuncle. He’s why I haven’t been having more nightmares…”

Prompto did remember the little fox like creature that had randomly appeared in their photos during their journey. He remembered being confused at the time, but chalking it up to local wildlife. Honestly, once Gentiana started appearing, he’d given the small creature no more thought.

But to think that they had been practically stalked by a messenger of the astrals… That was something unexpected. “So… you made a onesie of it?” He questioned slowly with a frown, “Isn’t like… heresy?”

“No more than some of the carvings of the six I’ve seen.” Regis said with a shrug. “Besides. He said I could.” He added, sounding almost petulant. The tone of voice was exactly the same as he’d often heard from Noct, and Prompto couldn’t help the small giggle.

“Well in that case…” He said with a shrug, letting his sentence trail off.

After a beat, he turned to Iris with a grin. “So- what’s the next movie?” He questioned.

“This one!” Iris jumped up and ran back to the dvd player to hold up a case.

“That movie’s four hours long!” Noct protested, eyes wide as he looked at the cover. “And the first in a trilogy! Don’t tell me…”

“Yup!” Iris’ grin was down right evil as she held up two more cases, showing the people in the room that she did indeed have all three extended movies. They weren’t bad movies, in fact, both Noct and Prompto had seen them a good number of times and enjoyed them each and every play through, but they were long and Iris had promised them ten movies. If three of them were four hours long each…

They were in for a long night.

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Iris, surprisingly, managed to make it half way through the second movie in the trilogy before falling asleep. After around twenty minutes, Clarus paused the movie and bundled her up, excusing himself to put her to bed.

While he was gone, Regis cleared his throat and regarded the other men in the room. “I believe it’s time to tell Clarus about your past.” He told them, looking at Gladio in particular. “I do not like to keep secrets from him and it may go towards explaining why you apparently had a sudden need to go to Niflheim.”

There was disapproval in his voice, and Prompto didn’t know him well enough to figure out if it was because they went to Niflheim, or because they did it without consulting him first. Or even letting him know. It was probably Cor who told him. The tattletale.

Everyone turned their eyes on Noct, waiting for his direction, for his orders. They may have gone back in time, but Noct was still their king, their leader. After a moment, he took a breath and shook
his head. “Not my decision.” He told them, instead turning his attention on Gladio. “He’s your dad. Your family. I leave it up to you how much he knows and when.”

Gladio thought on those words for a moment before giving a small nod. “Then we tell him.” He announced. “Dunno if he’ll believe us, but he deserves to know.”

The others agreed silently, and when Clarus returned to the room, Gladio told him their story.

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to join our discord!! https://discord.gg/esGdEpD
Clarus surprised everyone by listening to their story then believing them. Almost right away. All it took was a single nod from Regis, and Clarus believed them one hundred percent. No questions asked, not disbelief, no arguing. Just... belief.

Noct only wished that it had been that easy for Cor. It would’ve saved a lot of time, and a lot of arguments.

“Does this have anything to do with why you decided on an impromptu trip to Niflheim without clearing it with the council or taking backup?” There was definitely and admonishment there. Granted, it was somewhat warranted, but Noct couldn’t help but bristle at the reprimand. He was a king damn it, and quite capable of making tactical decisions without having to wait centuries for the old farts in the council to agree.

Still... he wasn’t king in this time, and there was a protocol that he was supposed to have followed.

Before he could argue, Ignis thankfully responded.

“It was a valid tactical decision.” He said, and Noct felt vindicated that Ignis was taking his side on the mostly imaginary argument. He couldn’t help the smug smile that briefly flashed on his face before he took control of his expression. “Had we come back to discuss it, not only would we have wasted time, but there was also the chance that the information could be leaked. Had that happened, we would have faced even more difficulties than we already had.”

“Difficulties?” Clarus questioned with a raised eyebrow.

“Oh you know, the usual.” Prompto was trying for casual, but to those who knew him, his tone was anxious, bordering on panic. “Dragoon warrior guarding the door, MT units, a fucking deadman’s switch,” His tone turned angry and bitter with those words. “Threat of deamonification, and unconscious monarch, a high speed airship chase with a novice pilot. Y’know. The usual.” He tried for a casual shrug, but Noct didn’t notice that part.

“What were chased?” He questioned, wondering why nobody had thought to tell him that.

Again, Prompto shrugged. “Not for long.” He admitted. “Lost them over Ghorovas Rift. Took the long way home.”

What was done was done, and Prompto had got them out safely. Still, he made a mental note to have a full debrief with his retainers, and remind them that they were supposed to tell him things like that.
“And your need to go there at all?” Clarus questioned, giving them a steely look.

“We destroyed the sole means of production for the MT units, and…” Ignis paused here to consider his words, looking briefly at Prompto, “Neutralized the scientist responsible for their creation and various other weapons that were to be used in the invasion of Insomnia.”

“Neutralized?” Regis questioned with a frown.

“Uh.. that’s one way to put it.” Prompto shifted uneasily in his seat. It was the first indication he’d given Noct that he was uncomfortable with his actions, and it somehow relieved him. It had been a hell of a shock to see his best friend and love suddenly murder someone, and they hadn’t talked about it since.

How did you even bring that up in conversation.

“Justifiable homicide is still homicide.” Clarus said in a careful tone. “He should have been taken as a prisoner of war.”

“Technically it was patricide.” Prompto muttered, and if that was his idea of a defense, he was in trouble. Noct grimaced at the shocked faces of his father and his shield, but didn’t say anything.

He wanted to come to Prompto’s defense, but he had no idea how to do so.

“And if you want to put me on trial for that, then go right ahead.” Prompto was sitting up straighter now, looking at Clarus with an air of determination. “I spent years trying to understand his psyche in order to understand his work and motivations. Trust me, the world - Lucis especially - is better off without him.”

“You believe him unredeemable?” Regis asked.

“Yes.” Prompto’s response was instant and adamant. “He was the only person within the empire who knows how to make MT units, and he wouldn’t have come quietly. Like I said, I got to know him through his research. There was no way we were getting out of there with him alive.”

“Patricide…” Clarus repeated the word, eyes trained on Prompto. “Am I to believe that this scientist was your father?”

“Versteal Besithia. He donated his genetic material to my existence.” Prompto answered.

During their explanation of their past, the group had collectively, silently, agreed not to tell Clarus where Prompto had come from, or how exactly MTs were made. That was Prompto’s secret to share, and really had no bearing on what they were going to do in the future.

“Actually,” Prompto continued, “in another world, we would’ve been the perfect subjects for an experiment on the ‘nature vs nurture’ argument. Besithia was egotistical and borderline evil. He fully believed that the ends justify the means. I mean, sure, I have a couple of homicides under my belt, but I’m not evil.” Prompto was rambling now, and Noct kind of wanted him to just shut up before he got himself into more trouble.

“A ‘couple’ of homicides?” Regis asked, surprise evident in his voice as he regarded Prompto. He was looking at him like he’d never met him before, and honestly, Noct could sympathise.
“I guess technically the others were mercy killings, or assisted suicide…” Prompto admitted, “Besithia was the only person who didn’t literally ask for it.” He added with a shrug.

“There was an illness,” Ignis spoke quietly, preventing any more questions. “The end result of which was the transformation into a daemon. During the dark years, there were a great many who wished to be killed before that were to happen.”

Gladio nodded in agreement, his own expression sombre. “I don’t think there was a single hunter or Glaive that didn’t answer that request at least once.”

The room fell into silence for a moment, the implications settling in on the king and his shield. Gladio had just all but admitted to taking a life himself, and lumped Ignis in with him.

“I think…” Regis spoke slowly, thinking his words through, “That these details should be kept between only us.”

Clarus nodded, looking uncomfortable with the idea, but realising that if they didn’t keep these facts to themselves, they would have to bring Prompto up on charges of homicide and possibly war crimes. Noct wasn’t caught up on the legalities of things, but he was pretty sure that they should’ve given Besithia the chance to surrender and become a prisoner of war.

“Thank you.” Prompto eventually said quietly, bowing his head.

“Perhaps we should have a full debriefing.” Clarus eventually spoke, breaking the tense silence that had fallen in the room. “Before the council meeting. If what you say about Drautos is true, then we need to be selective about what we say.” Clarus gave Regis a strange look, and the king waved him off with a look of his own.

If Noct hadn’t have spent so much time with his own retainers, he wouldn’t have understood the silent conversation. As it was, he realised that Regis was letting Clarus know that he’d fill him in on that particular detail later. Noct had given and received similar looks from his own retainers over the years.

“Do they know that we went to Niflheim at all?” Gladio questioned.

Regis shook his head. “Cor spoke to me directly. The only people that know of your trip, are the people you informed, and ourselves. I have ordered Cor to remain quiet on this until we have all the information. I think I will make that a standing order. For Lady Lunafreya also.”

“Which brings us to the next point…” Clarus was once again giving them all a disapproving look, having put his questions on the back burner for now. “Bringing Lady Lunafreya here could be considered an act of war.”


“Her safety is of paramount importance when it comes to the fate of the world.” Ignis added. “While she remains alive, the Starscourge is held at bay. It wasn’t until her death that the darkness began to truly spread.”

Noct nodded. “Keeping her safe, and having Adagium on our side definitely swings our chances in our favour.”
Regis’ eyes bugged out of his head and he almost choked on air as he stared at his son. “Come again?” He questioned. “Adagium…” He sounded bewildered, and not in a good way.

Noct nodded, “My contact in the empire.” He admitted. “He came back with us. We’re both tired of blindly following the gods’ plan. He’s no longer a threat.”

“No longer a…” Clarus too, was staring at Noct like he’d grown a second head. “You understand that he almost killed your father.”

“Yeah.” Noct looked at the king, “When were you gonna tell me about that? How did we not know that the Infirnian was walking the streets of Insomnia? How does that not go into the history books?”

“Wait, what?” Prompto looked at Noct in surprise, “When did that happen?”

“734.” Noct answered easily, remembering it for himself, “An assassination attempt, with the aid of Ifrit, foiled only because Bahamut got in the way.”

“How do you know this?” Regis asked, starting to recover from his shock. It occurred to Noct that Regis probably hadn’t known that he was saved by Bahamut. He’d been unconscious by that time, after all.

“Adagium.” Noct answered, not wanting to give away Ardyn’s identity yet, and also not wanting to explain how he had the immortal’s memories. Instead, he decided to just imply that Ardyn had told him.

“734…” Ignis was wearing his ‘thinking out loud’ face. “The year of mass hysteria? The contamination of the water source was a cover up?”

Regis nodded. “It seemed like a safer alternative than allowing the population to believe that we were infiltrated by a bedtime story.”

“More like a nightmare.” Gladio muttered and Prompto nodded in agreement.

The blond was sitting in his seat, curled up around himself as tightly as he could, and Noct found himself reaching out to pull him into a sideways embrace. As soon as he did, Prompto relaxed against him, looking up to give him a small smile.

Talking about Ardyn always put Prompto on edge and the rest of the conversation hadn’t exactly been easy. Noct couldn’t blame him, the man had put them through a lot - especially Prompto. Noct wasn’t particularly fond of talking about him either, even with the memories he had of his.

There was a time, eons ago, when Ardyn had actually been a decent person. A good man, even. Until the gods played with his fate. Noct’s opinion of the man was clouded by that fact. He was remembering what he had been like before, and sometimes he even forgot what he was like now. The shadow of the man he had once been.

“So… what do we tell the council?” Prompto asked slowly. “Do we just leave out the bit where we went to Niflheim?”

“I believe that would be wise for now.” Ignis agreed, “We should also keep quiet about your connection to Besithia.” He added.
Prompto nodded in complete agreement, and with a glance around, Noct could see everyone else doing the same. Regis still had a thoughtful look on his face, and Clarus wasn’t doing too well at covering up his own vaguely suspicious expression. Noct didn’t blame him. Prompto was a member of the ruling council and Noct’s lover. There was no way that he could be fully comfortable finding out that he was apparently the son of a politically important person within their enemy’s ranks.

But Prompto was trustworthy. Noct would attest to that to his dying breath, and beyond, apparently. Even if Clarus didn’t trust him, Noct and his retainers did and nothing could change that.

“Well then, on to a lighter note.” Regis gave Noct and Prompto a kind smile. “I’m happy to see that the two of you have taken advantage of the recent law change.”

Noct saw Clarus frown in confusion as he felt his face heat up a little. He was proud to be with Prompto, and if it wasn’t for his place in society, he would’ve already shouted it from every rooftop he could find. As it was, they had to be careful. Technically, they were both still minors, and with Noct’s life being somewhat in the limelight, it was only a matter of time before Prompto’s was too.

“You want us to tell the council?” He questioned his father.

“Only when you’re ready. I’m sure you understand the consequences well enough to make that decision for yourselves.” Regis’ words let Noct relax a little. He wasn’t sure if he was ready for the backlash from the public yet.

There had never before been an openly gay monarch, and Noct wasn’t naive enough to think that there wouldn’t be any objection. From within the council, and from the people.

“Though I would suggest sooner rather than later.” Regis continued. “To the council at least. Lest they find out through rumours.”

“Those rumours have been going around since our first year at high school.” Noct pointed out, “Old news by now.”

“Do the two of you intend on keeping up your friendship persona for the general public?” Clarus asked, having apparently recovered from his surprise.

Noct and Prompto looked at each other for a moment, trying to communicate silently, eventually, Noct shrugged. “We haven’t had a chance to talk about it yet…” Which was true. For the most part, Noct and Prompto had simply found themselves trying to once again settle into normalcy.

Gladio snorted in amusement. “I’ll bet.” He muttered, and Noct felt his cheeks grow even warmer. In his arms, Prompto snorted and shook his head, obviously amused at Gladio’s insinuation, but not embarrassed by it like Noct was. He also didn’t offer up a correction.

Unlike what Gladio seemed to think, Noct and Prompto had been somewhat reserved with their interactions. That one hand job aside, they hadn’t exactly done anything. Not yet. But now, for the first time, Noct felt like they had all the time in the world. Why rush?

“You are aware that traditionally, you have six months to make the announcement?” Regis questioned, and Noct nodded. Of course he was aware of that particular tradition. He’d been told about it time and time again since he first hit puberty.
Noct simply shrugged when he realised that Regs wasn’t actually asking in hypotheticals. He wanted to make sure that Noct remembered that particular tradition.

“So is there anything special about dating royalty that I should know?” Prompto questioned, sounding a little timid. Noct glanced down at him, and found that the blond was still trying to make himself small. Was he still intimidated by Regis? Noct thought that he’d got past that during their evening of tea and card games.

“There are a few extra steps involved.” Ignis took over the conversation, and all eyes fell to him. “First, there is the dating stage - which is essentially the same as it would be for any couple, the only difference being the need for a formal announcement within the first six months. After that, at a time of your choosing, you may declare the other to be your chosen. This is a precursor to engagement, however, unlike an engagement, it doesn’t have to come from the both of you at the same time. It is simply an announcement to say that you are serious, and intending on moving on to the next stage. Which of course, is an official engagement to be wed. The engagement must last no less than six months, during which time you will receive tutoring on etiquette and what is expected of the spouse of a monarch.” Ignis said the last part of that directly to Prompto, who nodded as he listened. It was a lot to take in, but the blond seemed to be handling it well.

“The marriage itself is split into two parts.” Ignis continued, “The first being the public ceremony, which while being somewhat more extravagant, is essentially the same as a civilian wedding. The second is the vow before the gods. I will admit that I am not familiar with what that entails.”

“Should the gods approve of the union,” Regis spoke, filling in the blanks, “There would be a ceremony in which your souls would become bound, allowing Prompto to join us in the Astral Realm after death.”

Prompto shifted a little awkwardly, sharing a glance with Noct. “And uh… what happens if they don’t approve…?”

“Then it would be up to you if you wished to to continue your relationship, knowing that death would separate you.” Clarus informed them. “Though to my knowledge the gods have never rejected a union.”

“They might this time.” Prompto sighed. “Not exactly on the best terms with the gods.”

Clarus raised his eyebrow, but didn’t ask his questions.

“Well, I believe it’s time for us to all retire for the evening.” Regis said, heaving himself from the couch, being careful of his tail. “The Marshal and Lady Lunafreya will be arriving early in the morning. I assume you wish to greet them?”

Noct nodded, also getting to his feet. He offered Prompto a hand, which the blond took and stood up. It wasn’t a long journey back to their apartment, but it was getting late. Noct found himself swaying sightly on his feet, prompting a giggle from Prompto who took him by the shoulders and began to lead him out.

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The apartment was dark when they returned, but luckily for them the central air was on a timer and the apartment was comfortably warm compared to the outside wintry chill. Noct was all but asleep, relying on Prompto for guidance as he made their way through to the bedroom.
With a chuckle, Prompto all but dropped Noct on the bed, watching as the Prince shuffled up and wiggled his way under the blankets. “You’re too cute.” The blond commented with fondness. He watched for a moment, before chuckling again. “Not gonna get changed?”

There was a flash of light, and the onesie was gone - stored in the armiger with barely a thought. “Suit yourself.” Prompto shrugged and climbed into the bed, not bothering to take his own outfit off.

Noct grumbled and pulled at the yellow fabric and Prompto chuckled. “Nope.” He muttered, turning to pull Noct against his chest. “It’s fluffy. I like it.”

“‘M not sleeping with a chocobo…” The prince muttered sleepily.

Prompto snorted in amusement, a long ago conversation popping into his head. “You said it yourself. ‘There’s no wrong way to love a chocobo’.” He quoted, giggling at Noct’s groan.

“You know I didn’t mean it like that... “ Noct sighed and lifted himself slightly so he was leaning over Prompto. He gently nudged the blond, tugging slightly on his onesie. “Prefer you naked anyway.” Somehow, even in the darkened room, Noct’s face still managed to blush hard enough to glow.

“Do you now…” Prompto couldn’t help the teasing tone in his voice. “Well… maybe you should do something about that…”

Noct hesitated for a moment before letting out a breath of disappointment. “Too tired.” He groaned, letting his head drop onto Prompto’s shoulder. “First time in my life, I’ve got the chance of getting laid, and all I want to do is nap.” He muttered against Prompto’s shoulder.

Prompto chuckled and placed a soft kiss against Noct’s hair. “This is definitely not the first chance you’ve had to get laid.” He pointed out. “You’re a prince, dummy.” He adjusted their position a little as he banished his onesie to leave him mostly naked and snuggled close to Noct, their warm skin pressing together. “Could’ve had any girl at school.”

“Girls are gross.” Noct spoke like the teenager he appeared to be, his voice slurring slightly with exhaustion. “Only ever wanted you.”

“We’ve got lots of time.” Prompto reassured the prince, as he felt the last of the tension leak out of his muscles. A few more seconds and Noct would be asleep. With a soft smile on his face, Prompto snuggled further into the bed and closed his own eyes, letting sleep take him.

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The first thing that Prompto became aware of when he woke up, was a soft touch on his chest. He kept his eyes closed, and stayed relaxed, simply allowing himself to enjoy the feeling of Noct’s fingers tracing the silver streaks of his stretch marks.

The last time he’d been a teenager, Prompto would have shied away from the touch, hating the way he looked, but this time around they didn’t bother him so much. After all the scars he’d managed to pick up during the apocalypse, a few stretch marks didn’t seem nearly as big of a deal as he once thought them to be.

When the fingers traced over his chest, Prompto let out a soft sigh of contentment, even when it
reminded him of what was missing. “Wonder if my folks’ll sign off on me getting my tattoo redone…” he wondered idly.

“You had a tattoo?” Noct’s fingers paused for a moment before they continued on their lazy exploration.

“Mmhmm.” Prompto moved, taking a gentle hold of Noct’s fingers to trace the outline of where his tattoo should have been. It was directly over his heart. “A Pink Jade Gar.” He guided Noct’s fingers to where the ink had once stained his skin. “We all got one.” He added, “Gladio’s almost got lost in his other tattoos though.” He found his fingers gently running up Noct’s arm and felt the goosebumps rising.

“Why?” Noct questioned, resuming his exploration of Prompto’s chest.

Prompto fell quiet for a moment, hand stilling in its movement. He let out a soft sigh before answering. “Well… I can’t say the alcohol didn’t help. But why do you think I got an elusive fish tattooed over my heart?”

Noct froze for a moment before moving, lifting himself up to lean on his elbow and look down at Prompto. The blond finally opened his eyes and gazed up at his boyfriend. The expression on Noct’s face told him that the man didn’t know what to say and it only took a moment for him to decide that actions spoke louder than words.

Prompto leaned up to meet the kiss he saw coming, slowly lowering himself back down to pull Noct atop him.

It took only moments for the slow kiss to heat up, and Prompto was most definitely enjoying himself - at least until he felt the wet drops land on his cheeks. With a frown, he broke the kiss and gently pushed Noct back far enough to look at him.

“Hey,” He wiped the tears from Noct’s cheeks, “Hey -what’s-”

Noct ducked his head, resting it against Prompto’s bare shoulder. “I’m sorry.” He muttered, the tears falling on Prompto’s skin. “I’m sorry.” The prince repeated.

“For what?” Prompto asked, having absolutely no idea what was going on. “Hey, it’s okay-” He turned them gently so that Noct was on his back and Prompto was the one leaning over him.

“I left you behind.” Noct’s fingers found Prompto’s chest again to hesitantly touch Prompto’s chest. “I was gone for so long…”

Prompto captured Noct’s hand and pressed it flat against his skin, allowing the prince to feel his solid heartbeat. “And I waited.” He told him, “I waited for you for ten years, and you know what…?” He waited until Noct looked up at him, his blue eyes still shining with tears. “I’d do it again.” He spoke quietly, his words meant only for Noct. “In the end, I got you back and look at where we are now.” He leaned forward and kissed him gently as if to prove his point.

“Prom…”

“You didn’t ask to go.” Prompto continued, once again wiping away Noct’s tears. “It was for a good cause.” His hand joined Noct’s on his chest, vaguely mourning the loss of ink that had been there for long enough to be missed. “We missed you and we wanted to show that.”
“Why a gar?” Noct’s voice was quiet, but at least the tears were stopping.

“Well… we thought about getting the Lucian Crest, but that didn’t really symbolise you, you know…” Prompto shrugged, “But a fish that took you two days to catch? Yeah - that’s you.”

Noct chuckled wetly, sniffing and wiping his eyes. “I guess.” He agreed before falling quiet for a moment. “I love you.” He said quietly, taking Prompto’s hand in his own.

Prompto smiled down at Noct, moving the hand he was holding above Noct’s head before leaning over him, pinning him to the bed. He looked down at Noct for a moment, before leaning down and capturing his lips again.

It once again started off slow, both of them pouring out the feelings they didn’t know how to say, but eventually things began to heat up. Kisses were broken by laboured breath and soft pants for bare moments before lips found lips once more.

“Prom…” Noct hummed, tilting his head back and pushing his hips up, gently pulling at the grip on Prompto’s hand. It wasn’t hard enough to mean he wanted to let go - rather it seemed like he was testing the hold and reminding himself that it was there.

Thanks to experience, Prompto knew just what that meant. He reached down and grabbed Noct’s other hand and held it above his head. He was rewarded with a soft half moan and Prompto took that chance to kiss down his throat.

“If you want me to stop,” He spoke against the rapidly warming skin, “Just say so.”

“Why the hell would I want you to stop?” Noct panted, pushing his hips up again, to press his hardness into Prompto’s hips.

Prompto couldn’t help the smirk as he gently nibbled at Noct’s collarbone. “Hmm? Well what do you want?” He questioned, lowering the tone of his voice into an almost purr, lifting his head to speak directly into Noct’s ear before taking the lobe into his mouth and pulling gently.

“Hgnn-” Noct gasped out, writhing slightly in Prompto’s grasp. “I don’t kn- I don- You?”

Seeing Noct become so undone so quickly under his touch sent a rush through Prompto, and he couldn’t help the second smirk in as many minutes. It was absolutely adorable how innocent Noct was and how easy he was to work up. Adorable, and hot.

“Hmm? But what would you like me to do?” He questioned, pushing things a little to see how far he could go.

He wasn’t expecting Noct to turn his head and blow him away with a passionate - if not clumsy - kiss and the heat of it made him moan and his own hips push forward. Okay. That was how far he could push things.

Remembering how Noct had reacted last time, Prompto made a small effort to take more control of the situation. The next time Noct’s pelvis bucked up, he pulled back, grinning at the frustrated sound Noct made.

“You still haven’t told me what you want…” He chided, grin widening when Noct opened his eyes.
in a lazy, heated glare.

“Prom.” Noct moaned out, trying to lean up to kiss Prompto, only to be foiled as the blond pulled out of the way. “Just-” He dropped himself back on the bed and looked up at Prompto, chest heaving with laboured breaths. “Fuck me.”

Whatever Prompto was expecting, that wasn’t it. He found himself staring down at Noct for a moment before leaning down and giving Noct a gentle kiss. “Sure you want to start with that?” He questioned, “We can start with something simpler…” He offered, knowing that Noct had literally no experience.

“Noct….” Noct looked up at Prompto, his cheeks a burning red. “I’ve been waiting for you for over a decade.” He pointed out and Prompto decided now was not the time to point out that Noct had been in some sort of crystal sleep for most of that time. Instead, he focused on the words his boyfriend was saying. “In my head, we’ve done it all, and I now I want it for real.” It didn’t seem possible, but apparently Noct could blush harder.

Instead of words - which were alluding him completely at this point thanks to Noct casually admitting to having fantasized about him - Prompto captured Noct’s mouth in another kiss. After a moment, he pulled back to regard Noct again. “How do you want it?” He questioned.

“Huh?” Noct definitely looked like his mind wasn’t working, and he took a moment to focus on Prompto’s face. “What?”

Prompto chuckled, pulling further back to give the man space to calm down enough to think. “Do you want to pitch or catch?”

Noct blinked up at him for a moment and Prompto could see the moment that comprehension hit him. His eyes widened and Prompto was suddenly afraid that he would spontaneously combust. “Oh.” He let out in a whisper, “Uhm… Catch..?” He sounded unsure, and Prompto leaned down to gently kiss him.

“Noct… I’m happy either way.” He reassured him, just in case Noct was making that choice thinking that Prompto wouldn’t want to take.

“No-” Noct cleared his throat and squirmed a little. Prompto let his hands go, but Noct didn’t move them. “I want to feel you…”

Prompto watched him for a moment, seeing nothing but embarrassment and want. He gave him a soft smile and a nod. “Okay. We can do that.” He gently kissed Noct’s forehead and pulled back completely, sitting up while straddling Noct’s thighs. “You ever played with yourself like that?” He questioned, needing to know just how much experience Noct had.

Sheepishly, Noct nodded. After a second of hesitation, he flicked his hand and produced a rather… large sex toy from the armiger. “I uhm… With this…” He admitted.

It was somewhat impressive, and Prompto couldn’t help but raise an eyebrow. “If that’s what you’re used to, I might be a bit of a disappointment.” He chuckled.

“I uh- never got past the tip…” This conversation was obviously embarrassing for Noct, and it was starting to get past the point of amusing and on to humiliating. If Prompto didn’t need to know this information, he would probably drop it.
“K.” He gently took the item and looked at it, taking note of the thinner tip. It was smaller than he was, but it was definitely a start. “Why don’t we start with this then?” He suggested.

Noct shook his head, touching the toy and banishing it back into the ether. He reached up and wrapped his arms around Prompto’s neck to guide him into a kiss. He sank down into the bed, pulling Prompto with him.

“Just you.” Noct muttered against Prompto’s lips. “I just want you.”

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Chapter End Notes

Feel free to join our discord! https://discord.gg/esGdEpD

I'm also looking at livestreaming my step daughter and her friend playing Ptioss Ruins. I'm going to announce when on my discord with a link.
Finally

Chapter Notes

NSFW warning. This is pretty much JUST smut. Like. Not much else.

A bit of an important conversation at the end, but other than that. Sex. Just sex. Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Noct’s words took Prompto’s breath away, so Prompto returned the favour with a bruising, desperate kiss. He slowly lowered his hips down, moaning at the sensation of their dicks sliding together through the thin layer of Noct’s underwear.

His hands reached up and once again trapped Noct’s to the bed, eliciting a desperate moan from the mouth still devouring his own. A moan that was returned in turn.

Prompto found his hips moving with no input from his brain as he ground himself against Noct, revelling in the sparks of pleasure and the squirming, moaning mess of boyfriend below him. Pulling Noct apart like this was now definitely Prompto’s favourite thing in the world.

Slowly, he reduced the friction and pulled back to look down at Noct. Their eyes locked for a moment before Prompto slowly let go of Noct’s wrists and made his way down, kissing as much skin as he could as he went.

Once he reached Noct’s tented underwear, he glanced up to see Noct staring down at him with wide eyes and messy hair. Prompto couldn’t help the smirk that graced his lips as he reached out and gently ran a finger over the outline of Noct’s hardness.

“Care to take these off?” He questioned in a sultry voice, letting his tongue gently brush over the fabric.

Noct moaned loudly, his hand shooting down with such speed that Prompto had to lean back to prevent himself from getting smacked in the face. Then, with a flash of blue light, Noct’s underwear was gone and Prompto was left facing his prize.

He could feel himself salivating and leaned forward, running his tongue up the heated flesh and slowly lowering his lips over the head. Noct’s hands all but flew into his hair as the prince jerked in his grasp and let out a strangled sound.

“P-Prom- You keep doing that and-and I’ll-”

Noct wasn’t exactly eloquent, but Prompto got the idea. He lifted his head, just enough to speak, his hand idly pumping at Noct’s shaft slowly. “That’s okay.” He assured him. “Teenagers bounce back pretty damn quick.”

Noct’s response was another strangled moan.

Even with the almost legendary refractory period of teenage boys, Prompto didn’t want this over too
quickly, so he refrained from returning to his previous task and instead moved further down.

“H-here…” Noct spoke breathlessly, and Prompto looked up to see the prince offering him a bottle of lubrication. With curiosity, Prompto took it and looked over the label before shaking his head and putting it back into the armiger.

“Got my own.” He told Noct, producing a different bottle. “Flavoured.” He briefly showed Noct the label - Cherry flavoured.

“Why do you need-” Noct’s words were cut off with a strange kind of yelp when Prompto leaned forward, his tongue darting out to gently tease the sensitive skin surrounding Noct’s hole. “P-Prom!” Noct sounded embarrassed, and Prompto couldn’t help the small smile even as he worked. “Th-That’s obscene!”

Those words sent Prompto into a giggling fit strong enough for him to have to pull back for a moment. “Heard that one before.” He told Noct, trying to calm himself down. He kissed the inside of Noct’s thigh, still smiling in amusement. “Don’t worry. I like doing this.” He didn’t give Noct a chance to reply before leaning forward and getting back to work, adding a few drops of his lube while he was at it.

It took Noct a few moments to relax, but when he did, the sounds he was making told Prompto that the prince too, enjoyed this. Very much. It didn’t take long for Noct’s hips to start thrusting, trying to get closer to Prompto’s mouth, and the hand that was still lightly stroking him. It was as if Noct didn’t quite know what he wanted. Words were definitely beyond him at this point too. The prince was nothing but a babbling, squirming mess.

Slowly, Prompto started adding a finger into the mix, his tongue lapping at the skin before a lubricated finger gently prodded it’s way inside. Noct tensed at the intrusion, so Prompto kept the finger still while still using his mouth until Noct relaxed again. Slowly, ever so slowly, Prompto managed to work his first finger inside.

By this point, his jaw was starting to ache, so he pulled back and concentrated on his finger, bending it slightly and finding the soft spot inside that-

Yep. Noct definitely enjoyed that. The prince jolted under Prompto, babbling incoherently, his hips thrusting up then down into the finger, trying to feel that again. But Prompto was in control. He didn’t allow Noct to get the touch he wanted, not yet. Instead, he slowly added another finger, being careful not to push too far, too fast, pressing on that magical button every so often.

Eventually, after three fingers and a generous amount of lube, he pulled his hand away, earning a grumpy grumble from Noct.

He made his way up to kiss Noct deeply, giving the prince a moment to regain his thoughts before speaking. “You sure about this?” He questioned quietly, wanting to give Noct another chance to back out if he wanted to.

“Stop asking that.” Noct pulled Prompto back into another kiss and wrapped his legs around the back of the blond’s knees. “Fuck me already.”

“Pushy.” Prompto admonished with a chuckle, pulling back and summoning a pack of condoms from the armiger.
“Don’t need those.” Noct muttered, watching the blond.

“Non-negotiable.” Prompto made quick work of putting one on, rolling it over his neglected erection with a soft moan. “You ready?”

“Yes!” Noct used his legs to pull at Prompto’s knees. “Yes! Get on with it!”

“Gimme that pillow.” Prompto ordered, placing it under Noct’s hips when the prince obliged. Then he leaned forward, using his hand to line himself up. He pushed his way in at an agonizingly slow pace, knowing from experience that going too fast would hurt. He kept all his attention on Noct, watching out for signs of discomfort and ready to stop if he had to. The tight heat around him pulsed as Noct tensed and Prompto paused his advance both for Noct’s comfort and to stop himself from ending things prematurely.

Sometimes, being in a teenage body had its disadvantages.

Eventually, he bottomed out and was pressed as close and as deeply as he could, connected to Noct in a way that nobody ever had been before. “You good?” He asked through panted breaths.

“I- C’n feel you twitching.” Noct muttered, his own breathing laboured. “Move.” He ordered, and Prompto was more than happy to oblige.

He started slowly, rolling his hips gently to allow Noct to become accustomed to the feeling, and also to find the perfect angle. He knew the moment he found it, when Noct tightened around him with a deep moan, his legs attempting to pull Prompto closer.

Prompto captured Noct’s lips in a desperate kiss as he pulled back to give a hard thrust against that spot. Noct’s fingernails dug into his shoulders as the prince keened into his mouth, scrambling for purchase with the onslaught of pleasure. Too much more of this, and Prompto knew that he wouldn’t last long at all, so he increased his pace, kissed Noct harder and reached a hand up to tug on the prince’s hair while his other hand tugged on his erection.

Suddenly, Noct went still, his body held taught and a cry coming from his lips. The warm wetness on his hands and the tightening around him sent Prompto over the edge to his own orgasm, hips thrusting erratically as he rode it out.

After, he somehow managed to not collapse on Noct. He held himself above the other for a moment, not ready to pull out just yet.

“Holy shit.” Noct breathed out, chest heaving, “That- We should- We should do that again.”

The endorphins running through Prompto’s system, coupled with Noct’s words, caused the blond to burst out laughing. He finally pulled out, removing the condom and tying it off before dropping it into the nearby trash can and collapsing next to Noct.

“Gotta give me like, half an hour, bud.” He chuckled, pulling Noct into an embrace. He didn’t miss the small grimace on Noct’s face, nor the way he shuffled a little uncomfortably. “I hurt you?” He questioned in concern.

Noct shook his head, then let out a soft sigh. “A little.” He admitted. “Lot less than I was expecting.”
Wasting no time, Prompto reached into the armiger and pulled out a potion, breaking the vial over Noct and allowing the healing magic to do its work. As soon as it did, Noct relaxed and let out a soft breath.

“Sorry.” Prompto apologised. “First time can hurt a bit.”

“Worth it.” Noct shuffled to kiss Prompto, their lips moving together gently. “Definitely worth it.” He pulled back and lay his head on Prompto’s shoulder.

They lay like that for a while, quietly enjoying the afterglow and each other’s company. Prompto was well on his way to sleep when Noct spoke again, his own voice slightly slurred with a content tiredness.

“What’s with the condom?” He questioned. “Pretty sure we don’t have anything…”

“Habit, mostly.” Prompto admitted, “Helps with the mess too. Going without is a bigger conversation, for when we’re not in the middle of things.”

Noct lifted himself up, leaning on his elbows to look down at Prompto with a slight frown. “Habit?” He questioned.

“Well…” Prompto felt himself blush as he shuffled a little uncomfortably. “You were gone for ten years… I wasn’t exactly celibate…” He wasn’t sure why he was suddenly embarrassed about this. Noct knew that he’d been with people before, didn’t he? He probably didn’t know how many he’d been with. “Like. At all.” He added, hoping that Noct would understand without having to have it explained to him.

Noct was quiet for a moment, for a long moment. Prompto wasn’t entirely sure what was going through the prince’s head. Was he upset? Had he expected Prompto to abstain with the vague hope that someday Noct would come back, and they could be together?

“Oh.” Noct’s quiet word didn’t do much to alleviate Prompto’s anxiety, but the blond didn’t push for more. Another eternity passed before he spoke again. “So you always used condoms?”

“More or less.” Still unsure, Prompto decided to just answer things honestly. “After the first guy, anyway.”

“What was your first time like?”

“No idea.” Prompto snorted, amused by his own fact. “Lots of alcohol. Got very drunk, woke up very hungover, very naked and very much not alone.”

Noct chuckled about that, and Prompto felt himself relax when the prince put his head back on his shoulder.

“Worked out for me, I guess.” He admitted, “Means you know what you’re doing…”

Prompto nodded, his arm tightening around Noct briefly. “That I do.” He agreed. He could feel that Noct still wasn’t completely relaxed, so he let out a sigh. “You have questions.” As much as he wished they could drop the subject, he knew that it would just eat away at Noct, and that without prompting, the prince wouldn’t bring it up again.
“How many?” The question came faster than Prompto was expecting, and he shrugged.

“Lost count.” He admitted, “But… a lot.”

“Why… so many?” Noct sounded uncomfortable, and he was shifting nervously in Prompto’s embrace. This wasn’t an easy conversation for him, and Prompto wanted to know what was going on in his head.

“It was the end of the world. Everyday we were thrown into life and death situations. I’d figured out how I was made and… I guess I just wanted to feel something. Feel human, I guess.”

“Did you love them?” Noct’s voice was getting quieter, as if he was afraid to know the answer, and suddenly it clicked in Prompto’s mind. Noct was feeling insecure and jealous.

“No.” He reassured Noct, “Came close with the first one. But I left before I let myself.” He moved so that he could look down at Noct, using his free arm to gently lift the prince’s chin. “My heart always has, and always will belong to you.”

Noct nodded, giving a small smile. There was still a little awkwardness in the air, but when Noct settled back down against Prompto, he was relaxed.

“Good to hear.” The prince muttered, stifling a yawn and readying himself to go back to sleep.

His nap would have to wait, however. A few moments after their conversation ended, there was a knock at the bedroom door and Ignis voice.

“If you wish to greet Lady Lunafreya, you’ll need to be ready in twenty minutes.”

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Chapter End Notes

As always, please consider joining our Discord server! https://discord.gg/4WDhMVb (Note, these links are set to never expire).

Sorry for the delay in updates. I'm struggling with some IRL stuff at the moment, and I'm super stressed. To the point where I slept for almost 30 out of the last 48 hours and haven't actually eaten in two days (oops). My updates will still be erratic, but I haven't given up or abandoned this fic. Please bear with me :(
Once again, I'm sorry for the long wait. It seems that I'm going to be updating weekly from now on, at least for the foreseeable future.

This is kind of a filler chapter, but the next one has a LOT going on. Shit is about to hit the fan...

Twenty minutes was nowhere near enough time to get ready. At first, Noct had suggested they shower together, but five minutes of heated kisses and wandering hands had Prompto pulling away.

“Okay. Not gonna get anywhere if we try to do this together.” He muttered, head leaning back against the shower wall. Noct took the opportunity to nibble on his neck, and Prompto held back a moan, his resolve crumbling ever so slightly. “Nooooocccc….” His utterance was a half moan, half warning. “C’mon dude. We should get ready.”

“Takes us five minutes to get ready.” Noct muttered against Prompto’s skin, pushing his body close, arms winding around Prompto’s shoulders. “Gives us fifteen minutes for this.”

“Dude. I’m not going to meet Lady Lunafreya with a hard on.” Prompto finally managed to gently shove Noct away, an amused look on his face. He gave Noct a small peck of a kiss and dodged his boyfriend’s arms as he stepped out of the shower. “I’ll clean up when you’re done.” He told him, “You should probably make the shower cold.” He added, smirking as his eyes roamed Noct’s aroused body.

“Proommmm.” Noct whined, but let out a familiar sigh. He agreed with Prompto, even though he really didn’t want to. “Fine.” He muttered, reaching up and changing the temperature of the shower.

Nineteen minutes and twelve seconds later, they were both fully dressed and slipping on their shoes when Ignis entered the apartment. “Ready to go?” He questioned, looking at the pair with a raised eyebrow, leading Prompto to wonder just how obvious their previous activities were.

“Let’s go already.” Noct muttered, pushing his way past his advisor and leading them down to the parking garage.

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They arrived only moments before Luna, stepping out of their own car just as the Regalia pulled up. Cor assisted Luna out of the vehicle and they met at the foot of the stairs leading up to the Citadel.

Prompto had no idea how a meeting of the two royals should have gone, but he was rather sure that the traditional greeting wasn’t the two throwing their arms around each other. Still, even with Cor’s eyeroll and Ignis’ sigh of resignation, to Prompto, it seemed perfect.

Luna and Noct hugged for a long moment, neither of them seeming to want to pull away, but
eventually even they had to succumb to propriety. They separated, Noct’s hands remaining on
Luna’s shoulders as he looked down at her, a wide smile on his face.

“It’s good to see you again.” He said quietly.

“As it is you.” Luna returned Noct’s smile for a moment longer before gracefully stepping out of his
grip. She glanced behind Noct before turning back to him, her smile turning amused. “Your
friends?” She prompted.

“Right!” Noct turned, excitedly and gestured to everyone. “My shield, Gladiolus Amicitia.” He
introduced, and Gladio gave a polite bow. “My advisor, Ignis Scientia.” Ignis also gave a bow, a little
deeper than Gladio.

“And-” Noct finally stepped away from Luna to put his arm around Prompto’s shoulders and bring
him forward. “This is Prompto!” He announced, sounding very proud. “You wrote to him before?”

Completely unsure of what he was supposed to do, Prompto fell into a bow - probably deeper than
was required. Luna gave a soft laugh and took him by the shoulders, easily dislodging Noct’s grip.

“It is good to finally meet you all.” She greeted them before turning her attention to the still bowed
Prompto. “Dear Prompto,” Her voice definitely carried the air of someone greatly amused but trying
to hide it. She guided Prompto into a standing position and looked up at him for a moment before
drawing him into a gentle hug. “Thank you, for all that you have done.”

Slowly, cautiously, and a little anxiously, Prompto returned the embrace. It didn’t last nearly as long
as the one she had shared with Noct, but the warmth and affection was still there.

“Lady Lunafreya!” Regis’ warm voice came from the top of the stairs and Luna pulled away from
Prompto to turn to face him. She gave a small bow as the king descended the stairs, and allowed
herself to be pulled into an embrace once they joined them. “It’s good to see you here, safe at last.”

Luna briefly hugged the king back before taking a step away to give him another small, polite bow.
“Honoured King Regis,” She spoke formally. “I thank you for showing me hospitality on such short
notice. I am humbled to receive your kindness.”

Regis bowed in return, showing her the respect that her station demanded. “I am honoured to receive
you as my guest.” He too, spoke formally before standing to his full height. “Now,” He continued,
his tone much less formal. “I have taken the liberty of asking the cooks to prepare us a breakfast, if
you would like to join us? The journey must have been hard, for you to have arrived so quickly.”
Regis gestured to the doors behind him.

The king had decided on the informal dining lounge and the group gathered around the table. When
Cor gave a bow and began to leave, Regis simply gestured for him to take a seat and join them. With
only a moment of hesitation, Cor did as he was silently bid and took a seat, looking a little confused
but saying nothing.

Prompto watched, somehow managing to not react when Noct sat down with a small wince.
Apparently while the potion had taken the edge off the after effects of their morning activities, it
hadn’t gotten rid of them completely.

Even though now definitely wasn’t the time, or the place, Prompto couldn’t help feel a little
satisfaction and pride, knowing that he was the reason Noct was feeling a little tender - and what
he’d done to make him that way.

He blushed slightly, both because of his thoughts, and because of the way Luna was looking at Noct with thinly veiled amusement, and the way her eyes flicked to him.

“Now that we’re away from prying ears,” Regis began, waiting until after the serving staff had left a large variety of food on the table. “We can speak freely. Noctis has informed me of his journey through time, am I to believe that you have also returned to us from the future?”

“Yes.” Luna bowed her head in acknowledgement. “I believe it is his intention to change the will of the fates.”

Prompto watched, listening in, but didn’t interrupt or say anything. Even though Noct had assured him of his position in his life, Prompto was still feeling somewhat like an outsider. To him, this felt like a family affair, if not a royal one, and he couldn’t yet count himself among the members of the ruling family.

He waited until he saw Ignis and Gladio both fill up their plates before reaching for his own breakfast.

“You don’t share his goal?” Regis continued, his tone questioning and slightly surprised.

Luna paused for a moment, looking at her bagel with an expression of concern and thought. “While I do hope he is successful,” She spoke, lifting her head to speak directly to Regis, “And his is the outcome I wish for, I am afraid that my role in the prophecy has been predetermined, as has his. I will stand by him, and aid him in whatever way I can, as is my duty and my will. But I hold little faith that his goal can be accomplished.”

She gave Noct a small, sympathetic smile, as if she was apologising for her belief. “I have been raised to believe the gods’ will to be absolute, and that it is not my place to challenge them thus.”

“You’re gonna help us anyway, right?” Prompto piped up, unable to hold his tongue any longer. The idea that Luna of all people would stand in their way was a little too much for him to handle, and he needed to know now if she was friend or foe in this.

“Yes,” Luna responded easily, “I will assist you in any way that I can. Please, do not confuse my lack of confidence for unwillingness.” She finished buttering her bagel and took a small bite.

“Well, with however you decide, I have had a suite prepared for you, for as long as you will stay.” Regis told Luna. “You are always welcome here, for as long, or as short as you wish. Though should you decide to venture beyond our walls, I would request that you take an escort, lest the Empire decide to recapture you.”

“Thank you,” Luna bowed her head, “For your hospitality, and your understanding.”

Prompto had no idea what understanding that was, but this time, he kept his mouth shut.

The rest of breakfast was mostly uneventful. Casual conversation was had by all, even Prompto once he relaxed. Luna was bright and a joy to be around, and Prompto found himself thinking of her fondly. Her letters didn’t do her justice, and he was glad that he finally got to meet her.

At least meeting her this way, he didn’t have to hold back his jealousy of an impending wedding.
Eventually, breakfast was over. Noct offered to show Luna to her rooms. Prompto was about to leave them to it, when Noct threw his arm around his shoulder and began to drag him along.

“Your Citadel is a work of beauty.” Luna commented, her arm slipping through Noct’s free one as she walked beside him. Noct let go of Prompto’s shoulders, to gently, almost hesitantly take his hand.

With a rush of fondness, Prompto took the offered hand and squeezed it, finding Noct’s slight nervousness endearing. They hadn’t yet talked about how public they wanted to be, and holding hands while strolling through the Citadel was kind of public, but really, it was a first step. By taking Noct’s hand, Prompto was letting him know that he was okay with this.

“I never really thought about it.” Noct admitted to Luna, taking the chance to look up and around at the marble walls. “I guess I took it for granted.”

“I know the feeling.” Luna agreed, “Many a time I have been told something similar of Fenestella Manor, and yet to me, it has always just been home.”

“Sometimes it’s easier to see beauty in the familiar through someone else’s eyes.” Noct gently squeezed Prompto’s hand. “That’s why I love looking at Prom’s pictures.” He added, “Even if it’s something I’ve seen myself, his photo’s make everything look so much better.”

Prompto felt himself blush darkly at the compliment. He knew that Noct liked his photos - the prince had often asked him to ‘take a shot from here’ or pointed things out that he wanted captured - but to hear him say so so blatantly, to Luna was just a little more than Prompto knew what to do with.

“I would love to see some of your photographs.” Luna leaned forward, looking past Noct to see Prompto, “If you would be willing to share them with me.”

“Oh course!” Prompto agreed quickly. Really, how could he turn her down? It wasn’t like he didn’t like showing off some of his favourite shots. “But uh- I just take the pictures, you know. If I see something pretty… I’m not really-” His words got cut off by Noct’s elbow in his ribs.

“Don’t you dare say you’re no good.” He warned, apparently knowing exactly what Prompto was about to say. “C’mon. We’re here.” Noct let go of Prompto’s hand and slipped his arm from Luna so he could reach forward and open a set of doors.

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The rooms beyond were extravagant, looking very similar to Noct’s suite, if not a little smaller. Umbra and Pryna were already there, and both greeted them with excited barks. With a big grin, Prompto knelt down to catch Pryna as the dog rushed at him, happily wagging her tail.

“Hey there Tiny!” He greeted, “Who’s a good puppy?” He questioned as he nuzzled the dog, much to Luna’s amusement. “You are! That’s who! Such a good girl!”

“Careful.” Noct muttered jokingly to Luna, “He might try to steal your dog.”

Luna giggled, crouching down to gently pat Umbra as she watched Prompto and Pryna. “Pryna cannot be stolen.” She told Noct, “If she follows you home, it’s because she wants to.”
Noct again looked at Prompto, who was now rolling on the floor with one very happy dog crawling all over him. He let out a soft sigh, “I’m going to end up with a pet dog, aren’t I?” He questioned, half rhetorically.

“It does seem that way.” Luna was watching Pryna while still giving Umbra a gentle pat. After a moment, the dark dog pulled away and came up to Noct, standing on his back legs to paw at the prince’s knees.

“Hey there, Umbra. Long time, no see.” Noct greeted him, gently rubbing at his head before turning back to Prompto. “Hey Prompto! How about we actually get in the room?” He questioned, gesturing at the still open door.

“Oh- Right!” The blond gathered Pryna in his arms and rose, carrying the squirming dog inside, where Luna had already taken a seat.

Rolling his eyes with fondness, Noct closed the door behind them and joined them, taking a seat opposite Luna, and snorting in amusement as he watched Prompto attempt to sit with Pryna still all but clinging to him.

“I still can’t believe you’re really here.” Noct muttered, turning his attention back to Luna. “Doesn’t feel real.”

“I assure you, I am real, and I am truly here.” Luna reached over the small distance between them and gently placed her hand on his arm, as if to reassure him that this wasn’t actually a dream. “I am glad that our reunion in this time was far less eventful than our last.”

“You and me both.” Noct chuckled a little, placing his hand over hers for a moment before leaning back in his seat. “Don’t think I could take on Leviathan again.” He added, not mentioning what else had happened during that battle.

“You have retained their blessings.” It wasn’t a question, so much as a request for confirmation, and Noct nodded, not bothering to elaborate.

“I mean, that’s good for you, right?” Prompto asked, finally looking up from Pryna to address Luna. “I heard that waking the six made you sick..?”

“Indeed.” Luna smiled softly at Prompto, “It placed a strain on my body, that I will not have to encounter this time around.”

“You and me both.” Noct chuckled a little, placing his hand over hers for a moment before leaning back in his seat. “Don’t think I could take on Leviathan again.” He added, not mentioning what else had happened during that battle.

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“Indeed.” Luna smiled softly at Prompto, “It placed a strain on my body, that I will not have to encounter this time around.”

“It was hurting you?” This was the first that Noct had heard of that. He knew that awakening the gods, and talking to them was exhausting, but he hadn’t realised that Luna was actually getting hurt because of it. Part of him - a very large part of him - wanted to tell Luna off, to scold her for not telling him, for putting herself in danger, for -

But one look from Luna stopped that train of thought. Even if she had told him, even if he had asked her to stop, or refused to partake in the covenants, she would have still done it. It was her duty, and she had always felt bound by her duty.

Slowly, Noct took a deep breath, and let it out. “You won't need to do that this time, right?” He questioned, and she shook her head.

Small mercies. At least this time around, her life would be longer, and with less hardships. “How
long can you stay?” He asked, trying to get away from this subject.

“As you are aware, I cannot remain in one place for too long.” Luna began, “My duty calls for me to travel, to aid as many as I can, and to ease their suffering. I cannot do this if I remain stationary. Though it has been some time since an Oracle has been able to aid those in Lucis, so I wish to begin here.”

“There aren’t many in the city with the scourge.” Prompto told her, “The wall protects us, and even the people that have been infected, won’t show symptoms as long as they stay within the King’s Wall.”

Luna nodded, “Which is why I intend on travelling around Lucis in the near future. I cannot, however, do my job in secret.” With this, she turned to Noct, “Noctis, I will need for the people to know where to find me. I understand your desire to keep me safe, and I also understand that to tell the population of Lucis would be to tell the Empire of my whereabouts. I do not wish to put Lucis in danger, but I will not forsake my calling for long.”

“You’re not a prisoner here, Luna.” Noct said quietly, “I do want you to stay. I want to know that you’re safe, and that the Empire can’t get you, but I get it. You’re the Oracle. You keep the darkness away, and you lift people’s spirits. As long as people can see you, there’s hope. But please, when you do go out, take some Glaives with you?” He requested, knowing that to ask, or even to beg for her to stay like he wanted to, would get them nowhere.

It wouldn’t be fair to ask that of her, and to demand it would make him no better than the empire from which she had fled.

“I will remain here, for the time being.” Luna assured him, “Though there is a certain man that I would prefer not to know.”

“Drautos.” Noct didn’t have to ask, he knew who she was talking about. Luna had been there, at the fall of Insomnia. She had probably seen him, and she knew that he was a traitor. “I don’t think he knows, but your arrival wasn’t exactly the most subtle thing in the world.”

“If you know of his tretary, has he been apprehended?”

“No.” Prompto sighed, shifting in his position at the other end of Noct’s couch. Pryna was curled up and asleep on his lap. “We don’t have any proof.”

“We do now.” Noct frowned, thinking, “The word of the Oracle is trusted to be true.” He turned to Luna, “If you tell dad that you saw him, that you know he’s the traitor, then that’s all we’ll need.”

“But if we lock him up now, won’t the Empire know something’s up?” Prompto questioned.

“Probably.” Noct felt his shoulders slump as he realised that they still couldn’t do anything about the man that had apparently betrayed them all.

“I believe that is the lesser of two evils.” Luna said after a small pause. “Titus Drautos is the man responsible for not only the fall of Insomnia, but for the death of the King. Had it not been for Regis protecting me, I would have likely fallen to his blade also. He was instrumental in their planning. The Empire may know that something is wrong, should he stop reporting in, but it may delay, or even prevent their planned invasion.”
Noct felt himself freeze. He knew that Drautos had betrayed them, he knew that he was a spy for the Empire. He even knew that he had killed Luna’s mother and orchestrated the downfall of Tenebrae. But what he hadn’t known, was that Drautos had killed his father.

Again, he took a deep breath and let it out slowly, keeping himself calm in the way that Ignis had always taught him. “I agree.” Noct said slowly, “If we’re lucky, he hasn’t told the Empire enough for them to get through the Wall. If we’re not...at least we wouldn’t have to watch our backs for friendly fire.”

“So we tell the king?” Prompto asked, gently placing Pryna on the floor so he could curl up next to Noct, pressing against him gently to comfort the prince.

“I will make an appointment to speak with him tomorrow.” Luna agreed, “I will tell him all that I know, and he will be able to decide from there.”

Noct and Prompto both nodded in agreement, and an odd silence fell over the room.

“What are your plans, to defy fate?” Luna asked after a moment, standing and making her way to the small kitchen area. She rummaged around the draws and cupboards for a moment, before finding the store of tea and coffee. She gestured at the cups in the cupboard, silently asking if either man wanted something.

Both waved her off, but Noct spoke, answering her question. “Not… so much.” He admitted. “Honestly, our main plan was to keep you safe. Ardyn’s agreed to hold off on the summoning darkness thing.” When Luna raised an eyebrow, Noct realised that he would have to elaborate.

“When we found out that he came back with us, he and I struck up a deal. He doesn’t want our fate, any more than we do. And he had even less of a choice than us. So... he’s going to do what he can to help while I think of something. His only goal is to be allowed to die.”

“And if you cannot find a solution?”

“Then I do it again.” Noct admitted. “I don’t know if we can change anything. I don’t know if this is all for nothing, and we might end up having to go through it all again. But... We have to try, you know. Even if we can only save a handful more than last time, it’ll still be something.”

Luna had finished making her tea, and returned to her seat. She sipped at it for a moment before giving a small nod. “It is my calling to aid you in the banishment of the darkness. You are right, there may not be another way, but if you find it, I will help you. However I can.”

“Thanks, Luna.”

They stayed with Luna well into the evening. While the conversation stayed light and away from the world’s end, they did have a lot to talk about. By the time the sun was setting, they had all drunk their fill of tea, and in Prompto’s case, coffee, and were comfortably sitting around the small fireplace.

Noct was surprised, when he turned to say something to Prompto, only to find him fast asleep, his head gently cushioned in Noct’s lap, arms curled around Pryna. The prince couldn’t help the small smile as he looked down at his lover, his fingers gently stroking through his hair.

“I see that you have attained your fondest wish.” Luna spoke quietly, watching the pair with a small
“What do you mean?” Noct asked, only half paying attention to her when Prompto mumbled in his sleep and nuzzled his face against Noct’s legs.

“Was it not your desire to be with him?” Luna questioned. “I believe the longest letter I ever received from you was about Prompto, and your lament of the laws preventing your partnership. It seems you have found a way to circumvent them.”

Noct couldn’t help but blush slightly at her words. It was true, his letters had often been lacking, but he remembered the one she was talking about. Instead of the usual three or four lines, he had sent her almost three full pages, asking for advice on how not to feel for Prompto.

Her response had been far from helpful. ‘You cannot control your hearts’ desire, you must simply accept it.’ Not what sixteen year old Noct wanted to hear.

“How do you know that?” Noct questioned, almost defensively. “We’ve always been pretty touchy.”

Luna chuckled and put her last cup of tea down on the table, leaning forward to give Noct a look that could only be described as smug. “I may be the Oracle,” She began, “But I am no prude. You have been very careful with the way you sit today, and you are constantly gravitating towards him. My, if I’m not wrong, the two of you were… together not long before I arrived.”

Noct was glad he hadn’t been trying to drink tea. If he had, he knew that it would be all over the table, or choking him worse than his shock already was. He coughed, his eyes wide and his cheeks crimson with embarrassment. Not only at her words, but at the fact that it was Luna saying them. Luna, the Oracle. The very picture of purity and innocence.

Was talking about his sex life.

Apparently his spluttering was all the confirmation Luna needed. She laughed at him and shook her head fondly, leaning back to sit properly in her seat. “I am happy for you.” She assured him, “You deserve all the happiness that you can get, and I know that he provides a great deal of it for you.”

Noct nodded, looking back down at the blond sleeping in his lap. “He always has.” He admitted, voice quiet, “Even when we couldn’t… be.” He didn’t have to elaborate on that for her to understand what he was saying. “Now it’s just…” He fell quiet for a moment, not sure how to voice his thoughts.

Luna gave him all the time he needed, and eventually he found himself speaking again, his eyes never leaving Prompto’s sleeping face. “When we were in Niflheim, just before I was taken into the crystal I made Prompto a promise. I said that when this was all over, I’d break down the borders between kingdoms and make the world a better place. He said that he would be ‘ever at my side’. That he would wait for me, that he would never lose faith in me… And he never did. Even when we thought we couldn’t ever be more than friends, even when things got hard, when I left for ten years, even when the damn world ended, he was still there. At my side. Never wavering…”

He finally looked up from Prompto to see Luna looking at him with a soft, understanding smile.

“When we first came back here, I honestly didn’t think that we could change things.” He found himself admitting. “The others… they all said that if we could change even the smallest thing, save even one more life, then it would all be worth it. Prompto was so adamant that something could be
done and - I believed him.

“Even though I know that everything in this world is preordained, that what happened before will happen again. Even though I’ve seen through the eyes of the gods and know that we can’t change anything … Hearing the way Prompto spoke about it… how hopeful and optimistic he was… I believe it can happen. And for him…

“For him, I will make it happen.”

Chapter End Notes

Discord: https://discord.gg/esGdEpD

Real life is getting a bit much at the moment, and I'm struggling with some aspects of this fic (my brain is now giving me more inspiration for the ENDING, not the large chunk between now and then x.x, or super fluffy stuff that I have no idea how to get in).

Also, I have decided to sort of mesh the last two arcs of this fic into one, so this is to be the last arc, but there will be more going on in it. I hope my plan for it works :)
I'm actually most of the way done with the next chapter too, so that shouldn't take too long.

Also, some of you may not have noticed, but this fic is now part of a series. There is a side fic now available to read. Feel free to go and check it out (and please let me know what you think when you do!!)

Monday came, and along with it, a council meeting. Noct was dragging his feet, much to the amusement of Prompto - who had finally read through his contract and realised that he was a much bigger deal than he’d first thought.

“C’mon…” Prompto grinned as he pushed Noct out of the bedroom door. “You know they have to wait for us to start. You really want the lecture about being late again?”

“Morning. Why did it have to be in the morning?” Noct mumbled, allowing himself to be lead to the apartment door. “And then we have to go to school. What the hell?” He complained.

“You need to study too.” Noct pointed out around a yawn, leaning heavily on Prompto. They were in the parking garage now, Ignis already waiting patiently in the driver's seat of their car.

“Nah.” Prompto shook his head, “I’m good.” He ushered Noct into the back seat and climbed in after him. “Could probably graduate now if I wanted to.”

“Show off.” Noct leaned sideways and dropped his head onto Prompto’s shoulder and nuzzled it a little. “You should.” He muttered. “Then I can get a tutor and we won’t have to go back to school. Ever.”

“Excepting in instances of time travel, of course.” Ignis joked, glancing in the rear-view mirror to look at them. “Are the two of you planning on announcing your partnership?” He questioned.

Neither of them said anything for a moment, but then Prompto shrugged and looked down at Noct, half expecting him to be asleep. The prince wasn’t, and he turned his head to look up at Prompto.

“Yeah.” Noct muttered, after a silent conversation with Prompto. “At least to the council.”

“So what do we tell them, exactly?” Prompto questioned, fidgeting in his seat as his usual anxiety began to set in. “I mean, we gonna walk in there and just be like ‘Hey bitches! Guess who’s gay’?”

That got a laugh out of Noct, and he finally sat up a little. Prompto wasn’t given long to miss the warm weight on his shoulder before Noct was shuffling over to the middle seat to press up against
“Beats my plan of just walking in there and making out with you.” The prince shrugged.

In the front seat, Ignis rolled his eyes and let out a sigh. “May I suggest having some decorum.” He muttered, “A simple, ‘I have entered into a romantic relationship with Prompto Argentum’, should suffice.”

Noct pulled his tongue out at Ignis, “You ruin all my fun.”

“Be that as it may,” Ignis chuckled, eyes concentrating on the road. “You would be best not to upset them. While the council no longer has a say in who you date, they can arrange a forced marriage.”

“Even if he’s with me?” Prompto questioned, frowning. He didn’t like that idea, not one bit. He’d been under the assumption that with the law change, he and Noct were free to date - he had no idea that the council could still force a marriage on him.

“If the two of you remain unmarried when Noctis turns eighteen, yes.”

“So we’ll just have to get married before then, then.” Noct dismissed Ignis’ concern with a shrug and Prompto gave a snort of amusement, wondering if Noct would even ask, or if he would simply show up one day and say ‘we’re getting married today’. Either way, Prompto would be down for it.

“And to do that would require the approval of not only both of your parents, but also the Council themselves.” Ignis countered, “A vote in which, I might add, Prompto has no say.”

“Okay, so be nice to the council. Gotcha.” Prompto agreed, nudging Noct in the ribs until the prince gave a reluctant grumble of agreement.

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The meeting began how it usually did, with the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting while everybody made themselves comfortable. Or at least as comfortable as they could.

As the minutes were being read, Prompto was distracted by the doors once again opening, and a squad of Kingsglaive filing in. This wasn’t normal. Sure, the council meetings usually had one or two Glaive’s keeping watch, but they were normally outside the door. And usually a pair. Not the - Prompto quickly counted - nine that were slowly surrounding the table. As soon as they took their places, King Regis stood, raising a hand to silence the councilman who had been reading out loud.

Silence fell across the room, nobody daring to make a move until they knew what the king was up to.

Prompto shared a concerned look with Noct, both ready to spring into action if they were needed. This many Glaives joining the council meeting did not bode well.

Thus far, Prompto had managed to hide the fact that he was able to use the armiger from the vast majority of people. In fact, only Regis, Clarus and Cor knew that he could - outside Noct and the others, of course. It had seemed easier that way, rather than having to explain himself, and potentially get Noct into trouble. So he held back from summoning his guns just yet. At least until it was absolutely necessary.
The room was still frozen. All eyes on Regis as he stood calmly, surveying the room, and in particular, the seat Drautos had taken. Eventually, he spoke, his voice loud and commanding.

“It has come to my attention that there is a traitor amongst us.” He said, confident in his words, leaving no room for argument.

Prompto had met and spoke with Regis a good number of times now, and never once had he heard him sound like this. Like an actual King. It was kind of scary, and Prompto was on his feet before he realised it.

Beside him, Noct also rose, a blue glow surrounding him that marked him ready to draw his weapons.

Suddenly, the room erupted into loud conversation, the council demanding to know who, and what proof the King had to make such claims. They were outraged, afraid, offended. Prompto couldn’t tell exactly. He wasn’t paying a whole lot of attention to them, instead focusing on the wall by the door, keeping Drautos in his peripheral vision, while not looking directly at him.

Once again silence fell, and Prompto turned to look at the king (still keeping Drautos in his view). Regis was holding his hand up for silence. “It is on the word of the Oracle that I make this claim.” He didn’t elaborate. He didn’t have to. Noct had been right when he’d said that the word of the Oracle is considered the absolute truth. So Regis could allow the rest of the council believe that the gods had told Luna, and that she had passed on the message.

Prompto was glad of that. It meant a lot less explaining.

Eventually, Drautos himself spoke up. “Your Majesty… we must hear these words from the Oracle for ourselves.” He told the king. “It is the duty of the council to be sure of these things before allowing the king to act, lest we allow a tyranny.”

“So that’s what that meant.” Prompto muttered under his breath, quietly enough that only Noct heard him. There had been a few lines of his contract that he hadn’t understood, and this had been one of them.

Louder, he addressed the council. “I have heard these words.” He told them, eyes now focused directly on Drautos. “Directly from the Oracle herself.”

“As have I.” Noct added.

The council once again began to speak over one another - probably protesting and wanting to hear it for themselves - when the king raised his hand to call for silence again. Without a word, he turned to the Glaives and gave a small nod. Instantly, they rushed in, subduing and binding Drautos before he had the chance to even react.

“Unhand me!” Drautos protested, attempting to wrestle his way free of the men holding him against the table.

“Titus Drautos, yours was the name given to me.” Regis spoke quietly, his voice somehow still carrying over the distance. “The Oracle has requested you be restrained before she makes her appearance.”

“The Oracle is here?!” A councilman asked in surprise, tearing his eyes from Drautos to look up at
the king, who gave a nod.

“Noctis, if you would?” He gestured to the door, and Noct all but fled to it, opening it as quickly as he could.

“Luna.” He greeted the woman waiting on the other side of the door, flanked by four more Glaives. “He’s held down.” He reassured her, stepping aside to allow her entry. She gave him a small smile before walking into the room.

She stood at the end of the table, the Glaives that had been escorting her standing slightly behind her, ready to protect her if they had to. Once the room finally fell silent, she spoke.

“I have been made aware of a secret identity held by the man that slayed my mother. General Glouca has been living here, in Insomnia, as one of your most trusted, living under the name of Titus Drautos.” She was looking at each and every member of the council in turn, speaking in the same way that she did when she addressed large crowds. “It is through the powers of the gods, and the aid of Prince Noctis, that I am able to tell you this today. I hold no doubts as to the validity of my claim.”

“That’s it!?” Drautos protested, still trying to get free of the four Glaives that were successfully holding him against the table. “You’re willing to accuse me of high treason on the word of a child!?”

“I am no child, General.” Luna addressed him directly, turning to face him with a stony expression. “That privilege was taken from me the moment you killed my mother.”

“For the Oracle to speak with such conviction…” One of the council members spoke hesitantly, “We must, for now, assume it to be true.”

Regis nodded in agreement. “Until we can prove otherwise.” He agreed. “Titus Drautos, as of this moment, you are stripped of your rank and to be held in the custody of the Crown, on suspicion of espionage and the intent to commit treason. You will be treated humanely until the investigation is completed.” He gestured to the Glaives, who lifted him to his feet and hauled him away.

Once he had vacated the room, the King returned his attention to the rest of the council. “Due to the position Drautos held within our forces, I have put him under the purview of Marshal Cor Leonis, and the Crownsguard. They will take custody of him momentarily.”

That made sense. Prompto slowly lowered himself to his seat as he listened to the king.

Drautos had been the captain of the Kingsglave. It wouldn’t be a huge surprise to find out that some of them were still loyal to him, even if they heard why he was locked up. By putting him under the watchful eyes of not only Cor, but the Crownsguard too, Regis was eliminating the possibility of a Glaive attempting to let him out.

“I apologise for the commotion.” Regis was saying to the council, “It seemed the most expedient solution. I will suggest that we adjourn early, and reschedule this meeting for another time. Unless there was something important that cannot wait?”

Nobody spoke, but slowly, Noct stood.

“Now?” Prompto hissed, eyes wide as he realised what Noct was about to do. In light of what had just happened, it didn’t seem like the best time.
Noct just shrugged at Prompto before facing the rest of the council. “I have a quick announcement to make.” He said, voice falling into a formal tone. “As is our custom, I am officially informing the Council of a change in my relationship status. I have entered into a romantic relationship with Prompto Argentum, and consider him to be my Chosen.”

Prompto stared up at Noct for a moment, the significance of that word not lost on him. Noct was essentially skipping the dating part, and telling the entire council that he was serious enough about Prompto to consider marrying him. Of course, Prompto already knew that, but to hear Noct inform the council in such a matter of fact way… It sent an anxiety threaded thrill through him.

If the council were to protest, he wasn’t sure what he would do. As it was, he stood beside Noct, ready to take on anything they could throw at them. By his side, like he would always be.

One councilmember did stand and open his mouth, probably to argue, but he was beaten to it by Luna.

“As the Oracle, I approve of this union.” Her voice was soft, but determined. She would not be argued with. She turned to Noct and Prompto, “You have my blessings and good will both.” She said, bowing down to them.

“Thank you, Lady Oracle.” Noct replied formally, bowing to Luna. “We will go forth with your blessing.”

The councilman who had stood to protest simply sat down, finding himself unwilling to argue with the Oracle’s will.

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“Well that was easier than I thought it would be.” Noct muttered as they climbed into the back of Ignis’ car.

“Yeah. Thanks to Luna.” Prompto agreed. Once inside the car, he leaned forward to speak to Ignis. “You’ll probably get an official statement soon. But I’ll give you the cliffnotes.” He told him, “Drautos has arrested. Luna blessed our ‘union’ and Noct is still whiny about school.”

Ignis’ eyebrows rose at the first, he nodded at the second, and rolled his eyes at the third. “As the meeting ended much earlier than planned, what’s say we find something to eat before I drop you at school then?” He suggested.

“Sounds good, Specs.” Noct agreed quickly, pulling Prompto back into the back seat so that Ignis could pull the car away. The advisor didn’t get far, however, as a Glaive approached.

With a slight frown, Ignis rolled the window down to allow the Glaive to bend down and speak with him.

“Can I help you?” Ignis questioned politely.

“Hey, I’m Nyx Ulric.” The Glaive introduced himself, “I’ve been assigned to Lady Lunafreya’s protection duty.” Ignis just raised his eyebrow, waiting for the Glaive to explain why he was interrupting their plans to tell them that. “She uh- wants to go with you.”

“Very well.” Ignis agreed easily, “Though as of yet we have no concrete plans of our destination.
There is, however, enough room in our vehicle for the two of you to join us.”

Though he looked uncomfortable, Nyx nodded in agreement. “I’ll go get her.” He agreed, stepping away from the car before anything else could be said. He returned a few moments later, Luna in tow.

She joined Noct and Prompto in the back seat, Noct shuffling over to the middle seat to accommodate her, and Nyx took the front passenger seat.

“Lady Lunafreya.” Ignis greeted her, inclining his head forward in a micro bow. “We were about to head to an early lunch. Do you have any preferences?”

“As a matter of fact,” Luna smiled at the rearview mirror, the closest she could get to looking Ignis in the eyes. “In one of our communications, Noctis told me of a place he frequents. I believe it’s called the ‘Crows Nest’?”

Ignis apparently couldn’t help the grimace of distaste that came across his face, but both Prompto and Noct grinned at the idea.

“Sounds good!” Noct announced, “Let’s go, Specs!”

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Lunch with Luna turned into afternoon with Lady Luna. After their brief (thanks to Ignis’ complaining) lunch at the Crows Nest, Luna had requested that they escort her to the shopping centre. She had packed light for her journey to Lucis, and only had the one outfit. So the boys found themselves guiding her around the local mall while she excitedly looked in every shop.

Noct couldn’t quite bring himself to complain about his boredom. Not when it was because Luna was finally able to act like the young woman she was. It was a girl thing, right? To be so excited about shopping for clothes and shoes? Noct had no idea, but Prompto appeared to be enjoying himself.

Since his Chosen was so enthralled by the idea of shopping with the Oracle, Noct, along with Ignis and Nyx had found themselves to be glorified bag boys, trailing after them from one shop to the next.

“Is Prodigy buying her everything in the mall?” Nyx asked, dropping himself into a convenient seat while Prompto and Luna fawned over a long blue dress.

It took Noct a moment to realize why Nyx was calling Prompto that, but then he remembered the first time Prompto had publicly sparred with Gladio in this timeline, and the Glaive that had called him that. Apparently Nyx remembered that too.

“I mean, I’m not gonna stop him if he wants to.” Noct shrugged. “He’s got the money for it.”

“Though I dare say this is making rather a large dent in his savings.” Ignis chuckled, joining Noct and Nyx in taking a seat. “He certainly has the funds to spare.”

“He’s on the council, right?” Nyx questioned, watching as the two blonds moved on to the shoe section, holding up pairs to the dress to see if they matched.

“Yeah. And my retainer. Gets paid for both.” Noct watched Prompto, a soft smile on his face as he watched his love interact with his childhood friend. “He lives with me, so he doesn’t have any real
bills. So he’s got enough saved to treat Luna.”

“Nice to be him!” Nyx commented, “I mean, the money to blow through part. No offense, highness, but you’re not my type.” He joked.

“Too bad,” Noct joined in on the joke, leaning back in his chair. “You don’t know what you’re missing.”

“A lot of grumpy mornings and a constant refusal to eat vegetables.” Ignis remarked dryly.

“Hey guys!” Prompto greeted them as he joined them, taking the last empty seat. “Whatchya up to?” He questioned.

“Wondering how long until your funds dry up and we can go home.” Noct muttered, not really complaining. While he was bored stiff of shopping, it was nice to see both Luna and Prompto being so carefree.

“No idea!” Prompto admitted, grinning. “I have absolutely no clue how much money I have. Just kinda keeping on going until I get declined, I guess.”

“Before today, I estimate it to be just under a quarter of a million Yen. You have spent just under five thousand thus far.” Ignis informed Prompto easily.

“You keep track of his money?” Nyx asked with a confused look.

Ignis simply shrugged. “Somebody has to.”

“So where’s Luna?” Noct asked, looking around but not seeing the Oracle anywhere.

“Trying clothes on.” Prompto answered, gesturing to the changing rooms that were within full view. “Figured she’d be safe enough doing that. She can shout for us if she needs to. No need to have someone watching her, right?”

Noct nodded in agreement. Thus far, nobody had even recognised her, thanks to the fact that she was wearing casual clothes. The danger to her here was minimal, and there were at least three decent fighters within earshot.

“So how many more shops do you guys need to go to?” Noct asked, unable to keep the whining tone from his voice.

“Couple more.” Prompto shrugged, “Gotta get some stuff for me too. Growth spurt baby!”

Noct groaned in frustration. “Fine, but you’re carrying your own shit.” He muttered.

“Why not just put it in the armiger?” Prompto asked, looking at the vast number of bags that the others were already carrying.

Noct rolled his eyes and let out a petulant sigh. “Because that’s a ‘frivolous use of the king’s magic and shouldn’t be used in public’.” He muttered, doing a bad impression of Ignis. Beside him, Ignis rolled his eyes with a small nod.

“It would not do well to draw more attention to us than necessary.” The advisor agreed, “And
flaunting the use of the Crystal’s magic would do little else.”

“Heh, sucks to be you!” Prompto laughed, stretching a little before disappearing back into the displays.

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Their (thankfully) final stop of their shopping trip was to an electronics store. Apparently Prompto needed a new memory card for his camera, since the one he’d carried through the end of the world was getting a little worn out.

Once again, Noct, Ignis and Nyx found themselves sitting in a corner, waiting for Prompto and Luna to conclude their shopping, a pile of bags beside them.

“It seems that Lady Lunafreya and Prompto are getting along rather well.” Ignis commented.

“ Always knew they would.” Noct shrugged, pulling out his phone to idly browse the internet while he waited for his friends. “But I think we accidentally stole her dog…” He added, “Followed us home last night and wouldn’t leave Prom’s side. For a tiny dog, she takes up a lot of space.”

He wasn’t actually grumpy with the idea of taking Pryna in for a while. Even if he had been, and even if he resented the lack of space in the bed, one look at Prompto’s grin turned his mood around completely. Every time she came near him, Prompto would break into the widest smile Noct had ever seen on him. If it wasn’t for the fact that she was a dog, Noct would’ve been very jealous indeed.

“She did seem rather taken with him on our journey.” Ignis leaned back in his seat and summoned a can of Ebony from the armiger.

“What happened to ‘frivolous use’ and ‘not in public’?” Noct questioned, glaring at the can in his advisor’s hand.

“Do you really wish to see me uncaffeinated?” Ignis remarked. “Besides, nobody saw.”

Beside them, Nyx couldn’t help but laugh as the two began to bicker.

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Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone that has left kudos and comments. I absolutely LOVE receiving and reading them! Getting comments actually inspires me to write more, and post more often, so THANK YOU to those that do!

I’m super excited about how much attention this fic is getting. I had a look at my stats today and it blew me out of the water! Holy crickets, that’s a lot of views/hits/comments/kudos. I’m loving it!

As always, please feel free to check out our discord: https://discord.gg/esGdEpD
Title: An Old Friend

Chapter Notes

Hold on to your horses people. This chapter is a hell of a ride.

The later part of the chapter hasn’t been gone over as much, so there may be some mistakes.

The song in this fic is “I may Fall” From the RWBY soundtrack.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmOZL_0rj70

Noct wasn’t used to waking up in the middle of the night. He hadn’t made a habit of it before the world ended, and certainly not since he came back. So when he found himself blinking awake in a darkened bedroom, he knew that something was wrong.

The fact that Prompto wasn’t in bed, but rather sat on the very end of it was also very concerning. With a confused frown, Noct struggled to sit up as sleep tried to call him back under. “Prom?” He questioned, trying to focus on the darkened outline of his Chosen. “‘Sup?”

“I… need to go out for a bit.” Prompto spoke quietly, but Noct had no problem hearing him in the quiet of the night. A quick glance at the clock told Noct the time, and his confusion just deepened. “It’s three in the morning.” He muttered, rubbing at his eyes.

“Yeah.” Prompto sounded far off, like his mind was elsewhere, and Noct was starting to feel more and more awake as the seconds passed. Something was definitely wrong.

“Noct… you gonna go at three in the morning?” Noct questioned, somehow dreading the answer.

Prompto just shrugged, his shoulders rising then falling heavily. “Just… out. I need to be alone.” He answered. “I’ll be home tomorrow, okay? I just… didn’t want you to wake up and find me gone.”

He stood, and that was when Noct realised that Prompto was fully dressed. He watched as the blond picked up a bag from beside the door and hesitated for a moment. “The others… they can explain if you need them to.”

With that, Prompto left. No further explanation, and no word of where he was going. He was just…

Noct gave himself a few more moments to collect himself, just in case he was still asleep and this was a dream. When it became apparent that this was real life, and Prompto really had just walked out, he shook himself awake and stood.

Within minutes, he was dressed and trying to follow Prompto, but finding no hint of where the blond had gone. Defeated, he let himself back into the apartment building and climbed back to the top floor but instead of going back to his own room and going to bed like he probably should have, Noct found himself knocking on Ignis’ Gladio’s door.
It was answered in just a few minutes by a tired looking Ignis, wrapped in a fluffy robe. “Noct?” The advisor questioned, instantly awake. “What’s wrong?”

“Who is it?” Gladio’s voice called from further in the apartment, and Noct took that as his invitation inside. He walked past Ignis and allowed the man to close the door before turning to him.

“It’s Noct!” Ignis called back, and there was a shuffle in the back room. Seconds later, Gladio came out, dressed in nothing but a pair of bright red boxers.

“What’s wrong?” The Shield asked instantly, looking around for a threat.

“Prompto’s gone.” Noct told them, rubbing his face tiredly. “Said he needed to be alone. I can’t find him. Said you can tell me what’s going on?”

“Shit. Fifteenth already?” Gladio muttered, and Ignis reached into his robe to pull out his phone and check.

“Indeed it is.” Ignis let out a sigh and gestured for Noct to take a seat. When the prince did as silently bid, the advisor turned to the kitchen and began to boil some water. “Prompto has a yearly tradition. I believe he’s simply continuing with it.”

“Dunno why he’s going it alone.” Gladio sat down heavily on the couch, leaning back and closing his eyes.

“He always does. I believe that’s the point.” Ignis poured the boiled water into three mugs and began to distribute the hot drinks. When Noct gave him the ‘tell me what you’re talking about’ look, Ignis continued. “Today’s date is the anniversary of the date on which you entered into the Crystal.”

“Every year, Prom goes out and kills as many daemons as he can.” Gladio chimed in, sipping at his drink. “Got a running tally. Tries to ‘beat his score’ every year.” His eyes were still closed, and Noct felt a little guilty for waking them up in the middle of the night. Especially since Prompto had said that he’d be okay.

“He’ll return when he’s ready.” Ignis reassured Noct. “There’s little point in trying to follow him. You’re welcome to remain here if you feel the need.”

If he didn’t want to be alone. That was what Ignis meant. And it wasn’t until now that Noct realised that since they had come back to the past, he hadn’t been alone. Not for any length of time, anyway. Prompto had always been there, at his side, and if for some reason Prompto couldn’t, then one of the others would be there.

If Noct returned to his apartment now, he would be completely alone for the first time in nearly a year. He wasn’t sure if he was ready to do that. Wasn’t sure if he would ever be ready for that. Wasn’t the point in having a Chosen that they would always be by his side? Wasn’t Prompto supposed to always be there?

Then again, Noct couldn’t begrudge him this tradition of his. Not if it helped Prompto feel better. The blond had been trying to hide it, but Noct knew that he was still feeling the effects of his trauma, that he was still having panic attacks. If this helped him feel better…

“Yeah, thanks.” Noct nodded, taking his advisor up on his offer. “I’ll take the couch.”
Unlike his apartment, Ignis and Gladio had two rooms. Noct was a prince, and could sometimes be an ass, but he wasn’t about to wake his friends up in the middle of the night and kick one of them out of their own room.

“No need.” Ignis collected the mugs from the others and gestured to one of the rooms. “That is our spare.” He told him, and Noct nodded, grateful to have the option of a bed.

“K. Night.” He muttered, standing and heading for the spare room. “Thanks.” He added again, just to make sure he said it.

After he left, Ignis and Gladio shared a look and shrugged. They had expected more questions than that, but perhaps the prince was merely too tired to ask why they were sharing a room.

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Hammerhead at twilight was more like what Prompto was used to. Sure, the perimeter gates were gone, and the lights weren’t quite as powerful or plentiful, but seeing Hammerhead like this… it felt like coming home.

Prompto looked around the small space as he parked his newly acquired bike. There were fewer people than he was used to. Takka was in his diner, setting up for the day ahead. The roller doors for the garage were open, and he could hear Cindy’s off key singing as she too got ready for the day.

Not sure where to go from here, Prompto filled the tank of his bike and basked in the early morning light, letting the familiar sounds blanket him until the pump beeped.

With a sigh, he replaced the handle and decided to go for a bit of a walk around. He didn’t really have much of a plan for the day - he needed to wait around until sunset, after all - so he figured he might as well look around and see the differences.

Some things never changed. Like the fact that Cindy was singing along to her phone, sweeping and tidying the workshop. She obviously wasn’t expecting any male customers any time soon, since she was wearing what she usually did when fixing the cars and out of customer’s sight.

She’d once told him that the ridiculous outfit she used to wear was to attract male clientele, and to make sure they didn’t look too closely at the bill. It wasn’t the most ethical thing to do, but times had been hard and the garage had often struggled to make ends meet. Now, she was dressed in her overalls, ready to take on any and all jobs that weren’t fleasing customers.

He watched her dance for a moment, remembering all the times they had done that together in the past. It had definitely made the long nights easier, and had been a fantastic stress relief. Even after their phones had begun to degrade to the point of being almost useless, and the power had been strictly rationed, they had still found a way to dance and sing.

The song on her phone finished, and she let out a sigh, picking up a stray bolt before the next track started. Prompto was starting to feel a bit like a creeper, so he began to walk away, only to freeze in his tracks as he heard the first bar of the next song.

‘There’s a day when all hearts will be broken,
And a shadow will cast out the light,’
Prompto stood rooted to the spot as his and Iris’ vocals filled his ears. Hearing the music and words again was like a physical slap in the face. His body trembled, unable to move as an impossible thought occurred to him.

‘And our eyes cry a million tears, 
Help won’t arrive.’

Cindy sang along, almost drowning out Iris’ adult voice crackling from the speakers. He remembered this, remembered when they’d played with Cindy, when she’d used the last of her phone’s power for the night to record them so she could listen to it whenever she wanted.

‘There’s a day when all courage collapses, 
And our friends turn and leave us behind. 
Creatures of darkness will triumph, 
The sun won’t rise.’

How had the Cindy from this time come to have such a recording? How was it that she knew all the lyrics to a song that hadn’t been written yet, when she hadn’t even recognised him? Had her phone come back with them, when she hadn’t? How?

‘When we’ve lost all hope, 
And succumb to fear, 
When the skies rain blood, 
And the end draws near.’

Without realising it, Prompto found himself singing along, quiet at first, but then picking up volume, voice joining with Cindy’s in a way that it hadn’t for far too long. He still stood in the same spot, eyes fixed on Cindy as he let the music flow through him.

‘I may fall, 
But not like this; it won’t be by your hands. 
I may fall, 
Not this place, not today. 
I may fall, 
Bring it all it’s not enough to take me down. 
I may fall!’

Cindy was staring at him now, her eyes as wide as saucers and her mouth hanging open, the last word dying on her lips. They both stopped singing, the music still playing on in the background. Prompto was the first to move, to take a step forward and approach, while Cindy simply continued to stare at him, gripping her broom tightly.

“How… how do you know that song?” Prompto asked quietly on a shuddering breath, surprised his voice was working at all. He dared not hope. How would it even be possible?

“Could ask you the same thing.” Cindy pointed out, still not moving. Behind them, the music continued, a familiar guitar solo blasting through her speakers.

“I wrote it.” Prompto admitted, barely audible over the music.

He saw Cindy hesitate, saw her begin to tremble as she reached out and paused the music, her eyes
never once leaving Prompto. “I thought I dreamed it.” She admitted quietly, “Pawpaw said I been gone for a month that I don’ remember. Nothin’ ‘cept this dream that felt mighty real. When y’all came here, you didn’ make any notions of you recollectin’ me, so I figured I just heard the song somewhere and it ended up in my dream….”

Prompto shook his head slowly, still staring at Cindy, waiting for the other foot to drop, or for him to wake up. There was no way that what she was saying was true, no way at all. How was it that she would remember, but nobody else? Ardyn and Luna, they both had explanations, they were connected to the Crystal and the gods and the whole prophecy thing. But Cindy? Cindy was barely connected to Noct, let alone all the other stuff. He needed proof, needed to know that this was real, and that it wasn’t some sort of elaborate prank.

“Cin… I… I need to make sure.” He spoke, stopping in his advance when she was just out of reach. She gave him a nod, and he tried to think of something that she would only know if she really did remember the future. “Why did I come to live here?”

“You all had just broken up with that boy of yours. You wanted some space to figure yourself out.” She answered his question easily, and Prompto closed his eyes against the torrent of emotion that was threatening to burst out. “It was real, wa’n’ it?”

Slowly, Prompto nodded, carefully making his way to a nearby empty bench. He sat on it, still looking at Cindy, and still in shock. “Yeah.” He admitted, after a long moment. “After Noct finished the Dawn Rite, he had enough power to send us back in time. I just…” He looked away, eyes finding the bright dessert outside. “I don’t know how or why you came back too.”

“You got me. Last thing I remember, the lights went out and we were fightin’ for our lives. Didn’t think I made it. ’Til I woke up here.”

Prompto frowned, his attention back on Cindy as she jumped onto the bench to join him. He thought about it for a moment. So far, everybody that came back had died in the other timeline. Luna had been dead long before, but everyone else? They’d died only moments before Noct.

Maybe it had been the same with others? Maybe that’s why Cindy came back? Maybe she died at the same time as everyone else and somehow got caught up in their return. If that was the case, had it happened to anybody else? Were there others from their timeline that hadn’t realised it was real?

The possibility caused his head to spin with both elation and dread, and he decided to think on it later. He could try to figure out why Cindy could remember another time, but right now… Right now, he had his friend back.

“Cin…” He found himself pulling her into his arms, his face splitting into a grin. “You remember!” He called, feeling her giggle against his shoulder as his joy overtook him.

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They spent most of the day catching up. It had been nearly a year since they’d come back, after all, and a lot had happened. It had taken them both a lot of getting used to, but Prompto was sure it was harder for Cindy. She hadn’t had an explanation, hadn’t been told what was going on, and worst of all, she’d been alone throughout. But she wasn’t alone any more. Prompto had made sure to give her his new number, and those of the others too. He’d explain to them later why.

“So what’re you doin’ here, anyway?” Cindy asked as the sun was starting to set. “Today’s the
fifteenth, aint it? I thought you’d be out doin’ your thing.”

Prompto shrugged, accepting the coffee Takka handed over to him. “Had to wait until night.” He explained. “Killed a few on my way here, but by the time I got here, the sun was coming up.”

“No need to sound so disappointed.” Cindy laughed, “There was a time you’d’ve given anythin’ to say that.”

Prompto laughed and nodded his agreement. “Yeah. But the sun being up makes hunting daemons a bit of a pain.” He pointed out. “So I figured I’d hang around here until night. Maybe do a few hunts. At least, that was the plan until my friend decided to show up and distract me.”

“Show up? You forget I live here or somethin’?” Cindy rolled her eyes in amusement. “An’ you’re the one distractin’ me! I’m gonna be way behind on my repairs.”

Prompto tried to feel guilty about that, but he was just far too happy to have Cindy back, and couldn’t quite muster the emotions. Instead, he shrugged and looked out the window. The sun was just going down. “It’s gonna be a few hours before the daemon’s really come out to play. I can help you out for a bit if you want.”

Which is how Prompto found himself working on old cars and singing duets across the workshop with Cindy, and for those few hours, he could almost feel like he’d never lost her at all.

Around midnight, an almighty groan came from behind Hammerhead, one familiar in its tenor. An Iron Giant. From the sounds of it, it was still quite a way away, and a quick look out the back of the shop confirmed this. It wasn’t any real threat to Hammerhead, but it was exactly what Prompto had come out here for.

“That’s my cue.” Prompto handed his spanner to Cindy and reached for a rag to clean his hands on before heading to the door.

“Hey Prom,” Cindy called from behind him, “You mind comin’ back here before the sun comes up?”

He didn’t turn around, simply gave a nod and a small wave. That much he could do. They’d lived together in the dark for eight years, planning for the day when the sun would once again grace the sky. Many long nights had been spent discussing how things would go, what would happen next. The least he could do after all that, was stick around to see a sunrise.

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Despite the churning of his stomach and anxiety taking up residence in his chest, Noct found himself following Ignis’ advice and returning to school the next morning. He was exhausted - Ignis’ spare bed was almost as comfortable as his own, but it felt far too empty for Noct to have had any decent rest.

He was also getting strange looks from his classmates. One even pulled him aside to ask where Prompto was, and if he was okay. Apparently it had become very weird indeed to see Noct without his best friend by his side.

After assuring a multitude of classmates and teachers that Prompto was fine, just taking a personal day, Noct found himself gathering missed assignments and homework from their teachers, making
sure to take enough for both himself and Prompto.

They’d been gone for a while, so the stack wasn’t insubstantial. Not for the first time, Noct was happy that he had the ability to hide things away in the nether, and not have to worry about physically carrying it. He ignored the look of astonishment from his classmates and teacher when he stored the large collection away and gathered the rest of his things.

The final bell rang, and Noct was the first out of the classroom, wanting to get home as quickly as possible in the hopes that Prompto would be waiting for him.

Prompto didn’t come home that night, but at least he did send a message, reassuring Noct that he was okay, and a promise to return home the next day. Once again, Noct found himself sleeping in Ignis’ and Gladio’s spare room, unwilling to face his empty apartment. He didn’t sleep any better.

The second day of school was just as long as his first. Without Prompto by his side, Noct found himself feeling the isolation that he had all but forgotten about. A few of his classmates approached him, apparently trying to help alleviate the loneliness that Noct was sure was obvious, but he barely paid them any attention. He kept his focus on his phone in his pocket, hoping that it would ring to let him know that Prompto was home. And dreading that it would ring to let him know that Prompto was hurt.

He had no idea what the teachers had lectured about, his mind unable to focus on them, and the day passed him by like an everlasting daze. Finally though, the final bell rang. This time, Noct wasn’t the first out of the classroom, his exhaustion finally setting in and making it harder to run.

As he neared the front gate, he heard his classmates whisper and gossip. As per usual, he paid them no mind, at least not until he heard Prompto’s name.

“Is that Argentum? What’s he doing with one of those? He’s not even old enough to ride!”

“Well he suddenly got hot.”

“Wonder if he’ll take me on a ride?”

“How’d he get a permit for that?”

Noct frowned at the utterings of his nameless peers, and looked around for what they were talking about. It didn’t take him long to spot Prompto.

He was casually leaning against a motorcycle, helmet in one hand, his phone in the other. He looked like he was playing some sort of game, and hadn’t even noticed the school was emptying. How long had he been there?

After a moment, Prompto lifted his eyes from the screen and saw Noct, a wide smile forming on his face as he lifted his hand in a small wave. All of a sudden, Noct was all but running towards him, his exhaustion forgotten in the wake of seeing Prompto again.

When he reached the bike, and the blond, Noct raised an eyebrow, gesturing at the motorcycle. “What’s this?” He questioned.

“Ragnarok.” Prompto introduced Noct to his bike with a grin. “Bought her on my way out of the city. Needed my own wheels, y’know.”
“Why a bike?” Noct asked, carefully moving to lean against it beside Prompto. He was trying to act cool, to not look how excited he actually was. Prompto was home. He was back. He was within arms reach. He was safe. He was unharmed. Mostly. Noct’s eyes caught the bandage on Prompto’s bicep, and wouldn’t move away from it, even when Prompto was excitedly telling him about his new toy.

“I had to find something to replace Shera.” Prompto was still saying, “Since I left her in the future. Miss her though. Built that thing from the ground up.” He finally seemed to notice Noct’s distraction and frowned. “You okay, buddy? I know I’m not technically old enough to ride this, but the king gave me an exemption…”

Noct shook his head, ignoring that for a moment in favour of reaching out to tenderly run a finger over the knot of the bandage. “What happened?” He asked, voice thick. It wasn’t like he’d never seen Prompto injured before. He’d been injured plenty on their journey, far more severely than this was, but the difference was this time Noct wasn’t there to see it. To help.

“That? Oh, Iron Giant got a lucky shot. I’m fine. Not even bad enough for a potion.” Prompto told him brightly while reaching into the bike’s storage compartment. He pulled out a spare helmet and shoved it into Noct’s hands. “Bandage is just to stop infection.” He added, gently nudging Noct’s hands until the prince realised what he was holding.

He looked up from the helmet to Prompto, and then to the bike before looking at Prompto again. “You want me to ride that thing?” He questioned, voice squeaking a little more than he would’ve liked.

“Dude, you’ll be fine.” Prompto rolled his eyes, putting his own helmet on. “Promise. I’ve been riding these things for years. You’ll be perfectly safe.” He climbed on board and gestured for Noct to join him. When the prince hesitated, Prompto chuckled. “What, you trust me to fly an airship, but not to ride a bike?”

“Kinda hard to crash an airship into cars…” Noct muttered, finally putting the helmet on and sliding behind Prompto.

“Yeah, but a hell of a lot easier to plow into the ground and kill us all in a fiery ball of fire. C’mon dude, trust me!”

After that, how could Noct refuse? He moved forward on his perch and wrapped his arms around Prompto’s waist, taking a breath and letting himself trust the blond. Prompto had shown himself to be a competent pilot of various vehicles before. He remembered not only the airship that he’d successfully brought them home in, but also the air bike that he’d flown in Altissia. He’d trusted him enough to jump then, so he would do so again.

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Chapter End Notes

I know Pryna didn't make an appearance in this chapter, but don't worry, I haven't forgotten about her :)
So... Reactions?

As always, feel free to join our Discord, where you get to help me make decisions about the fic for things like Motorcycle names! Thank you to Rikku Shinra for the idea of Ragnarok!

Discord: https://discord.gg/3BxaU46
Welcome Home

Chapter Notes

NSFW Warning - there is smut in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The ride wasn’t as bad as Noct was fearing. Aside from a few minor panic attacks when Prompto took a corner a little too sharply, it was actually quite nice. Something that Noct could probably get used to. Maybe Prompto would let him take it out for a spin some time.

They made it home faster than they would have in a car, thanks to the bike’s ability to weave through stopped traffic. Prompto was pretty good at piloting the vehicle, even if it was obvious he lacked city driving experience.

When they finally pulled to a stop in the parking garage beneath their building, Noct’s legs felt like jelly. He stumbled his way off the bike and shook his shaking limbs.

“No fan of the bike, huh?” Prompto questioned, amusement coating his voice. He took Noct’s helmet from him and put it in the storage compartment, along with his own.

As soon as he’d done so, and his hands were empty, Noct roughly pulled him against him, lips finding lips in a desperate kiss. “Missed you.” He muttered, pushing Prompto back against the bike, while his mouth hungrily devoured Prompto’s, showing all the emotions he had no words for. He absolutely hated the idea of Prompto being gone, and now he was back, Noct couldn’t get enough of him. He had to get closer.

“Oh, I like where this is going.” Prompto joked, leaning against his vehicle and spreading his legs so Noct could fit between them. He returned the multitude of fevered kisses with equal passion, his arms moving to circle Noct’s shoulders. “Maybe I should go away more often, if this is what you’re like when I get back.”

“Don’t you fucking dare.” Noct growled, actually growled, the anxiety from the last few days seeping out into every word. He found himself pushing impossibly closer to Prompto, his fingers digging into the blond’s hips. “Don’t leave me again…” He didn’t mean to say that, not at all, but the words slipped through his mouth before his brain had a chance to stop them.

The smirk on Prompto’s face calmed into a soft, sympathetic smile and Prompto lifted a hand from Noct’s neck to gently caress his cheek. “Hey,” He whispered, placing a soft, tender kiss on Noct’s lips. “I came back.” He told him, “I always will.”

Noct’s head dropped onto Prompto’s shoulders, and he allowed himself to just be held by Prompto. He loosened his grip a little and circled Prompto’s waist. “I hated every minute.” He muttered. “I’d turn around, and you weren’t there.” He was starting to shake, but somehow managed to keep his emotions mostly in check. He wasn’t crying. He wasn’t. But it was damn close. Now that Prompto was back, his anxiety was breaking, leaving him feeling even more vulnerable than he had been while he was gone.
“Hey,” Prompto was holding Noct close, gently stroking his hair. “I’m here.” He placed a soft kiss on Noct’s head before pulling back enough to look at him. “Let’s go inside, hmm?” He suggested, gesturing to the elevator. “We’ll make hot chocolate and curl up on the couch to watch something.”

Numbly, Noct nodded, but didn’t make a move. He ended up waiting until Prompto gently began to guide him back to their apartment.

Once inside, Prompto put Noct on the couch and wandered off to the kitchen to make the hot drink he’d promised. When it was done, he took the two mugs to the lounge and sat next to Noct, pressing their sides together. “Here.”

Noct took the drink and held it in his hands, feeling small and somewhat pathetic. How was it that he could break apart so easily just because Prompto was gone for a few nights. If this was how it felt, how had Prompto managed to live through ten years of it?

“I missed you.” He muttered lamely, leaning his head on Prompto’s shoulders.

“I missed you too.” Prompto shuffled to put their drinks on the table and pulled Noct into his arms. “Hey, why don’t we make another promise?” He suggested, “No matter what might happen, no matter where we have to go, we’ll always come back to each other. No matter what.”

Noct nodded, taking Prompto’s hands in his own. It sounded corny, cliched, and sort of pathetic that they needed that promise, but to Noct, it was absolutely perfect. It was exactly what he needed right now. “Yeah, I can get behind that.” He gave Prompto a shaky smile. “I’ll always come home to you.” He promised easily, knowing that there was no force on Eos that would keep him from Prompto’s side for long.

Prompto gave a nod, “No matter what.” He said quietly, “I’ll always come home to you, too.” He leaned forward and gently kissed Noct, letting the promise linger on their lips for a moment of quiet.

Slowly, their kisses began to heat up, and Noct found himself pushing Prompto down on the sofa and leaning over him. He wanted to get closer, to reassure himself that Prompto was there, that he was real, and that he wasn’t going away again any time soon. He wanted to feel his skin against his own, feel the touch of him everywhere possible. He wanted to get close enough to him that he knew without a doubt that he would never be alone again.

His kisses seemed to reflect his desperation, and Prompto gave back as good as he got. It didn’t take long for the first moan to escape Noct’s lips, and that was when he realised where this was going.

Stress, anxiety, and teenage hormones, were all pushing Noct in one direction, and it was obvious that Prompto didn’t mind one bit. He seemed to be enjoying the attention, but he wasn’t just lying back. His hands were roaming over Noct, pushing their way under his shirt to stroke the skin of his back. Every touch felt electrifying, and Noct felt himself becoming very aroused, very quickly.

He definitely enjoyed where this was going, and wanted to see it through to whatever end it would have, but there was something he wanted, an urge that he’d refused to think about before. Now, however, it seemed like the best idea in the world.

Slowly, he let his kisses trail off and shuffled his way down Prompto’s torso, not lifting his eyes to look up. He knew that if he looked into Prompto’s eyes, he would probably lose his nerve. This wasn’t exactly something he’d done before, and he knew he would probably be terrible at it.
Which was exactly why he hadn’t brought it up the few times they’d been intimate so far.

“I want..” He finally reached his destination, nuzzling his nose and mouth against Prompto’s clothed crotch, feeling a distinct hardness pressing against his face. He didn’t know how to finish his sentence, so instead settled for a question. “Can I?” He spoke against Prompto’s groin, letting his lips graze Prompto’s cloth covered length and revelling in the moan that elicited.

“You probably don’t want to.” Prompto panted, already short of breath. “Not had a chance to shower since I got back.”

Noct felt distinctly dirty when he realized that that didn’t put him off. Objectively, it should. He was wanting to- planning to stick it in his mouth, so really, he should want it as clean as possible. But the idea of Prompto being covered in sweat...? Noct decided to think about that later.

“Don’t care.” He managed to say, feeling the organ under his mouth jump at the motion and Prompto letting out a soft hiss. “Please?”

“Dude, no way in hell am I saying no to that.” Prompto chuckled, fidgeting slightly, “Or anything you want to do, really.” He carried on. Noct knew him well enough to know that this was the onset of ‘babble mode’, and that Prompto was feeling very flustered indeed. Noct hadn’t seen Prompto like this in a long time.

“I mean, this is literally a dream come true.” Prompto was still speaking, and Noct paid attention to his words while gently lapping at the seam of his trousers. “Well. Not quite. In my dreams you were on your knees and-oh!”

In one swift move, Noct had pulled Prompto into a sitting position and knelt on the ground in front of him. “Like this?” He questioned, finally looking up to Prompto.

The blond was staring down at him, cheeks flushed and eyes wide. His normally immaculately groomed hair was sticking out in all directions, some even falling into his face. Prompto didn’t seem to care about that at all. His eyes were firmly locked onto Noct, as if he was afraid that if he looked away, Noct would disappear.

“Holy shit.” Prompto’s breathless uttering told Noct that he was on the right track.

From this position, Noct couldn’t kiss Prompto, but he could run his hands over the man’s thighs and earn another delicious moan. Slowly, he stroked his way up, gently cupping him before reaching for his belt. He fumbled with it a little, hands shaking with nerves and clumsy, but he managed to get it undone. Followed by the button and fly. With a bit of Prompto’s help, he pulled them down enough to expose his underwear - the only thing between Noct’s mouth and Prompto’s desire.

He found himself once again nuzzling Prompto’s crotch, delighting in the feeling of the hard flesh twitch under silk, and the sounds that Prompto was making. He took his time with that, working up the courage to actually do what it was that he wanted, and eventually his hands caught the waistband of Prompto’s boxers and pulled them down, freeing his dick.

Noct stared at it for a moment, salivating slightly at the sight. Still, he hesitated, eyes locked onto his prize as a thought occurred to him. “Y’know... I’ve never actually touched it.” He muttered. He’d had it pressed against his own, pressed inside him, but he’d never held it in his hand let alone his mouth. He’d never even been this close to it.
Prompto gave a huff of laughter above him. “Well I’m not stopping you.” Prompto pointed out giving a shallow thrust of his hips as if to remind Noct that it was there. “Yours for the taking.”

Slowly, Noct gave a nod, wondering how the hell he was supposed to do this. He thought back to the pornography that he’d watched as a teenager, and the way that Prompto had briefly licked and sucked his, then leaned forward, fingers finally grasping the velvet flesh.

The first thing he did - the first thing that always seemed to happen in porn - was lift it to gently run his tongue from the base to the tip. Prompto’s musk was strong, sweat and something else that Noct couldn’t identify. Oddly, he liked it, which took him by surprise.

The taste wasn’t quite what he was expecting either. Salty and warm. He wasn’t sure how he could taste warm, but he could.

After licking his way to the tip, he gave only a second’s hesitation before opening his mouth and closing it around Prompto, savouring the salty taste on his lips and the loud moan from Prompto’s.

Having a dick in his mouth was absolutely nothing like what he had expected. Somehow, it felt so much bigger there than it looked. It filled his mouth and hit the back of his throat, making him gag slightly and pull back. He hadn’t even got half of it in!

It must have been obvious that he was out of his depth, because Prompto began whispering instructions to him. Noct tried not to feel embarrassed when he followed them - use his hand too, go slowly, swallow around it - and tried to get used to the alien feeling of someone else’s junk in his mouth.

It was clumsy, sloppy and inconsistent. He went too deep a little too often, making him gag enough for his stomach to protest. His jaw ached within seconds and his hand and mouth just didn’t seem to know how to work together. Noct was sure this was probably the worst blowjob that Prompto had ever received, but he didn’t want to give up. He wouldn’t get better if he didn’t try, would he?

After too short a time, Noct’s jaw began to ache enough to make his brain hurt, and he reluctantly pulled back, leaving his hand there to stroke. “I’m really bad at this.” He muttered, more to himself than Prompto.

“Nope.” Prompto confirmed brightly, and Noct looked up to glare at him.

The blond was flushed deeply, looking down at Noct with hunger in his eyes and a smirk on his lips. “So bad.” He teased. “Everyone is at first. Just need to practice.”

Noct opened his mouth and stretched his jaw, wincing at the pain it caused. He wanted to keep going, to ‘practice’ some more, but he knew his head wasn’t going to let him. Not as it was now. So he reached into the armiger and pulled out a potion, wanting to repair whatever damage was causing him pain so he could keep going.

“You’d better at it.” Prompto reached out, hand covering Noct’s. He wasn’t pushing the potion away, or stopping Noct from taking it, but he was definitely concerned. “We’ve got time.”

Noct nodded. He tested his jaw again for a moment before banishing the potion. If he stopped trying to give head, it wouldn’t hurt any more.
Instead, he kissed the tip again, wanting to take it into his mouth but afraid of the pain. “How do you want me?” He questioned, lips moving against the sensitive flesh. He looked up through his fringe, waiting to hear what Prompto had to say.

“Fuck that’s hot.” Prompto muttered, looking at Noct for a moment before sliding down and off the couch, straddling Noct. It was made harder by the fact that his clothes were still somewhat in the way, and he fixed that easily with a flick of his wrist and a truly inappropriate use of the power of the Kings.

The next thing Noct knew, he was naked on his living room floor with an equally naked boyfriend straddling him and rocking their hips together. “Got choices.” Prompto said between laying kisses on Noct’s skin. “Can take us both in hand like the first time.” He reached between them to demonstrate and Noct gave a deep moan. He hadn’t realized just how turned on he was until Prompto touched him. “We can fuck-either the same as before or the other way- or we could do other things.”

“Other things?” Noct was enjoying the feeling of Prompto touching him, but somehow managing to focus on the blond’s words. It was getting harder and harder to do so with every second and slow stroke.

“I could suck you off.” Prompto leaned forward to speak into Noct’s ear, his tongue brushing against the sensitive ridge, “And then make myself come all over you.” That was one option. An option that Noct found oddly appealing. But Prompto was speaking again. Apparently there were more things they could do. “Or I could aim for your mouth and you could play catch.”

How was Prompto still able to form coherent sentences? Noct’s ability to do that was quickly dwindling thanks to Prompto’s hand on him, but Prompto didn’t even seem affected. Was this simply a product of experience?

It took him a ridiculously long time to make his mind up, and when he did, he leaned forward to kiss Prompto deeply. “I want to feel you inside me.” He managed to say. “But… I want to be on top.”

Prompto raised an eyebrow and gave a smirk, “You want to ride me?” He questioned, and with a deep flush of embarrassment, Noct nodded.

“Okay. I’m definitely all for that.” Prompto nodded and stood, pulling Noct up with him only to turn him around and push him back on the couch. He summoned a bottle of lubrication and knelt down between Noct’s legs.

The sight of Prompto there, so close to his throbbing arousal, made Noct moan a little louder than he’d intended. He could understand why Prompto was so worked up when their positions had been switched. It was definitely a good sight.

Prompto smirked at him again, as if he’d been expecting that reaction, and leaned forward. He gently nudged Noct’s legs apart and pulled his hips forward off the couch so he could reach.

A finger probed him, and a mouth gently kissed his thighs. It was still an odd sensation - to have a finger there, but it wasn’t as intrusive this time. He’d known what to expect, and somehow that made things easier. He focused on relaxing, resisting the urge to tense up as Prompto slowly worked him open.

Slowly, the first finger was joined by a second one, and then a third, and only then did Prompto do
that thing inside him to overload his body with pleasure. Noct moaned deeply and found himself thrusting his hips back, trying to get more. But Prompto wasn’t having it, his hand was swiftly removed and Noct felt him kiss his thigh again.

“You’re ready.” Prompto told him, rising from his kneeling position and looking down at Noct. “You want to do this here, or in the room?” He questioned.

For an answer, Noct reached out and pulled Prompto onto the couch, swiftly straddling him in one movement. He leaned down and kissed Prompto deeply, feeling the motions of Prompto stroking himself.

Eventually, Prompto conjured a box of condoms and quickly put one on. Noct made a mental note to bring that conversation up later. He wanted to feel Prompto. All of him. He wanted there to be nothing between them. But Prompto had already said that they couldn’t have that conversation while ‘in the middle of things’, so it would have to wait.

After a nod from Prompto, Noct moved, using his hand to line himself up. He wasn’t sure what he was doing, but he had a feeling that Prompto would instruct him again if he sucked too bad.

Slowly, he pressed himself down on Prompto’s length, shifting a little to get the angle right.

“Here.” Prompto moved his arms, placing them on either side of his shoulders. “Use the back of the couch for balance.”

Noct nodded, thankful for the advice. With his new position, and Prompto helping line up, Noct easily sank down. It was less painful than last time - he was a lot more relaxed - and it didn’t take as long for the burn to disappear. Still, he found himself sitting still for a second once he bottomed out, letting himself simply bask in the sensations.

“Nooocccttt.” Prompto whined softly, hips bucking forward a little. “You gotta move buddy.”

“Y-yeah.” With difficulty, Noct began to lift himself up before lowering himself slowly. It was a lot more effort than he thought, and his legs were already starting to burn with the unfamiliar motions.

“Rock, not lift.” Prompto took a hold of Noct’s hips to guide him and oh- oh that felt better. So much better. Easier on the thighs too.

Noct caught on to the motion very quickly and those hands stopped guiding and started gripping. Prompto was groaning below him, his head thrown back over the couch and his eyes closed as he enjoyed himself.

Even with the simpler movement, Noct was quickly tiring out, his thighs burning and shaking as he pushed himself, unable to keep a consistent rhythm.

“Noct…” Prompto lifted his head, hands running up Noct’s back, “I need-” He didn’t seem to know how to say what he needed, but whatever it was, Noct wanted to give it to him.

He nodded, stopping his movement to kiss Prompto deeply. “Tell me.”

But Prompto didn't use his words. Instead, he gripped Noct under the ass and turned them, slipping out as he did so. Once Noct was lay on his back on the couch, Prompto pushed in again, upping the tempo with powerful thrusts.
“Yes!” Noct lifted his legs, trying to get Prompto into an even better position. This was far more intense, far more pleasurable far more-more than their previous position. Prompto was thrusting into him with frenzied determination, lost now to his base desires. Noct was far from complaining - the blond was hitting his prostate on almost every thrust and was driving him mad with pleasure.

Prompto’s hands were gripping Noct’s hips, helping guide his frantic movements, so Noct took himself in his own hand, chasing the impending orgasm that was threatening to overwhelm him. It didn’t take long before Noct was tensing up, his entire body taut like a bowstring ready to fire. He wanted to freeze time, to remain hanging off this precipice for hours to come, riding on wave after wave of building pleasure, but Prompto didn’t give him much of a choice. When the blond leaned over and took Noct’s mouth in a deep, dirty kiss, his hand finally leaving his hip to pull on his hair, Noct fell over that precipice, all but diving off the edge into the warm depths of all encompassing pleasure.

Blind and deaf to the world around him, Noct barely noticed when Prompto stillered, his hips slamming against Noct one last time before stopping, his thighs trembling. Noct reached out and ran a hand over those powerful muscles before sliding it up Prompto’s back to pull him down for a kiss.

They lay together for a while - Prompto having all but collapsed onto Noct’s chest - before Propmto finally peeled himself away from Noct, slipping out and removing the condom. He tied it off and threw it in the general direction of the rubbish bin, not having the effort to fully get up.

Once that was done, he settled back down on the couch, leaning between Noct and the back of the sofa. He summoned a blanket from the armiger and draped it over them. Noct took that as an opportunity to cuddle close, his arms winding around Prompto. They were silent for a long moment, basking in the afterglow.

“So how come you didn’t come home yesterday?” Noct eventually asked quietly, running his hands over Prompto’s rapidly cooling skin. He was enjoying the intimacy. Being allowed to touch Prompto like this was still new to him, and he didn’t think he would ever get bored of it.

“Ended up hanging out with Cindy.” Prompto answered, reaching to grab the remote while doing his best not to jostle Noct or their blanket too much. “Found her listening to some of my music from the future. Turns out, she remembers it.”

He said it so casually, so blase, that Noct almost missed the actual words. As it was, it took a moment for them to sink in, and when they did, he pulled back to look at Prompto with wide eyes. “What?” He questioned, wondering if he’d heard him wrong.

“Yeah,” Prompto’s grin was wide and happy, “She thought it was a dream! But when we got talking, she realised it was real and we had a lot of catching up to do.”

“But… how?”

“Uh,” Prompto’s grin wavered a little and he shrugged, “Was kinda hoping you could tell me.” He admitted, “But it sounds like she died at the same time as us? Apparently Hammerhead’s lights went out, and the daemons started pouring in. I figured that might have something to do with it.”

“I…” Noct frowned, trying to think. His memories from within the Astral Plane were all but faded, hazy at best. He could barely remember what it was like, but he was pretty damn sure that he’d only
tried to bring himself and his retainers back. Then again, both Ardyn and Luna had come back with them, so was it really so hard to think that maybe others did too? “You think it’s because she died when we did?” He questioned.

“That’s my running theory.” Prompto shuffled into a more comfortable position, abandoning his quest for the television remote as he settled back down on the couch. “I don’t have any other ideas. Neither does she. We should all go see her sometime.”

“Or bring her here.” Noct shrugged, barely paying attention to what he was saying. His mind was a wash with conflicting emotions. On one hand, he was happy that Prompto had got his friend back - from all accounts, they were close before Noct returned. On the other, he was confused and anxious as to how and why she had come back with them. There was also the smaller part of him that was unmistakably jealous.

Cindy and Prompto had been close. Noct had heard him refer to Cindy as ‘one of his best friends’ before, and had noticed that Prompto had taken a great effort to make sure that he didn’t call her his best friend. They’d lived together for longer than Noct had practically known Prompto, and they’d even tried to sleep together. Just because it hadn’t worked out, didn’t mean the intent hadn’t been there.

But he had to remind himself that Prompto had chosen Noct, even if he hadn’t made that declaration officially yet. While he hadn’t saved his body for Noct, he had saved his heart for him. Noct really had no reason to be jealous.

Noct looked at Prompto and realised that it really didn’t matter. Not at all. Prompto was wearing a grin that spoke of just how happy and relieved he was that Cindy remembered, and that was what mattered. Even if Noct was jealous, even if his worst fears really did come to pass, the fact that Prompto was happy …

That was all that mattered.

“We should tell the others.” Noct said eventually. “Iggy might have an idea how it happened. And they deserve to know.”

“Probably wouldn’t hurt to tell the whole squad.” Prompto agreed, with a nod. At Noct’s confused eyebrow raise, he spoke again. “Your dad, Gladio’s dad. Cor. Luna… Y’know. The peeps in the know.”

“The… squad…?” Noct couldn’t help but laugh at the name. It was all kinds of basic, and just completely lame.


“You’re terrible at naming things.” Noct laughed.

“Oh, oh! I’ve got it! The Regiment!”

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“Noct say what this is about?” Gladio asked Ignis as they made their way to the Citadel.
“No.” Ignis shook his head, “Simply that there was something he wanted to discuss with everyone. The king included.” They stepped through the imposing doors and walked down the hall together. “He did say it was nothing bad.” He added, noticing the way Gladio frowned in concern. “Though he refused to give any further details.”

“Huh. Guess we’ll see.”

When they walked into the king’s informal dining room, they realised they were the last to arrive. Prompto and Noct were already seated - Prompto not so subtly feeding Pryna under the table - along with Cor, Luna, Clarus and Regis. Once Ignis and Gladio took a seat, Noct nudged Prompto and the blond sat up.

“Right. Well… The other day, I went to Hammerhead and ran into Cindy.” Prompto began.

“That’s hardly a surprise.” Ignis pointed out.

“She does live there.” Gladio agreed.

“Yeah. But- that’s not all I have to tell you.” Prompto rolled his eyes and scooted his chair back a little, letting Pryna jump onto his lap where he stopped trying to be sneaky with the treats. “What I wanted to tell you, is that she remembers. All of it.”

There was quiet in the room, while people waited for him to elaborate. When he didn’t, Cor spoke up. “Remembers what exactly?” He questioned.

“The future!” Prompto was fidgeting, his leg bouncing slightly and his fingers tapping on Pryna’s fur. “The ten years of darkness. She remembers it all!”

“How?” Ignis frowned, “And why now?”

“I think she came back with us.” Prompto answered, “I think she died when we did, and somehow came back. I don’t know. All she knows is that one minute she was fighting for her life, and the next she woke up in Hammerhead, years in the past. Cid said she’d been missing for a month too. Just like us.” He looked around the group, his face falling slightly when he realised that nobody else was as excited as he was.

“Cindy Aurum? Cid’s granddaughter?” Clarus questioned, looking a little lost.

“Yes. The one and only.” Prompto confirmed. “I don’t know how, and I don’t know why. But if she remembers, then there might be others too… None of them would know why, and they’d probably all feel completely alone, discombobulated. They might think that it’s a dream, like she did.”

“You wish to reach out to anyone that may remember?” Regis questioned, frowning in thought. “That could be difficult to do, without raising too many questions.” He pointed out.

Prompto nodded, “Yeah, I know. But we can’t just leave them to suffer alone. Ten years of hell was lonely enough. I couldn’t imagine coming back here alone, with nobody to talk to. It’s hard enough as it is.” His voice was quiet, vulnerable. The fingers petting Pryna’s hair tightened for a moment, as if he was taking comfort in her presence.

“If your theory is correct,” Luna spoke up for the first time, her soft voice easily filling the room, “That anyone who died in that moment came back with us, then we do have a duty to them.” She
turned to Noct, “It was you who brought them back, without forewarning.” Her words were accusatory, but her tone was not. She wasn’t blaming Noct, or upset with him. She was simply explaining her point of view.

Ignis had to agree with her. It was their responsibility to take care of those that were dragged along, without warning or their permission. If he had realised the possibility of others remembering before now, he would have said much the same thing.

Noct nodded, seemingly also in agreement. “Yeah. But how?” He questioned. “We can’t exactly make an announcement asking for everyone who died thirteen years in the future to just show up on our doorstep.”

“Therein lies the tricky part.” Regis agreed.

Prompto was frowning in thought, and oddly quiet. Ignis watched him for a moment before speaking up. “Prompto?”

“How?” Ignis’ voice caught Prompto’s attention and he looked up at the advisor.

“Something on your mind?”

“Huh? Oh. I was just thinking... What if we used The King’s Trusted?” He suggested.

“Could work.” Gladio agreed with a nod and a grin. “Be fun either way.”

“The King’s what now?” Noct’s question, and the confusion of the rest of the room went unanswered for a moment. Prompto was grinning, nodding his head enthusiastically, Gladio was smiling too. Even Ignis looked amused.

“It would have to be somewhere public.” Ignis pointed out, “And we no longer have Iris as back up.”

“No. But we have Cindy.” Prompto seemed to be getting more and more excited. “She’ll help. And we can hijack the Year’s End festival! All of Insomnia comes to that - and a lot of people outside the wall!”

“What’s the King’s Trusted?” Noct asked again, this time getting Prompto’s attention.

“Kinda hard to explain...” He answered, face flushing red. He bit his lip in embarrassment - a habit that Noct hadn’t seen in a long time. Not since before they came back in time. He gave Prompto a gesture to carry on and explain, but Prompto simply shrugged.

“You’ll see I guess.” He teased with a grin.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for disappearing for a while. I moved house, and it was all very last minute and very stressful (we didn't get accepted for a new place until two days before our lease was up in the old one). We still haven't unpacked, and our place is a bomb site (for the
first time in my life, the kitchen is the tidiest part of my house...).

I'll probably be a little sporadic in my updating for a while, just while I let myself recover from the stress. I'm just glad my new house has a bathtub... This chapter was mostly already written before I moved, so I figured I'd post it while I can (now that I have internet again)

As always, feel free to join our discord (where I'm active, even if I'm paying through the nose for mobile data lol): https://discord.gg/JuCDQ4b (The link is set to never expire)
The song used in this chapter is "Let's Just Live" from the RWBY soundtrack (Seriously, the RWBY soundtrack is just perfect for FFXV....).

Sorry it took so long to get this out. I'm struggling to sit down and write at the moment. My brain keeps giving me ideas for ANOTHER long fic, or the END OF THIS ARC but nothing useful x.x

There's a bit of angst in this chapter, but it's nothing near as potent as the stuff I used to write. It's mostly fluff tbh. Like, cutesy fluff.

Preparations for the Year’s End Festival usually took several months to plan. It was less than a month away, and Prompto’s idea was very last minute. Noct had been roped into helping his father with some of the royal responsibilities and planning, and even though he’d tried to get Prompto to join them, the blond had insisted that he had his own things to organise - along with Ignis and Gladio.

Even a week after his suggestion, Prompto wouldn’t tell Noct what, or who The King’s Trusted was. When asked, he would simply grin and tell Noct he’d find out soon enough. Ignis had reassured Noct that it wasn’t anything bad, so the prince was willing to let it go.

Kind of.

He asked every day, and every day he was rewarded with a soft kiss on the nose and a sly grin from Prompto. He never did get his answer.

The Festival was set for the weekend before the actual holiday - allowing for people to both attend the festivities and then spend the holiday with their families. The date seemed to suddenly spring up on them and Noct soon found himself being ushered into the Citadel to get ready in his formal attire.

As the Crowned Prince, he was supposed to give a speech to initiate the celebration, with Regis giving one to close it. The Festival would go for the entire weekend and after his initial speech Noct wasn’t required to do anything else except make an appearance.

It was far from the first time he’d done this - he’d started from almost the moment he’d been old enough to string words together (his first speech had been a short one about how the candy was going to taste great this year and everybody should make sure to have some) - and it was as informal as it came, yet Noct couldn’t help but feel anxious.

This was his first time addressing the people of Insomnia since he came back. The rest of Lucis hadn’t been nerve wracking thanks to the fact that the largest crowd that had gathered had been less than thirty strong. But today he was expected to talk to thousands. The opening ceremony would be broadcasted live on televisions all over Insomnia, and on radio stations throughout the rest of Lucis.

It would be a great platform for political gain - he could use it as a chance to assure outer Lucis that
he hadn’t forgotten his promise of bringing them back into the fold of the Wall - but Noct had flatly refused. This was a time to celebrate peace and joy, not to further political agendas. Even if the agenda was his own.

He took a breath and stepped forward, approaching the podium with a fake confidence. He stood tall, his shoulders back, remembering what it had felt like when he had been king. It was only a year ago, yet it felt like it had been a lifetime.

“Welcome!” He opened his arms, looking down at the people gathered in the courtyard of the Citadel. “Tradition dictates that I address everyone for the opening ceremony,” He began, all but feeling Ignis’ face palm from somewhere in the crowd, “But I’m pretty sure that everyone wants to just start enjoying the party.” There were a few laughs and cheers from the crowd and Noct smiled at them, “I know that I, for one, am looking forward to this years festival and can’t wait to join in. So I’m going to leave the politics to my good friend Clarus.” He gestured to his father’s Sheild who had taken over Gladio’s duty towards Noct when he had said he had something else he needed to do. “And get me some of that street food my advisor hates so much.” He grinned at the way that Clarus rolled his eyes. “As always, eat, drink and be merry, and a Happy Years End to everyone!”

With that, Noct gave a small bow to the crowd and moved away from the podium, sidestepping Clarus as he did so.

While the Shield was hastily trying to finish the speech that Noct was supposed to have given, Noct lost himself in the gathered crowd, greeting people as he passed them, much to their confusion.

He was scanning the crowd, trying to find any one of his retainers, but failing completely. None of them had told him what they had planned for the festival - but then he’d only really asked Prompto. He’d never bothered to ask Ignis or Gladio since they’d been incredibly busy with whatever it was.

He was vaguely aware that the band had started playing - that meant that Clarus was done with his speech and was probably looking for Noct now. The prince ducked a little, finding the game of cat and mouse more fun than he’d expected. He wondered how long it would take for Clarus to find him.

Really, at this point, Noct hardly needed a Shield. Especially within the walls of Insomnia. He could definitely handle himself, and could take on whatever was thrown at him. Having Clarus guarding him was more of a tradition than anything else.

So, with that in mind, Noct didn’t feel too bad about ducking his guard. It made the day slightly more exciting, and he could pretend for a moment that he was a child again. Carefree and mischievous.

The music that the band was playing was something that Noct had never heard before, and it was completely different from what he was expecting. Instead of a classical symphony like it usually was, this year it sounded like a rock band had been chosen.

From where he was hiding Noct couldn’t see onto the stage but he took a minute to listen to the music anyway.

“It used to feel like a fairytale
Now it seems we were just pretending
We’d fix our world
And on our way to a happy ending.”
The lead vocalist was familiar, but Noct couldn’t quite put a face to the voice. He inched his way through the crowd, keeping his head low to avoid Clarus’ no doubt searching gaze as he made his way to a better vantage point.

“Then it turns out life,
Is far less like a bedtime story
Than a tragedy with no big reveal
Of the hero’s glory.”

He was almost there, he could just make out the side of the drummer as he banged on his instruments. Noct caught sight of the tattoos on his arms and frowned, wondering if Gladio knew that there was someone else out there with the same markings as him.

“And it seems we weren’t prepared
For a game that wasn’t fair.
Should we just go home,
Do we follow through?”

It was at this point that Noct became aware of two things at once. The first, and most confusing was the fact that he knew the people on stage. The lead singer had indeed been familiar, though less in this setting and more at home in a workshop.

Cindy played the bass effortlessly as she sang into the microphone, backed up by Prompto on the lead guitar, Gladio on the drums and Ignis on the keyboard.

The second was that they were good. Almost professional.

Noct stared at his retinue, wondering if he’d fallen and hit his head. It seemed surreal and like something out of a storybook. He pinched himself and rubbed his eyes but no, they were still there. Still playing and singing in front of the massive crowd, looking like they had been doing this for years.

Maybe they had. Noct hadn’t exactly been around for the last ten years, and Prompto had told him he’d learned to play the guitar. Noct had somehow assumed that Prompto only knew how to play the classic guitar, not an electric one like he was currently wielding like an expert.

“When all hope is gone
There is one thing we can do!”

Noct was entranced by the scene before him, and jumped out of his skin when a few people in the crowd joined in with the song, their voices loudly singing a line.

“Let’s just live!”

Cindy was grinning as she continued with the chorus, and Noct stopped listening to the lyrics as he looked around.

There hadn’t been many in the crowd that had sung along, but those that had were apparently pushing their way to the front. Noct followed his curiosity and joined them.

Was this ‘The King’s Trusted’? Was that what Prompto had called his band? Noct wasn’t sure if he should be amused or offended. Then again, given the apparent members, it wasn’t exactly inaccurate
He jumped again as the crowd once again joined in with the next chorus, and his attention was brought back to the song.

“Let's just live
Day by day
And not be conquered by our sorrows
The past can't hold us down
We must break free
Inside we're torn apart
But time will mend our hearts
Move onward, not there yet
So let's just live!”

The music suddenly slowed down, and Prompto’s voice replaced Cindy’s. He sang strongly, emotion tightly held behind every word. The backing music had all but fallen away, leaving Prompto to fill the soft quiet.

“When it feels like there's nothing
Worth living for
Everything is broken,
The light's not there anymore.

“And the story
Takes an unexpected turn,
A friend is suddenly gone.
We can cry our lives away,
But if they were here they'd say
“Go forward,
You must keep moving on.””

The small crowd around Noct again joined in, this time with hums and ‘ooohhhhh’s. It was an almost magical feeling, if it hadn’t been so surreal. Noct would’ve probably felt a little less confused if Prompto had told him what he was planning.

He wondered if this was one of his songs from the future. The lyrics would certainly suggest that, as well as the way that Prompto had found him in the crowd and kept eye contact with him during the last part of his verse.

The song was right. He would have told them to keep moving on. And if this was one of the songs that Prompto had written, and it was about him, how many more were there? It was a little humbling, and very embarrassing to have songs written about him, and Noct wasn’t quite sure what to make of it.
“Never thought I’d hear this song again…” Someone beside him said, and Noct tore his eyes from the stage to see someone he only vaguely recognised. He was speaking to the man beside him, who was nodding in agreement with closed eyes.

“Thought it was a dream.” The second man spoke, “Now, I’m not so sure.”

“It wasn’t a dream.” Noct spoke up, standing tall and proud in the way that he had as a king. He regarded them for a moment. “The ten years of darkness. It happened.”

They both stared at him for a moment, and Noct was starting to second guess himself. What if they weren’t talking about what he’d thought they were? What if they’d mistaken this song for something else, or Prompto was just doing a cover of a song that Noct had forgotten or never heard before?

But before his mind could spiral too far down, the two men in front of him changed stance, both bowing to him. “Y-your Majesty.” One said quietly, voice thick with emotion and hard to hear over the music. “You mean it was all real?”

“Yes.” Noct reached out and placed his hands on their shoulders, pushing them up from their bow. “I need you to do something for me.”

“Anything.” The first answered instantly with such conviction that Noct couldn’t doubt that he meant it.

He gave him a small smile and nod. “I need you to spread the word amongst those who remember. Tell them to gather in the audience chamber by dusk tonight.” He looked from one to the other, to make sure that they understood what he was saying, and agreed. “But only those who remember.” He stressed that part, “We don’t want to cause a panic.”

“Can do, Your Majesty.”

“Highness.” Noct corrected him with a small smirk, “Not a king anymore. Yet. Whatever adjective you want to use.” It had been a year, and it still confused Noct to think about it for too long.

With twin nods, the two disappeared into the crowd, leaving Noct alone. He looked up to the stage, noting that the music had stopped.

Prompto stepped forward, replacing Cindy at the main microphone. “Thank you all!” He called out to the clapping crowd. “Make sure you all have a great time at this year’s festival, remember to hold on to those you love, and make every happy memory you can tonight! Enjoy the party!”

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“You named your band The King’s Trusted?” Noct asked the moment he came close enough to Prompto to be heard.

“Uh, no?” Prompto shrugged, grinning and blushing at the same time. “I mean, we’re not really a band, and I didn’t name us so…”

“The King’s Trusted is less a band, and more of a… collection.” Ignis told Noct as he, Gladio and Cindy joined them.

“Anyone who played with Prompto was a member.” Cindy grinned, “Kinda a way for everyone to
feel like they belonged to somethin’. Like a giant club.”

“It just sort of took off.” Prompto added as the group found their way through the crowd to a small table by a food stand. Ignis left them to gather something for them to eat. “I was playing one night, and someone joined in, then another. Eventually most Glaives and Hunters would join in if I played.”

“Everyone knew his music. In and out.” Gladio slapped Prompto on the back of the shoulder, a look of pride on his face. “Made people forget about their problems for a bit. He became real popular.” He wiggled his eyebrows, making his insinuation clear.

Prompto rolled his eyes and shook his head. “Dude.”

“So your plan to figure out if anyone else remembered was to play your music and see who knew it?” Noct questioned, accepting a tray of food as Ignis returned.

“That’s how he figured out I remembered.” Cindy pointed out, grinning at Ignis as he handed her food too. “Heard me singin’ along to one of his songs.”

“It’s a subtle way to get people thinking about it.” Ignis took his seat in between Prompto and Gladio, dishing up the rest of the food. “Hopefully they will approach us, thus removing the need for an announcement of any kind.”

“Someone did recognise it.” Noct told them, “At least two people. I asked them to gather up anyone else they knew remembered and to meet in the audience chamber at dusk.”

“Then I guess we’ll see how many people we can find.” Prompto said.

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“You know…” Noct spoke around the candied apple he was trying to eat, “You’re kinda turning into the bad boy moms warn their daughters about.”

“Whadda you mean?” Prompto asked, finishing up his own apple. He threw the stick in a nearby rubbish bin as they passed by on their walk.

The streets were alive with people and laughter. Music playing loudly enough to force everyone to raise their voices, and to prompt many to dance in the street. Colour washed over the usually gray city streets.


“I didn’t run.” Prompto protested, “I walked. At a leisurely pace. Not my fault they didn’t notice.” He shrugged with a chuckle. “Though I should probably leave a phone number behind.” He thought out loud. “In case they come back, and can’t find me.”

“You mean you didn’t do that?” Noct asked, eyebrows raised. He lead Prompto to a stand and joined the line, waiting for their turn to buy more junk food. “We’ve been back a year.”

“Ten months.” Prompto corrected. “And nope. Didn’t even occur to me.” He sounded completely laid back about it, and Noct had to wonder just how bad the relationship between Prompto and his
parents had been.

They reached the front of the queue and Noct quickly paid for their snack food and drinks before Prompto had the chance. It was an old habit from when Prompto had been less well off, but it was one that for some reason, Noct wanted to keep.

After his token protests, Prompto took the food from Noct and they sat down on an unoccupied bench. “Technically, you’re still a minor.” Noct pointed out. “There could be a lot of trouble if your parents report you missing…”

“Nope.” Prompto shook his head, picking one of the mini donuts from their shared bucket and plopping it into his mouth. “I got emancipated.” He told Noct after he swallowed. “When we got back to Insomnia.”

“Don’t you need your parents to sign off on that?”

“No if it’s granted by the king.”

“You asked my dad for that?” Noct’s eyes widened as he looked at his partner. Prompto could barely get through five sentences around Regis, and that was in a casual setting. In fact, the only time Noct had seen Prompto interact with the king for any length of time was during official meetings where they were usually talking about important council things, or the literal end of the world.

The idea of Prompto approaching his father about something as simple as guardianship surprised Noct.

But Prompto shook his head. “I didn’t ask. He offered.” He took another donut, chewing on it thoughtfully for a moment. “When we had tea. And he cheated at card games. ‘S why I can get a motorcycle licence even though I’m not legally 18 yet. Got all the rights and responsibilities of an adult.” He grinned at Noct, “I even have a job.”

“You have two jobs.” Noct pointed out, elaborating when Prompto gave him a confused look. “You’re on the council, and you’re my retainer. You get paid for both, so technically, you have two jobs.”

“Huh.” Prompto seemed to consider that for a moment before shrugging. “Y’know… Since I’m legally an adult, I can officially sign up for the ‘Guard…”

“You want a third job?” Noct questioned with a laugh. “C’mon dude. You have two jobs and you go to high school. You even have a secret life - high school during the day, deamon hunting at night.”

“Not to mention a hot as fuck boyfriend.” Prompto added with a grin, “You’re right, I’m all kinds of cool.”

Noct rolled his eyes and gave a small laugh. “Dude, if you really want a third job, just wait. You’ll be king with me eventually.”

Prompto fell silent and just looked at Noct for a moment, as if that concept was a surprise. “You mean like… rule beside you?”

“Well yeah…” Noct frowned, turning in his seat to face Prompto. “I mean- I guess I was just
assuming that you’d want to—” He started to feel a little uncomfortable, only now realising that he’d never actually asked Prompto if he wanted this. “I should’ve asked— If you want to stay with me— I’m gonna be king again one day and if you stay with me you’ll have to—”

Noct’s heart was stammering just as quickly as his words, suddenly realising that maybe Prompto didn’t want that. Being king wasn’t exactly something that everybody wanted - hell, Noct didn’t always want to be king. By asking Prompto to be with him, to maybe even marry him one day, he was asking Prompto to be king with him.

How had he not realised that he hadn’t asked Prompto if he wanted that? He’d been so caught up in the fact that they were finally allowed to be together, that he’d completely forgot about the long term ramifications of their relationships.

“Noct—” Prompto was smiling with amusement and fondness. He didn’t look upset, but Noct was worked up enough to not really notice that. “Noct.” Prompto’s hand was on Noct’s cheek, the cinnamon sugar scratching his skin slightly. “Noct.” Prompto repeated his name, waiting for Noct to slow down and just listen to him.

Noct gave a small nod, taking a breath and letting his anxiety settle enough for him to listen.


Noct found himself laughing probably a little harder than the situation demanded, but the sudden release of anxiety left him feeling a little breathless. “How do you keep forgetting that I’m royalty?” He questioned.

Prompto shrugged, cheeks turning a little pink. “You’re just Noct.” He told him.

Noct chuckled and shook his head, finally taking one of the donuts. “You forget that I’m royalty, but freak out when you’re in the same room as my dad? You’re weird.”

“Yeah. But I’m cool remember?” Prompto nudged Noct in the ribs as he teased him.

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They enjoyed the Festival for the rest of the afternoon, eating far too much junk food and drinking far too much soda and for once thankful for their teenage bodies and their metabolisms. Eventually, the sun began to set and Noct lead them to the Citadel, and then into the audience chamber just off to the side of the throne room.

Prompto looked a little pale as they passed the doors for the throne room, and Noct reached out to take his hand. He didn’t care that it was semi-public, or that this was a little more intimate than they technically should have been. Prompto needed the reassurance.

Prompto squeezed his hand and gave him a small, thankful smile as they opened the doors and walked into the room.

Six pairs of eyes turned to them, and Prompto let go of Noct’s hand to step forward. “Hey everyone.” He greeted, giving a small wave.
There were six people in the room, of various ages. The oldest looked to be in his mid thirties, but
the youngest was the one that caught Noct’s attention. She couldn’t have been more than nine years
old, but the way she was sitting and looking around, it was obvious that her mind was nowhere near
that young. His heart broke when he thought of how much trauma that small girl had probably gone
through, and how much of it she would remember.

He followed Prompto and sat beside him at the small table that had been brought in. Noct assumed
that was Ignis’ doing, and made a mental note to thank him later.

“How is it true?” One of the boys, looking in his mid teens, asked Prompto. “That it wasn’t a dream?”

Prompto gave a small nod, expression serious.

“I knew it!” The young girl spoke up, “I knew it!” She turned to the boy beside her, “I told you!”

“Yeah. You did.” The older boy sighed out before turning his attention back to Prompto. “So what
happens now?”

Noct found it a little strange that everyone was addressing Prompto and not him, but then it occurred
to him that they didn’t know him. Noct had been gone for those ten years, but Prompto had been
around. He’d been visible, and apparently some kind of celebrity. Of course people would talk to
him.

“How honestly? I dunno.” Prompto answered, just as the doors opened again. Ignis, Gladio and Cindy
stepped into the room and joined them.

“How sup?” Gladio greeted everyone as the newcomers took their seats.

Noct waited until the greetings had been exchanged before standing and gaining everyone’s
attention. “Thank you for coming.” He said, taking a moment to look at each of them in turn before
taking a breath and speaking again. “I owe you all an explanation, and an apology.” The strangers in
the room exchanged looks of vague confusion before turning their attention back to Noct, keeping
their silence in order to hear what he had to say. “In order to banish the darkness, I had to perform
the Dawn Rite - a rite that killed me and sent me to the Astral Realm. It was expected that I would
remain there with my ancestors for the rest of time. But I…”

He shook his head and let out the breath he’d still been holding. “I was selfish. I found myself unable
to let go of the people I loved. The Dawn Rite afforded me a power greater than that of the Six
combined, and I used it. I used it to bring myself and my retainers back through time.

“It is our hope that we can change what is to come. In whatever way we can. We wish to improve
the outlook for everyone, if not prevent the darkness from returning completely. It was my intention
to only bring myself and my retainers back, but somehow you all came too. I don’t know how, and I
don’t know why. All I know is that you’re here, with memories of a future we hope never to happen.
I am sorry that I didn’t give you the choice, and that until now you have been left without answers. It
was never my intention to put you all through that.”

He had no idea what to say after that. He’d given them the explanation, and the apology. Honestly,
he didn’t know these people, and he had no idea what he could, or even should do for them.

“So. What can we do?” One of them asked, looking at Noct with determination on his face. A quick
look around at the others, and Noct saw that they were all standing ready, waiting for his orders.
They didn’t seem upset that he’d dragged them back in time and left them abandoned for a year. Instead, they all looked like they were eager to help, each and every one of them standing from their seat with their closed fists over their hearts to face him formally.

He took a moment to consider what they were asking. What could he have them do? What would be helpful? After a moment, he gave a small nod and spoke again. “I need you to find as many who remember as you can.” He told them. He turned to the older ones, “If I provide you with permits to leave and return to Insomnia at will, are you willing to travel Lucis to find more?”

“Sure.” The man replied, and it was at this point that Noct realised he didn’t know any of their names. He looked around at the six people in the room and realised that he didn’t know any of them. “I’ll set off right away.” The man stepped away from the table, as if ready to set off that moment. The others made to follow.

“Wait.” With one word, everybody stopped in their tracks and turned back to look at him. “Enjoy the festival.” He told them, “We owe everyone who remembers and explanation, but… after everything you’ve been through you all deserve some downtime.” He gave them a soft smile, “It’ll take me a few days to get the permits sorted anyway. I’ll need all of your full names, and some identification. Come back here on Monday.” He turned to the youngest members of their group, “Unfortunately, given your current ages, I don’t think I’ll be able to send you outside the wall. Instead, I task you with finding people within Insomnia…”

The two younger members nodded in agreement and Noct felt an odd sense of pride. “From now on, those that remember will be known as…” He paused for a moment, trying to figure out a code name for them - something that they could all answer to and know what it means, but not something that would give them away to those who didn’t. “The King’s Trusted.”

There was a small chuckle from around the room, and Noct gave them all a nod. “Enjoy the rest of the festival. I’ll see you all on Monday.”

With that, the group left, chatting amongst themselves. It was obvious that they knew each other, and were catching up on the last year. Noct watched them go until the door shut behind them, leaving him alone with his retainers.

“Ignis,” He turned to his advisor, “Do you know where my father is?”

Ignis gave a small shake of his head, “No. But I can find him for you.”

“No. But I can find him for you.”

“Ignis,” Ignis nodded again and left, Gladio following him with a wave of good-bye.

Noct turned back to Prompto. The blond was smiling and looking a lot more relaxed than Noct had seen in a long while - outside the bedroom anyway. He offered a hand to him, and Prompto took it without hesitation. “Let’s go enjoy ourselves before we see dad.”

Prompto let out a soft sigh as he followed Noct out of the room and back towards the city. “You really need me there?”

“Dude. You’re gonna have to get used to my dad eventually.” Noct teased, letting go of Prompto’s hand to throw his arm over his shoulders. “I thought you were getting along with him now?”
“Sure.” Prompto shrugged, leaning into Noct and winding his own arms around Noct’s waist. “But he’s still the king.”

“So what I!” Noct pointed out, highly amused, “You never had a problem with me!”

“I did too.” Prompto argued, “Took me years to get up the courage to talk to you.” He pointed out.

“But you did. And you never treated me like a prince. So why could you do that with me, and not with dad?” They paused at the large doors of the Citadel, taking a moment before they went back into public. Noct turned and pulled Prompto in his arms, looking at him with a soft smile. “So what if he’s a king?”

“I got to know you. You’re just a dude, dude.” Prompto looked at Noct, leaning forward to give him a small peck on the lips. “Lazy,” He kissed him again, “Nerdy.” And another, “King of naps.” Another, “Obsessed with fishing.” Yet another kiss was gently placed against Noct’s mouth, not giving him a chance to return it. “Kind. Sweet. Beautiful. You just happen to be a prince.”

“My dad’s more than a king too, you know.” Noct pointed out, laughing slightly and placing his forehead against Prompto’s in a gesture he hadn’t needed to use in a while. “Maybe you just need to get to know him too.”

“Yeah…” Prompto agreed, but Noct could hear the hesitation in that word.

“Y’know, I’ve been meaning to set up a weekly dinner with him. Why don’t you come?” He suggested.

“You sure you don’t want to hang out with him on your own? I mean, you haven’t really been able to see him properly since we got back…”

“You’re family now.” Noct pulled back enough to smile at Prompto, and to look into his eyes. “You should be there.”

Prompto again hesitated before giving a small nod. “Okay.”

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The end of the first night of the festival found Noct and his retinue gathered in his apartment for a more private celebration since the king wasn’t available until the next day. Away from the crowds, Noct felt himself relax a little. They no longer had to be careful what they said, and around who, and they could just relax and be themselves.

He grinned at the others as he entered the room, having just raided Gladio and Ignis’ fridge. He held up his prize as he threw himself on the couch. “Time for some real celebrating.” He announced, putting the bottle of whiskey on the coffee table in the middle of the group.

There was a bit of silence, and he watched as Ignis and Prompto shared nervous glances. “Uh. I’m out.” Prompto said quickly.

“Yes. I believe will refrain also.” Ignis agreed, almost as quickly.

Beside Ignis, Gladio laughed. “Thought you two got over that years ago?”
Prompto shuffled in his seat, a clear indication of how uncomfortable he was suddenly feeling. “Not… so much.”

“Got over what?” Noct asked with a frown, wondering what else he’d missed in his long sleep.

Silence fell across the room, and Noct found himself becoming concerned. If it was something that his retinue was afraid to tell him, it had to be bad. His head started to spin with thoughts and theories, none of which really made sense. Had something happened while they were drinking one night?

“Well… You see…” Prompto wasn’t looking at him. How bad was it if Prompto refused to look at him? Did Ignis and Prompto go on a killing spree when liquored up or something? After another look at Prompto, Noct realised that he was feeling embarrassed rather than ashamed. So it couldn’t be that bad… right?

“When Prompto and I drink together,” Ignis took over hesitantly, realizing that Prompto didn’t want to say it. Whatever it was. “We tend to have sex.”

That wasn’t what Noct was expecting. Not at all. It took a moment for the words to actually sink in to his brain. The world stopped while he replayed that word in his mind, trying to come to terms with what it meant. Surely they were kidding, right? Ignis and Prompto? Maybe he misheard them. He had to have, right? There was no way that was what Ignis said… Right?

“Lots of sex.” Gladio added, unhelpfully and Noct stared at him for a moment. Apparently he hadn’t misheard.

“Sooo much sex.” Prompto leaned heavily back against the couch, looking like he’d rather be anywhere else.

Noct just stared. At Ignis, at Gladio, at Prompto. Whatever he’d been expecting to hear, that was not it. His mind wasn’t quite understanding what they were saying, and he took a moment to be confused. “With… each other?” He questioned.

“Not me.” Gladio raised his hands in front of him palms out, as if distancing himself from any blame. Ignis and Prompto just looked a little uncomfortable, and Prompto shrugged. “Basically.”

“Given the change in circumstances, we have both agreed to forgo alcohol for the time being.” Ignis tone was reassuring, but it wasn’t really helping Noct. “Lest there be any… temptations.” The way Ignis said that, made it sound like it was a recent thing. Like it was something they did every time they drank together.

He felt like his whole world had been turned upside down. Sure, he knew that Prompto had had a large number of sexual partners in the past - the blond had told him as much - but he had never dreamed that Ignis could have been one of them.

His mind was spinning and his stomach churning, but he didn’t know for sure what he was feeling. He had no reason to be upset, not really. Whoever Prompto had been with in the past, that was Prompto’s business, not his. And as much as he wished it hadn’t happened, it wasn’t really Noct’s place to judge. He’d been gone for ten years and a lot could happen in ten years.

But that didn’t help with the fact that it was Prompto and Ignis.
“Noct.. buddy, you okay there?” Prompto sounded nervous, like he was expecting Noct to be upset. He was, but that didn’t mean he should be. His eyes moved to his lover, still wide and shocked.

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“You… and Ignis?” He questioned again.

“Yeah.” Prompto’s face was a little pink and he shrugged. “I mean… Dude, Iggy’s kinda hot, in case you haven’t noticed…”

Noct’s eyes turned to his advisor and he stared at him for a moment before shaking his head. While many may consider Ignis to be ‘hot’, and Noct could understand that objectively, he himself didn’t see it. He turned his eyes back to Prompto, his mind still trying to comprehend this new information.

Disturbingly, his brain began to provide pictures of what it assumed their… trysts looked like. He closed his eyes and shook his head again, trying to remove the offending images. He did not want to think about that.

“And… you’re worried it’ll happen again?” He questioned, glancing down at the bottle of booze on the table.

“No really.” Prompto tried to reassure Noct, but wasn’t really helping. “It’s just… something that always happened whenever we drank together before. Makes me kinda… not want to drink with him now?” Prompto sounded unsure, as if he didn’t quite know how to explain things.

Slowly, Noct nodded. He knew that Prompto had absolutely no intention of being unfaithful, but that didn’t help the pictures and questions filling his mind. How had that little tradition of theirs even started? And why Ignis of all people?

“Right… no booze.” He found himself muttering, still feeling off kilter. He stood, “I think… I’m just gonna go and crash…”

He didn’t wait for them to reply before leaving the room and retiring to his bedroom. He didn’t know what to think about this, but knew that he needed some time to process what he’d just learned.

As he closed the bedroom door, he heard Ignis speak quietly.

“Leave him be, for now. Give him time to think.”

Prompto took a few hours to join Noct in their room, probably following Ignis’ advice to give him time to think on things. The time hadn’t really helped much, his thoughts too interested in circling one another to actually make any sense, but Noct also knew that he didn’t want to talk about it any further. Not yet.

So when he felt Prompto climb into the bed, he just stayed still, pretending to already be asleep. It seemed to work. Prompto hesitated for a moment before leaving a soft kiss on his temple.

“I love you.” The blond whispered into the darkness, “Don’t ever doubt that.”

He didn’t know if Prompto knew that he was faking his sleep, but he was grateful when the blond didn’t try to rouse him, or speak to him. Instead, they lay side by side silently until sleep finally took Noct.
Chapter End Notes

As always, please feel free to join our discord!: https://discord.gg/esGdEpD

I would also love to hear what you guys think! I'm absolutely blown away with how many comments and kudos this fic has got and absolutely astonished that people are liking it this much.

I know that it feels like there isn't a lot of plot going on at the moment, but trust me, there is. This is laying down the groundwork for the end of the arc - where it will feel like everything happens at once.
Not long after Noct disappeared into his bedroom, Gladio and Ignis made their goodbyes. The atmosphere in the apartment had become tense, and both men wanted to get back to their own home. They left Prompto with a sympathetic shoulder pat and smile and were on their way.

Nothing was said for the first ten minutes after locking their own door behind them until Ignis heaved a sigh and massaged the bridge of his nose. “What is it?” He questioned tiredly.

“Hmm?” Gladio looked up from where he was sat on the couch, a hesitant expression on his face.

“Something is bothering you.” Ignis prompted, sitting on their arm chair and regarding his partner.

Gladio was quiet for a long moment, trying to organise his thoughts before speaking them out loud. “You still in love with Prom?” He finally asked in a soft voice, almost afraid of the answer.

Like Gladio, Ignis was quiet for a moment, and that was enough to give Gladio his answer. “Are you sure you wish to have this conversation?” The advisor asked, doubling down on Gladio’s suspicions.

“No.” The shield admitted, “But I think we gotta.”

Ignis gave a small nod, “Very well then.” He leaned back in his seat and Gladio sensed that this was going to be a long, difficult conversation. “Yes. A part of me is still in love with Prompto. And I believe that that part of me always will be.”

Gladio thought on that for a moment and spoke again, not allowing himself to fall into the trap of overthinking. “He was your first. Wasn’t he?” He asked.

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“Ig, you guys broke up almost a decade ago… There was no-one else?”

Ignis simply shook his head, “Are you familiar with the term ‘demi sexual’?” He questioned, in his ‘professor’ voice. Gladio had a feeling he was about to get a lesson. He shook his head, and Ignis nodded once. “Demi sexuality is not well known.” He began, “Simply put, before I feel a physical attraction to anyone, there must first be an emotional connection.”
“You gotta fall in love before you can fuck?” Gladio asked. He’d never heard of that happening before, but was more than willing to believe it was a thing. Even if it wasn’t Ignis telling him about it. The spectrum of sexuality was a lot bigger and more diverse than he understood, and he knew that.

Ignis chuckled a little, “Not love necessarily.” He corrected, “Just a strong emotional connection.”

“You felt that with Prompto?” Gladio asked, trying to understand the concept a little better.

“Somewhat. Though there was a large amount of alcohol involved in our first night.”

“You felt that with me?” This time, Gladio’s question was a little more hesitant. They’d only been together for a short time, and even he knew it was far too soon for the L word. But strong emotional connection? That, he could admit to.

The smile Ignis gave Gladio was soft and gentle and he gave another, slow nod. “I am well on my way to being completely besotted with you.”

The advisor paused for a moment before moving. He stood and made his way to sit beside Gladio, tucking one of his legs under the other so he could face him completely. “I have always had a strong emotional connection with you. Even when we were younger.”

“You had a crush on me?” Gladio asked, somehow finding that thought both amusing and charming.

Ignis’ face flushed slightly and the man chuckled, “I suppose I did.”

Gladio had to smile at just how adorable Ignis was being. He wanted to pull the man into his arms and whisper sweet nothings before whisking him off to bed. But he knew that if he did that, they wouldn’t talk about this again, and Gladio needed to understand everything he could before his emotions caught up with the conversation.

“But you’re also in love with Prompto.” He stated, trying to get his head around the idea.

“Yes.” Ignis wasn’t hiding anything. He was being completely and utterly honest with Gladio and the shield was thankful for that. He never did see the point in squirrelling away truths to protect someone’s feelings. “Do you not also still feel something for your first love?” Ignis asked, “I was under the impression that its not uncommon.”

“I do.” Gladio nodded, “I mean, I think about what time we had, and the memories make me happy, but I’m not in love with her anymore. Maybe it’s ‘cause I had more closure?” Gladio was just thinking out loud by this point, glad that Ignis wasn’t going to hold anything he said against him. He had always been free to speak his mind around the man.

“Hmm?” Ignis’ questioning hum was accompanied by Ignis gently placing his hand on Gladio’s thigh. It wasn’t a sexual touch, but it was definitely intimate and Gladio felt himself leaning into the touch.

“She died.” Gladio explained, “When Insomnia fell.”

“I wasn’t even aware you were seeing someone.” Ignis responded with a frown.

Gladio just shrugged, “I’m not exactly the guy that goes around yelling about my love life.” He
pointed out. “Wasn’t a secret or anything. Just wanted to keep my work life and home life separate, y’know?”

Ignis nodded. He could understand that notion. He and Gladio were doing something not dissimilar - never denying their relationship, but also not going out of their way to tell anyone that didn’t need to know.

“How did you get over her?” Ignis asked, shuffling his position so he could lean against Gladio with his head on his shoulder. Gladio threw his right arm around Ignis’ shoulder, glad that this conversation wasn’t nearly as hard as he had been expecting.

“Dunno. Falling in love with someone else probably helped.”

Gladio allowed Ignis to play with his right hand, fingers intertwining and gently stroking. He gave the advisor a soft kiss on the head and felt the man relax against him.

“Is this… going to be a problem?” Ignis asked in the most hesitant, unsure voice that Gladio had ever heard from him. “My feelings for Prompto?”

Gladio took his time, thinking about things. He wanted to reassure Ignis, to tell him that it wouldn’t get in the way and that everything was fine and dandy, but also didn’t want to lie to Ignis. He wanted to make sure that his words would be one hundred percent true before giving them to Ignis.

“I don’t know.” He answered honestly. He felt Ignis tense up against him and tightened his grip on his hand for a second. “I need to think on it some more.” He admitted, “Figure out my feelings and shit.”

Ignis was quiet for a moment before he pulled away. “Very well.” He said quietly, standing and pushing his glasses back up his nose. “I will set up the spare room.”

“Huh?” Gladio frowned, wondering where the hell that had come from. “What? Why?”

“If you’re unsure of the status of our relationship, then perhaps I should-”

“What?” Gladio’s frown deepened and he leaned forward to recapture the man’s hand and pull him back down onto the couch. “Ig, I’m not unsure about our relationship! I just don’t want to lie to you and tell you everything’s fine when I don’t know for sure.” He pulled the chamberlin onto his lap and buried his head on his shoulder, arms loosely holding him around the waist. If Ignis wanted to get out of the embrace, he wouldn’t even have to struggle.

“You’re not the only one falling fast, Ig.” He said quietly against the man’s back. “And it’s fucking terrifying. At least you knew about your sexuality before all this. I was a hundred percent sure I was straight until you kissed me.”

“Gladio, you kissed me.” Ignis pointed out, chuckling lightly. He finally relaxed a little, moving to be more comfortable on his boyfriend’s lap.

“Nah-uh.” Gladio shook his head, a smile playing on his hidden lips. “I was straight, remember?”

“That was what I believed too. Which is why I never attempted to start anything until you kissed me.” There was a teasing edge to his tone and he moved again, this time managing to hook a finger under Gladio’s chin and lift his head. Once eye contact had been established, Ignis turned around
fully within Gladio’s arms and leaned down, gently pressing their lips together in a feather light touch. “While I can’t say I never dreamed it would happen, I can say I never expected it to. Rather a surprise, to be honest.”

“We good?” Gladio asked quietly, voice cracking slightly as he asked for reassurance.

“That would depend entirely on you.” Ignis answered, “Though I am willing to spend every day fighting to show you that my feelings for you far out shine those that I have for Prompto if need be.”

Those words settled what discomfort was left in his stomach, and Gladio leaned forward to rest his head against Ignis’ chest, arms tightening around him some more. He still didn’t want to say that everything was fine - he wanted to give himself time to be absolutely sure - but he was now convinced that it would be.

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Prompto was already gone by the time Noct woke up. For the first time in weeks, Noct wasn’t expected to wake up early and had apparently been allowed to sleep for as long as he wanted, so he closed his eyes and tried to take a nap, ignoring the cold spot beside him.

Sleep didn’t come easily for him. His mind was still fixated on the things he’d learned last night. Prompto had slept with Ignis. On more than one occasion. When he’d spoken to Prompto about his past before, the blond had made it sound like he’d only had a series of one night stands and Noct was under the impression that Prompto had never slept with anyone twice.

Except Ignis, apparently.

How was Noct supposed to look his advisor and friend in the face, knowing that he had slept with Prompto? Knowing that Ignis, his confidant and most trusted had been with the love of his life, and never even said anything?

The clock beside the bed read 11:15am when Noct finally crawled out of bed and showered. He didn’t know what to do with himself now. Today’s plan had been for him and Prompto to spend the time together, to enjoy the festival before dinner with his father. But now, Noct didn’t know if he wanted to do that, or even where Prompto was.

Instead, he let his feet carry him down the stairs to the gym that Prompto had once shown him. Maybe he could exhaust himself into another sleep? That sounded like a plan. At least then he wouldn’t have to think for a few more hours.

When he arrived, he found Gladio using the weight bench, and nobody else around.

“Yo.” His shield greeted him and Noct sat on one of the nearby seats and said nothing, simply returning Gladio’s greeting with a nod.

After a few more reps, Gladio replaced the weights and turned to sit on the bench and face Noct. “That really shook you up, didn’t it.” It wasn’t a question but Noct nodded in answer anyway. Trust Gladio to jump straight to the point. “You gotta chill.”

How could Gladio sound so calm about it? Okay, sure, it wasn’t his boyfriend that had slept with his brother, but still...
He watched as Gladio stood and summoned two wooden training swords, much like the ones they had used when he was a child. He handed one to Noct - who took it without question - and lead him to the only open space in the small gym.

“Why’re you so upset?” Gladio questioned, taking a ready stance and gesturing for Noct to come at him.

The prince did as silently bid, raising his sword to bring it down on Gladio’s head. The shield blocked him easily and shifted his stance slightly to push Noct away.

“I don’t know.” Noct answered honestly, waiting for retaliation.

“Is it ‘cause you weren’t Prompto’s first?” Gladio questioned, bringing forth a slow swing that was easily dodged. He was going easy on Noct.

“No. Knew that.” Noct stepped aside and brought his blade up again. The wood felt too light in his hands, and he had to concentrate on not over extending his reach. “Prom told me he’d been with… a few people.”

Gladio’s bark of laughter confirmed that ‘a few’ wasn’t quite right. Noct had suspected as much when Prompto had told him he hadn’t kept track of how many, but it had been something he hadn’t really put much thought into.

“A few.” Gladio repeated, still laughing. Noct, more upset about that than he realised, took the opportunity while Gladio was distracted to try to land a blow. He came close, but his friend managed to side step out of the way. “A few don’t cover it.” Gladio confirmed Noct’s thoughts, “After he left Iggy, he let loose.”

“Wait… left Iggy?” Noct nearly missed a block in his distracted state. For Prompto to have ‘left’ Iggy, that meant it had to have been more than a one night stand. Right?

“Yeah.” Gladio stepped back and lowered his weapon, watching Noct with a frown. “Iggy was his first. Don’t think he was ever serious about anyone after that.”

Noct felt his heart drop into his stomach and was distantly aware of his sword clattering to the ground. His eyes were wide and glued to Gladio, breath caught in his throat. “F-first?” He questioned.

“You okay?” Gladio banished his sword and stepped forward, a look of concern etched onto his features.

“You first…” Noct repeated, his body frozen as he recalled a conversation he had had with Prompto after their first time.

‘Did you love them?’
‘No. Came close with the first guy though.’

Noct’s knees began to tremble, and he slowly lowered himself down on a nearby bench before they could give out entirely. His mind was churning through those words. When he’d first heard them, he’d managed to bite back his jealous reaction, but now knowing that the first guy was Ignis…

‘Came close with the first guy though.’
Prompto had admitted to nearly falling in love with Ignis.

“Noct.” Gladio’s gruff voice brought him back to the present and he looked up to watch his shield sit beside him. “They broke up like nine years ago. You got nothin’ to worry about.”

Noct swallowed the lump that had formed in his throat, “Prom… told me once that he never loved any of them except…”

“Except Ignis.” Gladio gave a nod, as if this was old information for him. “Kid’ll deny it to his last breath, but he definitely loved Ig.” Gladio’s words were not helping Noct’s spinning mind. Why would Prompto deny it if it were true? To make Noct feel better about himself? About them?

“What… happened…?” Noct wasn’t sure if he wanted to know why his best friend and advisor broke up, but he knew that he needed to know.

“Prompto got scared.” Gladio shrugged, “Realized what was happening wasn’t just some tryst to pass the time and ran away. Half way across Lucis. Said he didn’t want to fall in love with Iggy.”

“He abandoned him?” Noct frowned. That didn’t sound like Prompto. Prompto was fiercely loyal to those he loved, and Noct couldn’t believe that Prompto would just up and leave, not without trying to figure it out first.

“Ig knew what was coming.” Gladio replied, “Knew from the minute they got together it wouldn’t last. He understood and let him go.” The shield sighed and shook his head, looking a little forlorn. “Didn’t mean it didn’t break Iggy in half though. The man was a mess.”

Noct closed his eyes, feeling a wave of sympathy for his old friend. He didn’t know what that would’ve felt like, and he didn’t ever want to find out. To have someone he loved run away like that…

“took Iggy years to get over him.” Gladio continued, voice quiet and sad. “Not sure he really did, to be honest.”

Those words caused Noct’s eyes to flash open and he turned to stare at his shield. Was Gladio implying that Ignis was in love with Prompto? Even though they apparently broke up years ago?

Gladio must have noticed his sour expression, and he gave a sad and amused snort. “You think you got problems? Prompto was well and truly over Ignis years ago. Don’t think he ever looked back - ‘cept for the times they got drunk together. You got nothing to worry about. It’s my boyfriend that’s in love with yours, not the other way around.”

Gladio’s words began to comfort Noct. Ignis may still have feelings for Prompto, but Prompto wore his heart on his sleeve, and everybody could tell that he was crazy about Noct. Gladio was right, his boyfriend wasn’t in love with another man, it was Gladio’s-


Gladio laughed again, sounding surprised. “Since Altissia. Thought you knew? You didn’t even ask why we had a spare room.”
“Just assumed you guys were crashing together. Didn’t think you guys were.. *Together.*” And now his mind was trying to be helpful in supplying images for *that.* He shook his head to dislodge them and then allowed himself to be amused. “Well… congrats, I guess.”

Gladio just shrugged, as if it wasn’t a big deal. “So. You gonna go talk to Prom, or what?”

“Guess I should.”

Noct eventually found Prompto on the roof, guitar in hand. The blond was staring out over the city, watching the celebrations below. From this high up, the sounds were somewhat muted, and Noct could hear Prompto singing quietly to himself as he approached.

“I never felt that it was wise to wish too much,  
*To dream too big would only lead to being crushed*  
Then I met you, you weren’t afraid of anything,  
 Nicolaicatu me how to leave the ground, to use my wings.”

Noct held back, standing behind Prompto close enough to hear him, but far enough away to not interrupt. The song was beautiful, a slow melody and soft words. He could hear the emotion in Prompto’s voice in the way it cracked every so often.

Noct wanted to hear more.

“I never thought a hero would come my way,  
*But more than that, I never thought you’d be taken away.*

Now it’s cold without you here,  
It’s like winter lasts all year  
*But your star’s still in the sky*  
So I won’t say good-bye  
*I don’t have to say good-bye.*”

Noct closed his eyes, letting the music surround him. His mind conjured up images of Prompto singing this alone in the dark, waiting for him to come back. His heart ached at the thought and he listened.

“My days of doubt were in the past with you around,  
You made me feel I had a place, direction found  
You showed me that a greater dream can be achieved,  
*Enough resolve will conquer all if we believe.*  

The light you gave to guide me will never fade away  
*But moving forward never felt as hard as today.*”

But who was Prompto singing about? Now that he knew their history, Noct couldn’t help but wonder if the song of sorrow and love was meant for Ignis, not for him. A remnant of their breakup. He tried to push away the jealousy, and somehow managed.

Prompto may have been in love with Ignis, but he wasn’t with him any more. Prompto had chosen him, even if he hadn’t *said* that yet. Noct tried to reassure himself that Prompto had waited for him as
best he could, that he had never been disloyal and never would be.

Slowly, he stepped forward, joining Prompto on the edge of the building. The blond looked up from his guitar, but after a gesture from Noct kept playing.

“Now it’s cold without you here
It’s like winter lasts all year
But your star’s still in the sky
So I won’t say good-bye
I don’t have to say good-bye.”

Prompto finished his song and waited a moment before banishing his guitar into the ether. “Hey.” He greeted Noct, not looking at him.

“Hey.” Noct returned the greeting, his own eyes trained on the horizon and they both fell quiet.

Prompto was the first to break the silence, his eyes still watching the city below. “Notice all our heavy conversations happen somewhere high…?” He questioned with a chuckle.

Noct nodded, “Yeah.” He hadn’t noticed that, not until now. Their first one, when he’d initially confessed to Prompto and told him about the law… that had been here. On this roof top. After that, they’d often found themselves somewhere high up when having an emotional conversation - when it was possible, that was.

“So…” Prompto spoke again, taking a breath, “This gonna be another heavy conversation?”

“I dunno.” Noct wished he could be more helpful, but his mind wasn’t providing him with the words to say. He knew that Prompto would have to take the lead with this one, at least until his thoughts cooperated.

Prompto sighed softly and finally turned to look at Noct, prompting the prince to do the same.

“I’m not gonna apologise.” The blond started, “Not for Iggy and me. It was a long time ago, and it was great while it lasted, but it’s over now.” He paused for a moment before letting out another breath, “But… I will apologise for not telling you. It was shitty of me, I just didn’t know how to tell you that the only other real relationship I’ve ever been in was with a guy that’s practically your brother.”

“He is my brother.” Noct corrected quietly, when he saw Prompto’s frown in confusion, he elaborated. “Iggy’s a ward of the crown. His parents died when he was a kid. I guess they were friends with my dad? So dad took him in. Since dad couldn’t adopt him and took him as a ward instead, he’s not eligible for inheritance. But in every other legal sense, he is my brother.”

Prompto was quiet for a moment, just looking at Noct, dumbfounded. “I’ve known you guys sixteen years.” He muttered, “How did I not know that?”

Noct gave a shrug, looking back out over the city. “We don’t tell people. Makes him more of a target. It’s safer for it to not be public knowledge. After a while of not saying anything to anyone, it kinda slips your mind that someone might need to know.”

“That makes sense, I guess.” Prompto was still frowning, Noct could feel it. “Now I feel even shittier.” The blond muttered, “For not saying anything about sleeping with your brother who you
didn’t tell me was your brother for sixteen years.” He prodded Noct in the chest with mock outrage, “So why don’t we call it even?” He suggested, and Noct turned to look at him. “I slept with your brother and didn’t tell you, and you didn’t tell me you had a brother.”

Apparently not having been told that Ignis was legally his brother had upset Prompto quite a bit. Noct could kind of understand why - it was a bit of a big thing to not know about your best friend. Slowly, he gave a nod.

“We can call it even.” He agreed, turning his attention back to the city before them. “But… it might take me a bit to get over this.” He admitted quietly. It was hard to say that out loud, but Prompto deserved to know how he was feeling. The key to a good relationship was communication, right? At least, that’s what he was always told.

He knew that he could tell Prompto anything, in fact, the man was probably happier when he did rather than keep it inside. Even if it wasn’t something that Prompto really wanted to hear. Even knowing that, Noct found it hard to express himself at times. He was getting better at it though.

He felt Prompto nod beside him, understanding and accepting. After a moment, the blond nudged his shoulder, “Got any other siblings I should know about?” He questioned jokingly.

“Why? So you can sleep with them too?” There was no malice in Noct’s words, only a joke. He was trying to be cool about it, and surprisingly making the joke helped.

“Just keeping it in the family bro.” Prompto’s continuation of the joke made them both laugh, and Noct felt himself let go of some of the tension. He leaned sideways a little resting his head on Prompto’s shoulder, happy when the blond leaned back against him, head atop his own. “I love you.” Prompto said quietly, “You and nobody else.”

Prompto’s words were comforting but Noct couldn’t help but feel that if Prompto was serious, he would announce Noct to be his chosen. Even if it was only to him, if not the council. Still, Noct wasn’t going to push it. That announcement had to come from Prompto when he was ready.

“I love you too.” Noct wound his arm around Prompto’s, pulling himself closer to hide from the winter chill. “Even if I can’t get that mental image of you and Ignis out of my head.”

Beside him, Prompto snickered, “Trust me. It’s nothing like what you imagine.”

Noct pulled a face and nudged Prompto with his shoulder. “Gross.” Though the subject wasn’t his favourite, talking and joking with Prompto was making him feel a hell of a lot better. “You know he and Gladio are a thing?”

“Duh.” Prompto pulled back a little to look at Noct, amusement lighting up his eyes. “You didn’t? Been obvious since we came back from our trip…”

Noct shrugged, still a little bewildered. “Why doesn’t anybody tell me these things?” He questioned rhetorically.

“Because nobody expects you to be that oblivious.”

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Things were still a little strained between Noct and Prompto when they made their way to dinner
with the king. While Noct had accepted the fact that Prompto and Ignis used to be a thing, he wasn’t exactly over it. That would probably take some time - at least long enough for the shock to wear off.

He wasn’t entirely sure what his problem with it was, only that he had one and that he would have to get past it eventually. One thing he did know, however, was that it wasn’t enough of a problem to completely get between himself and Prompto. He loved the blond far too much for something like that to scare him off.

His fears and insecurity were probably very obvious to Prompto, and Noct would forever wonder if that was what prompted the blond to do what he did next.

The moment they entered the king’s informal dining area, Prompto closed his fist over his heart and gave a formal bow. “King Regis,” He greeted, tone far from casual, “Thank you for inviting us to dinner. If I may, I would like to take this opportunity to officially claim Prince Noctis as my Chosen and declare my eventual intention on taking my place at his side in marriage.”

Noct stared at Prompto, eyes wide and mouth hanging open slightly. While he knew that the fact that Prompto hadn’t said it before had been weighing on him, he hadn’t actually expected him to announce it so soon, and so formally. Didn’t Prompto know that it would’ve been fine for him to announce it to Ignis and Gladio, or any other member of the court, that he didn’t have to say anything to the king himself?

His heart was pounding in his chest as he watched his lover take a breath to steady his nerves. His racing pulse was loud enough in his own ears to almost drown out what came next.

After another steadying breath, Prompto spoke again before the king could reply to his previous statement. “I humbly request your blessing of my askance for his hand.” While Noct could see that Prompto was trembling slightly, his voice held nothing but conviction. Determination.

Regis chuckled slightly, regarding his shocked son and the man that wanted to marry him. “You do realise,” The king began, amusement in his voice, “That it is customary to ask the blessing of the father without your intended beside you?”

Prompto glanced to his side, to look at Noct with soft, loving eyes and a gentle smile. “That would require me to leave his side, your Majesty.” He pointed out, words quieter than before.

All Noct could do was stare and wonder if he was still asleep and dreaming. Today had been a day of roundabouts and rollercoasters for his emotions, and this wasn’t exactly steadying him.

Prompto was not only declaring Noct to be his Chosen, but also asking for his father’s permission to marry him.

Sure, they’d talked about it before, and they’d both hinted or even outright said that it was something they wanted in the future, but to Noct it had been exactly that. Something to think about in the future. He honestly hadn’t expected this so soon and now that Prompto was bringing it up, it felt too much, too fast.

Regis chuckled again and Noct’s attention turned to him. “Are you intending on proposing to my son right now?” He questioned, looking at the two of them with a raised eyebrow.

“No, your Majesty.” Prompto admitted. “And while this is a formality that I’m happy to indulge in, please do understand that it is just that. A formality. The only thing that will truly stop me from
asking, is if he asks me first.”

“It sounds as if you do not truly care for my opinion.”

“You opinion is not the one that matters.” Prompto countered, a soft smirk on the corner of his mouth, as he finally lifted his head to regard the king. “While your blessing would make things easier, I told you once that I will fight with everything in my power to remain at his side. That is not a vow I take lightly, even should it be you that I fight against.”

Noct’s eyes widened as he looked between his father and his beloved, wondering what the hell was happening. Prompto was all but threatening his father, the king, the man he was usually so completely intimidated by that he couldn’t string two words together without running away.

Did he not understand how close he was to actually offending him? He’d just all but told the king that he didn’t care about what he thought. Noct hadn’t really got to re-know his father since returning to this time, and he had no idea how he would react to this. This could end very badly indeed. Didn’t Prompto know not to insult a king?

When Regis chuckled, Noct’s attention flew to him, bewildered and confused. Though he was glad that Regis wasn’t taking it badly, Noct was so off kilter that he felt he was going to fall sideways any second now.

“Such words are easy to say, when you already know my answer.” The king said lightly, “Though I admire your spirit and willingness to face political backlash to simply remain by his side. You will make a fine king one day.”

Prompto deepen his bow a little, “Please, Your Majesty,” He requested, still sounding formal. “I would like to hear the words.”

“I am honoured to give you my blessing.” Regis said, voice turning kind, “On one condition.”

Frowning, Prompto lifted his head to regard Regis and Noct could see the trembling in his hand intensify.

“And what is that, your Majesty?”

“That you refrain from calling me that outside of official business and formality.” Regis’ tone was highly amused and the look on his face was the fond one usually reserved for Noctis. There was also a mild look of challenge and a raised eyebrow. “If we are to be family, it would not do to be so formally addressed, don’t you agree?”

“Well sir, that was about as formal and official as I get.” Prompto pointed out, relaxing a little and stepping towards the table.

Dumbly, still in a state of shock, Noct followed behind, taking his own seat as he continued to stare at the other two men in the room.

Regis laughed again, and Noct’s head spun.

“Are you quite alright, son?” Regis questioned, “Perhaps you should drink some water. You look as if you’re about to keel over.” Noct did as suggested, taking a glass and filling it with water, gulping the cold liquid down to try to do something to steady his emotions and ground himself.
While he was busy, Regis turned his attention back to Prompto. “You didn’t warn him you would be saying that, did you?”

Prompto shook his head, and to his credit, he did look a little apologetic. “No. Wasn’t sure when I’d get up the nerves to say it without falling over.”

“Prom… you want to…?” Noct managed to not choke on his water, but his words were proving to be more difficult. “You asked my…”

Prompto turned to look at Noct, his expression softening as he reached out and took Noct’s hands in his own. “I love you.” He said, “And I hadn’t been following your family traditions to make that clear. I didn’t realise how big of a deal it was until Ignis told me the other day. I’m sorry I made you wait so long.” He lifted the hand he was holding and gently pressed his lips against the heated skin. “I chose you years ago, I guess I just forgot that I had to say it.”

Noct was trembling slightly, too many emotions hitting him at once. He squeezed the hand that still held his and watched his love. Prompto was smiling at him, a look of such adoration that Noct wondered how it was that he even had the smallest doubt.

Prompto hadn’t not named him his chosen because he wasn’t ready for it. No. He hadn’t named him, because to him it was a declaration made years ago in another lifetime. One that still held strong even after ten years apart.

Suddenly, everything felt right in Noct’s world. The worry and doubt that had been festering deep within him was released and he was finally able to take a breath. “I love you too.” He said quietly, returning Prompto’s words and smile. “Just wasn’t expecting that.”

“You know me, love the unexpected.” Prompto quipped, lowering their joined hands and turning back to the table.

It was then that Noct remembered that his father was there, and felt himself flush deeply. For a moment there, his world had shrunk to be only himself and Prompto and he had completely forgotten where they were.

Prompto turned his attention back to the king. “Your Majesty, this-”

Regis was giving Prompto The Look. The ‘you’ve forgotten something’ amused look. The one that he used to use when Noct forgot his table manners. Apparently Prompto understood that look, and he flushed slightly before giving a nod and a slightly nervous laugh. “Regis.” He corrected himself, only for Regis to intensify the ‘look’. Prompto blushed deeper, “Reggie..?” He squeaked, half questioning. Regis gave a satisfied smile and Noct couldn’t help the snort of amusement.

Prompto cleared his throat and tried again. “Reggie. This wasn’t the reason we asked to see you tonight…” He drew himself to sit up straight, “As you know, we aren’t the only ones to remember the future that was.” Regis nodded, and Prompto continued, “We planned on using the music of The King’s Trusted to find any more that did.”

“Am I to assume that your plan worked?” Regis asked.

“Yeah.” Noct took over this time. “Six people so far. I’ve tasked them to find others. No matter how things come down, having people on our side with all the information will make things easier.”
Regis nodded, and Noct laid out a plan for the King’s approval.

Noct was quiet their entire journey home. Prompto didn’t comment on it, simply gave him concerned looks and decided against breaking the silence. Instead, he just followed his lover all the way back to their building and up to their apartment, wondering what was bothering him. His plan was sound, and even Ignis would have approved of it. The King was certainly all for it.

So what had got Noct into a mood? Was he still upset about the whole sleeping with Iggy thing? Prompto had hoped that his feelings and intentions towards Noct were clear now, if not before.

He was going to bring it up when they got inside, or at least, that was the plan. Before he could get a word out, he found himself being manhandled and pushed against the door they just closed. “Wh-” He didn’t even get to finish his one word question before lips hungrily descended on his.

Okay. He was not going to complain about the suddenly needy man pushing him back against the door, but he was going to question it.

Later.

For now, he returned the almost desperate kiss, his own arms wrapping around Noct to secure their closeness as their mouths battled for dominance. Noct was being a lot more aggressive than before, and Prompto was more than happy with that.

Eventually, Noct pulled back to breathe and pressed his forehead against Prompto’s. “I’m your chosen.” The prince said, a grin on his face, “You chose me.”

The way Noct was grinning and bouncing slightly made him look like an excited kid being shown where the candy store was. Prompto couldn’t help the fond smile or chuckle. “I chose you years ago, Noct.” He pointed out, voice a whisper. He reached up with one hand and gently stroked Noct’s cheek. “Ever at your side. Remember?”

That earned him another series of clumsy kisses passionate enough for Prompto’s knees to go weak. He leaned heavily against the door and Noct simply pressed himself closer.

“You want to marry me.” Noct whispered in the same ‘I can’t believe this is actually a thing’ voice when he next pulled back for air. Apparently he hadn’t yet mastered the ability to breathe through his nose when kissing.

Again, Prompto chuckled fondly. “Yeah. I do.”

Apparently those words were a trigger for Noct, because the next thing Prompto knew, the prince was on his knees in front of him, nuzzling into his groin.

This was a fantasy come true for Prompto and his body responded eagerly, hardening rapidly enough to make him a little dizzy. “Noct…” He leaned back against the door but kept his eyes trained on his lover, watching as he undid his trousers and pulled him free. Noct took him in hand and his mouth soon followed. He was still clumsy and uncoordinated, but had made definite improvements since they’d last tried this.
Prompto found himself burying his hands in Noct’s hair and leaning back to enjoy the touch. He hadn’t realised that making that declaration would work Noct up so much, or how excited it would actually make him.

“Ever at your side.” He muttered, wondering if he could push this any further.

Below him, Noct gave a soft whine and redoubled his efforts, greedily sucking on Prompto’s cock while using his hands in an uncoordinated effort to bring him more pleasure. While the technique was lacking and inconsistent, the enthusiasm was more than making up for it. Noct wanted to make it good for him.

“No and forever.” His words again made Noct moan, but they also prompted him to pull back and stand up to kiss him deeply.

“Fuck me.” Noct ordered, pressing himself against Prompto with a hand sneaking between them.

Prompto batted it away gently and buttoned his trousers up with one hand while the other wound around Noct to keep him close. Their mouths were busy kissing again, so he didn’t bother to tell Noct his plan before grasping him by the ass and lifting.

Noct’s legs automatically went around his waist and Prompto stumbled forward, carrying his prince to their bed.

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Chapter End Notes

So I wasn't sure if I should write the smut or not for this chapter, but it does seem like this was probably a good place to end it, rather than try to wait for me to get inspiration.

The next chapter is going to have a timeskip in it, just so you're aware. I'm about half way through writing it. Finally got to a point where the plot is actually happening... So enjoy the fluff in this chapter and the next. It's about to get /hectic/.

As always, feel free to join our discord!: https://discord.gg/esGdEpD
Monday came, and with it the gathering of The King’s Trusted. As Noct shuffled into the room, he found himself looking around, trying to memorize the faces of the people who were still loyal to him, even through the end of the world and his abandonment.

He gave them all a moment to catch up with Prompto, and to chat amongst themselves before he stood and gained their attention. “Thank you for coming back.” He said to them, glad to see they were all there. “I have spoken to my father, and we have come to an arrangement.

“Should you agree, The King’s Trusted is to become my answer to the Kingsglaive. A taskforce loyal to me and under my command with the same rights and privileges afforded to the Glaive. Officially, members have been handpicked by myself or my retainers and those that are currently legally too young to join will be considered reserve members or members in training.” He kept his eyes on the people he was talking to, and they all seemed to be paying attention. They didn’t look upset by the idea, so Noct continued.

“This will allow me to send you throughout Lucis, and possibly the rest of Eos with a lot less red tape involved. It also allows me to financially compensate you for your time and effort.”

“You’re gonna pay us?” One of the Trusted questioned. A young man, possibly sightly older than Gladio.

Noct nodded, “With benefits.” He added, “Fitting for someone serving the crown. Ignis and I were up for most of the night working out the specifics, but there is room for negotiation.”

Noct pulled a stack of papers from the armiger and placed them on the table in front of him. “Prompto gave me all your names, but please make sure that the information we have is correct.” He gestured to Prompto who began handing the pages to the right people. “These contracts allow me to pay you. Most of it is pretty standard.”

He watched as each of them took the paperwork and began to glance through them. “Please, remember this isn’t an order. It’s a pretty big commitment and I don’t want any of you to feel pressured into this.”

“It has an end date…” The youngest member of their small group said with a frown on her face. She
looked up at Noct, “Five years from now?”

Noct nodded, “That was Ignis’ idea. I don’t want to trap any of you into a lifelong service. After five years, there is the option to renew the contract and renegotiate any terms.”

“It also says that you aren’t in charge…” Another questioned. From the names given, Noct was under the assumption that he was the older brother of the young girl.

“Yes.” Noct nodded again, “While you will be serving me, you will officially be put under Prompto’s direct command. He’s worked with you before, he knows you better than I do and has more experience with what’s to come. You’ll still be expected to follow my orders, but his take priority. If I tell you to do something, and Prompto tells you the opposite, you do what he says.”

That had been an easy decision for him. Once Ignis had pointed out that Prompto had not only worked with the Trusted before, but had also experienced the ten years of darkness that Noct had missed out on, Noct had agreed that he was a better choice of leadership. Convincing Prompto of that had been a little harder, especially when the blond had all but ordered him to stop trying to give him more money, insisting that he didn’t need to get paid for his third job for the Crown.

He let the group continue to read through the contracts for a while before again reaching into the armiger. This time, he pulled out a box. “If you agree to join, this will be what identifies you as a member.” He reached into the box and pulled out a wristband.

It was similar to the one that he’d given to Prompto over a decade ago. Leather, with an embossed skull decoration. Unlike Prompto’s, however, these ones were red in colour. The same red as the soles of the shoes of the Crownsguard.

“Wearing these, and presenting them will allow you access to places that is usually closed off to the public. They will also act as a permanent border pass to allow you to come and go from Insomnia freely.”

He turned to look at the youngest members of their group, “Your apparent ages make things a little more tricky. Nobody would believe I would send a nine year old beyond the wall, and will likely question your credentials.” He fished around in the box for another, different wrist band and held it up.

This one was the same as the others, but the colouring was green and white. A homage to the wristband that Prompto had worn before Noct had given him the upgrade. “This will identify you as reserve members. You should still be able to access most areas, but if you run into trouble, contact Prompto.”

The younger members nodded and reached out, taking a wristband each.

“Please take your time to read your contracts carefully. If you agree, sign both copies and return one to myself or any of my retainers. Then, Prompto will contact you with your orders and issue you with your identification cards and wristbands.”

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It seemed that Noct was the only person surprised to find out that all six of the people who remembered had signed up to be members of The King’s Trusted. Prompto had dutifully set up training sessions for them with the help of Cor - the new Captain of the Glaive. The Trusted and the
Glaives were set to work together to increase the efficiency of their training. Both groups brought something different with them, and while the Trusted had been instructed to keep their knowledge of the future secret, they had managed to come up with their own reasons for their expertise.

“Think I’m gonna have to quit school.” Prompto grumbled, throwing himself onto the couch beside Noct. He’d been at the citadel all day dealing with his new job and had only managed to come home after it was already dark. “Working on the council and being the commander of an entire branch of the military’s gonna suck up a lot of my time.”

Noct frowned and turned to look at his partner, vaguely amused. “Your ‘entire branch’ consists of six people. Three of which are too young to officially train…” He pointed out, “How busy can they keep you?”

Prompto’s half glare wasn’t nearly as frightening as the blond seemed to think it was. He huffed a sigh and leaned heavily against Noct, dislodging the gaming controller from his hand. Noct picked it up to pause his game before turning his attention completely on his lover. “It’s not the size that matters.” Prompto muttered under his breath.

Noct’s hands found Prompto’s shoulders and began to gently rub them.

“Mmmm.” Prompto leaned into his touch and sighed, “Logistics.” He muttered, answering Noct’s earlier question. “I have to know exactly who I sent where, and what else needs to be done. I gotta keep track of all of them and make sure the paperwork goes through properly.” He made a sound that would’ve been an irritated grumble if he wasn’t relaxing completely under Noct’s touch. “Why me dude?” He whined. “Gladio’s way more suited to being in charge.”

“If they’re gonna be my equivalent of Kingsglaive, that means they’re gonna be serving you too.” Noct pointed out. “Besides, Gladio’s busy with his martial arts thing.” He added.

Since coming back to the city, Gladio had taken back his class and was putting a lot of effort in. He seemed to enjoy it, and had even roped Ignis into joining him for the odd class. Now that he knew they were together, Noct understood how he’d managed that.

“School’s on break.” Prompto objected, “He’s not teaching right now.”

“The break’s two weeks, Prom.” Noct chuckled, “He’ll be back into it after that.”

Prompto let out a defeated sigh, “Fiinnnnee.” He muttered, making a sound of protest when Noct went to move his hands away. Taking that as a warning, Noct returned to his amateur massage.

“If you quit school, I’m gonna get homeschooled.” The prince declared. “School’s shit without you. Everyone’s always asking me where you are.”

Prompto chuckled, “You leaving because I do won’t do anything good for the rumours.” He pointed out.

Noct shrugged, and a soft quiet fell between them. After a moment, Noct spoke a little hesitantly. “We could always… confirm the rumours…” He suggested.

Prompto tilted his head backwards so he could look at Noct, a slight frown on his face. “You want us to go public?”
"I want to shout to the world ‘haha bitches, he’s mine!’.” Noct half joked, “I hate not being able to hold your hand and shit in public.”

“I would hope you wouldn’t shit in public.” Prompto’s bad joke earned him a light smack on the arm. “But for reals. If you wanna tell everyone, I’m fine with that.”

“You realise that you’ll get hounded by paparazzi…” Noct warned slowly, not quite ready to hope that he would get his way.

Prompto shrugged, “They’ll get over it eventually.”

“And a lot of people’ll probably be upset that I’m with a guy… You’ll face the brunt of that…”

Again, Prompto shrugged, “We’re gonna have to come out sooner or later.”

“You’ll need your own shield…”

“What the fuck for?” Prompto frowned, apparently not liking that idea.

“People’ll know your connection to me. Makes you a target. Especially if you don’t have a guard.”

“Prompto… I survived an apocalypse. Not to mention battling gods, endless robotic armies, fuck loads of deamons. And I’m in command of an army.” He pulled away from Noct’s hands to sit up and face him properly. “Whether it’s officially recognised now or not, I am fully trained as Crownsguard, Kingsglaive and daemon hunter. I can summon guns at will and am proficient with over seven unique weapon styles, and unarmed combat. Why the hell would I need a bodyguard?”

“Because nobody knows about those things.” Noct explained. “And if you refuse a shield, you’ll be going against centuries of tradition and basically saying ‘fuck you’ to the entire royal family and House Amicitia. I’m not saying you need a Shield to protect you. I’m saying you need one for propriety. It’ll be expected of you.”

Prompto was quiet for a moment before he let out a defeated sigh. “There’s a lot of that in your family, isn’t there?” He questioned rhetorically.

Noct shrugged and nodded. It was something that he’d grown up with and was just normal to him. Something that Prompto would have to get used to. “I’m a prince.” He pointed out, “Comes with a lot of tradition and political bullshit.”

“Can’t I just share Gladio?” Prompto suggested, “I’m like, always with you anyway. Even more than he is.”

“That could probably work.” Noct agreed.

“Either way,” Prompto leaned back against Noct and the prince began rubbing his shoulders again, “We should probably talk to Iggy first. In case there’s stuff like that we’ve not thought of.”

“See, look at you, already learning to utilize your advisor!”

“You mean I get my own Shield, but I don’t get my own Iggy?” Prompto fake pouted, “No fair.”

Noct chuckled, trying to ignore the jealousy that came up when he thought about the fact that
Prompto had already had Ignis. “Iris’ll probably end up your official Shield.” He said instead.
“When she’s older. She’d be over the moon, by the way. When we were younger, she used to tell me to ‘hurry up and get married’ so she could be a Shield too.”

“Wonder if she’s upset we missed movie night this week.”

“Nah. Having too much fun at the festival.”

Slowly, a new routine was established. Prompto had only been half right about how busy the Trusted kept him, and he used the free time he hadn’t been counting on to finish up with school so he could earn an early graduation. His teachers were astonished, but he managed it with ease.

Noct quickly pulled out of school and nominated Ignis to be his tutor. He was upset about the fact that he would still have to take the official exams, but he quickly got over it.

Instead of school, he spent his days actually studying with Ignis and training with either Glaido or the Trusted. After a few weeks, the three older members were officially deemed fit for combat and sent on their merry way to gather the ones who remembered scattered over Lucis.

Every so often, Prompto would receive a message from a member, telling him the name of someone else who remembered. By the time their one year anniversary of their arrival came around, the Trusted had grown to encompass over a dozen people and Prompto was starting to become busy organizing them all.

The fact that they were growing, and that their members seemed to be random had the Council questioning who exactly they were and how Noct was hand picking people from all over Lucis seemingly without even meeting them first.

The excuse of having met them while traveling was starting to become more and more flimsy as more and more people joined up and eventually they had to add in that they were recommendations from people that were already members, and that Noct and Prompto spoke to them all by phone.

Eventually, Prompto and Ignis had to come up with a second contract to give to those members, detailing that they would only become full members after a formal interview with Noct and Prompto. Since the council never bothered to read the contracts, they were exactly the same but with that paragraph added.

It seemed to work, and was keeping the council off their backs.

Ignis was also teaching Prompto etiquette in preparation for the official announcement of his and Noct’s relationship. He’d managed to convince them to wait for a while, at least until Prompto had the basics down.

Between classes with Ignis and his other duties, Prompto joined the others as all three of Noct’s retainers began training with a member of the Kingsglaive, Crowe, on the use of the Kings magic. While they had become adept at summoning things from the armiger while on the road, Noct had been unable to teach them some of the finer points of his magic. Without the ring and the throne, Noct wasn’t able to share the power to warp with them and they couldn’t borrow it from Regis without giving up access to Noct’s armiger, but they were becoming proficient in their own unique styles. Magic manifested differently in everyone that had access to it and the retinue were no
exception.

Ignis’ aim became sharper along his ability to sense enemy weakness and not have to rely on memory. He was also now able to pass off his blind fighting ability as a manifestation of the Crystal’s magic, allowing him to indulge in the practice more often in the guise of training.

Gladio’s resilience and resistance to damage was growing by the day, and he had surprisingly developed the ability to create low level curatives. A fact that had oddly delighted the Shield and Ignis reported finding him in stasis a few times too often before he figured out his limits.

Prompto was now able to create magic bullets on his own using bottled elemancy but try as he might, he was unable to create the spells in the first place, which he found to be a disappointment, but decided not to be too upset since it gave him an excuse to spend more time with Noct as the two of them worked together to make magical rounds.

Noct was proud of his retainers, and had to wonder just how powerful they would be once they all had full access to the crystal’s magic. A part of him wondered if he would ever find out.

Lunafreya spent the winter in the city, but almost as soon as the thaw came, she departed accompanied by a small envoy of Glaives tasked with her protection. Noct had offered her the use of the Trusted, but she had simply said that they were needed elsewhere.

Their weekly movie night was now permanently moved to the Amicitia house, and they were regularly joined by King Regis. Slowly, Prompto came out of his shell and started to get to know him, even like him enough to not hesitate so much when using the nickname the king had ‘requested’.

Eventually, after months of consideration and schooling from Ignis, Noct and Prompto decided to come out to the public and announce their relationship. But not before Noct could do one final thing.

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One Saturday, Prompto was surprised to find out that their usual gathering had been postponed when he received a formal invitation to the Citadel. Noct had apparently received one too, because when Prompto texted him about it, he replied that he was already there.

So, with no small amount of confusion, Prompto took his bike and made his way to the Citadel and to the large ballroom the invitation specified. It had also specified that he dress in formal attire, and he was glad that Ignis had taken the time a few weeks ago to make sure he was properly fitted. Later, he would realise that Ignis was aware of what was about to happen, and had ensured that Prompto had appropriate attire at the ready.

When he arrived, Prompto was surprised to find Lunafreya standing outside the room he had been summoned to. He cocked his head to the side and regarded her, trying not to get distracted with the white ball of fluff circling his feet waiting for attention.

“Is something wrong?” Prompto asked, worried. Luna had been gone for only a month, and they’d all expected that she would be gone a lot longer than that. Something big must have happened for her to return so soon.

But she gave him a wide smile and approached him, her hand landing to rest gently on his arm. “Not at all.” She reassured him, and he felt himself relax a little and finally allow himself to bend down to
pet the over excited dog at his feet, his attention never fully leaving the Oracle princess.

He looked up at her, still frowning. “Then what’s all this about?”

“You’ll see.” With that, she gestured for the door and when he stood she opened it for him. That was odd treatment to get from the Oracle, and only made Prompto more confused, especially when she closed the doors behind him, leaving herself outside them.

As he stepped inside, he stopped in his tracks. The room was decked out in decorations, soft lighting and a projector throwing images at a wall. It was a slideshow of all the photographs he had saved. From the animals he shot in middle school to the pictures of their older selves in front of the Citadel. Each picture was shown for a few seconds at a time.

His confusion deepened as he watched the pictures change, and only got worse when the sound of a piano began to fill the room. He looked around the room and his eyes fell on Noct behind a piano.

The prince was playing beautifully and Prompto realised he’d probably been playing since he was a child, given that he was royalty.

Then Noct began to sing.

‘When the night has come
And the land is dark
And the moon is the only light we’ll see,

No I won’t be afraid
Oh I won’t be afraid

Just as long as you stand
Stand by me’

As he listened to his love play and sing, his eyes fell back on the pictures on the wall. There were now more pictures of just him and Noct, the hundreds of selfies taken being displayed one by one.

‘Oh darling, darling stand by me
Oh stand by me
Oh stand now
Stand by me
Stand by me’

Noct’s voice was soft but strong, full of love and affection. Prompto couldn’t decide where he wanted his attention to be - on Noct or on the pictures painting their lives on the wall.

‘If the sky that we look upon
Should tumble and fall
Or the mountain should crumble into the sea’

Prompto had to hold back a snort of amusement as one of his action shots of their battle with the massive adamantoise flew onto the wall. He turned to Noct to see him smile too and suddenly he couldn’t look away. They held eye contact as Noct continued to play and sing, the words finally starting to sink into Prompto’s mind.
'I won’t cry, I won’t cry
No I won’t shed a tear
Just so long as you stand
Stand by me

And darling, darling, stand by me
Oh stand by me
Oh stand now,
Stand by me

‘Whenever you’re in trouble
won’t you stand by me
Oh stand by me
Stand now
Stand by me’

Noct jutted his chin forward, wordlessly asking for Prompto to turn his attention to the projection on the wall. His pictures were gone now, replaced by a white screen with delicate text. Text that Prompto had to read four times before the words truly registered.

‘Stand by me,
Stand by me’

Heart beating a hundred miles a minute, he turned his head to look at Noct, as if confirming that it was actually happening. Noct, still smiling at him - albeit a little nervously - gave him a small nod.

Prompto’s eyes turned back to the four words hanging on the wall and read them over one more time.

‘Will you marry me?’

Noct had finished his song now, and slowly rose from his seat. He stepped forward and joined Prompto in the middle of the room to take his hand. Then, once Prompto’s eyes left the writing on the wall and looked into his, Noct knelt down on one knee.

“I wasn’t sure if you had planned on asking me any time soon or not and waiting was driving me crazy. Then I realised that you were probably waiting too, and I’ve already made you wait way too long.” Noct cleared his throat when his voice cracked a little. He took a breath and continued. “I don’t know if now’s the right time or not, or if there’ll ever be a right time. But I already know that I don’t want to go a single day of my life without you by my side. Without you, I’m incomplete. I want to do everything I can to make sure nothing can tear us apart again. Not politics, not crystals, or monsters, or gods. I want to be able to walk tall by your side, proudly as your husband.” He cleared his throat again and took another breath, his hands gently squeezing Prompto’s.

“Prompto Argentum, will you grant me that honour? Will you marry me?”

Prompto was shaking, his breath was coming out in shallow gasps as emotion flooded over him. Sure, he sort of knew that this was coming, and sure, they’d mentioned it, joked about it and talked about it but he hadn’t expected it to be this intense when it actually happened.

He wasn’t sure if he could find the words to express the multitude of emotions flowing through him, and though they both already knew his answer, he found himself acting instead of speaking. He knelt
down to join Noct face to face, his hands adjusting their position so that he could hold Noct’s hand.

“The honour would be mine.” He finally managed to say, in a tone that was way too formal. He pulled a face at his words and inflection before letting out a choked laugh. “I meant yes. Yes. Yes, I’ll marry you.”

The grin that split on Noct’s face was infectious, and soon they found themselves smiling like fools until eventually Noct leaned forward and captured Prompto’s lips in a gentle, loving kiss.

When he pulled back, it was to awkwardly stand and pull Prompto up with him. Once they were both on their feet, Noct pressed a button on his phone and the doors to the room opened.

One by one their friends entered the room starting with Ignis, Gladio, Cindy and Luna. Behind them came Clarus, Iris, and Regis and finally the members of The King’s Trusted and a few Glaives filed in. Prompto recognised all of them and realised that the reason the room was decked out in decoration was because this was a celebration.

Noct had, of course, known what Prompto’s answer was likely to be, and had obviously arranged it so that every friend that Prompto had was there to share in their joy. A glance at the wall showed that the writing had changed. In the same loopy font, the words now read something new.

‘He said yes!’

There was a picture under the words, one that had obviously been taken from by the projector. It showed Noct and Prompto on their knees, sharing a tender kiss.

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“Playboy Prompto, settling down and getting married! Whoudda thunk it?”

Noct joined Prompto in a small group and handed him one of the two glasses of champagne in his hands. The blond took it with a big smile and leaned against him, listening to the words of his friends.

“Never thought I’d live to see the day.” Another quipped, lifting his glass towards Noct in greeting.

“Well technically, you didn’t.” The youngest of their small group pointed out, and there was a small smattering of laughter between them.

“Noct,” Prompto wound his arm around Noct’s waist. “This is Elmyra,” He gestured to the youngest of the group, “Eldon,” To the next - the one Noct was sure was Elmyra’s older brother. “And Valos.” Prompto gestured to the last of their small group.

“It’s an honour to meet you.” Noct gave them a small bow and smile, feeling a little out of his element.

He was spared any more small talk when something heavy collided with his chest. Somehow managing to keep his balance, he looked down to see a mop of dark hair connected to the sobbing girl clutching him in a tight hug.

“Iris?” He questioned, handing his glass off to someone so he could give the upset child his full attention. “What-?”
“Please don’t die.” Her sobbed words tore a hole through his heart and he found himself winding his arms around her, holding her head to his chest. “Please. You’re not allowed to die.”

Gently, he pulled away so he could kneel in front of her and look into her eyes. “Why do you think I’m going to die?” He questioned quietly, though he had a fair idea of her answer.

They were at a party with almost a hundred people who either remembered, or knew about the future. Almost a hundred people who knew that he had had to die, and that there was a fair chance that it would happen again, even if they managed to change things. Even if nobody told her, there was a good chance that she’d overheard something that she shouldn’t have.

It had been one of the things he’d considered before inviting her to the party, but in the end he’d decided to bring her along because she was important to Prompto - to them both. She was as much a part of their small family as Gladio, and it had felt wrong to exclude her. Even if it was risky.

Noct was beginning to think he’d made the wrong decision.

“People were saying–” Iris tried to speak, her words failing as more sobbs tore through her throat. “That—that you’re from the future. And that you died and you’re gonna have to die again.”

Noct fell quiet, one hand gently running through her hair in what he hoped was a comforting gesture, and the other holding on to her shoulder. He didn’t know what to say. What could he say?

Of course, he could deny the truth, tell her that they were all wrong and that everything was fine and he was never going to die. He could comfort her with hollow words that wouldn’t be believed by either of them and treat her like the child she appeared to be. A part of him was sure that that was what he was supposed to do but…

But he couldn’t lie to her. Not like that. Iris might have been a child, but she was still a person, a friend, that he respected far too much to give empty promises.

“We’re gonna do everything we can, to find another way.” He said instead, voice quiet but honest.

Iris finally pulled her hands from her tear filled eyes to look down at him, her lips trembling as she tried in vain to hold back another wave of sobs. “Promise me.” She demanded in a broken voice, “Promise me you’ll find a way where you don’t have to die.”

Again, Noct hesitated. He wanted to, oh how he wanted to. He wanted to make that promise and be able to keep it. He wanted to make sure that this innocent little girl never had to worry about things like that. But he knew that he couldn’t. “I can’t.” He told her honestly, his heart breaking even more as the sobs she’d been holding back broke free. “I can’t promise you I won’t die. Nobody can.” He moved the hand from the top of her head to gently lift her chin and make her look at him. “But I can promise you that I will do everything I can, that I’ll ask anyone I need for help, so that I can stay here with everyone I love.”

Surprisingly, this seemed to help. Iris sniffed a few times and wiped her eyes before hanging her head and giving a small nod. She didn’t like it, but she accepted it as the best he could do.

“So you’re really from the future?” She asked, her voice so quiet it was almost lost in the music in the room.
“Yeah.” Noct admitted. Clarus was probably going to kill him for telling her, and Gladio would find a way to bring him back to life just so he could kill him too, but Noct didn’t want to lie to her.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

It would be so easy to blame others. To tell her that he was afraid of how her father would react, or her brother. It would be easy to tell her it was because she was a child and not old enough to understand. Or that he didn’t want to scare her. But none of those were entirely the truth.

In all honesty, Noct wasn’t entirely sure why he hadn’t told her. It was probably a combination of the above, but that didn’t feel like it was everything.

He didn’t know what to say, or how to answer, but apparently Prompto had some ideas.

“Because we’re selfish.” The blond knelt beside Noct and looked up at Iris, who turned her attention to him. “In the future,” He began quietly, “I adopted a little sister.”

With a frown, Noct turned a little so he could look at Prompto as he listened, curious as to where this was going. His love didn’t often tell stories of the ten years that Noct was away, and while they were more often than not heartbreaking, Noct treasured every single one he heard - even the few about Ignis.

Prompto had a sad smile on his face, one of grief and love. “She was one of the strongest people I’d ever met, and without a doubt the most powerful woman. We were all hunters but she...? She was a slayer. When the world ended, she was among the first to go out and join the fight, even though she was still a kid.

“Every night, without fail, she would go out into the wildlands and fight each and every daemon she could find. She would go out of her way to save and protect anyone; from children to warriors - whether they wanted it or not.” There, Prompto gave a small, proud, laugh. “That got her into trouble a lot.” He admitted. “In the early days, big tough guys didn’t like to get saved by this tiny ball of female rage. But eventually, the fact that she was a girl, and that she was small didn’t matter anymore.

“On the battlefield she was truly a marvel. She could take down a Red Giant in three hits, all on her own. She was always so brave, never backing down from a fight when people were in trouble, even when it put her in danger.

“If she wasn’t out there fighting to protect people, she was training, honing her skills. She barely took any time for herself in the beginning. One day, I asked her why she didn’t take a break.”

Prompto reached forward and shifted his position a little so he was more stable. He then took Iris’ hand and looked up into her eyes. “Do you know what she told me?” Iris shook her head.

“She told me, that she kept fighting because she was scared, all the time. She was terrified that if she took a break, someone she loved would get hurt. That if she didn’t train enough, one day her blade would miss its target and someone would die. She was terrified that one day, she wouldn’t be fast enough or strong enough, and she wouldn’t be able to protect people.

“She was smart. Smart enough to realise that at the end of the world, losing someone, not being able to help - that wasn’t a possibility, it was an eventuality. One day, something would happen that she wouldn’t be able to stop, and she knew that it was only a matter of time before she lost someone she
“She told me that she worked hard because she believed that if she did, if she worked hard, if she trained hard, she could push that day further and further away. That even though it was exhausting, even though she was getting tired and hurt, it was better that it was her that was hurt than someone else.

“So every day, she would train and she would fight. And every day, she was just that little bit more scared that the day she lost someone would come. Until she was living her entire life in fear. Instead of letting that fear slow her down, she used it to push herself forward, to keep walking tall and to keep on protecting people.”

Prompto had to pause to take a breath, and Noct could see that he was trying to keep his emotions away. He’d never told Noct any of this and the prince felt his heart break for him. Coming back in time meant that he’d lost that sister, lost that connection. Iris was here, alive and safe, but she would never be the same person that he’d known in the future. Too much had already changed to let that happen. He was laying it bare for Iris, telling her the truth and not sugar coating it. Noct watched as Prompto re-lived it, felt the pain and worry again, and there was nothing he could do to help.

“When we came back in time,” Prompto continued, “My little sister had no idea who I was. We’d met in passing, but she didn’t know me. And she wasn’t the same person I left in the future. When I saw her again, she was this… Innocent little girl. Not afraid of anything. And even though she wasn’t grown up yet, she was already showing the strength and courage that I admired.” He was smiling up at Iris now, not bothering to stop his tears from gathering.

“I watched her, saw her face the world with optimism and joy. Her only worry was that her school wasn’t going to let her learn how to fight…” Prompto gently brushed Iris’ bangs behind her ear in a soft, caring gesture. “Iris… How could I tell that little girl that one day, she was going to live every day of her life afraid? How could I tell her that the people she loved would be in danger, fighting for their lives in every moment? How could I take away that peace and innocence? Tell her that one day, being Iris the Daemon Hunter would be all she knew how to do?

“Even though the little sister I had is gone, a part of her is still here.” He reached out and gently tapped the young girl’s chest, over her heart. “And here,” He tapped his own heart. “And I want to do everything in my power to protect you, just like you want to protect everyone else. Because even though you’re not the same girl she was, you’re still my little sister. I wanted you to keep being protected from the horrors of the world, to not worry about any of those things, even for just a little longer. We all did.”

Prompto bowed his head and took a shaky breath, “We were selfish. You’re just a little girl, but you’re big enough and smart enough to understand and we should’ve seen that. The future that we’re trying to stop, it affects you too. You have a right to know what everyone is fighting for. We didn’t tell you because we were selfish. Please, forgive us.”

Iris was quiet, and Noct turned his attention back to her. She was staring at Prompto with wide eyes, a hand over her mouth. After a moment, she lowered it and her eyes narrowed with determination. She gave a single nod to Prompto before turning back to Noct.

“That settles it.” She announced, voice starting off shaky but quickly becoming steady. “You’re not allowed to die.” She told Noct. “If you’re gonna marry PromProm, that means you’re gonna be my brother too. And I’m an Amicitia. We don’t let our family die.” She stood up straight, holding herself tall as she stared down at Noct. “I want to join the Trusted.” She told him before shaking her head.
“No. I will join the Trusted. I will protect you both, not because I’m a Shield, but because you’re family.”

Before Noct could object, she turned to Prompto and punched him on the arm. “Even if I’m scared, I’ll be brave. So I need you to be brave too. I’m not the Daemon Slayer, but I’m still Iris. And I’m gonna help make sure that nobody has to live every day scared.” She had her hands on her hips by now, and Noct couldn’t help the proud smile, even as he shook his head.

“Iris, one day I will gladly take you into my Trusted. But right now—”

She rounded on him, eyes narrowed into an almost terrifying glare as she stared at him, mouth drawn into a thin line, “Do not tell me I’m too young. Do not say that I can’t help because I’m a child.” She prodded him in the chest hard enough to hurt. “Because even if you don’t want me to, I will be fighting. I’m an Amicitia, and that means I’ll protect not only my King, but my friends too. Let me train, and fight as one of you Trusted.”

“That’s.. Not entirely up to me.” Noct admitted, noticing that Clarus was standing a few feet behind Iris. He hadn’t even notice the King’s Shield join them. Or any of the rest of the crowd.

“No.” Iris agreed, “It’s up to me.”

“I would rather think I get a say in it too, don’t you think?” Clarus questioned, and Iris turned to face her father.

“Nope.” She decided. “All you can do is make me wait.”

As Noct watched her stand off against her father - one of the most powerful men in the Kingdom - he could see the warrior that she would one day become. The strength was already within her, and it seemed that finding out about an impending apocalypse was the quickest way to bring it out.

“I’ll train her.” One of the Trusted spoke up, gaining the attention of everyone around him. He was one of the older ones, one of the ones that Noct hadn’t officially met yet. “I’ll keep my eyes on her. Iris the Daemon Slayer protected all of us at one point or another. I don’t think any of us’ll have a problem returning the favour.” There was a series of nods and noises of agreement in the crowd around them.

“Look at that, Iris.” Prompto grinned at the girl, “You just gained a hundred more overprotective older siblings.” He teased. “Gods help anyone who ever tries to hurt you.”

“You can train.” Clarus agreed slowly, “But you won’t be going onto the field until you’re at least sixteen.” He watched her carefully, as if expecting her to object, “You have four years to prove to me that you can handle yourself. And if your grades slip, your training will be put on hold. Do you think you can find a balance?” He questioned.

Iris’ face split into a wide grin and she nodded enthusiastically, showing her true age for a moment. “YES!”

Noct watched her for a moment before turning to look at Prompto. His love was wearing a look of grief and pride as he too, watched the young girl. Noct had no doubt that Iris would do them all proud, but he could feel the anxiety in Prompto. He reached out and gently leant his hand on Prompto’s shoulder. The blond leaned into it and turned to smile at him with a small nod.
“Hey, Iris.” Noct pulled his eyes from Prompto to turn back to Iris. He stood to his full height, grimacing as his knee protested. “May I be the first to congratulate you on becoming a member of the Kings Trusted in training.” He gestured to Prompto, who had stood alongside him, “Present yourself to Commander Argentum on Monday morning to receive your credentials and training schedule.” He said formally.

“Yes sir!” Iris responded, closing her fist over her chest and standing at attention. She was trying very hard to keep a straight face, but the grin was winning out and Noct found himself returning the grin.

“Now. Go enjoy the party. Maybe get to know some of your new brothers in arms?”

Again, Iris gave a nod and a grin, and then flounced off into the party proper. As soon as she was out of sight, Noct felt himself let out a breath before facing the rest of the small crowd. “Protect her.” He told them, “Train her. Don’t go easy on her, but remember that she really is just a kid… She’s not the Iris you know.”

“You don’t have to worry.” Elmyra told Noct, a smile on her young features. “We’ll look after her. You’ll see. She’ll be stronger and braver than ever, and she’ll never be lacking backup.”

“We’ll train her good enough so she won’t need protecting.” Another chimed in. “And until then, if shit hits the fan, we’ll look out for her.”

“Thank you.” Noct said with a smile.

Slowly, the group disbanded and Noct and Prompto took a step outside. As soon as the balcony door behind them closed, Noct let out a harsh breath and sagged, leaning heavily against the railing. “Why do I feel like I just made a massive mistake?” He questioned.

Prompto chuckled as he joined Noct at the edge of the balcony, pulling himself up to sit on the stone railing. “Uh… because you just let a twelve year old join the military?” He suggested.

“Train with.” Noct corrected. “Train with the military. And she was gonna do that next year anyway.” He pointed out.

“Well then,” Prompto was speaking quieter now, and Noct lifted his head to watch his fiance. Prompto’s eyes were staring up at the glistening gold of the New Wall. “Maybe it’s because we just told a little girl that the world is going to end, and that everyone she’s ever loved is gonna be in danger.”

Noct nodded, casting his eyes over the city below them. “Yeah.”

“But it’s better that she know now, right?” Prompto questioned, half rhetorically, “Better that she can prepare for it, rather than just get thrown into it, right?”

“I don’t know.” Noct answered honestly. “She seems real grown up, but she’s still just twelve. Is she really mature enough to get told this stuff?”

“Too late to worry about that now.” Prompto pointed out, “If she’s gonna join the Trusted - even as just a trainee - I need to brief her completely. I don’t like the idea of her joining if she doesn’t have all the details. And if she doesn’t hear it from me, she’ll hear it from the others. Better that she hears it all from me, than her trying to piece it all together from overheard conversations and rumours.”
Noct had to agree, but that didn’t mean he had to like it. “I think maybe Clarus should be with you when you tell her.” He suggested, watching as Prompto nodded in agreement.

After a moment, Prompto took a breath and looked at Noct, smiling. “That’s Monday’s problem.” He told him, “Today, we celebrate.” He pulled Noct close, spreading his legs so the Prince could stand between them. “You finally asked me to marry you.” He said with a grin, pulling Noct into a soft kiss. “There’s gonna be a lot of days to stress and worry in the future. For now- For now, let’s just be happy.”

“Yeah.” Noct returned Prompto’s grin and leaned in for a kiss, only to be interrupted by the shrill sound of his ringtone.

With a frown and a sigh, he pulled back from Prompto and looked down at his phone. “Ardyn.” He told Prompto, his frown deepening as he stepped away from the balcony edge to answer it. “What do you want?” He questioned, tone harsh.

“Listen very carefully and do not interrupt. I have little time.” Ardyn spoke in a hushed voice, but there was something strange about the sound of his words that set Noct on edge.

“What is it?” Noct questioned.

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Of all the people that could have interrupted them, Ardyn was the last one that Prompto had expected. He let out a soft sigh of irritation and dropped off the balcony railing. He checked the door to make sure that nobody was coming, and kept an eye out for any further interruptions.

He wished he could be annoyed at Noct for answering the phone, but the fact that Ardyn had only called a handful of times told him that this was something important. The ever deepening frown on Noct’s face told him that whatever it was, it was serious. He tried to listen in to the conversation, but Ardyn’s voice was too muffled for him to make out, and Noct seemed to be speaking in another language, though it was hard to tell since he only got one or two words in at a time.

The conversation wasn’t too long, five minutes at most, but when Noct lowered the phone from his ear his face was pale.

“Go get my father.” He ordered, voice kingly and in control. “Tell him to gather the council.” Noct wasn’t speaking to him as his lover. He was speaking to him as his future king. This was serious.

“What is it?” He questioned, rather than just running off to do what Noct ordered. It would be good for him to have at least a basic idea of what they were gathering for.

Noct’s eyes met Prompto’s and the blond could see fear behind them. “The Empire is on its way.”

Chapter End Notes

A WILD PLOT APPEARS!!!
I have to say that I appreciate each and every comment and Kudos. I'm absolutely blown away with how many this fic has gained, and will be the first to admit I do a little happy dance and squeal whenever I get a notification for a new comment. Whenever I've got a block, finding a new comment helps too.

So please, if you are able, do comment. Even if it's just a thumbs up. It's helping me keep my motivation for this monstrously long fic lol. I love to hear what people think, and what their reactions are. I love to hear theories and thoughts on what is gonna happen next.

As always, I'm going to link our discord here. Feel free to come say hello :):
https://discord.gg/4WDhMVb (Link is set to never expire)
Plans

Chapter Notes

I'm back!

I'm so sorry for the delay in this one! I want to reassure everyone that I haven't forgotten or given up on this fic. I have plans, and I want to write it but unfortunately my physical and mental health is not cooperating x.x

I'm hoping to get back to my minimum weekly updates soon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Welcome and good morning!” The bright studio lights hurt Noct’s eyes, and the time of day didn’t help much at all. The bright and sunny disposition of the host was irritating, if not infectious, but Noct had a job to do and this was the way it was going to get done.

He was totally going to have to have a chat with Prompto after this. Ignis too. Whoever’s idea it was to make the announcement of their engagement on morning television. On a Sunday. But those conversations would have to wait. For now, Noct had to pretend to be awake enough to answer the questions presented to him, and to make the announcement.

Beside him, Prompto was grinning - stupid morning person that he was. A sharp nudge to his ribs told Noct that he wasn’t looking happy enough and he redoubled his efforts.

Mornings sucked.

“I am Maria Takkan, and today, we have a very special guest. For his first appearance on live television, may I present our very own Crown Prince, Noctis Lucis Caelum! Joining us today with one of his retainers, Prompto Argentum.” The host grinned at them, looking more enthusiastic than the time of day should have allowed. “Welcome to you both.”

“Thank you,” Noct replied, pushing himself to appear awake and enthusiastic. “And thank you for agreeing to host us.”

“But of course! I have to admit, it was a surprise to find out that you wanted to be on our show. We’ve all heard that you’re not fond of mornings.”

Beside Noct, Prompto snorted in amusement. “Ain’t that the truth?” He muttered, causing the audience to giggle.

Noct simply rolled his eyes at his lover’s remark. “No. I’m not hugely fond of them to be honest.” He admitted with a bit of a laugh. “But it’s about time I grew up, and apparently grown ups do things in the morning.” He poked out his tongue in distaste, showing what he thought of that idea. Again, there was laughter through the room.

“Oh I’m sure you’ll come to appreciate mornings one day.” Maria said with amusement, having no idea how close to the truth she was. “Now we weren’t given any information as to why you wanted
to join us this morning. While it’s lovely to have you on the show, I can’t help but be curious as to why.”

“I actually have an announcement to make.” Noct told her, sitting forward a little to reach the bottle of water on the table. Something to occupy his hands, to channel the nervousness he was feeling. “This seemed like a more interesting and fun way to do it, than a stuffy press conference.”

“Y’know we’re gonna have to have one of those too, right?” Prompto questioned and again Noct pulled a face. It might have been a little immature, but he was supposed to be seventeen, right?

“Two years ago, I met someone. Someone special.” The audience seemed to let out a collective gasp at that, and Noct wasn’t really surprised. He’d never once admitted to having feelings for anyone. As far as the public was concerned, this was all brand new and it probably was somewhat shocking.

He let himself smile softly, if not a little sadly. “That was when I found out that the old laws prevented me from pursuing anything.”

“You were expected to marry a princess?” Maria asked, sympathy in her voice and on her face.

Noct shook his head and readied himself. This was it. He was about to come out to the world. He knew that it didn’t really matter - not to the people that mattered anyway - but he couldn’t help but feel a little nervous.

Prompto seemed to notice this and managed to move in such a way that he could take Noct’s hand without anybody seeing.

“I was expected to marry a woman.” He explained. “The old laws forbade a member of the royal family from entering into a same sex relationship.”

Another gasp went through the audience and Noct steeled himself. He knew that there would be people against this, against him being with a male. But honestly, he could deal with that. There was no way to ever please everybody, and Prompto made him happy. It’s not like it was anybody else’s business anyway.

“Wow, that’s quite the revelation.” Maria seemed surprised and unsure what to say, but in a show of professionalism, she kept things moving. “You said that the old laws ‘forbade’?” She prompted.

Noct nodded, allowing himself to smile again. “Yeah. Until I pointed them out to my dad, and he abolished them.”

“So this special someone is a man?” The host still looked unsure, but Noct nodded in confirmation.

“One of the best I’ve ever met.” He couldn’t help the smile from widening a little as he spoke.

“Looks like he’s impacted you greatly.”

Noct nodded again. He glanced at Prompto for a moment, who gave him a subtle nod. “Greatly enough that last night I asked him to marry me.” There. It was said. That was the whole reason for today’s television appearance. And it was done. Now all there was left to do was to answer the questions that would be posed to him.
The crowd reacted with yet another gasp, and a quiet fell over the room before the whispers started. This was the first time that Noct had admitted to being interested in someone, and it was quickly followed by an admission of a marriage proposal.

The host took a moment to recover from her surprise before speaking again. “And what did he say to that?” She questioned, and Noct couldn’t help but turn his attention to Prompto.

Prompto was blushing deeply, looking a little sheepish. “Well I couldn’t exactly say ‘no’.” He pointed out, squeezing Noct’s hand a little between them. “I’ve been in love with him for years.” He admitted, possibly realising that it had sounded like he’d been pressured to give his answer.

“'You’re going to be our new prince?’” Maria asked, turning her entire attention to Prompto.

The blond grimaced a little then gave an awkward chuckle. “Keep forgetting that part.” He admitted.

“How can you date royalty and ‘forget’ that?”

“That’s what I keep asking!” Noct exclaimed, laughing at the way Prompto flushed even darker and squirmed in his seat a little.

“And like I keep telling you. You’re just Noct!” Prompto answered defensively. “All that royalty stuff, that’s just…” He shrugged, trying to come up with the words, “Not as important as that.”

“Well that certainly is a surprise.” The host seemed to recover from her shock, and she looked at the two of them with a wide smile. “I’m sure you’re expecting some backlash over this?” She questioned.

“Oh absolutely.” Noct confirmed, shifting a little in his seat. He hoped that his nervousness wasn’t too obvious. “I imagine that there’ll be a few people who have issues with me being involved in a same sex relationship. There’ll be others who are against me marrying a commoner. There’ll probably even be some that think I’m too young to make this big of a choice.”

“And you don’t care about those opinions?” Maria asked, politely.

Noct knew what this was. This was what Ignis had called a ‘leading question’. A question designed to make him stumble or look bad. It was apparently something that the media did.

“Oh absolutely.” Noct confirmed, shifting a little in his seat. He hoped that his nervousness wasn’t too obvious. “I imagine that there’ll be a few people who have issues with me being involved in a same sex relationship. There’ll be others who are against me marrying a commoner. There’ll probably even be some that think I’m too young to make this big of a choice.”

And what about Lady Lunafreya?” Maria asked, yet another probing question.

“What about her?” Noct questioned.

“She was seen in Insomnia recently. Her presence here sparked a lot of rumours about a possible marriage between the two of you. I’m sure a lot more people would think that a better match?”

Noct shook his head and shrugged. “It was definitely something that was previously seen as a
possibility - at least to the council. But it wouldn’t have been a good match.”

“And why is that?”

“Because I’m gay…” Noct said slowly, as if not sure if the host had understood that. “Don’t get me wrong, I love Luna. She’s a dear friend. But a romantic relationship between the two of us could never work.”

“And what does she think of all of this?” Maria asked, and Noct got the distinct impression that she was one of those that had hoped he would marry Luna.

“She gave us our blessing.” Prompto spoke up, expression unreadable to most. To most, Noct could see the irritation behind his eyes. The hand that held Noct’s tightened as the blond continued. “She was at our engagement party. She’s been nothing but supportive since she found out.”

“And when was that?”

“About three days after we got together.” Prompto’s eyebrows twitched in the way that Noct knew meant his irritation was building. Not that Noct would blame him. The woman was implying that he wasn’t good enough for Noct. On live television.

Noct was having to hold back his own irritation.

“It seems,” He said slowly, “That you’re one of the people that has a problem with my chosen?”

That seemed to surprise Maria. The woman sat up straight and her eyes widened for a moment before she shook her head. “Oh, no. Not at all.” She said quickly. A little too quickly. “I’m only saying the things that I know others are thinking.”

“That Prompto isn’t good enough for me?” Noct questioned. “Because I can tell you now, there is nobody better. Prompto is my best friend. He’s stuck with me through thick and thin and never made me feel like I didn’t belong with him. No matter what happened, no matter how bad things got, he was always there, right by my side. And there’s nowhere else I ever want him to be.”

Maria seemed a little taken aback by his passionate honesty, and beside him Prompto tightened his grip on his hand, silently reiterating his previous vow.

“The two of you have been together for less than a year. You don’t think the decision to marry is a little hasty?”

“No.” Noct answered simply. The way she looked at him made him realise that she was hoping for elaboration so he sighed softly and attempted a smile. “I’m seventeen. Traditionally my family marry early, some as young as eighteen. Sometimes for political reasons, and sometimes for love.” He briefly glanced at Prompto, his smile softening slightly and becoming more genuine. “I just feel blessed that I fall into the second category.”

Maria also turned her attention to Prompto, and Noct felt himself tense as if she was a threat. The small squeeze of his hand calmed him somewhat, and he reminded himself that while Prompto hadn’t grown up in nobility and politics, he had been a capable leader.

“There are those that might claim you to be interested only in his political rank and the money that that affords him. What would you say to those people?”
“That I don’t need his money?” Prompto answered, a vaguely questioning tilt to his voice. “I have enough of my own, and I don’t need his. Quite frankly, he could be a broke fisherman in the Vesperpool, and I’d still want to marry him.”

“Retirement plans.” Noct joked. It was obviously a joke, and everybody knew it - No king of Luis had ever retired, they had all died on the throne. Still, there was a smattering of chuckles in the audience and Noct joined him once he caught the look of distaste on Prompto’s face.

“Dude. You hate that place as much as I do.”

“Too many bugs.” Noct aggred with a nod and a grimace. “Let’s live in Duscae instead.”

“You promised me a house full of cats.” Prompto reminded him in a faux serious tone and Noct couldn’t help but laugh softly at the look on his face. So determined.

“That I did. Fine. If I ever get the chance to retire, we’ll move to Caem. Have a house of cats. I’ll fish and you can raise chocobos.”

“Deal.” And they shook on it. On live television. Much to the amusement of the crowd and host.

“So Prompto, you say that you have enough money of your own, but you’re only seventeen. Did your family come into money?” Maria seemed to want to get them back onto topic. And Noct had thought that he’d managed to change it. Damn.

Prompto shook his head, looking slightly puzzled. Noct couldn’t blame him. The fact that the blond was his retainer and served on the council were matters of public record. Sure, they hadn’t gone out of their way to tell the general public about it, but surely she would have done some research when she found out that Prompto would be joining Noct on the show? Granted, she’d had less than ten minutes notice on that. Maybe she simply didn’t have the time.

“I have four jobs…” Prompto said slowly, as if thinking the same thing that Noct was.

“Four? Surely as someone engaged to marry the Prince of Lucis, you don’t need so many to get by?”

“I don’t do my jobs for the money.” Prompto told her quickly, “I do them because I want to. Honestly, getting paid for it didn’t even occur to me before I got my first paycheque.”

“And what do you do for work?” Maria questioned, her tone sounding genuinely curious.

“First and foremost, I’m Noct’s retainer.” Prompto answered, and Noct felt a small smile creep onto his face when he realised that that was the job Prompto valued most.

“And what does that entail?”

“Mostly making sure he doesn’t kill himself doing something stupid.” Prompto chuckled, ignoring Noct’s sound of protest, “Like getting himself dragged out into the ocean while trying to reel in a fish.”

“That was one time.” Noct found himself muttering, pretending to be upset.

“Three times.” Prompto corrected him.
“And what else?” Maria questioned.

“I serve on the council.” Prompto chose to list his next job instead of getting into the specifics of his work as Noct’s retainer.

“In what capacity?”

“I’m the Minister of Citizen Relations. Which is a fancy way of saying that I make sure that the council doesn’t forget about the common folk.” Prompto told her, sitting up a little straighter in the way he did when he was trying to be official. To Noct, it was adorable, but to others it seemed to work. “I’m working on expanding the role to be an elected position. My hope is that one day, the Minister of Citizen Relations will be a true voice for the general population. So that everyone’s issues can be heard, regardless of the circumstances of one’s birth.”

This was news to Noct. It wasn’t something that he’d ever considered before - opening up a council position to the public? Electing a representative? The more he thought on it, the more he liked the idea, especially for that role, but he also knew that there would be a lot of opposition to that. People don’t like change, and for the last two thousand years Insomnia had run by monarchy. Even the council members had inherited their positions. An election for any position would be difficult to achieve.

But if anyone could do it, it would be Prompto.

As always, Prompto was thinking about the general population, rather than just himself. The man was a natural leader - even if he would never believe it himself.

“That sounds like a tall order.” Maria said with a laugh that told Noct she didn’t think Prompto could manage it. Again, he bristled, ready to stand at his Chosen’s defence - until Prompto gently squeezed his hand to calm him down.

“It is.” Prompto agreed, a rue smile on his face, “But I fully believe that it’s what’s best for Lucis, so I won’t stop pushing and organising.”

“I’ve never heard of the position before. Is it new?”

“Yeah. Apparently you need a title if you serve on the council, so after Noct bullied them into letting me join, they had to come up with something.” Prompto said with a laugh.

“Me? I’m not the one who told them to sit down, shut up, and listen.” Noct objected.

“I never said that!”

“Not with your words.” Noct chuckled, “But damn you’re scary when you’re pissed. The way you just stare at people when they upset you…”

“So that’s two jobs…” Maria once again tried to gently keep them on subject, but she had an amused smile on her face. “You said you have four?”

“Right. I’m also a member of the King’s Trusted.” Prompto told her, proudly lifting his right wrist where his armband was situated.
“Ah, the elusive personal army of Prince Noctis.” A look flashed on Maria’s face, one that told Noct just how much she wanted to learn about the Trusted, and how much she wanted to be the first to report on them. Noct gently squeezed Prompto’s hand in warning.

The fewer questions he answered about them, the fewer lies he had to keep up with. He wanted to keep them as close to his chest as he could. All the public knew was that the King’s Trusted was an elite force chosen by Noctis himself. Nobody knew how the recruitment process worked, how Noct chose his Trusted, or what the training was like.

Of course, Prompto understood Noct’s worries without having to be told. He simply gave Maria a smile and nod, and changed the subject. “I’m also a hunter.” He told her, switching to his last job.

“And what game do you hunt? Small animals or large?”

Prompto listened to her question, then looked her dead in the eyes and answered in a serious, but easy tone. “Daemons.”

The raised eyebrows and look of disbelief on Maria’s face was completely understandable. Prompto was presenting as a seventeen year old boy, and without knowing their history, his claims could be seen as extraordinary and somewhat embellished. He didn’t blame her for doubting Prompto, but there was a part of him that didn’t want to stand for it.

“Prompto’s been trained by the best.” Noct told her, “He’s fully capable in combat and one of the best hunters I’ve ever met.”

“I mean,” Prompto was blushing a little, but he ignored his embarrassment when he spoke. “The money’s not the best, but it’s worth it in other ways. The more daemons I kill, the fewer are out there to hurt other people.”

“That’s very noble of you.” Maria said, without any hint of sarcasm. “I must say, I’m surprised that someone as young as yourself has the skills necessary to hunt daemons.” She remarked.

Prompto simply shrugged, not really having an answer for that. They were on live television, so he couldn’t exactly come out and tell her that he’d spent ten years in perpetual night battling daemons.

“I’ve been training for a while.” He said instead.

“Now, we’re running a little short on time,” Maria changed the subject, a small smile on her face, “And there is one more important question to ask. I understand that you’re both young, and this may be somewhat delicate, but what are your plans for children? Noctis, you are still expected to produce an heir, after all.”

“With today's medical technology, there are means and ways.” Noct muttered cryptically. He couldn’t exactly come out and say that he had no intention of having children, not yet. Not until he’d had that particular argument with the council. He could only imagine the trouble he’d be in if he mentioned it on live television before bringing it up with the council. It wouldn’t be pleasant.

“There are no laws preventing the use of a surrogate, and so long as I am married and Prompto is legally considered the second parent, any child born that way will still be a legitimate heir.” That had been one of the things that had been included in the new law change. Something to allow Noct to marry whomever he wanted, regardless of childbearing abilities.
“Well I’m glad that you’ve thought about this. And I think we’ve covered anything important.” Maria said with a tight smile. Noct got the distinct impression that she didn’t approve, but couldn’t bring himself to care. It wasn’t like she was somebody important in his life, after all. “And I’m afraid that’s all the time we have for today. I do hope to see the two of you here again.”

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“That was a stupid waste of time.” Noct grumbled as he and Prompto climbed into the car. “The empire is planning an invasion, and we’re stuck answering questions from a stuck up bigot on live television.”

“It wasn’t that bad.” Prompto shrugged with a small smile. “And it’s done now. Besides, Iggy was right. We need to keep up outward appearances for now, to make sure we don’t get a mass panic on our hands. At least until we have a plan.”

Noct sighed and ran a hand over his face as the car set off towards the citadel. “I know.” He muttered. “It just feels like it was a complete waste of time, given what’s coming.”

Prompto nodded in agreement and reached between them to take his hand. “But now we’re out in the open.” He told Noct, grinning at him. He lifted the hand he held and placed a gentle kiss on Noct’s knuckles. “No more sneaking around or hiding it.”

“No can’t go too crazy with the PDA.” Noct reminded him with a shy smile, “And the media isn’t going to leave you alone. At all. They’re gonna dig up everything they can find about you and twist it into something ugly.”

“I know.” Prompto reassured his lover, “But I think the worst they’ll find is that I’m from Niflheim.” He shrugged, “The fact that I’m adopted isn’t a huge deal. They might find out that my parents aren’t around, but then they’d also find out that I’m emancipated.” He squeezed the hand he was holding, “I’m really not worried. Even if they did manage to find something that’s a big deal, I can’t see it mattering to anyone I care about.”

“The fact that you’re emancipated means that the laws preventing them from stalking minors don’t apply.” Noct pointed out. “You don’t have the same protections from them as I do.”

“Dude. I survived an apocalypse. I’m sure I can deal with a few paparazzi.”

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“Now that you’re finally here.” An older councilman all but spat the moment that Prompto and Noctis entered the room. “What is important enough that you had to call an emergency meeting of the entire council?”

He seemed upset. Probably because Sunday was pretty much the only day that the council didn’t meet. Unless it was important.

Instead of taking offense at the minister’s tone, Noct walked forward and took his place at the table, standing by his chair rather than sitting. Prompto stood beside him, following his lead like always.

“Last night I received word from my Nif contact.” He began, “Niflheim is preparing to attack Insomnia. The fleet will arrive in less than a month.”
There was silence in the room for a few seconds before the council all began to speak at once. It wasn’t until Regis held his hand up that silence fell. “Can your contact be trusted in this?” He questioned.

Noct nodded. “He will be sending me further details when he can today, but he has given me enough to know that we have to start planning.”

“Niflheim do not have the capability of breaching the King’s Wall.” A voice spoke up, “Otherwise they would have attacked years ago.”

“They do.” Prompto said, gaining the attention of everyone. “A device known as The Wall Breaker. It interrupts the connection between the Crystal and those who use it’s magic.”

“How do you know this?”

“We’ve encountered it before.” Noct told them. He wasn't willing to get into the finer details of when, but he could come up with a few things. “While on our travels around Lucis, we made a detour to Tenebrae.” This, they already knew. It was something that they had to be told when Luna arrived. What they didn’t know, was that they had moved further along and had broke into a secure Nif facility and brought it down. “That’s where we came into contact with the device. Luckily we were able to leave it’s area of effect.” Okay, that was mostly a lie. But it was one that the council bought.

When they began to fall over each other to ask questions about why Noct hadn’t reported this sooner, the king simply raised his hand again, silencing the room.

“How can we counter it?” He questioned.

Noct and Prompto shared a look, and Noct spoke again. “By shutting off the device. It’s huge, so it will be carried by a ship. It’s surprisingly easy to destroy, but the problem is getting to it. Without warping capabilities, it’ll be tough to reach an airship.”

“Could use mine.” Prompto suggested with a shrug.

Silence fell in the room, everybody staring at him. Noct watched as his face reddened slightly at the scrutiny and fought the urge to smack his forehead. “The one you parked behind Hammerhead?” He questioned.

Prompto nodded and opened his mouth to reply when he was interrupted by a council member.

“How do you have an airship?” It sounded accusatory and suspicious. Not that Noct could really blame him. They hadn’t exactly been honest about their past, or their little field trip into Niflheim.

“I stole it.” Prompto answered simply. “Turns out, they’re not that hard to fly.

“And you didn’t think to tell us?” Outrage. “Having such access to enemy technology could have given us an advantage in the war!”

“No. It wouldn’t.” Prompto turned to the council member that had spoken, keeping his own voice calm. “It takes a month to get you guys to agree to change a lightbulb. Even if I had told you I had it, you’d still be arguing about it and nothing would’ve got done. Besies, my mechanic is already looking over it to see what she can learn. I have more faith in her than the royal engineers.”
A rush of voices protesting his words rose, and once again, Regis lifted a hand. It took a little longer for the council to calm down this time, but when they did, the King spoke. “We’re getting off topic. We need to figure out how to combat this ‘Wall Breaker’, and how to minimise damage and casualties throughout the city. I am also curious as to why the empire is attacking now.”

Noct knew what he was meaning. According to their previous timeline, they still had around three years before the empire was supposed to attack. Why they were doing so now was a curiosity. One that Ardyn had explained to him. “Their chief scientist was assassinated and his laboratory destroyed. Niflheim blames Lucis, and with their scientist and his work gone they realized that they would never be as ready as they want before attacking us. They’re hoping that they would have surprise on their side.”

“Except you apparently have a spy, high enough in their hierarchy to give you this information. Who exactly is this contact?”

“I’m not going to reveal his identity to anyone.” Noct told the council. “If Drautos was a traitor, there’s no telling who else would send information to the empire. I can’t risk my contact.”

“Maybe a codename?” Prompto suggested with a shrug. He seemed annoyed at the conversation, but also a little distracted. He had his thinking face on, and at any other time Noct would take a moment to appreciate the cute way his nose scrunched slightly, or the way his eyes narrowed a little. Or the small tilt of his head as he worked on whatever problem was plaguing him.

Now, however, he had more pressing matters to attend to. “Uncle.” Noct said with a shrug, earning a snort of amusement from Prompto.

“Back to the topic at hand.” Regis tried again to reign in the council. “We have an invasion to prepare for, and may not be able to count on the magic that protects us. We need to find a way to protect as many citizens as possible, and recall all Glaives and Trusted from beyond the wall.”

“Do we tell them what’s coming?” Prompto questioned, looking up at the king. It was a valid question. On one hand, it would allow the citizenry to prepare. To stock up on rations and make them more likely to listen to the authorities when it came to their safety. On the other hand…

On the other hand, the news that the empire was coming, and that the King’s Wall may not protect them would cause a mass panic. Riots were likely and the crime rate would skyrocket. People might not listen to the police or the crown - afraid of only their own safety.

This sort of situation would either bring out the best in people, or the absolute worst. It was probably best not to tell the general public yet.

“Not at this point.” Regis answered, echoing Noct’s thoughts. “If we announce the empire’s intentions without a solid plan, we will cause nothing but panic. We need to be able to tell the people what we plan to do about it, and how we plan to keep them safe.”

“I may have an idea…” Prompto said slowly, his thinking face still in place. He reached into the armiger and pulled out a vaguely familiar schematic. Trying to figure out what it was for, or where he’d seen it before almost distracted Noct enough to miss the way the council stared at Prompto in shock.

This was the first time they’d seen him use the armiger, after all. He was probably going to get into
trouble for sharing his magic without consulting them first, but no matter. Prompto had been using his magic for over a decade now, and Noct wasn’t about to steal it away.

“What’s this?” He questioned, leaning over the paper that Prompto had spread over the table.

“Something I’ve been thinking about for a while.” He answered, looking down at the page. “I call it the ‘Third Wall’.” He spoke a little louder, allowing the council to hear him without difficulty. “From what I could tell, the Wall Breaker interferes with the Crystal’s output on a sonic frequency. The Crystal emanates a field of magic, but that’s not what gives us the ability to use it. Otherwise when the Crystal is far away, we wouldn’t be able to access it.

“From what I can gather, the Crystal lets out pulses of magic on a subsonic frequency that somehow doesn’t get weaker as it travels. The highs and lows are almost like a heartbeat and the Caelum family seem to be completely in sync with it. The Wall Breaker disrupts that synchrony by letting out its own pulsewave that changes the frequency of the Crystal’s.

“The Third Wall sends out its own wave that corrects for that.” He looked down at the schematics on the table. “Unfortunately, I won't be able to fine tune it against the Wall Breaker without access to the waves it produces. Without that, there’s no way to pinpoint the exact frequency I’d need…”

He frowned as he looked at the image on the table, and Noct leaned over to get a closer look. It was still bugging him, where he’d seen it before, but he trusted Prompto to tell him later. It might have been something in Besithia’s lab or something.

“How do you know all of this?” There was suspicion in the woman’s tone, and she was looking at Prompto with narrowed eyes. “First, you claim to have an enemy airship, and now you know how their ultimate weapon works. I can’t help but wonder where you’re getting this information.”

Prompto looked her in the eyes and gave her a cold smile. “I stole it.” He answered. “And the Wall Breaker is not their ultimate weapon. I don’t know if they’re going to deploy Diamond Weapon or not, but I assure you, that is far more terrifying.”

Noct frowned slightly. He’d only been given the bare bones of the tale of how the city had fallen, but he could piece together what Prompto was talking about. A daemon constructed by the empire, one that was only usable once, but contained massive power. From what he’d heard, only one thing had even stood a chance against it.

“If they release Diamond Weapon,” He said slowly, lifting his eyes to look at his father, “Then we will need to call on the Old Wall.”

There were some gasps around the room, and Noct knew why. He wasn’t supposed to know about the Old Wall until he came of age or took the throne. Which ever happened first. But here he was, barely seventeen and already knowing some of the top secrets of the realm. And Regis wasn’t surprised.

The King simply nodded in agreement before turning to Prompto. “Is there anything else you require for your wall?” He questioned.

Prompto nodded, still leaning over his schematics. “I need something to power it.” He told him, not looking up, “A shard of the Meteor should do. I would need it to be a specific size. And…” now he finally raised his eyes to look directly at the king. “A shard of the Crystal.”
“The first is easy enough done.” Regis agreed, “A shard of the Crystal, however, could be tricky. You can understand that I have no intention of chipping away at a celestial boon and I can’t think of anywhere you would find one.”

“The Crystal used to be whole.” Noct muttered, closing his eyes and picturing it. He could remember it through memories that were not his own. He could remember standing before the Crystal, Aera at his side, and staring up at the perfectly smooth surface.

His own memories of the Crystal, however, show him that a large chunk of it had been removed at some point. Either through malicious, or through accident, the Crystal was no longer whole. He tried to remember why or how it had happened and came up blank.

No matter, he’d probably remember in his dreams anyway.

“Okay….” Prompto waved his hands, asking him to continue with his train of thought. “So where can we get a Crystal shard?” He questioned when Noct stayed quiet.

“Solheim.”

Chapter End Notes

After such a long time between posts, I’m a little nervous that I’ve lost people. If you could find the time, please leave a comment to let me know you’re still here. Even if it's just a 'hi'.

Also, feel free to join our discord!! https://discord.gg/esGdEpD
“Uh, Noct buddy. Dunno if you know this, but uh Solheim fell like, a thousand years ago…” Prompto said what everybody was thinking as he stared at his prince. “How’re we gonna get a Crystal Shard from there…?”

“Solheim fell, but the ruins are still around.” Noct pointed out. “When Lucis was founded, a lot of people used to hide things there. Including Somnus. There were rumours that he hid a great treasure in a Solheim ruin.”

“So you want to send someone on a wild goose chase, while the empire breathes down our necks?” Apparently some of the council members didn’t like that idea, and Prompto could understand why.

It wasn’t like he had any history of building machines here, and he could hardly tell them that he’d been working on the plans for the Third Wall for the better part of a decade. There was no reason to trust that his invention would work, even if they did manage to get the Crystal Shard. With the empire arriving in less than a month, they didn’t really have the time to go looking for something that might not even work.

Not to mention the fact that the machine still needed to be built.

“No.” Noct turned to the minister that had spoken and shook his head gently. “I intend on going there myself.” The room fell silent before erupting into chaos. Ministers were falling over themselves to object to Noct’s decision, resulting in nothing but noise.

Noct held his hand up, much like Regis had done several times already, and the room slowly fell quiet. “I’ve been in the Solheim ruins.” He told them, “They take a bit of getting used to, and I know how to navigate them. I’ll take a team of Trusted with me. We’ll hit Costlemark first, since it’s the closest, then move on to Steyliff. If I can’t find anything there, we’ll come back. I shouldn’t be gone for more than a week.”

Without waiting for anyone else to object, Noct turned his attention to Prompto. “How long will it take you to build the machine?” He questioned.

Prompto didn’t jump to an answer, instead he looked down at the schematics on the table and did a bit of calculating. “If I have all the materials readily available… Two weeks. If I rush. I could probably get it done in about ten days if I have Cindy’s help.”

“Send for her.” Noct ordered, now apparently in king mode. Prompto gave him a nod in acquiescence and began to gather up his plans.

“Give your list of materials needed to Ignis.” Regis spoke directly to Prompto. “Anything he has trouble sourcing, I will help find. There is a disused laboratory in the west tower at your disposal.”

“You’re not seriously considering this?” A minister looked up at the king, his eyes wide. “There’s no guarantee that his machine will work. Even less guarantee that it’ll be needed. A chance encounter with a phenomenon doesn’t mean it will always happen. We need to spend the time training troops,
finding ways to protect the citizens! We can’t waste time on things that might not even help!”

Regis simply looked at the minister before cocking his head to the side. It was such a Noct move, that Prompto couldn’t help but smile at the similarities.

“How do you think it will spread our resources so thin? A hand full of people working on this won’t slow down preparations, and even if the Third Wall isn’t needed, I would rather be safe than sorry. I do hope that it won’t be necessary, but I would rather not find it is and be without it.”

“What about sending the prince into some ruin? He’s the only heir to the throne, we can’t risk his safety. It’s bad enough you let him outside the wall last time!”

“Noctis is more than capable of handling himself, and I will not be sending him alone. His shield will accompany him, along with a team of his Trusted.” Regis turned to Noct, “I’m afraid I will have to keep Ignis here to assist Prompto.”

Noct nodded in agreement, and Prompto had the feeling that Noct was expecting that. Ignis really was the best person to help Prompto. He’d been there to hear about the Third Wall when he came up with it, and had offered a few suggestions when he was stuck. He was also the person most likely able to get the raw materials he would need without difficulty.

“I’ll leave in the morning.” Noct gave a small bow to the room. “If you’ll excuse me, I have to prepare.”

“Uh, yeah. Me too!” Prompto quickly added, having no desire to be left in the council meeting without Noct. It was bad enough usually, but the council were already riled up and he knew that it was only a matter of time before they turned on him. Especially with Noct not in the room. He gave a hasty bow and followed Noct out of the room.

“I’ll call Ignis.” Noct told Prompto the moment they were out of the room. “You call Cindy. Tell her we’ll pay her as much as she needs for being away from the shop.”

Prompto nodded in agreement, looking up from his phone where he was hastily sending messages. “I’ve already sent out the message to recall all Trusted. Most were already here for last night.”

Their fast paces had allowed them to already reach the parking lot, and Noct was climbing into the back of a car. A quick look to the front told Prompto that there was already a driver, so he joined Noct in the back.

Once inside, Noct turned to him and gave him a soft smile. “After this is over, we’ll celebrate properly.” He told him, voice taking on a soft, fond quality.

Prompto couldn’t help but return the smile and he took Noct’s hand, gently kissing the knuckles. “Regardless of if we win or lose,” He said, voice a little sad, “There’ll be a lot of rebuilding to do when this is over. I’m just glad we got a heads up this time.”

“We have Uncle to thank for that.”

Prompto grimaced and leaned back in his seat, staring up at the ceiling. “Ugh,” He made a sound of disgust in the back of his throat. “Why’d you have to call him that?”

“First thing I could think of that wouldn’t freak out the council.” Noct replied with a shrug.
He was right, of course. Had Noct told the council that his contact in the empire was *chancellor Ardyn Izunia*, they would’ve lost their minds. And if he told them that he was the  Ardagium, it would’ve been even more hectic.

The brother of Somnus was just unbelievable. So Noct wasn't wrong in coming up with a codename for him. But still.

“But Uncle ?” He whined.

“It’s accurate.” Noct muttered with a shrug.

“For you, maybe.”

“For you too, now that you’re marrying me.”

And that just opened up a whole can of worms that Prompto was going to politely ignore. He didn’t want to think about the fact that he was soon going to technically be related to Ardyn. Nope. He was going to remain blissfully ignorant of that fact, thank you very much.

He let out a sigh and closed his eyes, essentially dropping the subject for the rest of the ride home.

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It was a four hour drive to Costlemark Tower, so Noct decided that instead of setting off the next day like initially planned, it would work out better to set off a few hours before the sun set. Given that the tower was locked until after dark, Prompto really couldn’t fault him on his logic, but that didn’t mean that he didn’t hate it.

“This’ll be the longest we’ve been apart in more than a year.” Prompto mumbled, watching as Noct made sure that he would have everything he needed.

His team had already been selected and were waiting for him at the Citadel. Noct was due there in another hour, and then he would be gone for possibly as long as a week. Maybe even more, depending on how much trouble he found. Prompto was having problems keeping his anxiety in check, his mind filling him in on all the details of everything that could go wrong from daemon attacks to nasty falls (there were a lot of long drops in Costlemark. He remembered that much at least).

Noct paused in his checks and turned to Prompto. It didn’t seem to matter how hard Prompto tried to keep his face straight and carefree, Noct seemed to just know what Prompto was feeling.

The prince dropped what he was doing and moved to Prompto’s side, sitting beside him on the couch to gather him against his chest. “I’m gonna hate it.” He admitted to the blond.

“How?”

“When you went to Hammerhead for a few days, I was so lost. I could barely function without you, and that was here, somewhere safe. I was utterly useless until you came back. I knew you could handle yourself out there, but I couldn’t help…”

“Didn’t help but worry about everything that could go wrong?” Prompto chuckled weakly and
gripped on to Noct. “Pretty sure that’s what I’m gonna be like.”

Noct shook his head and pulled out of the hug to smile at Prompto. He kept his hands on his shoulders, as if afraid of letting go. “No. You’ll be fine.” He told him, seemingly completely confident in that fact. “You’ll be busy working on the Third Wall, and you’ll have Iggy nagging you to take care of yourself. And-” He reached into his pocket and pulled a small trinket out. “I want you to use this. Keep it safe for me.” He dropped the trinket in Prompto’s hand and the blond looked down at it.

A small figurine of a fox-like creature looked back up at him, and it took him a moment to realise what this was. “Carbuncle?” He questioned.

“Carbuncle helps protect you when you sleep.” Noct told him quietly, pushing Prompto’s fingers closed around the totem. “I’ll be running ragged, and exhaustion’ll do that for me. But I know you. The minute you stop working, you’ll start freaking out. You need him more than I do right now.”

Prompto was still staring at his closed fist for a while. Noct had told him about Carbuncle, about how much the small figurine had helped him out when he was young, about how he probably wouldn’t have woken from his coma without him. He’d told Prompto stories of the dreams that Carbuncle would guide him through, of the wonderful things that he would see.

He also told him what happened when Noct didn’t have Carbuncle. The nightmares and torments he had gone through on a nightly basis. The night terrors that had kept the palace staff awake night after night.

“No.” He tried to give the totem back, to make Noct take it. “I can deal with nightmares.” He told him, “I’ve been doing fine for decades.” Somehow, he managed to get the small figure back into Noct’s hands. “I’m used to them, and you need to sleep better than I do.”

“You need to work on the machine-” Noct started to object, trying to thrust the item back into Prompto’s hands.

“And you’ll be fighting daemons.” Prompto pointed out. “Worst thing that happens if I don’t sleep is I mess up on the math - and Iggy’ll catch that. But you…” He shook his head, gently pushing Noct’s fist into his chest. “If you mess up, you might not come back.” He looked into Noct’s eyes, silently pleading with him to just take the damn magic trinket with him.

“I guess…” Noct spoke slowly, accepting Prompto’s logic regretfully. He pocketed the small item and returned his attention to Prompto. “You’ll have Cindy, at least.” he told him while averting his eyes, and Prompto felt his stomach drop when he realised that he couldn’t read Noct’s expression.

Was Noct mad that he was close to Cindy? Was he jealous? There was absolutely nothing romantic between them, but for Noct it was only a year or so ago that Prompto had been decidedly obsessed with her.

“Huh?” He questioned, not sure if his thoughts were on the right track or just paranoid about hurting Noct.

“She’s your best friend, right? I’m sure she’ll look after you.” Still, Prompto couldn’t read Noct’s emotion in those words. He didn’t sound upset, but he didn’t sound happy either. Prompto had no idea what Noct was thinking, and that was such a weird concept that it was all kinds of scary.
“Uh Noct, you’re my best friend…” He tried to correct Noct, worried where this was going. But Noct simply gave him a soft smile and took his hands again.

“What we have transcends friendship.” He said quietly, kissing Prompto’s knuckles as he looked back up at him. “You’ll always be my best friend, Prom, but it’s okay if Cindy is yours. She was there for you when I couldn’t be and you guys have a lot of history.” He gave Prompto a smile of such fondness and love that Prompto felt himself relax immediately. Noct was being completely honest. He was absolutely fine with Cindy being his best friend, and seemed to understand that they had a shared history. He wasn’t upset at all, wasn’t jealous in the slightest.

With a small nod, Prompto returned Noct’s smile and squeezed Noct’s hands gently. “You’ll always be my most important person.” He could say that with absolute sincerity, since he knew that they would never have children to compete for that title. He knew that Noct would always be his most important person.

Noct’s smile widened a little, “Oh, that reminds me.” He gently extracted his hands from Prompto’s and made his way back towards the bedroom. “I got something made for you.” He disappeared for a moment before returning.

In his hand was a small, long box. “I did some research.” He began, looking suddenly nervous. “It’s not traditional in Lucis for men to wear engagement rings, but apparently there’s an old custom in Niflheim…” He handed the box over.

Prompto took it with shaking hands. He knew the tradition that Noct was talking about. An age old betrothal custom that predated modern history. He slowly opened the box to find a necklace encased inside.

It was beautiful. The pendant was almost like a teardrop shape, with the tip curling around as if trying to make a circle. It was mostly black with a small white gold circle in the middle of the widest part.

“I took a few liberties…” Noct was still speaking, shuffling from one foot to the other as if he wasn’t sure what Prompto would make of it. “Traditionally, the pendants are matching to signify that you’re two halves of a whole but…” He shook his head and pulled the collar of his shirt aside to show Prompto his own.

The pendant was almost the same as Prompto’s, only mirrored in both colour and shape. White gold for the main part, with the small circle in black.

“You and me… we’re our own people. And you don’t belong to me like the tradition says. But you do complete me…” He stepped forward and gently lifted the small necklace from the box in Prompto’s frozen hands. He lifted it and held it by his own, where the two shapes slotted together perfectly. “Yin and Yang…” Noct was still speaking, but Prompto was only staring at him, eyes wide and mouth open. “Two separate halves of a whole….”

Noct’s smile wavered when he lifted his eyes from the jewellery to see tears gathering in Prompto’s eyes. “Shit. Did I mess it up?” He questioned, “I wasn’t sure if it was okay to change things like that I-” He was cut off when Prompto gently kissed him.

“It’s perfect.” He whispered, pressing his forehead against Noct’s. He wanted to express how much it meant to him, that Noct would research the culture of his origins, that he would incorporate that part of him into their relationship, that he was willing to do that even though Niflheim were still
technically the enemy. He wanted to be able to tell Noct that this was the most thoughtful and perfect
an engagement gift he could have thought of.

But his emotions were running too high. His words were failing him and all he could do was lean
against Noct and savour the closeness. He gently moved Noct’s hands to indicate that he should put
the chain around Prompto’s neck, and he was glad that the prince got the hint and did so.

“I love it.” Prompto found his voice again, pulling back out of the embrace to look down at his new
jewellery.

The chain was long enough that it could be hidden under his clothes if he wanted it to be, but
Prompto knew without a doubt that the only time he would hide it away was if he was doing
something that could endanger it or himself. He would have to tape it down or make sure it was
under his shirt for training and combat, and probably for any mechanical work, but other than that, he
was more than proud to show it off.

He never wanted to take it off.

He looked up at Noct, who was looking both unsure and proud of himself and gave him a grin. “My
words are broken.” Prompto said after a minute, unable to come up with anything else to say. It
earned him a laugh and a kiss.

“I’m glad you like it.” Noct admitted as he gently kissed Prompto’s forehead. “I was so worried I’d
screwed up.”

Prompto shook his head. “No. It’s perfect.” He found himself gently grasping the pendant and
holding it tight.

It was an action he would repeat a lot over the next week and a half. After Noct left, Prompto threw
himself hard into his work, only stopping when Ignis or Cindy forcefully removed him from his
desk, and then only until they were gone and he could get back to it.

He couldn’t sleep. Couldn’t stop. If he stopped, he’d miss Noct something terrible and it was just
easier not to think about that, and to just keep working, hands idly grasping his pendant whenever
they weren’t busy.

Nine days after Noct left, Ignis, Cindy, and Luna of all people cornered him.

“Prompto, you must sleep.” Ignis gently took Prompto’s shoulders and lead him to the small couch in
the corner of his new lab. He pushed the blond down and stared down at him. “Your body needs
rest.”

“I need to keep working.” Prompto said, somewhat desperately. He tried to stand, only to be pushed
back down by Ignis.

“No. You need to sleep.” The advisor wasn’t taking no for an answer it seemed. “You haven’t had
any significant rest in the last four days. Your health will suffer if you continue this way.”

“You forgetting about Longwythe?” Prompto questioned, reminding Ignis of the battle that had
lasted six days. Nobody had slept at all during that time as they futility fought against wave after
wave of daemons to prevent them from getting to Hammerhead while they were fortifying it.
It had been a long and grueling week for everyone.

“I can go without sleep.” Prompto urged, trying to stand again.

This time, it was Lunafreya that took his arm and guided him to the couch. She sat beside him and left her hand on his shoulder, turning to face him so her knees were pressed against his legs. “Prompto… You may have been able to avoid sleep in the future, but please remember that you currently have the body of a teenager. Teenagers require more sleep than adults. You will damage yourself if you continue how you are. We are all simply worried for your wellbeing.”

“Yeah,” Cindy joined in, standing beside the couch and dropping her hand on his other shoulder. “How’d ya think that prince of yours’ll feel if he comes back to you in the hospital from exhaustion?”

“I’m rather sure we’d all be in trouble for that one. Rightfully so.” Ignis said with a soft sigh. “Please, Prompto. Just rest. Six hours is all we ask.”

“The Third Wall isn’t finished.” Prompto started to feel small and curled up on himself. He really was exhausted, but the few times he’d managed to sleep since Noct left had been fitful at best. If it wasn’t for the fact that Noct had doubtlessly needed it more, Prompto would have regretted not taking Carbuncle. “I need to get it finished. We’re running out of time.”

“There is little more to do until Noctis returns with the last of the materials.” Ignis tried to reason with him. And really, Ignis was right. There wasn’t anything else he could do until he had the meteor fragment to power the machine and the Crystal Shard to tune it. But that didn’t mean he couldn’t find something to do. He had to. Resting and sleep just lead to nightmares at this point.

He closed his eyes and took a breath, curling in on himself further but somehow not dislodging the hands of the women on either side of him. “I can’t sleep.” He admitted quietly, “I’ve tried.”

“Well then, please at least rest.” Luna spoke quietly, gently taking both his shoulders and guiding him to lay on the couch, his head resting in her lap. At the other end of the couch, Cindy straightened his legs a little for him to fit properly.

There was a quiet bark and then a dip in the cushion and when Prompto looked down he saw Pryna curling up against his stomach. He let himself smile a little at that, his hand finding its way to the dog’s stomach where he idly began to pat her. “Hey girl.” He greeted.

“Why don’t I tell you a story?” Luna suggested, and Prompto felt her hands begin to gently stroke his hair. He nodded and let his eyes fall closed.

Maybe if she kept talking, it would keep his brain distracted enough to stop him from slipping into nightmares?

“There is a myth, passed down from mother to daughter in my family line. A story that many of us believe to be the true origins of our world, and one we don’t often share. Many think it blasphemous, and other believe it nothing more than a fairytale.” Her fingers continued to gently stroke his hair, and Prompto could already feel himself relax under her touch. He kept his eyes closed and listened to her words. “But I believe it. It’s a story of where our world came from, and how it began. The story of how the Blessed Six Astrals were once just as human as you or I. A story of endings and new beginnings…”
Chapter End Notes

So the next chapter is tiny. Like, super small. Like, less than 600 words small. So it'll be ready in a few days :)

As always, all feedback is appreciated!

Also, feel free to join our discord server!! https://discord.gg/3BxaU46
Bhunivelze

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Vague spoilers for Final Fantasy XIII - 3 - Lightning Returns.

This is an incredibly short chapter, but that's because it's simply the fairytale that Luna tells Prompto to try to get him to sleep.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Long ago, before this world was born, another existed. But as with all things, this world eventually came to an end. It was slowly dying and Bhunivelze, the god of Light and Life could do nothing to stop it. He was helpless, only able to watch as the world he cherished fell into a darkened Chaos.

The only constant left in his world was death. Even the birth of new things had died. There were no new animals, plants, or even children, to grace his lands. Slowly, over time, the darkness spread and consumed all that touched it, leaving nothing in its wake.

With few other options, Bhunivelze knew that he had but one recourse. To do what countless other gods had done before him, and settle in a new land. His world was to die but he could move on. And he could take humanity with him.

So he chose a warrior and bequeathed her a holy mission. Her task was to gather and save as many souls as she could for him to carry to the new world with him. She had only thirteen days to achieve this task, but she was successful, and Bhunivelze had enough souls that he could populate the new world he was to land on.

But once he arrived here, on Eos, he came to realise that he no longer held the power he once did. Taking so many so far had weakened him and he was afraid that he would no longer be able to support the new race of humanity he was to awaken.

So he chose six of those human souls and imbued them with what little power he could spare. In time, their power grew and they ascended to a higher level of existence, somewhere between that of gods and men. Humanity began to call them the Astrals, and then, gods.

The six grew in power as the world turned, and eventually Bhunivelze knew that his world would be safe in their hands. He also knew that he would need his strength to ferry souls to the next world, once this one came to its end. So he sealed himself away in stasis to await the end of the world. His body became crystal and his mind slept.

Milenia passed and the Blessed Six became all we knew of gods. Bhunivelze lay forgotten and abandoned as the egos of the Six allowed them to begin seeing themselves as true gods. At least, until the Starscourge began its rampage against our star.

When the Astral’s realized that they lacked the power to stop it themselves, they became fearful. They retrieved Bhunivelze’s crystal from where it had lain for centuries but found that they could not wake him. The one true god continued to slumber, and the Six knew not what to do.
Until one day, the leader Bahamut had an idea. He gathered the God Crystal and offered the magic it leaked to two families. The Caelum and the Flouret.

It was their hope, that by fostering that power and allowing it to grow through successive generations, it would become more powerful than they and be enough to awaken their true god once more. But once they had blessed humanity with these gifts, Bahamut received a vision from Bhunivelze’s crystal. He saw what would happen to the families he and the Astrals had blessed, and thus the prophecy of the King of Light was born.

Chapter End Notes

I really kinda want to get this done before NaNoWriMo starts, but I doubt I will be able to, given that NaNoWriMo starts in less than a week and we have maybe another 20-50k words left in this fic... I'm also hosting a party this weekend, and will be utterly trashed on Sunday-Tuesday x.x.

If I try really hard, I know that I can write around 20-30k words in a day. So there's the possibility.... Maybe...

If I can't, then the story might be a little delayed throughout November, as I'm intending on trying my hand at an original fic for NaNoWriMo

If you want to hear more from me, my ramblings, complaints, or even my drugged up ideas for fics, feel free to join my discord! https://discord.gg/esGdEpD
Exhaustion

Chapter Notes

The chapter title actually sums up how I'm feeling right now, so there may be a few mistakes in this chapter (the fact that I literally wrote some of it with my eyes closed probably won't help with that). Please feel free to point out any large errors.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Noct was tired. No. Tired didn’t cut it. He was exhausted. An exhaustion that seeped deep into his very bones. All he wanted to do was find Prompto, curl up around him and sleep for the next week.

But he knew he couldn’t do that. Not with the new information he’d received during his travels. No. He didn’t have time to do anything. His first port of call was to drop his precious cargo off to his precious person, and then report to his father and the rest of the council.

So instead of finding his love and just sleeping his exhaustion away, he took a long breath and pushed his feet to move forward to the lab he’d been directed to, knowing it would only be a quick visit. From what the guard said, Prompto should be there. It was vital that he was given the Crystal Shards Noct carried in his satchel, and the new information.

His tiredness was not at all helped by the man currently trailing behind him, constantly talking and complaining about things that Noct had no interest in discussing. He left his new companion outside the door to the lab with strict instructions to stay and then let himself inside.

The lab was larger than he expected. A work station had been set up in the center, a large machine situated on the wide bench. Papers and stray tools were scattered around it, but nobody was working.

With a small frown, he carefully placed his bag down and turned to look at the rest of the room. In the far corner was a small break area with two couches and a coffee table. It was there that he finally found the person he’d been looking for.

Prompto was lay on his side on one of the couches, his head pillowed in Luna’s lap as he slept. Curled against his stomach was Pryna, and on the other couch was a passed out Cindy.

Luna looked up at him, a soft smile on her face. She lifted one hand to delicately press a single finger against her lips, motioning for Noct to quietly come closer. He followed her silent instruction and knelt down beside the couch, looking at the peaceful face of his beloved.

“He has not slept in four days.” Luna told him in a hushed whisper. “I finally got him to rest around an hour ago. Please do not wake him.”

Noct closed his eyes in regret. “I have to.” He told her, keeping his own voice hushed. “The empire will be here sooner than we thought. We have five days at most.”

“Don’t you dare wake him.” Luna responded, voice firm and somewhat scary. “He can receive this news once he has rested. Waking him now will not hasten his work, but will cause him harm.”
“He’ll want to know I’m back…” Noct half-heartedly protested. She was probably right. If she was
protesting him being awoken even for Noct, then Prompto almost certainly needed the rest. She
wasn’t one to stand firm about trivial matters, after all. He just didn’t want to have to deal with his
new companion on his own.

“We can tell him. When he wakes.”

“You planning on just sitting there for hours until he wakes up?” Noct questioned, eyebrow raised.

“If need be.”

He gave a small nod at that. “The Crystals are on the bench.” He told her, slowly raising to his feet.
A small change of plans then. He would take his new ‘friend’ to report to the council, then come
back. “Let me know when he wakes up.” Luna gave him a smile and a nod of agreement before
turning her attention back to Prompto, her hand resuming its motions of gently stroking his hair.

Now that he was looking closely, Noct could see the deep purple bags under Prompto’s eyes, and
the way the blond was so utterly still. He was obviously even more tired than Noct felt. He leaned
forward and as gently as he could placed a small kiss on Prompto’s forehead, his fingers slipping him
the small Carbuncle figurine, before he stepped away and left the room.

It almost physically hurt to leave after being away from Prompto for so long, but he knew that Luna
was right. He really did need his sleep.

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The council had already been in session when Noct arrived. He didn’t bother to announce himself
before throwing the doors open and striding into the room. In fact, he hadn’t even bothered to wash
and change. Dirt clung to his clothing and shoes, and dust was coating his hair. He was sure he had
dried miasma on his face from the last daemon he’d slain on his way home.

Hopefully that would be enough to persuade the council that he was in a hurry.

As soon as he stepped inside, a hush fell through the room and Noct used it to his advantage. He
stepped to the end of the table and addressed the people in the room.

“I’m too tired, and we don’t have the time for formalities.” Noct began, feeling his head begin to
ache with lack of sleep. He reached behind him and gracelessly grabbed his companion by this shirt
to push him towards the table. He didn’t care if it looked brash, rude, or cruel to the rest of the room.
“This is ‘Uncle’.” He introduced. “He came to me with news. Though why he didn’t just call me, I
don’t know.” The last part was muttered loudly to himself, and he threw a glare at the disguised
Ardyn.

“You were simply not picking up, dear nephew mine.” Ardyn replied, voice dripping with something
that Noct was far too tired to decipher. “And I do believe that my information is somewhat time
sensitive.” He made a show of looking around, “And where are those friends of yours? Surely they
should be here too, hmm?”

“We’ll fill them in.” Noct replied, keeping his own tone level.

Ardyn had insisted upon being the one to present his information to the council, refusing to tell Noct
what he knew. Noct knew that this was just a ploy for him to get into the Citadel and didn’t entirely trust that it wasn’t for nefarious reasons. He had vowed to keep his eyes on his dear ‘uncle’ for as long as he was within Insomnia’s walls, but knew that he had little choice but to let him in.

“Talk.” Noct ordered, and Ardyn heaved a dramatic sigh.

“Very well.” He answered with a roll of his eyes before turning to the council. He gave them a deep bow. “My dearest esteemed members of the Lucian ruling council,” He began, addressing each and every member with his eyes as he spoke in a loud, clear, voice. Noct had to admit that the man was good at public speaking, if nothing else. “I have some information that I believe you all wish to know, about the planned attack from Niflheim and what forces they employ.”

With those words, he had the full attention of everybody in the room. Nobody spoke as they waited for him to continue.

“Their forces have been weakened due to the Lucian attack on their primary MT production facility, but have no doubt that there will be Magitek units employed in the imminent attack. Though they are useful foot soldiers, they are not the primary weapons that Niflheim will count on.

“In the last few months, the remaining scientists - ” Ardyn pointedly looked at Noct while he said this, who simply rolled his eyes.

“Don’t make me stab you.” Noct muttered under his breath, apparently louder than he had intended. The closest minister moved their attention from Ardyn to Noct, a look of shock on her face.

“What, again?” Ardyn questioned, tone mocking and amused.

Noct found himself uttering quiet insults in a language he was barely familiar with. It seemed that when speaking with Ardyn, Noct had gained the habit of reverting to Ardyn’s original language. Thanks to the memories he shared with his once enemy, the language fell from his lips easily, though he barely understood it himself.

“Well I never!” Ardyn’s tone was one of mock offense, his hand flying up to cover his heart as if hurt. “I’ll have you know that my mother was a wonderful person.”

Noct frowned, thinking on what he had said and realising that it was, indeed, an insult to Ardyn’s mother. And further reflection told him that Ardyn was absolutely right. Izunia had been a wonderful woman.

“Yeah. Sorry.” He muttered, rubbing his eyes with one hand. “She really was. I wonder where she went wrong with the two of you.”

Again, Ardyn scoffed in mock outrage. “Regardless of your thoughts on my family,” As he spoke, he turned back to addressing the council, “I am here for a reason. Now, where was I?” He asked rhetorically, “Ah yes,” He continued before anybody else could speak, “The remaining scientists of Niflheim have made excellent strides towards completing one of their ultimate weapons. Three of them, in fact. Known as ‘Diamond Weapons’.”

Noct took a seat and leaned back, his fingers rubbing at his temples as he attempted to keep both his headache and his exhaustion at bay while Ardyn spoke.

“While they are incomplete, they are combat capable if not a touch uncontrollable. The empire
intends on using those after the MTs and dropships have sufficiently reduced your defenses.

“Their first move will be to disable your Wall.” Here, he spoke directly to King Regis. “I would suggest letting them do so, sooner rather than later.” He ignored the surprised shouts of the council and continued to speak to Regis, as if they were the only ones in the room. “By doing so, you should be able to re-erect the barrier when they are not expecting it.”

Noct lifted his hands from his face and looked up to his father. He was on edge, his hands gripping the edges of his seat hard enough to turn his knuckles white, and it was then that Noct remembered that he’d revealed to him that ‘Uncle’ was the Adagium. No wonder he looked ready to attack.

“Uncle.” Noct said with a sigh, gesturing for the man to get back onto the subject at hand. “Tell us about these weapons.”

“Ah. They are quite formidable.” Ardyn answered, “With naught but two weeknesses. The first—” He held one finger in front of himself dramatically, “Is sunlight. As such, they will be deployed only after dusk. And the second…” Here, he paused to smirk up at the king, bringing his other hand in front of him to dramatically raise his two forefingers together. “The magical weaponry of the Lucain Monarchy. Be it your Royal Arms, or your Old Wall.”

Noct was once again rubbing at his face, but he didn’t have to be able to see them to know what kinds of looks he was getting from the council. While he hadn’t told Ardyn of the Old Wall, he knew that it looked that way since only the people in the room were supposed to know about it.

He kept his eyes covered and tried not to pass out in his exhaustion.

“While they can be defeated, they are not to be taken lightly. Thus, I have decided that it is up to me to save the day.” Noct lifted his face in time to roll his eyes at Ardyn’s second dramatic bow to the council. “I have taken the liberty of sabotaging the airships designated to carry those particular weapons. They should drop them somewhere around… Oh, Ghorovas Rift.” He looked way too proud of that one, and it took Noct a moment to understand why.

“You really hate Shiva, don’t you?” He questioned with an amused snort.

“It’s somewhat mutual, she is rather frigid towards me.”

Noct rolled his eyes for the dozenth time since ‘running into’ Ardyn the day before. “She’s the nicest one of the lot and you know it. Dropping two mega-daemons on her corpse won’t make her like you more, you know.”

Ardyn simply shrugged, showing how little he cared for the fickle nature of the gods. “I very much doubt that anything can these days.” Noct just buried his face in his hands again.

“How sure are you that your tampering will go unnoticed?” One of the council members finally got a chance to speak, and was addressing Ardyn directly.

“Oh, don’t you worry about that.” The Immortal brushed off the councilman’s concerns with a lazy wave. “I have fail safes upon fail safes. I can all but guarantee you that they will not arrive here. And on the off chance that they do, I have the schematics of the beasts. I’m sure somebody will be able to come up with a viable defense.”

Noct was having trouble keeping his eyes open as his body began to feel extraordinarily heavy. He
didn’t know when the last time he slept was, and he didn’t really want to figure it out. He knew it
had been a while though. Costlemark was a lot bigger than he remembered, and after traversing what
felt like a hundred levels to find the damn Crystal Shards, he’d had to climb his way back up through
hordes of daemons. It had taken days, of that he was sure.

He was somewhat thankful that Ardyn had been able to bring him home quickly. If it wasn’t for the
Immortal’s Shadow Stepping, he would still be on the road like Gladio and the others. At least now
that he’d delivered his treasure and message, he could find a nice dark corner and collapse until the
exhaustion lifted.

The others were still talking, still arguing (because that was apparently all the council were truly
capable of), and Noct knew he didn’t have long before his body forced him to rest. So he stood,
intending on interrupting the proceedings to excuse himself.

Instead, he simply swayed on the spot and would have fallen if not for the closest council member
catching him.

“Prince Noctis!” The woman looked at him with a rare show of concern, and Noct tried to focus on
her, tried to keep himself awake. It was a battle he was quickly losing.

“Don’t worry my dear,” Ardyn’s face swept into Noct’s vision and he briefly wondered if he had
had anything to do with the sudden impact his exhaustion had had on him. It wasn’t normal. He was
sure he had the energy to at least get to somewhere soft before passing out. “He’s simply exhausted.
Our return was quite rushed and I dare say he hasn’t slept in days.”

As his vision darkened completely, Noct felt himself being lifted and carried but try as he might, he
couldn’t get his eyes to open and reality soon slipped away from him.

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Noct awoke to a dark, quiet room. It took him a moment to wake up enough to look around and
ascertain his location. He was in his old suite in the Citadel, snuggled deeply in his oversized bed. A
quick glance at the window told him it was well into night, and that he had to have been asleep for
several hours.

Slowly, he moved. Stretching his limbs and pushing himself to sit up he assessed his levels of
exhaustion. He was well rested and terribly hungry. His body seemed to read his mind, for the next
thing he knew, his stomach growled rather loudly and he climbed to his feet ready to look for
something to eat.

Passing the bathroom on the way through, he took the time to relieve himself and couldn’t help but
glance in the mirror. As he’d half expected, he was clean. Not a mark of grime left on his skin after
his long travels, and he briefly wondered who had taken the time to wash him.

Long ago, he would have been embarrassed about the fact that someone had bathed him while he
was unconscious, but now he was simply grateful. It meant he hadn’t had to sleep in his own filth,
after all. Whoever it was had even dressed him in the softest pajamas in his suite.

Once finished into the bathroom, Noct made his way into the larger rooms. Here, he found Prompto
hunched over the coffee table, working furiously on some paper. The room was lit only by a small
lamp, and Noct wondered how Prompto hadn’t succumbed to eyestrain yet.
“Hey,” He greeted, deciding against simply turning on the overhead light. He hadn’t wanted to startle Prompto, but apparently the man had been absorbed enough in his work that he hadn’t noticed Noct moving around, and he jumped with a high squeak.

“Noct!” Prompto struggled to his feet, almost losing his balance and hopping on one leg for a moment. Obviously it had fallen asleep at some point.

“You should probably have more-oof!” Noct tried to tell Prompto that he needed the room to be better lit, but was interrupted by an enthusiastic hug from Prompto. The blond clutched to him for a moment before reaching up and kissing him deeply. It was an act that Noct couldn’t help but reciprocate.

They took their time, slowly reacquainting themselves with the other, pouring their emotions into the kiss. Noct somehow ended up on the arm of the couch, Prompto practically in his lap as the two silently professed their love and fondness for one another.

Eventually, their kiss came to a natural end, and Noct pulled back to look at Prompto. He brushed some of his hair from his face and then gently pressed their foreheads together. “Missed you too.” He muttered, feeling Prompto’s grip around his neck tighten slightly.

“Luna told me you wanted to wake me when you got home.” Prompto spoke quietly, neither man moving from their intimate position. “Said she had to threaten you to stop you.” There was a teasing edge of amusement from Prompto and Noct couldn’t help but smile. “I’m surprised that actually stopped you.”

“Luna’s scary as fuck dude.” Noct chuckled, “You should’ve seen her when Ravus accidentally stepped on her flower crown. Pretty sure if Sylva hadn’t stepped in, Luna would’ve become an only child that day.”

“No way.” Prompto shook his head, finally pulling away from Noct to sit back down on the couch. He reached over and gently tugged Noct until the prince fell onto the couch beside him. “Luna’s like… a pacifist.” Prompto continued speaking as they adjusted their positions to sit together comfortably. Noct ended up lay across the couch, his head in Prompto’s lap. “I can’t see her killing anyone.”

Again, Noct laughed, simply basking in being so close to Prompto again after their separation. “She’s got a hell of a temper. Hard to piss her off, but when you do…” He shrugged, “Hell hath no fury like a Luna scorned. No way was I gonna piss her off by waking you.” He shuffled slightly to get a little more comfortable, then relaxed completely. His eyes fell closed as Prompto’s fingers began to lazily stroke up and down the skin of his arm. “I had to see the council anyway.”

Prompto was silent for a moment before speaking in a carefully controlled voice. “Gladio said you came back without him. That *Uncle* gave you a ‘ride’ home.”

Noct froze for half a second before letting out a long breath. He opened his eyes and looked up at Prompto. His love was staring at the wall opposite the couch, pointedly *not* looking at Noct. He was upset. Angry. Maybe even scared. Noct couldn’t quite tell from this angle, and wasn’t sure that moving away was a good idea right then anyway.

“You brought him here.” Prompto continued before Noct could figure out what to say. “You brought him, here.” There was a tiny tremble in Prompto’s hands and Noct reached up to take them in his own.
“He shaved off a full day of my journey. Brought me back faster so I could get the Crystals to you. So that I could tell everyone that the Empire is coming sooner. If I hadn’t brought him with me, he would’ve come anyway. He can wear the face of anyone he’s killed, in this lifetime or the last. There would be no way to keep him out. At least this way, we know where he is.”

Or at least, that was his hope. He had passed out before being able to organise for someone to watch Ardyn, but he was reasonably certain that either his father or Clarus would have made sure to keep the Immortal in check. They at least knew who he was.

“I know.” Prompto’s voice sounded defeated and he let out a sigh. “I hate it, but I know you’re right. I just… guess I just don’t want to be near him. And I definitely don’t want him near Luna.”

Noct nodded, agreeing to that one. He had a feeling that Ardyn had no ill intentions towards Luna this time around, but he couldn't be sure. Nobody could ever be sure with that man.

“How close is your Wall?” Noct asked, shifting the subject away from a problem they could do nothing about, and towards one that they could.

Prompto let out a frustrated sound before turning his attention to the mess on the coffee table. From his new position on the couch, Noct could see that it was filled with sheets upon sheets of papers. It looked completely disorganized and an utter mess, but Noct had no idea if it truly was or not.

“No matter what I try, I can’t get the resonance right!” Prompto grumbled, pulling a hand through his blond locks. “I’m missing something, I know I am. I just… can’t figure out what it is! I keep thinking I’ve got it, only for it to just not work! If I can’t even get past this stage, I’m never gonna get it to counteract the Wall Breaker. As it is, all I’ve managed to get it to do is amplify the Crystal’s song, which is of absolutely no help to us right now!”

“Song?” Noct questioned with a frown.

“Yeah. Remember the Astral Realm?” Prompto questioned, not waiting for an answer before continuing. “There was this like… singing? From everywhere?”

Noct tried to think back to his brief time in the Astral Realm. He could remember swirling colours. Bahamut. Luna. He could remember the crystal shards hanging in the air in the faux Citadel. And if he tried really hard, he could remember the song. A thousand voices in harmony, singing a gentle melody at a barely perceptible volume.

“Yeah…” He agreed, slowly sitting up to idly look over the papers on the table. He couldn't make heads or tails out of any of them. But at least he now realised where he'd seen them before.

Prompto had been working on them when they had gone back to high school, a year ago. How long had he been working on this problem?

“You can make it so people can hear the Crystal’s singing?” Noct questioned, curiously. He barely recalled the melody, but he did remember that it was hauntingly beautiful and had filled him with a sense of utmost calm. He knew of quite a few people who would appreciate the music, if nothing else.

“Mhmmm….” Prompto nodded somewhat distracted. “It’s nice and all, if not a little creepy, but it’s not what I’m going for.” He sighed and leaned back in the seat, eyes still staring at the pages on the
table. He rubbed his face and groaned.

Looking closely at Prompto, Noct noticed that the man looked drained. If he hadn’t seen him sleeping on Luna’s lap, Noct would think that he hadn’t slept at all. “Hey,” He turned and gently stroked Prompto’s hair from his eyes. “How much sleep did you get?” He questioned.

“Few hours. Don’t really have the time to-”

Noct shook his head and stood, trying to gently pull Prompto up with him. The blond was reluctant and remained stubbornly stuck to the couch.

“Prom. You need to sleep.” He told him, trying to make his voice convey authority he knew he didn’t have over his partner. “You’ll think better after some rest.”

“No. I don’t have the time.” Prompto tried to argue, pulling away from Noct to turn his attention back to the plans on the table.

“Prompto.” Noct sighed and crouched in front of his partner, blocking his view of his work. “You need to sleep. So help me I will tie you to the bed if I have to.”

His words seemed to strike something within Prompto and the blond paused. He went so still that Noct was worried that what he’d said had offended or worried Prompto, and was about to backtrack and take it back (he wasn’t going to do anything to Prompto in the bedroom that would upset the blond), when Prompto tilted his head to one side in thought.

“That… could work.” He said quietly before looking at Noct. “Come on then.” He stood and took Noct’s arm, preventing the prince from falling backwards with his movement. He pulled Noct to his feet and dragged him towards the bedroom. “Tie me up.”

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will start with NSFW. I'm currently struggling to write it since my exhausted (and hung over) brain is rebelling against using english as my primary language at the moment and trying to make me use words from at least three different languages, including Maori which isn't widely spoken at all.

BUT I am making headway. I probably wont get this done before NaNoWriMo, which sucks because once I start on a new story I don't go back very easily, so we'll see how that goes.

I have every intention of finishing this story, even if it means that my NaNoWriMo doesn't quite get done.

If you want to keep up with my random as thoughts, feel free to join our discord! We currently have 55 members, including myself. We also have a space for people to help you with your plot ideas, share headcannons or plot ideas, and even a space for sharing pictures of pets.

https://discord.gg/esGdEpD
As always, I appreciate each and every comment and Kudos that this fic generates (it makes me giggle happily every time I see a new comment in my inbox).
Noct hadn’t expected things to take this turn. Not at all. All he’d wanted when he made his suggestion was for his partner to get a few hours of extra sleep - preferably cuddled up beside him. Instead, he found them both completely naked with three of his fingers deep inside his partner.

Definitely not what he had been expecting.

Prompto’s arms were tied behind his back, his wrists pressed to his elbows and secured by silk rope. The blond was pitched forward, his ass high in the air and slowly rocking on the fingers that were working him open.

“I’m ready Noct.” Prompto whined.

Noct hesitated before shaking his head. Prompto had spoken to him before this. Had told him what he specifically wanted, and how he wanted Noct to act. He’d even given him a safe word.

This was completely new to Noct, and more than a little outside his comfort zone. But if this was what Prompto wanted or needed, then Noct was going to give it to him.

“No.” He lowered the tone of his voice, trying to put a warning into it. “You’re ready when I say you’re ready.” He was floundering. He had no idea if he was doing this right or not, but was reassured when a soft shiver ran through Prompto and the blond moaned.

“Yes sir.” Prompto mumbled, hips still fidgeting to attempt to gain more sensation.

Noct, with minor hesitation, brought his free hand down on Prompto’s ass with a loud smacking sound. “Stay still.” He breathed the order out, constantly wondering if he was pushing things too far. His hand remained on Prompto’s flesh, gently rubbing at the slowly reddening mark blooming on his cheek.

But once again, Prompto simply moaned at the action and followed the instructions, hips stilling completely. The flesh around Noct’s fingers twitched and tightened briefly, a physical confirmation that Prompto was enjoying this.

Slowly, Noct indulged himself. He knew that Prompto had asked him to be somewhat rough (“as rough as you can mentally handle, buddy! I’m not gonna break. Trust me.”), but Noct had never before had the opportunity to take on this role. To touch Prompto in such an intimate place.
He curled his fingers, pressing down on the sensitive bundle of nerves he’d found a short while earlier. Like before, Prompto’s reaction was instantaneous - a deep, satisfied moan, and a tense hole. Noct wondered what would happen if he just kept pressing down, lifting the pressure for only a moment before returning it, harder than before. He wanted to know how it would make Prompto feel for him to do that over and over and over again.

So he tried it. Prompto howled, seemingly now unable to keep himself still as his hips rocked in an unsteady pattern, trying to fuck himself on Noct’s fingers, to seek out that sensation, the friction.

“Noct. Noct. Please.” Prompto was begging him now, and Noct couldn’t deny the way that affected him. He was just as ready for the next stage as Prompto was, but he knew he wanted to take his time with this.

Again, he lifted his hand and brought it heavily down on Prompto’s backside. “Still.” He ordered, taking satisfaction with how quickly his instruction was followed. Prompto all but froze. Another moan and another flutter.

Slowly, with achingly deliberate movements, Noct pulled his fingers free from their warm sheath. He fumbled for the condom, cursing as his lubricated fingers dropped the packaging on the bed more than once as he tried to open it.

“Skip it.” Prompto mumbled, breathing heavily with his face still in the blankets.

“No.” Noct wanted to. Oh how he wanted to. He’d been meaning to have a conversation with Prompto about ditching the condoms for a while now. But they hadn’t had that conversation, and Prompto had made it clear that it wasn’t one to have while they were ‘in the middle of things’.

This definitely counted as in the middle of things.

Eventually, he managed to slip the condom from its packaging and fumbled with putting it on. He tried to recall long ago taken sex education classes to give himself a vague idea, then just did his best. He remembered that he had to pinch the tip and - ok. He’d done it. The condom was on.

It was an odd sensation, and he decided then and there that he didn’t like it. It was worth the discomfort to be with Prompto, but if they were doing things this way around again, he would definitely have to talk to Prompto about condoms.

A whine from the man spread before him brought Noct’s attention back into focus and he turned his attention onto the blond.

Prompto was lay on his face, his arms tied behind his back and his ass in the air, ready and waiting. Lubrication was dripping out of his glistening, twitching, hole. His skin was flushed dark pink and there was already a bruise forming on his ass.

Noct found his fingers gently running over that skin, fascinated with the way it made Prompto shiver.

“Noct…” Prompto moaned, hips twitching with aborted movement. “Don’t be so gentle.”

Swallowing back his nervousness, Noct nodded. Prompto had asked that before they had even began. Had told him he wanted it to be rough, wanted to be used. With a deep breath, the prince lined himself up and thrust in - burying himself in one move.
Beneath him, Prompto let out a soft cry, his body trembling even harder as Noct simply pulled out to thrust back in. This wasn’t exactly how he would’ve pictured his first time doing this, but it was definitely enjoyable. At least, physically. Everything else would have to be considered after, when his mind was clear.

He found himself getting lost in the sensations. The warmth around him, the building pleasure. He focused entirely on Prompto, on the way that the blond writhed against him, pushing back with equal force. The way he called out and all but screamed when Noct gave a particularly rough thrust.

Prompto really was enjoying this.

Doing his best not to break stride, Noct shuffled their positions. He used Prompto’s tied arms to lift the man’s torso, holding it almost parallel to his own as he thrust up. This new position allowed Noct more access to Prompto, to run his lips up and down Prompto’s neck, to reach for his hair and pull.

When Noct’s teeth next grazed against Prompto’s skin, he felt the way that the blond shuddered, the way his breath hitched, so he followed his instincts and gently sank his teeth down.

“Yes, yes, yes.” Prompto breathed out turning his head to bear his neck. “More.” He requested.

Noct wasn’t sure what Prompto wanted more of, but whatever it was, he was happy to give it. He pulled harder on Prompto’s hair, forcing his head to the side where he sank his teeth deeply into Prompto’s flesh, his other hand reaching from his bound wrist to his hip so that he could change the angle slightly and thrust deeper, faster, harder.

“Yes, yes, yes!” Prompto was babbling, repeating the same word over and over and Noct almost violently pounded into him, hips snapping forward quickly and roughly. Pressure and pleasure built up and up, piling on top of each other until it was almost too much and Noct knew he was close. He let go of Prompto’s hip and changed their positions slightly so he could reach around and take Prompto in hand, his teeth finding a new place to bite on Prompto’s shoulder.

He didn’t even have the chance to fully close his fingers before Prompto was crying out and spilling over his hand, the pressure around Noct tightening and pulsing and Noct lost himself in the sensations.

One, two, three more thrusts and Noct was coming, emptying himself into the condom at dizzying speed, his mouth clamped down on Prompto’s shoulder as he breathed heavily from his nose.

They both sat still for a moment, letting themselves come down while basking in the afterglow until the night chill brushed against their sweat soaked skin. Slowly, Noct pulled his face away from Prompto’s shoulder, grimacing at the sticky warmth and copper taste. Apparently his last bite had broken the skin.

With a grimace, he looked down to the lightly bleeding wound and pulled a potion from the armiger. “Shit, Prom. You’re bleeding.” He muttered apologetically, bringing the curative up ready to smash the magical glass.

His fingers had barely tightened on the vial when Prompto’s hand closed around his wrist. He pushed Noct’s hand away and shook his head, refusing the aid. Slightly confused, Noct looked at where Prompto’s hand was holding his, idly wondering where the bindings had gone. Had they come loose and fallen off? He was pretty sure he’d tied them pretty damn tight.
But the rope was nowhere to be seen, and it took Noct’s frazzled mind a moment to realise that Prompto had somehow put it into the armiger, releasing himself easily with barely a thought and absolutely no struggle. The ropes really were just for show then.

“No. Don’t. I’m—” Prompto cleared his throat as he took a breath, his limbs shaking slightly. “This is good.” His voice sounded strange, as if far off, like he wasn’t all there. It was worrying, and Noct couldn’t help but frown. He didn’t send the potion back to the nether, but didn’t make any move to use it either. After a moment, Prompto let his hand drop and simply sat there, still.

“Prom?” Noct questioned, voice wavering slightly. He couldn’t help but worry that he’d hurt Prompto - he hadn’t been gentle, and the way Prompto was acting right now…

As if sensing his doubt, Prompto turned his head and offered Noct a reassuring smile. “Thinking.” He told him, grimacing as he pulled on the tender wound on the juncture between his neck and shoulder.

Before Noct could insist on any first aid, Prompto had pulled a clean rag from the armiger and pressed it against his skin, pushing down a little harder than Noct would’ve liked. It didn’t seem to hurt Prompto, or if it did, Prompto didn’t mind. He shuddered - but in a good way - and dug his fingers in a little more. After a few seconds, where Noct was struggling to think of what to say or do next - Prompto shifted, lifting himself off Noct with a grimace and crawling forward along the bed on shaking limbs.

Noct caught him as his thighs gave way and pulled him back to the top of the bed, laying down beside him.

“I was going for my phone.” Prompto laughed weakly, waving his hand vaguely towards the foot of the bed, “Figured it out.” He added tiredly, “Need to tell Cindy before I forget.”

With a nod, Noct climbed off the bed. His own limbs were shaky, and he nearly lost the condom before remembering it was there and to take it off and tie it. He threw it towards his trash can and then dropped to the floor to hunt for Prompto’s discarded phone.

Unlike their clothes and other items, the phone had been dropped to the floor rather than put in the armiger. They’d long ago learned that electronic devices didn’t always do well when magically sent to gods know where, and after a few destroyed cellphones had decided to just never put them in there.

Which was all well and good, until one was frantically banishing clothing in an effort to be naked now. That was how phones got casually tossed somewhere in the room.

Noct’s fingers danced over the plush carpet under his bed until they came across the cold plastic of the device. “A-ha!” He retrieved it and shakily climbed back onto the bed beside Prompto, handing it over.

The blond took it and quickly tapped out a message to Cindy before dropping it on the blankets. “It was something stupid.” He muttered with a chuckle. “Obvious.” He added, his voice slurring slightly in a way that Noct had long ago become familiar with. Prompto was very close to sleep.

Carefully, Noct maneuvered Prompto so that he was under the blankets and comfortably in the bed. He leaned over the barely conscious blond and gently kissed him. “Can I use the potion now?” He questioned with a whisper.
“Hmm.” Prompto nodded lightly and removed the makeshift bandage, letting it drop to the sheets.

Without wasting any time, Noct broke the potion over the bleeding skin and banished the bloodied rag before settling down into the bed beside Prompto.

They were quiet for long enough that Noct was sure that Prompto had fallen asleep, at least until the blond moved to place his head on Noct’s shoulder and speak quietly. “Thank you.” He whispered, gently kissing Noct’s collar bone. “We don’t have to do that again if you didn’t like it.” He added.

Noct waited a moment before replying, taking the chance to gather his thoughts. “I don’t know if I didn’t.” He admitted. It had been unexpected and intense, and he certainly didn’t like hurting Prompto. But he could see the appeal. “But maybe we could talk about it more before doing it again?” He requested.

Prompto lifted his head to give Noct a slightly quizzical look, silently asking for more clarification. Noct took a moment to think, wading through the sludge of cognitive thought to figure out how to articulate what he was feeling.

“I liked… being inside you.” He admitted, “That part I’d like to do again some time, but…” He shrugged, and hoped that his fiance could extrapolate the rest of his thoughts for him. When Prompto simply remained quiet, waiting for him to speak, Noct let out a soft sigh. “I don’t like to be the one to hurt you.” He admitted.

“Ah.” Prompto offered him a soft, sleepy smile. “If it helps any, you barely did.” He shrugged. “And I’m happy either way, so if you wanna top more, I’m good with that.”

“No all the time.” Noct admitted. “I guess I like it both ways?” He couldn’t help the questioning tilt to his voice, but in his defense, he’d only topped once in his life and it was a little tainted by the mild violence.

“Me too.” Prompto grinned at him, his expression quickly becoming more and more sleepy. “It’s nice to be able to top the same guy more than once.” He admitted, eyes falling closed. “Learn more every time.”

Noct looked at him for a moment with a frown. “You never did?” He questions.

“Nah. Never been with anyone more than once. ‘Cept you ‘n Iggy. ‘N Iggy’s exclusively a top.”

That was far more information than Noct ever wanted to hear about Ignis. Far, far more. He stared at Prompto for a moment, trying to force the inevitable mental images to stay away. He kind of wanted to change the topic of conversation to something that would prevent his treacherous brain from conjuring images that he would rather live his entire life without seeing.

Except when he tried to open his mouth to start a new conversation, he noticed that Prompto was dead to the world. His chest was rising and falling steadily as his body finally succumbed to the exhaustion that had been clinging to it.

With a soft sigh, Noct snuggled down further into the bed and held his love close. He’d only just woken up from his long sleep, but if he was good at nothing else, Noct was good at napping. So he closed his eyes and allowed himself to fall asleep, curled around the love of his life.
Chapter End Notes

Sorry this was short. But the next chapter fits better if it's on its own.
The Four Days Before The End

Chapter Notes

Ok, so this chapter is probably lacking. I know it needs another look over, but I kinda want to get it posted (and certain people in my discord decided to tell me that it doesn't matter if I spelled 'toast' wrong five times and that it's probably good enough).

If there's anything hugely out of place, let me know.

I'm not sure where exactly I'm going with the next chapter (I know C and A, just gotta figure out B), but there might end up being another filler chapter before the action (trying to figure out a way not to).

Songs in this chapter:
This Will Be the Day (RWBY OST) Acoustic: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLK3XYqu5g8
This Will Be the Day (RWBY OST): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wwohhs3LvRQ
(Unfortunately I couldn't find a mash up)
When it Falls (RWBY OST): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Abf8CQ_dxzc

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ignis was busy. There was no denying that fact. Not only did he have his normal duties to attend to, but he was also suddenly expected to assist not only Prompto in his endeavours, but also to help the rest of the council with whatever they saw fit.

Honestly, after this week was up, Ignis had half a mind to retire - or at the very least demand a raise.

And so, it was no surprise to himself when he realized that in order to get everything done in time, his day suddenly started at four am. While he was more than used to early mornings, four am was a little early even for himself. He struggled with it on the first day, dragging himself out of bed with the same reluctance he’d often seen from Noctis.

He was careful not to wake Gladio, but he needn’t have bothered. Gladio remained dead to the world as Ignis slipped out of the bedroom, simply rolling over to steal Ignis’ firmer pillow. It was something that Ignis had noticed Gladio doing often, and wondered if it was because it smelled like Ignis’ shampoo, or if the man was simply using the wrong pillow normally. Either way, his instant capture of Ignis’ pillow was something that the advisor found remarkably adorable.

It didn’t matter right now though. What mattered was the fact that it was four in the morning and Noctis was sitting on his sofa casually sipping from a steaming mug and apparently reading one of Gladio’s romance novels.

“Never figured out why he likes these so much.” The prince muttered, having noticed Ignis’ arrival in the room. He didn’t look up from the book he was smirking into. “Then I found out about the dirty stuff.” He added with a chuckle.
Ignis would probably have found that tidbit a little more amusing, if it wasn’t for the concern bubbling in his gut. Noct was awake before the sun. It was very rare that that happened, and Ignis couldn’t help but worry that something had happened. Possibly between Prompto and Noctis.

“Good morning, Noctis.” Ignis greeted with a frown, watching his charge for a moment before deciding that whatever bad news Noct had in store for him could wait until he’d at least made his coffee.

Noct sat back on the sofa and peered over the book, seemingly enjoying his own hot drink while he waited for Ignis. Once the advisor sat down, he turned all his attention to the prince and waited.

“Seriously, these things are super trashy.” Noct continued, finally putting the book down. Ignis noticed how Noct had made sure to slip a bookmark in before doing so, obviously intending on continuing it at a later date. Or perhaps putting Gladio’s marker back.

“As much as I enjoy your commentary on Gladio’s reading material, I must ask, why are you here? At such an early hour too.”

“What, don’t enjoy my company?” Noct teased, sipping at his drink once before shaking his head and gently putting his mug on the coffee table. He shrugged and sighed. “I slept like fourteen hours.” He explained. “Prom’s finally sleeping, but I couldn’t nap.”

Ignis raised his eyebrows in disbelief. “You, not able to sleep?” He questioned, half teasing. He sat down beside Noct and faced him, sipping at his own steaming cup of Ebony.

“Fourteen hours.” Noct reminded him with a small smile. “Anyway, I figured you’re probably super busy, since you don’t know how to say no. Figured I’d volunteer my services until I can figure out how else to be useful.”

Ignis again raised his eyebrows, regarding Noctis for a moment. His charge had certainly come a long way since their initial journey beyond the wall. While he looked younger than he did even back then, he had grown and matured during their exploits and was now showing his true age.

With a sigh, Ignis simply shook his head. “It would take me longer to explain things to you than it would to simply do it for myself.” He told him, knowing that it would be true. “While I do appreciate the thought, having you help at this juncture would actually cause me to have more work.” He checked the time on his phone and let out a soft sigh, realizing that he needed to get to his office to pick up whatever paperwork the council had left for him. Not to mention the several parts that Prompto had requested.

Though from the sounds of it Prompto would be asleep for a long while, Ignis knew that the blond would appreciate having all the tools necessary to finish his work from the moment he awoke. Since his invention could literally be the difference between victory and defeat, Ignis wasn’t against making his tasks a priority.

“As lovely as this is, Noctis, I’m afraid I must leave you for now. Please, do continue to read those books,” He gestured to the book on the table, “It would be nice for Gladio to have someone else to talk about them with.”

Noct snorted and shook his head. “No way. I barely enjoy reading as it is.” He chuckled and picked up his mug to rinse it in the sink. “Don’t worry, I’ll find a way to keep out of trouble until someone
needs me for something.”

Ignis gave him a small smile, knowing that in his own way, Noct was trying to reduce his workload. “See that you do.”

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Noct’s definition of ‘keep out of trouble’ and Ignis’ apparently varied greatly. It was barely noon when Ignis was walking through the Citadel, his pace more hurried than usual and a clipboard with paperwork in his hand. He walked past a corridor and a flash of blue caught his eyes.

Taking the three steps back necessary to investigate, Ignis found himself even more curious when he caught a flash of crimson. Now more concerned than curious, he peeked around the corner and what he saw astonished him.

It seemed that Noctis and Regis were once again up to their old tricks. They were warping across the hallway and out into the gardens, playing their old game of chase. Only this time, they had a third companion. One that was leaving behind a trail of red crystal shards.

It only took a moment for Ignis to realise who it was that was gleefully racing the royal family, and only another moment after that for him to decide that he was simply too busy to care. Noct had been quite clear about the fact that he trusted Ardyn, and with Regis by his side, Ignis was sure that the two of them could handle any difficulties long enough for the cavalleri to arrive.

Either way, right then, it was decidedly not his problem.

With a small sigh, Ignis continued on his previous trajectory and made his way to deliver the paperwork he was still completing en route.

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The next day was much the same. Start at four, joined for coffee by Noctis (who was apparently struggling to get back into an appropriate sleep cycle and would spend most of the night attempting to all but force Prompto to actually sleep), then on to his multitude of tasks.

Again, he found Ardyn spending time with both Noctis and Regis. Again, it was in an unexpected way. This time, it was when Ignis had been asked to deliver a barely important memo to the king. He had agreed to it, of course, without so much as a complaint. He was more or less walking past the king’s suite anyway and if Regis wasn’t there, then he would simply give it to Noct to pass on instead.

The king was in his room. Along with Noct and a man that Ignis assumed was Ardyn. It was the same face he wore yesterday, and his mannerisms were all too familiar. Though their activity was not.

“Noctis, are you cheating?” Regis was asking as Ignis let himself in.

“No. That would be you, your Majesty.” Came the drawl from the possible chancellor. He sounded amused, “In a way that’s awfully familiar.”

Across the table, Noctis obviously bit back a snort of amusement. “Somnus cheated like that, didn’t he?” His question was barely a question, and Ignis had to wonder just how many memories he and
Ardyn shared.

“Quite. Though I do blame mother for that.”

Now Ignis was convinced that this stranger was indeed Ardyn. And once again, he knew he could trust Noctis to keep his guard up. Noctis and Ardyn began to speak rapidly in what sounded to be ancient Lucian, none of them seeming to have noticed Ignis.

Holding back a sigh, and deciding once again that he simply didn’t have enough time in the day to make it his problem, he put the paperwork on a nearby counter top and made his exit.

At least Noct seemed to be keeping himself out of trouble. After a fashion.

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On the third day, it was video games in Noct’s suite.

While taking a sorely needed, and far too infrequently available break in his apartment, Ignis was disturbed by shouting and crashing sounds from the rooms across the hall. Within seconds he was opening Noct’s door and silently letting himself in, keeping quiet as to not alert any possible intruder.

But what he found wasn’t an intruder. Not an uninvited one, anyway.

Sitting on Noct’s couch was the king, prince, and the accursed, each with a gaming controller in their hand. The (regrettably) familiar music of a racing game filling the room, loud enough to be heard over their shouting.

“Now who’s cheating!?” Regis was challenging.

“Down with the monarchy!” Ardyn replied.

“Rematch!” Noct demanded.

Ignis stood still, simply staring at them for the longest moment before shaking his head and slowly slipping out. His head was beginning to hurt and he really didn’t have time for this.

As he closed the door behind him, he heard Regis cry out in victory. “Long live the king!”

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Thankfully by the fourth day, Ignis had mostly completed his tasks, and had somehow managed to refuse any further ones, claiming the need to be well rested and ready for the empire’s arrival slated for the next evening. He was finally able to return home and have some much needed rest.

He had yet to run into any of the royals today, and he was rather hoping that it would stay that way. He had no intention of getting caught up in whatever Noctis was doing, and had no patience to so much as be in the same room as Ardyn. Though he did wonder if Prompto knew that Ardyn had seemingly spent the majority of the previous day in their citadel suite.

No matter. He really didn’t have the energy to even care at this point. The moment his head hit the pillow, he fell into a deep slumber.
His slumber was uninterrupted for a long while. At least twelve hours. However, around nine pm Gladio was shaking him awake, a soft smile on his face.

“Hey,” He greeted Ignis as the advisor sat up and put his glasses on. “You been asleep for a while.” The bed dipped as Gladio sat down. “Thought I’d check on you ‘n’ see if you’re coming to the shindig.”

“The what?” Ignis’ brain was still coming online. It was working at an excruciating pace, and he decided to blame his exhausted state for that.

“It’s the night before battle.”

“Oh,” Ignis gave a soft smile and nodded, reaching under his glasses to rub at his eyes. “Give me some time to shower and caffeinate.” He requested, feeling more than seeing Gladio’s nod and tender smile.

Thirty-five minutes later, Gladio lead Ignis to one of the larger ballrooms. He could already hear the familiar music of the King’s Trusted from within and allowed himself a soft smile.

It seemed that even through the end of the world, and their arrival in another timeline had not dulled this particular tradition and as he expected, within the room was a large collection of people.

As they passed, various members of the King’s Trusted waved and greeted them before returning to whatever conversations they were having over the loud music. The room was full, at least two hundred people had to be there.

While he was grateful for the backup, Ignis couldn’t help the pang of regret that went through him when he realized that for them to remember, all of these people had to have died at around the same time. It was a larger number than he had expected, and he had to wonder if something had happened in those moments to cause so many deaths.

It was difficult to know how many of these people he knew. He couldn’t be sure until he had heard their voices or been close enough to feel their mannerisms. While he was ever grateful to have his sight back, it was at moments like these where he remembered the decade he went without.

Once they were fully in the room and Gladio had offered him a (non-alcoholic) drink, he took a moment to close his eyes and just listen.

A small smile graced his lips as he heard Noct approach, his slightly uneven stride as familiar to Ignis as his own.

“Hey Specks.” Noct greeted as he joined them. “Uh… You know what this is about?” He questioned.

“It’s a party.” Gladio said and Ignis chuckled softly. He shook his head and opened his eyes to regard his friend.

“A simple tradition.” He began explaining. “Around the third year, there began to be more battles as
we tried to hold the daemons back from taking more settlements. We failed, of course, in the end. But it became somewhat of a tradition to gather together before a fight, if we had enough notice.”

“Before the battle?” Noct questioned with a frown.

“People don’t always come back.” Gladio told him, pointing out a fact that had become somewhat normal for them in that time.

“Indeed. There were a great many lost during some of our larger encounters, and those that were left were often far too exhausted or injured to partake in any festivities.”

“So we started a tradition. Party first, then fight, then sleep for as long as we can.” Gladio shrugged, his explanation simple but correct.

“Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die?” Noct questioned, seemingly understanding.

The words were familiar, but Ignis wasn’t quite sure where they were from until Gladio laughed out loud.

“Been reading my books?” He questioned and Ignis watched as Noct simply shrugged, a light dusting of pink on his cheeks.

“So everyone shows up to battle hung over?” Noct questioned, looking at the champagne flutes that both Ignis and Gladio were holding.

“Nah. Non-alcoholic. We’re not that stupid.” As if to prove his point, Gladio handed his drink over to Noct, who drank it down in one go leaving Ignis to wonder if that had been the point of his question in the first place.

Noct grimaced at the taste and handed the empty glass back to Gladio. “So everyone goes into battle exhausted from a night of partying?” This question seemed more genuine, the young prince worrying for his people.

“Party ends at midnight. No matter what.”

“Right.” Noct looked around for a moment before giving a small nod, seemingly understanding. “Yeah, makes sense.” He seemed distracted for a moment, and a brief look over his own shoulder told Ignis why. Prompto had just walked into the room, and Noct looked like he was only moments away from rushing to him.

Sometimes it was sickly how sweet those two were about each other. If it weren’t for the fact that it had been going on for more than a decade, Ignis would have almost been inclined to call it puppy love.

“Go.” Gladio gave Noct a small shove, strong enough to get the younger man to move forward, but not quite enough to knock him down. It was all the prompting that Noct needed to rush from their sides, right into the arms of his beloved.

“They’re too cute for their own good.” Gladio muttered, echoing Ignis’ earlier thoughts.

Ignis nodded, watching them for a moment before the lights in the room began to dim. Everyone fell silent as soft piano music filled the room and a projector turned on, shining images on the far wall.
Even from this distance, Ignis could see the grainy photographs being displayed. They all seem to have been taken at gathering similar to this one, and he had to wonder who the people were. He didn’t recognise many of them, and none seemed to be in the room.

When the singing began, Ignis couldn’t help harshly sucking in a breath. It was a familiar voice, one that he hadn’t heard in some time, but would always remember. It was likely that he would hear it again one day - after all, Iris will eventually grow up - but to hear it now…

Her voice accompanied the music from the speakers, the sound quality less than ideal, but good enough to convey what was needed.

“They see you as small and helpless,
They see you as just a child,
Surprised when they find out that a warrior
Will soon run wild.”

As the singing continued, Ignis watched the slideshow of people, finally understanding who they were.

These were the Trusted that couldn’t be with them today. Either because they had died before Noct’s return, or had seemed to survive that night. These were the friends that would never be seen again as they were. Never again join them at these gatherings.

These were the people that the Trusted mourn together.

“Prepare for your greatest moments,
Prepare for your finest hour,
The dream that you’ve always dreamed
Is suddenly about to flower,”

Here, Ignis joined the others in raising his glass, realizing that this was a tradition he had previously taken part in. Only this time, he could see the slideshow. He wondered if they had always had one, or if the thought of wasting power had stopped them.

“We are lightning,
Straying from the thunder
Miracles of ancient wonder.”

As the voice of Iris began to sing the chorus that Ignis knew well, he couldn’t help but notice that the band that had previously been playing began to move. It didn’t take long for him to realise why.

Once the chorus was finished, the soft piano melody fell away, and the band picked up from where it had left off, playing the rock version of the song that Ignis was far more familiar with. The juxtaposition of the two working to highlight the then and the now, the same song, with two timings, the same song with the same singer, at two different ages.

Ignis watched as young Iris stepped forward, a microphone in her hand. He couldn’t help but notice the emotion in the air, as everybody watched the young girl take up the position of her older counterpart.

“Your world needs a great defender,
Your world’s in the way of harm  
You want a romantic life of fairytale  
That’s full of charm.”

She was doing well. Very well for someone of her age. Especially given that she hadn’t had much time to practice. Only around a week had passed since she had even become aware of the King’s Trusted, and now she was already partaking in one of their longest standing traditions.

“Beware that the light is fading  
Beware as the dark returns  
This world’s unforgiving  
Even brilliant lights will cease to burn,”

Again, Ignis raised his glass, joining his voice to the multitude of others as each member of the Trusted sang the next line in union. As was their tradition.

“Legends scatter!”

Iris seemed to know what she was doing, at least. It seemed that somebody had taken her under their wing and instructed her in the culture of the new community she now found herself a part of.

The song continued on, Ignis concentrating on the voice rather than the well known words. He closed his eyes and allowed himself a moment to reminisce, to remember those that they had lost along the way. He knew that most of the rest of the room were likely doing the same thing.

Beside him, Gladio took his hand in a rare show of public affection and Ignis squeezed it gently in return, standing proud with his brethren.

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Noct watched as Prompto gathered a handful of people and made his way to the stage. He’d made an off hand comment about the fact that all of their songs always sounded so hopeful, and Prompto had admitted that they had a few songs that definitely weren’t.

So now, Prompto was going to show him one of their not so hopeful songs with a warning that it was quite dark.

It started with a soft piano, then harsh lyrics all but shouted into the microphone as the band played along. Noct tried to concentrate on the lyrics.

“Maybe it’s red like roses?  
Maybe it’s the pool of blood  
The innocents will lay in  
When in the end you fail to save them.”

Noct couldn’t help but raise his eyebrows, wondering if they were singing about him. About his disappearance into the crystal and his abandonment. A familiar guilt flooded him as he listened in, the lyrics hitting him hard in the chest.

“Our dying eyes,  
Are wide and white like snow  
And now they know,”
He took a breath, his eyes closing as he tried to keep his emotions in, to keep himself from breaking down as every guilty thought he’d had in the last year was shouted to the world.

“Mirrors will shatter,
Crushed by the weight of the world
The pillars collapse in shame.”

He felt someone stand beside him, but he didn’t bother checking who it was. The room was full of people that already knew this song, probably knew more about it than he did, about who it was written about, about where the pain that Prompto was singing came from.

“There’ll be no rest,
There’ll be no love,
There’ll be no hero in the end
Who will rise above.

“And when it ends,
The good will crawl,
The shining light will sink in darkness,
Victory for hate incarnate,
Misery and pain for all,
When it falls.”

“I must say,” The person beside Noct spoke and the prince opened his eyes to turn to look at him. “I rather like this song.”

Noct found himself rolling his eyes, trying to push away the overwhelming emotions that threatened to break him in a public place. He shook his head and spoke.

“You realise, that if a single one of these people figure out who you really are, it won’t exactly be fun for you.” He warned.

Ardyn laughed. “What will they do? Kill me?”

Another roll of Noct’s eyes and he shook his head.

“Swallowed by the darkness,
Soon the moon is bathed in black,
The light of hope is taken,
And discontent is the contagion.”

Beside him, Ardyn was almost dancing with the way he was moving back and forth, regarding the stage with barely hidden glee. “It’s almost like they wrote this for me, don’t you think?” He questioned rhetorically.

“The blinding eyes,
That burn a yellow flame,
The embers that remain,
Will light the fuse of condemnation.
“What are you even doing here, Uncle?” Noct questioned, trying to keep his mind off the words he’d been concentrating on so hard just a few seconds ago. Maybe if he let the words fade away, the stabbing feeling in his chest would follow.

“Why, I believe I should be here, should I not?” Ardyn was smirking at him, and Noct didn’t care what face he wore - he would never like that expression. “After all, I fit into the category of your chosen warriors. I have sworn an, albeit temporary, loyalty to you, and I have more than my fair share of memories of the future. Doesn’t that make me one of your merry band?”

“Kingdom in tatters,
Hung on the brink of a war,
The peace will succumb to flames.”

He didn’t really have an answer to that. Not at this point, anyway. The aching in his chest wasn’t going away - rather it was getting stronger. The words he’d tried to ignore were burning in his brain, burrowing into the nooks and crannies of his psyche and wreaking havoc, reminding him of exactly what he had missed out on, of how much of their lives he’d been away for.

“There’ll be no rest,
There’ll be no love,
There’ll be no hero in the end
Who will rise above.

“And when it ends,
The good will crawl,
The shining light will sink in darkness,
Victory for hate incarnate,
Misery and pain for all,
When it falls.”

Noct couldn’t take it anymore. He took a breath and stepped away from the still dancing Ardyn and made his way slowly outside.

The night air greeted him with a cool breeze as the doors closed behind him, blocking out most of the rest of the song. Prompto had been right. It hadn’t been a hopeful one. Noct was seriously regretting asking to hear it, but at the same time, it was something that Prompto had had a hand in writing, something that had meant something to him at the time.

How often did Prompto feel like that? Hopeless? How often had he lost faith in Noct’s eventual return? Ten years is a long time, after all. Ten years of darkness and pain, of endless hoards if daemons advancing on them with every passing hour. Ten years of losing people, of watching them die. Helping them die... There was no doubt in Noct’s mind that there were times when Prompto’s optimism failed him.

He was only human, after all.

He had been left alone with his thoughts for no more than five minutes when he was joined by another. Ignis quietly stepped up to the railing beside him, loud enough for Noct to know he was there, but quiet enough to not disturb if he didn’t want to talk.

“Hey.” He greeted his oldest friend, turning to lean back against the balcony railing.
He had expected Ignis to speak to him, to offer him platitudes, or to try to convince him that he had nothing to feel guilty about. He did. But not that. Being gone for so long was completely out of his control. But instead of the mini lecture or pep talk, Ignis simply stood beside him, close enough for their shoulders to touch, but far enough to give Noct the space he didn’t realize he needed.

“After this is over…” Noct found himself saying quietly, “I want to hear all your stories.”

“I’m not sure that you do.” Ignis warned, “Very few have happy endings.”

It was then that Noct realised why he hadn’t heard them before. Why he’d only been given snippets of their lives before his return. At first, he’d assumed that it was because his retainers found it difficult to talk about. It was the end of the world, after all, and obviously very traumatic. They hadn’t really talked about it, and Noct had believed that it was for their good. He hadn’t pressed them, or asked too many questions because he didn’t want to upset them.

But now he realized that that wasn’t the reason they were keeping quiet. They weren’t afraid of hurting themselves, they were afraid of hurting him. His retainers - his friends - knew him well enough to see the guilt that was slowly eating him inside, and knew that to hear the worst of their stories would only make it that much worse.

“I can appreciate that.” Noct said, his words holding a double meaning. “But I want to know.” He turned to face his friend, to look up at him as he had for most of his life. “You guys all had a life I couldn’t be a part of. I’m not gonna lie and say that I don’t feel guilty about that… I get that you guys are trying to protect me from feeling worse but…” He sighed, wondering if he would ever become eloquent enough to get his feelings across easily. He was at a loss for words with no idea how to say what he meant.

But that didn’t seem to matter. The small smile and half nod that Ignis was giving him told him as much. His friends understood him without those pesky words.

“Once this is over, we will set aside a time.” He promised. “But Noct… know that it won’t be easy. On any of us.”

Noct gave a small nod in understanding. It would be hard for him to hear about it, but it would be just as hard for them to say it.

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True to Gladio’s words, come midnight, the party ended. The music died down as the lights came on and Prompto took to the stage.

“Tomorrow marks a battle unlike any most of us have faced before.” The blond spoke to his people, voice loud and clear even without the microphone. “Coming back in time has thrust us into an old war with a forgotten enemy, an enemy that can think. Whatever happens tomorrow, keep your heads. The empire is not mindless like daemons, they will employ strategy and forethought. Make sure you do the same. Don’t fall into the trap of familiarity, of blindly swinging at an unintelligent enemy. Always be thinking two steps ahead and one behind. And never forget what we’re fighting for.”

Noctis couldn’t help but feel proud of the way that Prompto was addressing the crowd, of the way that he seamlessly took on the role of leader without even a thought. He was effective, and the trusted seemed to be ready to follow him into the end of the world. Again. Noct knew that he’d made
the right choice when he’d appointed Prompto Commander of the Trusted.

He watched as his beloved raised his glass, following the motion as the rest of the room joined him in a toast.

“Until the sunrise!” Prompto called out only to be echoed by two hundred voices.

Noct had no idea what the morning would bring them, but at least he knew the people in the room would be there. They would back him up in whatever way was needed, and for the first time since hearing about the impending invasion, he was filled with a sense of hope.

Chapter End Notes

As always, a link to our discord: https://discord.gg/esGdEpD

I’m also hoping to get the next chapter out a little sooner, but my brain isn’t working too well lately (apparently you need to eat more than once a day for your brain to be active? oops. But I DID learn how to make Mother and Child Rice Bowl. It was great!!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!