What Hides In Plain Sight

by Not_just_any_fangirl

Summary

Natsu Dragneel is just an ordinary 21 year old trying to get by on his craft’s business, keep his landlady off his ass, and grow his friendship with his new weird neighbor Lucy. Without revealing that he’s a witch. Or his cat can fly and talk. So maybe Natsu isn’t that normal. Things take a serious left turn for him when people from his past start showing up, and he and Lucy as well as some new -and old- friends travel across Fiore trying to find some answers. But the question is, will they be happy with what they find?

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
One

Natsu Dragneel did not freak out. He did, however, from time to time, perchance, become acutely aware of how much of a shit disturbing cat he had, and said cat’s ability to somehow break into the apartment across the hall from him. The one that a new tenant had just recently moved into, that Natsu had not yet met. He didn’t really care about what other people thought about him - he didn’t exactly socialize- but he figured that his cat tearing up all of their furniture or getting into their fridge would be a truly horrible way to meet someone.

So had Natsu decided the only available option would be to break into their flat.

“Happy!” Natsu hissed, dropping down to his hands and knees to look beneath the large cream sofa in the living room. His cheek was pressed firmly against the soft carpet as he craned his neck to look into the darkness that separated the furniture and the floor, glaring when all he saw was two pens and a handful of change. A slight rustle from the kitchen caught his attention and Natsu jerked his head up, cracking it on the low wooden coffee table behind him. Natsu let out a low groan, and tenderly rubbed the now sore spot by the crown of his head. The fridge door was open and blocking his view, but Natsu knew what Happy was searching for. “Happy, you can’t just break into someone’s apartment and take their food.” Natsu chastised as he walked around the sofa and short bookshelf that rested against it’s back. When he finally got to the kitchen Natsu crossed his arms and rolled his eyes at the cat’s sad face. Looking over the contents of the fridge Natsu let out a small chuckle and relaxed his stance. “Of course she’s not going to have raw fish laying around buddy,” Natsu sighed at Happy’s watery eyes, bending down to scoop up the feline. “I know you smelt it earlier, but maybe she ate it.” The cat shot him an aghast look before leaping from his arms and running down the hall, dashing into the girl’s bedroom.

Well, Natsu had assumed it was a girl from the vanilla scent the already permeated the air in the apartment. Not to mention the ten pairs of boots and heels he had seen in the front entrance. Really, why did someone need that many different things to wear on their feet? This entire apartment confused him if Natsu was honest. The furniture looked brand new and high end, plush cream upholstery and dark wooden accents on the matching reading chair to the sofa. A lush dark carpet designated the living room space, which also boasted an average sized flat screen, or at least what Natsu though would count as ‘average’ for someone who could afford a flat screen. The off-white walls that were standard with the apartment flowed nicely with the look of the open floor space, while in Natsu’s they were smudged and stood out from his mixed-matched furniture. A small sandalwood table by the window had a tiny flower pot -freshly planted- and two chairs, though Natsu guessed that one was more for show than another person. Overall the room looked like it had been ripped from one of those home design magazines, the glass and white plastic cabinets and stone countertops of the standard kitchen included.

How this person managed to make the exact same kitchen as Natsu’s look classier than he could ever hope to was beyond him, though a part of him had to admit it might be due to the clean stove top and lack of dishes in the ceramic sink. But on the coffee table were newspapers with job requests circled, and the contents of the fridge looked more like a university student trying to eat healthy rather than a well-off adult. And then there were the bookshelves. There were two large ones on either side of the TV that reached to the ceiling and had to be at least three feet wide, stacked to the brim with books. The other was positioned against the back on the sofa, also filled completely, some even laying on top on the dark polished wood beside a small lamp. And all genres could be seen in the small library, Natsu’s brain starting to hurt from trying to find the pattern. Were some of them even written in english? Natsu rubbed a hand over his face as he looked down the hallway to where Happy had ran, frowning as he heard more rustling. Did he even want to know what his cat was doing? Probably
not, but his conscience told him he should look into it anyway.

Natsu let out an angry noise as he threw his arms into the air. Why him? What had he ever done to deserve this? Breaking into a stranger’s apartment was one - fairly easy - thing, but entering a girl’s room when she wasn’t home was just creepy. Even Natsu had boundaries, though Happy would disagree. Walking cautiously down the hallway it took Natsu a few moments to reach the white door, afternoon light shining through where the door was cracked open. Just enough for an annoying cat to slip through. Breathing through his nose, Natsu pushed open the door and stepped into the smaller room. The first thing Natsu noticed was that he really liked whatever scent his new neighbour used. The second thing was that Happy had curled up on her bed and was currently getting blue fur all over the pink comforter and striped pillowcases. Natsu could only stand there and gawk as Happy purred sleepily and opened his eyes to look at Natsu.

“What the hell?” Natsu grit through his teeth, looking around quickly as though any noise would bring this strange girl back to her apartment instantaneously. Happy yawned lazily before nuzzling into said girl’s pillow, sighing happily. “Happy,” Natsu whined, knowing if he reached for the cat again Happy would run away. “Happy, how would you feel if someone broke into your house and tried to eat your food and slept in your bed?”

Happy snuggled in even more, not even bothering to look at Natsu as he spoke. “I wouldn’t mind if it was her. She smells nice,” his high pitched voice chimed, and Natsu couldn’t help but agree that his new neighbour did smell nice. A small snigger from the bed drew Natsu’s mind back to the offending feline. “I meant she smells like a nice person, Natsu, not that I like her scent,” Happy teased, and Natsu felt heat crawl up his neck as he realized he must have made a sound of agreement at Happy’s thought. He was about to make a lunge for the small blue annoyance when Happy’s trill made him freeze.

“You liiiiike her.”

Natsu sputtered at the cat, who finally looked up at him, a smug grin pulling at his tiny mouth. Natsu rolled his eyes and dropped his outstretched arms, looking anywhere but at Happy. Glaring at the cat after inspecting yet another bookcase - really how many books could one girl own?-, Natsu opened his mouth to retort the ridiculous idea that he liked the pleasant smelling stranger whose apartment he had broken into when he heard the sound of a key in a lock. Whirling around, Natsu’s eyes widened as he looked through the open bedroom door and realized the owner was home. And he was in her room. With his talking blue cat curled up on her bed. With no escape as they were on the 10th floor and Happy seemed quite content to stay where he was.

Natsu Dragneel began to freak out.

A soft, feminine voice floated from the living room and Natsu would have found the sound soothing if not for the fact that he was about to die in 0.2 seconds. His body finally seemed to break free from whatever fear-induced trance it had been stuck in, and Natsu lunged at Happy. Miraculously Happy was distracted enough by the look of horror on Natsu’s face that he couldn’t escape from Natsu’s strong hands, one placed firmly over the loud feline’s mouth. Natsu bolted from the bedroom, looking frantically around the hallway trying to find another door to run into, or at least appear to be coming from. Claws sunk into his chest and Natsu hissed, deciding that the door to the left and across the hall from the girl’s bedroom would do. It was the spare in his apartment, so hopefully it would be here too.

“Levy, I swear, I’m fine!” he heard the voice say, exasperation clear in her tone. Great, she was in a bad mood, exactly what Natsu needed when he had to try to explain that no, she did not need to call the cops. Or kill him. Natsu really hoped that Happy’s nose was right and she was a nice person.
Seeing a pale hand wave itself from around the corner, Natsu slipped as quietly as he could into the chosen room. Standing outside of her open bedroom door was definitely not how he wanted to be found. Well, he didn’t want to even be in her house in the first place, but details. Leaning his back against the door, Natsu let out the breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding in. Looking around, Natsu could have groaned as he saw that this was not the spare room, but more of an office. A very disheveled office.

Partially unpacked boxes were stacked in a corner, and more bookshelves could be seen covering the wall to the left of Natsu, though they were only partially filled. Small trinkets were littered between empty spaces and books, Natsu having to fight his curiosity to go explore. He could examine them better after she had invited him over.

Whoa, where had that thought come from? Natsu didn’t even know this girl and he was already planning to snoop through her house and try to weasel his way into her life? If he hadn’t felt creepy before, he sure as hell did now. Happy brought him back from his thoughts by digging his claws into Natsu’s bare forearm this time, glaring up at the man. Natsu returned the glare with equal force, holding the cat’s gaze until Happy looked away with a small huff. Looking around the room once more, Natsu took in the obviously worn reading chair tucked into the back right hand corner, the red fabric matted down and worn around the arm rests and seat. The warm, loved feel Natsu received from the chair transferred to the large oak desk in the center of the room as well. Natsu wasn’t quite sure how the desk had gotten into the room, as it looked much too big to have fit through the door. Walking over to look at it closer, Natsu had to have guessed that it was about the same age as the chair, not that he could easily tell it’s shape from it’s top.

Papers were scattered all over the dark wood, some with handwritten notes scrawled neatly, others with almost illegible words crossed out or circled. Pens were held in a cracked pink coffee mug next to the only clear space on the desk, roughly the size of a laptop. Natsu gently lowered a hand and brushed the papers with his fingertips. Whoever this person was, she poured her soul into these pages. Natsu could still feel the remnants of her frustration and joy and passion in these papers. Transferring emotions to inanimate objects that intensely was impressive, especially as it had been hours, maybe even days since she had scrawled these words. So enthralled with these lingering feelings was Natsu that he didn’t even notice the light footsteps coming closer to his hiding spot. Happy could hear quite well, but he was looking forward to seeing Natsu get in trouble far too much to warn his human.

Natsu now stood centered behind the desk, his legs having pushed back the black office chair out of his way. He had never been one for reading more than he had to, but some of these plot points intrigued Natsu. A mage that could turn into a dragon if his power went unchecked? Now that was a book Natsu would read, and no way, he was a demon too? Natsu admired the creativity of his neighbour, he certainly never would have thought of that. A small slip of paper with question marks caught his attention, and he was about to move the several papers that covered it out of his way when he heard the sound of the door in front of him open. Panic and disbelief raced through Natsu as all he could do was stand frozen, hand on her desk and blue cat trapped in his hold.

He had forgotten she was home.
Natsu Dragneel is just an ordinary 21 year old trying to get by on his craft's business, keep his landlady off his ass, and grow his friendship with his new weird neighbour Lucy. Without revealing that he’s a witch. Or his cat can fly and talk. So maybe Natsu isn’t that normal. Things take a serious left turn for him when people from his past start showing up, and he and Lucy as well as some new -and old- friends travel across Fiore trying to find some answers. But the question is, will they be happy with what they find?

Happy’s snigger pulled Natsu’s wide eyes away from the door to squint accusingly at the cat who just looked up at him innocently. It might have worked too, if Natsu hadn’t known for a fact that his cat had the mischievous streak of an imp.

The door was pushed open and Natsu kept his eyes trained on Happy, praying that if he scowled at the cat for long enough all of this would just be a bad dream. That just happened to smell amazing.

His staring seemed to be for naught however, as he watched Happy yawn and heard the soothing voice from before speak to his right.

“Umm, Levy? I have to go, ah... no, no, I’m fine, it’s just... Yeah, I’ll text you.” Natsu closed his eyes and tried to keep his breathing even, praying one last time that this was just a really bad dream. A potion must have gone wrong. Yeah, that’s it, his last spell backfired and Natsu hit his head.

“Why are you in my apartment?” The soft voice asked, more with curiosity than fear. Natsu sucked in a deep breath and opened his mouth to speak when Happy finally managed to break free from his grasp. Natsu could only watch with dissociated horror as the blue cat shot across the large desk, papers flying away as his paws pushed at them before launching himself at the - very cute- woman.

Right into her breasts.

Her very large and barely covered breasts.

Natsu’s eyes widened as Happy made himself at home curling into the girl’s arms -which she had instantly brought up to catch the cat flying at her- and was that smug bastard purring? He was. Happy was purring and snuggling into the girl’s embrace, and Natsu could have sworn, no, he knew that Happy was smirking at him. Why, of all the ways the little traito-

The woman laughed softly, and then cleared her throat as if trying to stop the light, tinkling sound. Natsu realized with a start that he rather liked her laugh, it made him feel all bubbly inside, like he could float. He also realized he was still staring at her chest. Dragging his eyes up to her face, Natsu would have lost his breath if his body had been capable of breathing.

Golden hair framed her face, seemingly fallen out of a messy bun that was knotted at the top of her
head. Wide brown eyes were squinted at him accusingly, full lips pinched and cheeks puffed out slightly. The light red dusting her cheeks and collarbone only added to the sudden tightness in Natsu’s chest, and the fact that her lips were twitching trying to hold back a smile did not help matters.

“My cat’s an asshole,” Natsu stated bluntly, feeling his face heat when he realized how stupid that sounded. The girl however burst into laughter, clutching Happy even tighter to her chest as she was forced to double over. Heavy gasps could be heard from the wheezing blonde and Natsu was left to smile dumbly at her. He liked this laugh even more than her giggle. She eventually managed to calm herself down, and looked up at Natsu with tears in the corners of her eyes. Giving him a rueful smile, the woman spoke again.

“And does your asshole cat have a name?” she asked, a teasing lit in her voice as she continued to look at Natsu. Honestly, this girl was so weird. Shouldn’t someone be terrified of a stranger in their home, not speaking to them as if they were an old friend? Not that Natsu was complaining, this was going much better than he had ever hoped. Natsu couldn’t help the grin that spread across his face, her smile was just too infectious.

“Happy,” Natsu replied, trying to hold in his own chuckle as the pretty girl looked at him in confusion. “My cat, his name’s Happy.” Natsu clarified, running a hand through his loose bangs. The girl cocked an eyebrow at him and smiled again.

“Well that’s a... unique name,” she said, and Natsu had to laugh. If only she knew how unique his cat was... “And what’s his owners name?” the girl questioned, leaning against the doorframe and petting Happy absentmindedly. Natsu stared at her for a second before tugging at the scarf wrapped loosely around his neck, chuckling nervously. He hadn’t introduced himself had he? Not like he’d been given a chance, but still. He cleared his throat before speaking, eyes flitting to the bookshelves as a strange feeling crawled its way into his chest, making him want to disappear. Was this what embarrassment felt like? Huh, that was a new one.

“I’m Natsu Dragneel. I live ‘cross the hall. It’s, um, nice to meet you?” Natsu managed out, peeking at her when he heard her snort after. Even her snort sounded cute. Natsu didn’t know what it was about this girl. The female gender had never bothered him before, and he had been perfectly fine! Now his mind seemed to be on a permanent loop of ‘how cute’. The girl stayed quiet, seemingly appraising him. Sudden self-consciousness crashed over him, and Natsu tugged at his scarf again. His wild salmon - not pink- hair was mostly pulled back into a small bun, aside from his bangs that always managed to escape. He had been in the middle of working a seal of protection into a clay sculpture when he realized Happy was missing, so he was still in his work clothes, thankful he had decided to wear a black tank today. His gray sweats were stained with brown clay splotches but Natsu could never really be bothered to look after his clothes anyway. He narrowed his eyes at the girl as he felt even more heat spread across his cheeks and ears. “It’s rude to stare ya know,” Natsu grumbled.

The girl’s eyes widened before her nose scrunched and her eyes narrowed to slits. Turning her face up and away from him she spoke haughtily, “Well it’s rude to break into people’s apartments and touch their things.” Natsu ducked his face into his scarf slightly, she did have a point. He mumbled a quick ‘sorry’ into the white scaled fabric, and watched through his lashes as she turned to look at him, her expression softening. Her annoyed face had to be the cutest expression she had made yet, but for the moment Natsu was thankful it was replaced by the more relaxed one. A small snigger sent chills down Natsu’s spine and he trained a scowl on Happy once more.

“Oi, what do you think you’re laughin’ at!” Natsu scoffed, holding the pleased gaze of his cat.
“Excuse me?” The girl asked mildly offended, and Natsu snapped his eyes up to her face again. She looked torn between angry and confused and Natsu backpedaled, not wanting to get on her bad side. Well, more than he had already anyway.

“Not you! My cat, he’s laughin’ at me! I can see it in his beady eyes,” Natsu tried to explain, but the girl just stared at him, amusement clearing showing on her face. To top it off, Happy let out a loud meow and stretched in her arms before climbing onto her shoulder. The girl lifted a hand and scratched under his chin, pulling another purr from Happy and she rolled her eyes.

“Yes, he does seem like a malicious little demon, doesn’t he?” she asked sarcastically, cooing at Happy when he nuzzled her cheek.

_That bastard._

The girl looked over at him as he gawked at the pair, and finally seemed to take pity on Natsu. “My name’s Lucy, by the way,” she said easily, and Natsu pushed away the thought that her name suited her. _Light._ “So are we just going to stand in my study all day and stare at each other then?” she asked, something sparking behind her eyes as Natsu grinned at her. It seemed that Lucy had a streak of playfulness in her too. He stretched his arms above his head as he walked around the desk to stand in front of her, arms falling to cross behind his head.

He looked over the way Happy was perched on Lucy’s shoulder and chuckled again. “I’d try to take him from ya, but I’d rather not scratch up my hands right now,” he said, Happy meowing his confirmation. Lucy’s lips quirked in a small smile before she turned on her heel and walked down the hall. Natsu poked his head out the doorway, unable to stop his eyes from running over her body at least once. At least now Natsu understood what all those ads meant when they said ‘sexy’. Her wide hips swayed enticingly when she walked, flowing into a small waist and then into what Natsu counted as a, ah, _generous_ chest. Her long legs were covered by yoga pants, which showed off the curves and muscles nicely, also displaying the firm, full curve of her backside.

“You going to follow me or just keep staring at my ass?” Lucy called as she turned the corner to her kitchen, Natsu trying to sputter out his denial. Which would be a lie, because he had been staring at her as she walked away, though it had been her entire body more than just one part his eyes had been fixated on. Swallowing thickly and silently bemoaning the fact that Happy was never going to let him live this down Natsu made his way down the hallway. Rounding the same corner as Lucy, Natsu stopped and leaned against the fridge as he watched Happy explore the kitchen countertop while Lucy was reaching into one of the cabinets, digging around for something.

“Aha!” she chimed happily, pulling down a metal container. Natsu watched curiously as Happy raced over to Lucy, the scent of tuna filling the kitchen when she pulled back the tab. His smile widened when he watched her pour out the canned fish onto a small plate and push it towards Happy. The small cat didn’t even sniff it before he was nibbling on the fish, and Natsu walked the rest of the way into the kitchen to stand beside Lucy. He leaned his head over her shoulder and watched as Happy devoured the gift, an exasperated smile pulling at his face. Why did it always seem like Happy ended up with fish, no matter if he did anything to deserve it? Perk of being magical he guessed. Natsu looked at Lucy from the corner of his eye, taking in her face again. It was much more relaxed now as she watched Happy eat, a soft smile making her face glow, at least to Natsu. She seemed lost in her own thoughts, and Natsu realized that she hadn’t noticed him yet. His easy grin turned impish, and he spoke loudly after inching closer to her ear.

“How’d you know that’s what he wanted?” he asked, feigning innocence in his tone. Lucy’s loud squeal and jump into the air broke his mask however, and Natsu let out a howl of laughter, throwing back his head. That was too easy! He looked down at Lucy, who had her hands on her hips and was
pouting up at him, sending Natsu into another fit of shortles. All her reactions were so weird, Natsu couldn’t wait to find out all her buttons. Lucy for her part was not amused, and swatted at his chest, the red flush betraying her embarrassment. “What’d ya scream for, weirdo? You should’ve seen your face!” Natsu teased, making Lucy’s face scrunch up again as she glared at him.

“I am not a weirdo! If anyone’s weird here it’s you. With your blue cat and lack of personal space! Do you make a habit of breaking into the new tenants apartments, or am I just special?” Lucy fumed and Natsu cocked his head to the side, as if in thought.

“Well, Happy agrees with me that you’re the weird one here, right?” Natsu stated, Happy’s mumbled meow agreeing with him, even if the cat’s mouth was full of what Natsu considered undeserved tuna. “And I don’t remember breaking into anyone else’s place, so I guess that means you’re special,” Natsu finished, smiling widely down at Lucy. He noticed a light red travel up the pale skin on her throat, and realized she was blushing again. Lucy let out a small huff and fidgeted in her place, looking at anywhere but Natsu’s face. His heart stuttered for a second when Lucy looked up at him through her lashes and pulled her lower lip in between her teeth, Natsu’s eyes automatically drawn to her mouth. Wetting his own suddenly dry lips, Natsu watched as Lucy turned away without warning, walking quickly to her sofa. Happy finally lifted his head from the now spotless plate, and followed after her, blue tail twitching as it rounded around the cream sofa corner.

Natsu walked back into her living room, sending the wooden coffee table a quick glare before looking at Lucy. She sat curled up in the corner of the couch, Happy purring contently once more on her lap. There was no way Natsu was going to get that cat out of here anytime soon, and he really didn’t want to leave him here alone with Lucy. Poor girl would think she had gone insane the first time Happy spoke, and Natsu knew for a fact that Happy would slip up and speak to her. Probably asking for more fish. Natsu now stood awkwardly by the side of the sofa, hesitant to sit down. It looked expensive and clean, and he was well, not clean right now. Lucy looked up at him and rolled her eyes slightly. “You can take a seat, I don’t think Happy plans on going anywhere anytime soon anyway,” Lucy smiled, looking fondly down at the cat curled up in her lap.

“Sweet,” Natsu said as he flopped down onto the couch, jostling Lucy and earning him a disgruntled look, which Natsu returned with a toothy grin. “He really likes you, ya know,” Natsu commented. He had never seen Happy be so affectionate with anyone but him, and he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t a little bit jealous. Whether he was jealous about Happy’s affections for Lucy or the fact that it was Happy and not Natsu lying in Lucy’s lap Natsu had yet to admit.

Lucy hummed in thought before looking at Natsu. “How’d he even get in here? I know I closed my door before going to work this morning,” Lucy asked, and Natsu tugged at his scarf again under her gaze. Letting out an embarrassed laugh, Natsu lifted up his legs and rested them on the coffee table in front of them, not missing Lucy’s eyes narrowing at his offending feet. At least he was wearing socks.

“He has a habit of getting into places he shouldn’t. I really couldn't tell ya how,” Natsu explained, shrinking when she turned her glare on his face. He could have sworn he could see the gears turning in her mind, and Natsu was suddenly aware of how smart his neighbour most likely was.

“Speaking of ‘how’, how did you get into my apartment?” Lucy asked suspiciously. Natsu snorted and rolled his eyes before speaking.

“Picked your lock ‘course. It really was too easy, you should look into that,” Natsu said lazily, only realizing that that probably wasn’t the best thing to say when he saw death flash in her brown eyes.

“What are you?” Lucy cried angrily, Natsu’s back stiffening as dread washed through him. There was no way Lucy was that smart, they had known eachother for a whole twenty minutes. Happy
hadn’t even spoken yet for crying out loud! There was no possible way she could know he was a witch. Natsu opened his mouth to try and explain, or at least say something, when Lucy spoke again. He figured she had probably seen the fear flash through his face for a brief second - he couldn’t seem to be able to keep his face neutral around her-. Her voice was less harsh now, and anger had stopped radiating off of her in waves, though she still looked like she wanted to kick him out. Or just kick him.

“Are you some kind of thief or scam artist? I mean how many people know how to pick locks?” Lucy groused, talking more to Happy than Natsu as she played with his little blue ears. Natsu cleared his throat and sagged back against the couch in relief. So she didn’t know. Good, that was good. He didn’t want to scare her away, though a voice in the back of his head said that Lucy didn’t seem like the type to run away scared.

“Nah, I just spent some time on the streets when I was younger. You kinda pick up on stuff like that after a while,” Natsu said, preparing himself for the look of fear or contempt, maybe even pity. Natsu hated that one the most. Everyone gave him that look when he revealed that bit of his life, and while he wasn’t keen on sharing that much with Lucy yet it was better than the other option. He raised his eyes to Lucy’s face again, having dropped them to watch Happy earlier, and was taken aback by the look in her chocolate eyes. Instead of any of the usual looks Lucy was looking at him with a sad understanding, as if she had spent time on the streets too. Which was ridiculous, considering the apartment she now lived in, but Natsu couldn’t shake the feeling that her look was genuine. As was the slight hint of shame in her voice when she spoke.

“Ah, sorry. I shouldn’t have jumped to conclusions like that.” Natsu waved a hand in the air and grinned at her, trying not to let how happy he was show. No one had looked at him the same after he told them he was homeless for a bit, let alone looked as if they understood.

“Hey, don’t worry! It’s not like it’s a common thing right? Probably safer for ya to assume the worst, ‘specially after finding me tryin’ to catch my cat in your office,” Natsu said, a small chuckle shaking his chest as he finished. A light giggle traveled across the couch and Natsu’s grin widened as he watched Lucy laugh, her eyes lighting up as she looked at him.

“As I recall, you had managed to capture him by the time I got home,” she teased, the anger from before having dissipated into a relaxed air. Natsu winked at her and stretched his arms above his head once more, trying to relieve the ache in his left shoulder.

“That’s cus I’m a Happy Whisperer,” Natsu drawled, and Lucy broke into a loud fit of laughter, pride spreading through his chest. He couldn’t really care at this point if she was laughing at him or with him, Natsu just wanted to hear her laugh more. He himself dissolved into laughter when he met her eyes and saw that she was in fact laughing with him. Happy let out a loud ‘mrow’ in protest at having his lap moved around so much, and jumped to the floor, sounds of his little padded feet fading down the hallway, where Natsu suspected he was disappearing into Lucy’s room and curling up on her bed. Again. “Speakin’ of Happy, hope ya don’t mind blue fur on your pillows,” Natsu chuckled. Noticing Lucy’s eyebrows scrunching together in confusion, Natsu motioned down the hall with his head. “He likes your bed, found him curled up on it before,” Natsu continued, his smile dropping when he saw Lucy’s expression turn deadly again. Really changing emotions for this girl was as easy as flicking a switch.

“You were in my room?” she asked quietly, and Natsu felt a shiver of fear run down his spine. Now this was more of what he was expecting when Lucy came home. Natsu pulled at scarf with one of his fingers before burying his chin in it. He felt his cheeks burn and shifted his gaze away from Lucy’s intense expression. He scrunched his forehead in concentration, trying to decided if he should tell Lucy the truth or remain quiet, but that felt wrong. He had broken into her apartment after all, the
least he should do was tell her where he went.

“I just herded Happy outta there, I didn’t do anything creepy, I swear. I do have some lines I won’t cross,” Natsu mumbled into his scarf, looking at Lucy out of the corner of his eye. Her sharp brown eyes pierced him, and he wondered briefly if she could look into his soul. He’d run into a witch that could do that once, and Natsu really didn’t want to go through that again any time soon. The green haired woman had just kept muttering about a locked door and pain. It was one of the weirdest moments in Natsu’s life, and that was saying something considering he himself practiced magic. It took a few more moments of silence before Lucy released the breath she’d been holding and seemed to relax slightly. She did however lift her finger and poke him in the side of his head as she spoke.

“I guess you get one pass, but if anything’s missing from my room...” Lucy let her warning trail off, though her words lost their severity as Natsu caught the teasing tone and slight curl of her lips. Her smile seemed infectious as Natsu felt his own mouth pull into an easy grin.

“I’m not a pervert ya know,” Natsu shot back, receiving an eye roll and shove to his head from Lucy. Natsu allowed his body to fall over onto the arm of the couch, and brought his arm up to cover his eyes. “So mean! I’m too weak for such abuse, and ah! This is it! I can see the light, tell Happy, tell him I love him. And that there’s fish in the fridge,” Natsu moaned dramatically, peaking out when he heard Lucy snort. He let loose another long wail when he saw her hand covering her mouth, tears in the corners of her eyes. The rather pathetic noise he made seemed to break Lucy as loud howls of laughter rang through the room, her breathing raspy as she tried to suck in gasps of air. He removed the arm from his face and continued watching her laugh, her legs curling into her chest as she wrapped her arms around her stomach. Lucy caught his gaze as she managed to contain her laughter, and wiped at the wet trails down her cheeks as she poked him in the side with her foot. Natsu yelped a little at the feeling of her sock pressing into a rather ticklish spot, and Lucy’s grin sharpened as she poked him again. Deciding she had had enough fun, Natsu grabbed her feet and drew them across his lap as he straightened into a sitting position once more, a small ‘eep’ coming from the blonde at the sudden movement. He let his hands rest on the tops of her shins as she settled into the new position, raising an eyebrow at him but not saying anything else. Natsu felt a soft chuckle shake his chest and he shook his head a little. Lucy sure was weird.

“What?” the blonde questioned, squirming a little when he looked at her again. His thumb was rubbing small circles into the smooth fabric under his hand, and Natsu stilled his hand when he realized. How could he be this comfortable around someone he had just met?

“Just thinkin’ bout how weird you are,” Natsu hummed, smiling broadly when she pouted at him. He squeezed Lucy’s leg when he heard her mutter ‘are not’ under her breath as she looked away from him, red creeping up her neck. “Are too,” he teased lightly as he rolled his eyes. “Who else than a weirdo would drape her legs over the lap of a guy who had just broken into her apartment?” Natsu raised a pink eyebrow when he heard Lucy snort, pinching her ankle after she dug her heel into his thigh.

“If I’m going to be honest, a part of me is pretty sure that I’m passed out in the yoga studio from the heat, and that this is all a dream,” she replied lightly, but now Natsu was furrowing his forehead in concentration. Lucy’s light giggle drew his attention back to her, and mirth spilled from her eyes as she looked over his face. “What’s that look for?”

Natsu stuck out his tongue at her before speaking, thumb rubbing circles into her shin once more. “Why would you pass out at your studio?” He asked seriously - well, almost seriously- as he cocked his head to the side. Lucy flexed her feet a little, Natsu forcefully ignoring the way the small movement caused her legs to rub along his thighs. It seemed that the talk of her earlier work out reminded Lucy of her sore muscles as she then stretched her back over her armrest as she spoke.
“My friend dragged me to a hot yoga class, something about me ‘needing to explore more rigorous exercise regimes’. I’m pretty sure she just wanted to torture me,” Lucy sighed, continuing to explain when she noticed confusion return to Natsu’s face. “It’s like regular yoga, but the temperature of the room is raised. It’s often more advanced too. You didn’t think I was wearing yoga pants for the fun of it did you?” Natsu shrugged at her question.

“Don’t know much ‘bout fashion,” he replied lazily, attention taken from Lucy when he heard an annoyed ‘mrao’ to his left. “So ya finally decided it’s time to go home then?” he glared at Happy, who was decidedly unimpressed with Natsu’s annoyance, licking at one paw instead. Natsu snorted at his cat’s mild contempt, and looked over at Lucy to see an amused smile beaming at him.

“I don’t think he respects you,” she commented, her voice melodic with her poorly concealed giggles.

“Ya think?” Natsu shot back dryly, eyeing Happy out of his peripheral vision again. He started when Lucy began to remove her feet from his lap, masking his pout into a neutral expression when she raised an eyebrow at him, her smile widening slightly. At least Natsu was of some entertainment to Lucy, he figured. He stood and rolled out his shoulders again, face pinching as a spark of pain radiated from his left shoulder. He really needed to be careful with the blowback from the sealing spell, the landlady wouldn’t be happy if there was a Natsu-sized hole in the wall of his living room again. One per month was usually the short woman’s limit.

Ignoring the flash of concern on Lucy’s face Natsu bent forward and picked up Happy, letting the blue feline perch on his shoulder. Scratching under the cat’s chin Natsu looked at Lucy and gave her a tired smile. “Should probably be getting him home before he decides he want to live ‘ere permanently,” he joked, a warm flush working it’s way through his body when he saw disappointment in Lucy’s eyes. They were so expressive, it made Natsu want to melt into the rich chocolate colour. Lucy walked towards him and bumped his free shoulder with her own slightly, smiling at him as she led him down the short hallway to her front door.

“Well Happy’s always welcome to come over,” she replied airily. Natsu cocked an eyebrow down at her, neither moving to actually open the front door. “His owner on the other hand…” Lucy trailed off, a small ball of anxiety tumbling in Natsu’s stomach before he caught the mischievous glint in her eye. If Natsu didn’t know any better - and let’s be honest, this was the longest interaction with another human he’d had in years - he would think she was flirting with him.

“Too bad for you we’re a package deal then,” Natsu flashed her a cocky smile as yet another blush traveled along Lucy’s collar bone. He was really starting to like the way red looked against her cream coloured skin. Lucy drew out a hum as she looked at him, and Natsu could only describe the smile she gave him as sultry. Maybe Natsu really was conked out and in a pain induced fantasy. It was the only possible explanation for how this little visit had ended so spectacularly.

“I guess I can live with that,” Lucy’s flirty smile had widened into a more friendly and open one, Natsu unable to do anything but beam down at her in response. Happy’s loud call broke their attention, Natsu rolling his eyes as Lucy cooed again and stroked Happy’s cheek. Stupid cat was purposefully trying to steal Lucy’s attention back, not that Natsu cared or anything.

He was still fixated on Lucy’s weird expressions when he heard the soft ‘clack’ of the door knob turning, and turned his head just in time to be whipped in the mouth by Happy’s tail. Letting out a gagging noise Natsu somehow tried to glare at Lucy’s cackling laugh while spitting out a mouth full of blue fur. He may be leaving with his cat, but Natsu sure as hell wasn’t leaving with his dignity. Lucy opened up the door wider and had to lean against the white painted wood, sill sputtering.

“I c-can’t believe I just sa-saw that! He, he got you right in t-the mouth. Oh my god, it was perfect, I
mean, BAM. Oh god you st-still have blue fur on your m-mouth,” Lucy was hiccuping now, and he heard Happy’s soft snigger in his ear. That's what you get for looking so stupid is what Natsu assumed Happy was going for. Pulling his scarf up to cover his nose Natsu grumbled into the soft fabric.

“Ya ya, keep laughing. I might just end up leaving the hairball with you, Luigi,” That seemed to curb Lucy’s laughter as she stared up at him with a blank face.

“What did you just call me?” she asked quietly, and Natsu saw her left eye twitch slightly. Now this was interesting, it seemed Natsu had stumbled upon one of her buttons already. Letting the scarf drop he beamed down at her before he spoke in a sing song voice, drawing out the word.

“Luigiii.”

Now it was Natsu’s turn to laugh as Lucy’s face turned a new shade of red, and she glared up at him in the hopes of setting him on fire. “My name is Lucy!” she screeched, sending Natsu into another roar of laughter as she shoved him out the door. Natsu’s laughter stalled as he considered - Happy would say fawned over how strong Lucy was, but his large grin stayed on his face. He raised his arms again and crossed them behind his head, Happy crawling to perch on his mop of salmon hair.

“Whatever you say, Luigi,” Natsu teased, and Lucy’s cheeks puffed out even more, both hands now on her hips. She made to open her mouth, but thought better of it and walked back into her apartment, slamming the door in Natsu’s face. “I’ll see ya later then!” he called through the wood, and chortled when he heard Lucy’s faint mutterings drifting from her apartment.

“You look dumb standing there smiling at a door,” Happy commented, Natsu shrugging off the insult. He was already thinking of a present that he could make for Lucy, something that would stop people from breaking into her flat. Well, people other than Natsu. Maybe a painting? Or a statue? Running through the designs in his head, Natsu absent-mindedly walked back into his own apartment. It somehow seemed dingier than before, without Lucy’s light brightening up the space. The almost finished statue sat in the middle of his workspace - read, the living room- and Natsu figured he should probably finish this one before he started Lucy’s. The small dragon sat curled around a globe, and Natsu’s anti-theft spells hummed in the air surrounding the item, as did the fortune and navigation charms. Sighing as he removed his shirt, Natsu watched Happy flutter around the room, white angel wings sprouting from his back.

Natsu closed his eyes and let the thrum of his magic pool into his hands, muttering soft incantations of sealing as he prepared to bond the spells and charms to the clay, baking it in the process. Heat tickled at his fingers and when he opened his eyes fire danced in his hands, multicoloured sparks flying from the red flame. Natsu felt his cheeks heat at Happy’s light trill, though he tried to convince himself it was from the heat of the fire he currently held in his hands.

“You liiiike her.”

Chapter End Notes

Listen I want to tell you that the sizes and update schedule and pacing even out from here on but tht would make me a filthy liar and I ain't gonna play you like that.
Three

Chapter Summary

Natsu Dragneel is just an ordinary 21 year old trying to get by on his craft's business, keep his landlady off his ass, and grow his friendship with his new weird neighbor Lucy. Without revealing that he's a witch. Or his cat can fly and talk. So maybe Natsu isn't that normal. And Lucy is starting to figure that out. Wiccan AU.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Two days later Happy was still singing that annoying phrase, which Natsu refused to repeat. Instead he flopped onto his overworn couch, face buried in one of the mismatching pillows. The one he was currently trying to suffocate himself with was the nicer one, a pale red that had a button in the center and the fewest char marks. He turned his face to look at the statue perched on the work table stationed in the middle of the room. It was by far the most delicate thing he had ever created, and probably held one of the highest total work hours put into it.

The statue was another clay figure -Natsu’s specialty media- glazed over in a pearly white colour. Several thin bars rose along the edge of the circular base, all with a broken and jagged edges at the top and of descending size from the left. A thin band connected the larger bars parallel to the base, it too appearing to disintegrate halfway around. A small tree sapling sat in the center of the platform and branched out into several delicate arms as it passed the thin central bar. The main focus of the piece was not the crumbling cage however, but rather the three birds that seemed to have been freed. One sat with it’s wings closed and tail wrapped around the shortest bar that it was perched on, looking up at the other birds. The second was set in flight, wings spread within the cage and tail touching the floor -Natsu had decided to say fuck it and use the tail to hold the weight of the bird, lazy as it was- with it’s head turned towards the third and final bird. This one had posed the most trouble as Natsu wanted it to be the highest peak of the statue, which meant there was not going to be a lot of support for it’s weight. The small bird was looking down at the second, wings spread behind it’s back and tail feathers swallowing part of one branch limb. Natsu was rather proud of his design and way around gravity. Really, the world would be better without it. Probably not, if Natsu had a functioning brain to think with. Natsu really needed some sleep. Or coffee. His head hurt.

Natsu groaned as he squeezed his eyes shut. He then felt a light weight settle on the side of his head and small paws begin to knead on his temple. Letting out a soft sigh Natsu’s lips pulled into a faint smile. Happy really was the best friend he could ever ask for. Happy’s small ‘tch’ pulled him back from the much needed sleep he had been falling into, and he grunted in acknowledgment. He knew he had overdone it with Lucy’s present. Something of this much detail and finesse usually took Natsu at least three days, especially with the complication of the charms he had imbued the clay with.

Spells usually took at least three hours to set in properly, and the longer the time it was allowed to soak before sealing the more powerful the spell. The more spells and charms added to a piece the longer it would take as only one spell could be added at a time, although they could all be sealed at once. The strength could also be increased by actually inscribing the symbol into the object, even more so if the spell was written on it. Natsu had opted not to, relying solely on the strength of the positions he would mix into the clay and glaze. They were his specialty as a witch after all. That and
fire. Natsu used his fire to seal the spells while baking the clay, able to finish a piece in an hour that would take a usual kiln several. It had taken Natsu years to perfect his technique, able to sense if a piece was going to crack or when it was finished. It was even more important since once a spell was sealed it released a wave of magic that sent a blast of whatever residual magic hadn’t soaked into the piece in a circle around the source. Which of course resulted in Natsu being caught in the shockwave if he wasn’t careful or the piece he was working on to be damaged. He couldn’t even count how many times he had to restart a sculpture or the bruises and scars he had earned. He had been extra careful with Lucy’s though, not wanting to see all his hard work lost. Natsu thought he might actually cry if that had happened.

Not only would the statue stop virtually anyone from forcing their way into her apartment, but if Lucy ever invited someone in that meant her harm a charm would activate and cause the person shooting pain behind their eyes. It also had a potion in the glaze that would make her home feel warm and loved. Safe. The only person the anti-trespassing spell shouldn’t work on would be Natsu. A devilish smirk spread across his tired face at the thought of Lucy’s outraged expression when she came home to find him lounging on the couch. She was going to look so cute annoyed like that.

A louder groan resonated in Natsu’s throat as he buried his head into the pillow once more, displacing Happy from his perch with the small movement. He really needed sleep, thoughts like that proving it. Happy, being unable to read Natsu’s mind, mistook his groan for one of worry. “Natsu,” Happy said seriously, curling into a small ball between Natsu’s shoulder blades, “she’s going to love it. It’s one of your best pieces, even if it doesn’t have any fish.” Natsu gave a thankful smile, even if Happy couldn’t see it. He had been encouraging the whole time, even giving Natsu the idea for a bird to represent each of them.

Everything about the piece was meant to represent something. There were three birds, one for him, Happy, and Lucy. Natsu hadn’t told Happy this, but the highest bird was Lucy, looking down and leading him and Happy out of their cage. Happy was represented by the bird perched on one rod, and Natsu was the bird flying up to Lucy. The witch would never live it down if Happy learned about the identity of the birds, and the implied meaning. -oh god, even the imagined teasing made Natsu cringe-. The small sapling was meant to show a new start, growing from the rubble of their cage. Natsu didn’t quite know why, but he had sensed that Lucy had broken from some cage of her own earlier in her life, something which Natsu could relate to. And what was more symbolic of freedom than birds escaping a broken cage? Natsu had agonized over the colour for a solid half day as he rolled out and molded the clay, finally deciding on the pearl white that had ended up with a pinkish undertone. White was a colour of light and safety, the pink created by Natsu’s feelings mixing with the potion that he had combined with the glaze. He choose not to reflect on what it meant, focusing on how pink seemed to be a very ‘Lucy’ colour.

He turned his head once more and let his eyes flit over the statue. The glaze had thickened a bit at the joint of one of the bars, and the thin band wrapping around had a dent in it that made it dip slightly between two bars and oh god one of the birds was tilting to the left he had not designed it that way Lucy was going to hate it and never let him into her life aga-

“NATSU!”

The witch jumped at the sudden scream in his ear and flailed his arms as he rolled off the couch with a yelp of his own. Happy floated above him, white wings glimmering beside him. Natsu pouted up at the cat, letting his body relax against the floor. A low moan sounded in his throat as he felt his back settle back into alignment, Happy making a face of disgust at the cracking and popping sounds resonating from his body. Natsu rolled his eyes and focused on Happy again. “Why’dya yell at me like that?” he questioned, eyes squinting when he heard the cat’s small snort.
“I called your name like five times, but you had that weird face on like when you nitpick your sculpture or you have to go to the bathroom,” Happy chimed, voice light and tinkling as he once more settled onto Natsu’s chest, wings disappearing into a light puff of sparkles. “You haven’t slept in 48 hours, and no, a half hour nap that you took while trying to make cereal does not count. You know how much magic drains energy Natsu, and I won’t let my charge exhaust himself. Not before he has fed me at least.” Natsu blinked at Happy’s firm tone. He had never spoken like that before, and sometimes Natsu forgot that Happy was his familiar as well as best friend. He supposed that title did come with some responsibilities, no matter how eclipsed by fish they were in Happy’s list of priorities. Natsu released another tired groan and scrubbed at his face before letting his hands fall to the side and smiling up at the little cat, who was now looking down at him with a worried expression.

“I know buddy, I’ll get you some fish in a bit,” Natsu hummed soothingly, giving gentle scratches to the top of Happy’s head only for the feline to bat away his hand and glare down at Natsu.

“That is not what I meant! I’ll still take the fish, but what I was saying is I don’t like seeing you work yourself this hard and I don’t understand why you pushed yourself to the limit!” Happy huffed, standing on all fours as though he could pin Natsu down by his chest. Natsu was shocked again by the outburst. He opened his mouth to try and explain, but nothing came to him. If he were being honest, he really didn’t understand himself why he had worked so hard on this statue. He had just felt like he needed to have it done for today. It was important he made it up to Lucy as quickly as possible. As he continued to gape at Happy Natsu saw the small animal shake his head before patting Natsu’s forehead in a sad manner.

“You liiike her,” the cat trilled resignedly before unfurling his wings once more and flying to the kitchen, muttering about puberty and male hormones, leaving Natsu to shoot up into a seated position and sputter out denials. Natsu eventually let his rather incoherent words die off as he realized Happy was no longer paying attention to him. Staring up at the ceiling for a few seconds Natsu let his mind drift into emptiness and hey, when did that mark get up there? Good thing his landlady couldn’t lift her head that high or Natsu would be kicked out for sure. He then let his head loll to the side, onyx eyes squinting and scrutinizing the sculpture again before his vision flickered. Forcefully blinking his eyes Natsu rubbed his face again, exhaling through his nose. He was going to go crazy if he kept staring at it. He just really hoped Lucy would like it.

Natsu slowly made his way off the ground before gently gathering the statue in one hand and tucking it into his side. A nice warmth flowed into his side where his bare chest connected with the pale glaze, the magic reacting to his proximity. It soothed his fears and Natsu sighed in pleasure as he felt the tension start to drain and a small pulse of strength return. He was glad his magic was so warm and lively, it still had a small force of it’s own even after being sealed. Igneel had told him it was a gift before. Igneel...

“Come on Happy! Let’s go give this to Lucy!” Natsu called into the kitchen, ignoring Happy’s tiny ‘finally’ as he walked towards the door. Happy beat him there though, and floated in the air as he looked Natsu once over.

“Don’t you need something?” He asked in amusement, eyes twinkling with withheld laughter as the small cat crossed his arms in front of him. Natsu scratched behind his head with his free hand, running it tentatively through his wild hair which was loose for once.

“No...?” Natsu guessed, cringing when Happy shook his head, looking down at the floor. Natsu’s ears burned slightly under Happy’s condescending look, but he still didn’t know what was wrong. He had taken a shower this morning while waiting for the final charm to soak, he had the statue in his hands, he had some form of thought of what he was going to say to Lucy. Well that last one was
a lie, but still, Happy didn’t need to know that.

“You’re such a mess Natsu. What am I ever going to do with you?” Happy sighed dramatically to himself, a small grin pulling at his muzzle and his whiskers twitching. Natsu could only scowl at the cat blocking his path to Lucy, feeling the already exhaustion-depleted patience he held fraying.

“Your shirt, Natsu. You need a shirt. Really,” Happy giggled, fluttering towards the mage and circling his head. “Unless you want Lucy to see you shirtless. Because you like her and you want her to like you. Not that you’ll have to try very hard,” Happy purred, snorting as his voice quieted to a murmur, talking more to himself than Natsu. That didn’t mean Natsu missed it though, and he tried to shove down the bubbling hope that built in his chest. He wanted to be her friend first and foremost, but he wouldn’t be opposed if something else grew from there...

Gulping loudly Natsu turned on his heel and walked quickly to his room, stepping over clothes piles and left over supplies and books that were strewn across the floor. He had to find a shirt.

It was several hours later when Natsu was once more startled awake and sent tumbling to the floor in a mess of arms and legs. Lucy was standing above him and waving her arms frantically around her head, her face a bright red. Probably from the fact that she hadn’t inhaled in the last minute, too busy screeching at him to fully breathe. Natsu figured he should probably start listening to what she was saying before she passed out.

“-is what I come home to find! I have had a very busy day filled with gross perverts and split coffees and interviews and I do not need this right now!” Natsu just beamed up at her from the floor, ignoring the glare she shot at him as she took a second to catch her breath. Chest heaving and arms crossed in front of her, Natsu thought Lucy might look scary if not for the warmth she always seemed to carry with her. When Lucy realized her glare wasn’t being as effective as she would like, she sighed heavily and dropped her arms to her side before shooing at him with her hands. “At least move over. I’d like to sit down after running around all day,” she said tiredly. Lucy then flopped onto the couch and allowed her body to collapse so that her face was pressed into the beige cushions, knees pressed against the armrest and feet waving in the air. Natsu pulled himself into a seated position on the carpet and poked at her cheek, a sad whine resonating in Lucy’s throat. Natsu chuckled at the noise, having to mentally stop himself from running his hand through her hair.

Happy however did not care about whether something was acceptable in human society, as he was a cat.

The small animal crawled along her back and batted at a lock of golden hair until he heard Lucy giggle. Satisfied, he continued forward until he stood atop her head. Walking in a circle Happy settled into a ball and curled up on Lucy’s head, blue fur mixing slightly with blonde strands. Natsu couldn’t help but find it adorable. He then watched as Lucy’s muscles went lax and she sunk more into the couch, the tension seeming to melt away with Happy’s soft purrs.

“You know, a normal person would be freaking out more,” Natsu mused out loud, raising an eyebrow as Lucy murmured something into the pillow, Natsu catching words like ‘lucky’, ‘normal’, and ‘ass’. Pieces of her golden hair trailed over the edge of the cushion, Happy having loosened them from the side ponytail her hair was currently falling out of. Natsu absently wondered if her hair was as soft as it looked, cheeks burning when he realized what he had just thought. Happy snickered from his perch, but thankfully Lucy was still mumbling less than pleasant things about Natsu and men in general into the plush fabric. Natsu chortled as he poked her cheek again. “You’re sure a weirdo, Luce,”
Natsu watched Lucy’s body tense once more before she lifted her hands and patted her head in search of something. They finally settled on Happy, and a startled ‘mr-ao’ left the small cat as Lucy’s hands grasped him while she turned her head towards Natsu before settling Happy back down on the side of her head. When Natsu lowered his gaze back to her face, he felt a cold rush of fear travel along his spine at her glare. Shuffling back until his back hit the coffee table Natsu tried to smile at her, the rage in her eyes melting into a critical searching. They softened into a tired acceptance as she finally seemed to find what she was looking for in Natsu’s expression, her voice cautious as she spoke. “I can’t tell if that’s supposed to be an insult or not.”

Natsu felt his eyebrows knit together as he stared at her, why would she take that as an insult? It was much better to be weird than boring, life was always more exciting that way. His confusion only grew when he watched her roll her eyes, though a small curl was pulling at her full lips. “What are you even doing here, Natsu?” Exasperation was clear in her tone, and Natsu would have been more worried if not for the faint amused lit he caught mixed in her voice. Still, sudden self-consciousness crashed over him again and he looked down at his feet, the bottoms of his white socks pressed together and legs pushed into a butterfly pose. What if she didn’t like it? She didn’t seem to want him here anyway, panic starting to sink in as Natsu wondered if he had totally misread her body language last time he had been over. A gentle call of his name broke his mental downward spiral and he looked shyly up at Lucy, whose brown eyes were filled with mild concern as they flited over his face. Natsu felt his ears heat again as he held her gaze, struggling to clear his throat.

“I, uh, made you a present,” he said softly, grinning a little as surprise widened her eyes and made her mouth fall open slightly. She looked adorable like that, a light red making it’s way onto her cheeks now, and Natsu had to look away before he did something stupid like say that out loud.

“Why?”

Her voice only held innocent curiosity as Lucy gaped at him, and Natsu felt his smirk widen into a full blown smile, eyes squinting as he tilted his head to the side.

“Because you’re nice!” he said simply, opening his eyes to see a deep red coating Lucy’s cheeks and chest - which was once again prominent due to the low neckline of her shirt- as she wordlessly opened and closed her mouth. Finally squeaking out a tiny ‘what’ Lucy watched as Natsu scratched the back of his head, a small blush returning to his own cheeks. “You know, ‘cus you didn’t kill me the other day, or call the cops. And ya fed Happy, he’d scratch me up to shit if I didn’ thank you for that,” he explained, eyeing Happy suspiciously after. The cat yawned lazily, licking his paw as he held Natsu’s wary look. Lucy’s light giggle was all the warning Happy had as she sat up slowly, the cat slinking away to the kitchen, the soft sounds of paws batting at plastic alerting Natsu that he had gone to the fridge.

He ignored the cat’s quest for fish as he looked up at Lucy, who seemed to be trying to hold back her excitement. She was bouncing in her seat and Natsu felt the energy rolling off of her, the giddiness infecting him quickly. Smoothly he stood and walked to the small table by the window, gently picking up the statue and watching Lucy’s expression as he returned, sitting down beside her on the couch. Emotions ran rampant across her face, awe, joy, shock, and disbelief all alternating as her eyes travelled between the figure in his hands and Natsu’s face.

“I don-, I mean, wow , it’s so... beautiful,” Lucy breathed, reaching out a hand to tentatively brush her fingertips along the tail of the highest bird. Her bird . “How long did this take, the detail on the feathers alone is amazing ,” Lucy awed, eyes scanning over the figure, finger brushing along the beak of the middle bird now. Natsu beamed under her praise, chest puffing out slightly as she looked up at him. Pride swirled through his through him, his blood seeming to catch fire. She really liked it, Lucy was impressed with him! He lifted his chin and spoke as though he was bragging to a teacher,
‘I’ve been workin’ on it since Tuesday,’” Natsu lifted a hand and wiped at his nose with his thumb, embarrassment at announcing how hard he worked on her piece clouding his mood slightly. His mouth didn’t seem to get the idea though and continued to ramble, his brain yelling and waving hypothetical arms in the air in panic. “I really wanted to get it done for you as soon as possible, so I didn’ really sleep. I mean I took naps and showered, it be gross if I didn’. I swear I’m clean, ‘course I’m cle-... fuck. I mean the statue was totally not what I spent all my time on and kept me up ‘till five in the mornin’ ‘cus I’m not a crazy person,” Natsu stalled, his brain finally able to make his teeth clamp down on his tongue. Anything to stop himself from saying more stupid things. Lucy just blinked owlishly at him, trying to understand his ramblings. Natsu decided to keep digging his hole before Lucy was able to gather her thoughts. Maybe she would think it was cute? Or freak her out and ban him from her apartment.

Natsu looked down at the statue and rubbed his thumb along the side of the base, voice still minorly strangled. “Ok, so maybe I went a little overboard. I just really wanted to make you something special, Luce. And then when it was done, I needed to give it to you right away or else I’d overthink it and chicken out. But when you didn’ answer I was worried I’d pass out on my couch and miss ya again, so I let myself in and guess I fell asleep waiting for you to come home,” Natsu knew he was rambling again, but at least it was slower and less frantic than his episode before. It also reminded him about how Lucy hadn’t changed her lock yet and he squinted at her, all anxiety forgotten for the moment. “You really need to fix your lock,” he said accusingly. Annoyance deepened his scowl at her amused expression, eyebrows lifted and fond smile pulling at her mouth. “All sorts’a freaks could get in here if you’re not careful,” he warned, holding her warm gaze as she lifted one eyebrow at him, snorting as she shook her head and looked down at the gift.

“Thank you, Natsu,” she said softly, looking up at him with a large, watery smile. Natsu started at the beginnings of tears in her eyes, but Lucy laughed it off and wiped at her face. “I really needed this today. Honest and caring and just, this,” her voice was soft but still strong, and Natsu felt a pang echo through his heart. He didn’t like seeing Lucy cry, even if they were -almost- happy tears.

“Rough day?” he asked gently, trying to build up the courage to reach out and touch her knee, or even her hand. Natsu was never very good with words when he wasn’t building a spell or enchantment, physical stuff was always more in his lane. Before he could decide though, Lucy smiled at him gratefully, stealing his ability to think.

“Yeah, rough day,” she agreed, reaching out her own hand and resting it gently on top of one of his own. Natsu inhaled sharply, eyes darting down to her pale skin contrasting to his own deep tan. Her skin was soft and felt cool against his, Natsu’s mouth suddenly dry at the contact. Just as suddenly as her hand had been on his though, she removed it, giving a firm nod before speaking. “So how much do I owe you for the bird cage?”

Natsu blinked at her a couple times, mouth pulling into a frown as he understood what she meant. He nudged the statue more into her lap, giving a sharp shake of his head, loose hairs tickling the back of his neck. “It’s a gift,” he responded, frown deepening as Lucy pouted at him.

“No way Natsu, this is way too elaborate to just be a gift. I need to pay you for it, especially with all the effort you put into it,” she pressed, but Natsu shook his head again, letting an easy grin melt away his frown. It wasn’t like she could refuse his gift now, Natsu knew for a fact she loved it.

“It’s what I do for my job Luce. Besides, I’ve broken into your place like twice now, it’s only fair,” Natsu said, pushing the gift even further into her lap. Lucy rolled her eyes though, and muttered under her breath.
“It’s hardly breaking in if you’re wanted,”

Natsu paused for a second before grinning smugly at her, a wicked expression coating his face. “What was that?” he teased, red crawling up Lucy’s throat and a cute, high pitched ‘eep’ escaping her mouth before she cleared her throat.

“Nothing,” she squeaked, pulling the gift fully into her lap and out of Natsu’s hands. She worried at her lip for a moment as she examined the pale clay, her head suddenly flying up and her eyes bright with victory. “At least let me make you dinner then!” she said triumphantly. It seemed to Natsu that she had already figured out there was no way he was going to say no to food, even if she had nothing to base it on. He couldn’t help but laugh, pulling at the scarf around his throat as he returned her smile.

“Sure, ‘though I don’t see why you’re so happy ‘bout it,” he conceded, leaning into the corner of the couch and lifting his arms behind his head. He didn’t miss the way Lucy’s eyes flickered to his arms, his fanged grin ignored as Lucy stood up while cradling the clay statue. Her movements were gentle as she shifted the weight between her hands, the delicateness contradictory to her sticking out her tongue and blowing a raspberry at Natsu. He sat there stunned for a minute before he let loose a roar of laughter, tempted to lunge and tickle her in retaliation. He would have too, if not for the very breakable statue in Lucy’s hands. Lucy turned on her heel and walked towards the kitchen, pausing briefly beside the short book stand along the back of the couch before shaking her head and continuing on. He heard her speak to Happy, light coos and kind words boosting the little imp’s ego and Natsu couldn’t help but holler over the edge of the couch. “If ya keep fawning over him like that his head won’t fit out the door.” A small ‘hrmph’ and more cooing was all Natsu heard in response.

Turning his head in agitation Natsu couldn’t help but glare at the small cat, who was now pressed deep into Lucy’s cleavage and was nuzzling her ear. He grinned wickedly at Natsu when he caught the witch’s onyx eyes squinting at him, and Natsu felt his left eye twitch.

Like hell was he going to let Happy hog all of Lucy’s attention.

Shooting up from the couch Natsu was already three strides away from Lucy when he spoke. “I’mma help ya cook then!” he said confidently, ignoring Happy’s amused tail twitch at his sudden plan. He couldn’t really find it himself to care if Happy was judging him, he just craved Lucy’s attention. Maybe having only a cat as a companion for several years had rubbed off some traits onto Natsu. His plans were cut short when Lucy whirled around on him, letting Happy drop back to the floor with an offended yelp.

“Oh no, no, no you don’t. I don’t know why but I can’t help but feel that you’d set my kitchen on fire if you set a foot in here,” Lucy scolded, hands on her hips as she blocked his path to the stove. Natsu balked for a second before crossing his arms over his chest and continued walking towards her.

“You been talkin’ to the landlady?” he accused, coming to stand before Lucy, who was now pouting at him again. God, she looked adorable like that, and Natsu felt his lips twitch before he was able to regain control of his face. Her face was turned up to look at him, and Natsu became aware of the solid 7 inches he had on her height. He would have to rub that in later, now he was too focused on trying to figure out if the crazy landlady had been ‘informing’ the new tenants about him again. The guy three doors down still ran the other way when he saw Natsu.

“No, but now I’m thinking that I should,” Lucy replied while eyeing him cooly. “Not that I’d listen, but some forewarning would be nice. Now shoo before you burn something,” she finished, and Natsu pouted down at her.
“You haven’t even started cookin’ yet,” he whined. Truly, he was hurt she had so little faith in him. Lucy looked at him pointedly, eyes determined but the frozen brown had melted into soft chocolate. He let his arms drop as she shoed at him with her hands, fingertips almost brushing along his chest. Red started climbing up her pale throat again, and Natsu realized his closeness was starting to affect her. Natsu leaned forward in his spot, a cocky grin breaking across his face.

“Make me.”

Lucy glared up at him before a smirk of her own pulled at her mouth. Whatever she was about to do was interrupted when a certain blue cat decided Natsu had had enough fun, and wove himself between Lucy’s legs midstep. Natsu couldn’t help but feel that it was going to be a very long and passive aggressive fight between the two for Lucy’s attention. All thoughts were shoved from his brain however when his arms were suddenly full of Lucy, eyes wide and a cute bashful blush heating her cheeks. Natsu’s heart skipped a beat at how beautiful she looked pressed up against his chest, until he realized that her chest was pressed against his. Soft breasts pressed against hard muscles, and the pressure made more of her cleavage spill from her shirt. Fire consumed his blood and thoughts, Natsu having to fight himself from getting a nose bleed. His hands tightened on her bare upper arms where he had caught her, and he subconsciously pulled her closer. Lucy’s own hands gripped at the black material of his t-shirt, dainty fingers splayed across her upper chest. Natsu’s eyes were drawn to the quick swipe of tongue over her full lips, and he couldn’t help but wonder... If he were to dip his head just a little, or maybe she raised onto her tiptoes, he could...

Magic surged through his limbs and the lights blew with a loud ‘pop’. Natsu instinctively pulled away from Lucy, clearing his throat and burying his nose into his scarf. He watched as she blinked dazedly, looking slowly up at the light fixture.

“Ohh,” she said softly, her rough voice sending pleasant chills down Natsu’s spine. “I guess neither of us will be cooking then, huh,” she joked, a small smile lighting her face and Natsu breathed a heavy sigh of relief. Good, he hadn’t ruined everything just yet. He pulled down his scarf sheepishly, and returned her gentle smile.

“Take out?” he suggested hopefully, and Lucy let out a shaky laugh.

“Sure.” Lucy walked by him, forearm brushing his gently as she walked to the front door, short skirt drawing Natsu’s eyes as it swayed with her hips. “Coming?” he heard her call as she picked out a coat, and Natsu looked away from her ass if he’d been burned. He met Happy’s serious look as he moved to follow Lucy, and Natsu couldn’t help but agree with the cat’s silent warning.

He really needed to figure out what the fuck was going on with him.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: And it continues! So this chapter touches a little on how magic works in this world, as well as building the friendship between Lucy and Natsu. Hopefully next chapter some plot will begin to build lol.

As I’ve said before, I am horrible when it comes to understanding what an appropriate chapter length is. I don’t think they’ll all be this long, but honestly I can’t make any guarantees. I guess we’ll be going on that adventure together :P.
Natsu banged his head on the desk. For the tenth time in a row. Maybe twenty. He honestly wasn’t counting. What he was trying to do was figure out why his magic had overloaded a week ago. He hadn’t released pure magic energy like that in years. Not since Igneel had begun teaching him. God, Natsu wished his foster father could be here now, elbowing him in the ribs and yelling at him to ‘keep his magic in his pants’ or some other horrible innuendo. Helping him understand what the fuck was going on, or at least go through the dozens of tomes and books and notes with him. Natsu scrubbed at his face as he looked around his messier-than-usual room for Happy, glancing at his alarm cook -and seeing that he still had four hours before Lucy returned from her new job- while he shoved those thoughts from his mind. Wishing wouldn’t help him now.

But maybe his goddamn cat could if he ever found him. A yellowed piece of paper caught his attention to his right, resting on the large wooden chest Natsu had had with him for almost as long as he could remember. Several old books were strewn across it’s lid, some open, others not. What was special about the single paper was that it’s center seemed to be rising and falling at a steady rate.

Natsu glowered at the small ball shaped peak that was the center of the movement, and he stood abruptly from his chair before stomping over and swiping it into his hand.

Happy blinked up sleepily at him, meowing as he rolled onto his back and stretched his legs into the air, tail twitching lazily.

“You could at least be pretendin’ to help,” Natsu sighed, too drained to even feel angry with his little friend. Not like Natsu could blame him for trying to steal a break.

Happy whined, and spread his wings so that he could fly up and settle in Natsu’s hair, tied back in a short pony tail again. “Natsuuuuu, we’ve been looking for answers everyday for forever until Lucy comes back. I think it’s safe to say that the answer isn’t in these books, we don’t understand what the problem even is, and I need fish,” the small cat said irritably, small dots of glitter disappearing into the air in Natsu’s peripheral as Happy’s wings disappeared. He still nuzzled at Natsu’s salmon strands, offering some comfort to the witch.

“You always need fish, buddy,” Natsu said, lips twitching. Now would probably be a good time to stop anyway, and Natsu hadn’t even looked into it on his laptop yet. Maybe some forum could help him, praying that he wouldn’t have to ask at the yearly meeting with the covens. It would just give them more fuel to pressure him into joining one of them, and Natsu shuddered at the idea of having to sit through more recruitment speeches.

Hearing Happy’s light snores helped ease some of Natsu’s frustration though, and he chuckled to himself at how Happy was somehow able to balance on top of Natsu’s head even while asleep. Slowly turning around in a circle, Natsu surveyed the damage the past few days of research had done to his room.

Piles of dirty clothes were haphazardly stacked on the floor, a small path broken between old books and papers bound loosely together. Igneel’s familiar scrawl was in the margin of some of the open spellbooks, Natsu’s much messier writing adding notes in others. Some of these books Natsu had picked up during his time on the streets, but the majority were from Igneel’s private library, the hoard having started long before the old witch had found a scared, pink-haired, seven-year-old hiding in an alley, a small flame in his hand to keep him warm. Natsu couldn’t help but scowl at the mess around him, remembering all the lectures his father had given him about the importance and history of these books, the power within their words and directions. And now here they were, transferred from the storage locker they had sat in for several years and scattered around the barely-affordable apartment
of a twenty one-year-old covenless witch.

Oh if Igneel could see him now.

Natsu would be dead.

He supposed it could be worse, his bed was relatively clear, though his thin blanket was more of a crumpled bundle and his two pillows were placed randomly on the twin mattress. At least there was no food containers, but that was mostly because Natsu had been eating all of his meals with Lucy. And spending all of the time that Lucy was at her home with her.

After he had blown her lights -and he still had no fucking idea why - the three had gone for curry, Natsu’s favourite take-out restaurant only a block away. It was relatively inexpensive, but when Lucy had insisted she pay for everything, Natsu may have gone a little overboard. It was a good thing the owner always gave him extra helpings, he was a loyal customer after all, ordering curry at least twice a week. Lucy had still looked a little pale after, from the bill or watching him go through five servings of curry Natsu was undecided. So he hadn't eaten that much in the days he took making her statue, and orders for his art had been slow. Sue him if he was a little hungrier than usual.

He had learned while they ate that Lucy was an intern for Hargon’s largest publishing firm, but unfortunately the low pay grade couldn’t support the apartment as well as Lucy’s yoga and kickboxing classes. Natsu’s apartment block had been the closest to her price range that wouldn’t risk constant break-in’s -oh the irony- and she had saved up enough money when she had lived in Crocus to put down the first payment. So now she was searching for a second job, which she had eventually found as a waitress at a local bar. Lucy wasn’t too thrilled about her new work uniform, though Natsu wasn’t about to deny that he found the tight black jeans, low heels, and low-cut black crop top appealing. Natsu frowned as he looked back at the clock, his thoughts on Lucy reminding him of the time, and how busy her schedule could be. Working at her internship four times a week, her serving job three nights, and going to her kickboxing lessons and yoga once a week each. Natsu couldn’t help but worry that he might not see her as often as he’d like.

Since when had he been so dependent on another person?

Besides, Lucy was becoming accustomed to coming home and seeing Natsu sprawled on her couch or raiding her fridge. She still berated him half-heartedly, but never kicked him out. So now Natsu worked his morning runs, witching time -as he liked to call it-, and sleep schedule around Lucy’s. He got up earlier than her so that he could steal some of her coffee once he was done his half hour run, worked on his orders and going through his books when she wasn’t home, and went to bed when she did. Natsu tried not to think about how much he bent his schedule to see Lucy, though Happy had unfortunately recognized the pattern, even if he had yet to start teasing. Probably because Lucy had promised to buy him salmon.

Natsu wasn’t sure if he should be worried that his cat could be so easily bribed.

His stomach suddenly growled, and he remembered he hadn’t eaten in hours, too busy pouring through the rune-filled books, looking through their explanations of magic to a solution for his problem. Food would have been a more worthwhile pursuit. Happy continued to sleep as Natsu made his way out of his room, careful not to step on any books or disturb the small cat. He had snagged the leftovers of the pasta Lucy had made yesterday, and he was starting to realize how hungry he really was.

He cringed a little when he looked over his living room, the space not much better than his room. The couch was still pressed against the wall opposite the main door, and his work station had clay pieces and potion jars strewn about in a semi circle around the main bench that Natsu sculpted on.
His plants on the long cabinet he had shoved beneath the window were starting to overgrow, and the glasses of dried herbs and flowers were unorganized still from his making of Lucy’s sculpture. His supply of candles was disorganized and running low, as was his selection of animal bones, stored in the open cupboards just underneath the top shelf of the dark stained cabinet. Granted that had been low for years - the bones creeped Natsu out to no extent- but he still figured he should replenish in case they were needed. His book stand to the left of the cabinet was now empty of the scrolls and bound papers, those currently littering his bedroom floor. The few nick nacks he had collected over the years were still on the shelves, a piece of floorboard from his and Igneel’s house, ticket receipts from shows he had seen as he traveled, the napkin from the restaurant Natsu had bought some fish and chips from to feed the small blue kitten he had seen on the street, a part of the first statue Natsu had blown up when perfecting his unique magic style, and others. All of these had important memories to Natsu, and he understood the power that they now held.

Good God, Natsu had spent way too much time reading those damn books. It was dredging up all sorts of memories and emotions he just didn’t have the energy for today.

Finally meandering into his kitchen - that he had finally cleaned- Natsu opened up his fridge, grabbing the plastic container of shrimp alfredo and a gatorade, ignoring the barren white that mocked him. Looks like he needed to go shopping for more than witch supplies soon. Placing the drink on the countertop, Natsu cupped the container in both of his hands and muttered a soft spell. He felt the heat flare in his blood, the magic trickling through his fingers and into the noodles quickly, bypassing the easily meltable plastic. Once steam started to rise from the dish Natsu cut off his magic, blinking a little to clear his mind as he felt his energy dip for a second. He rifled through one of his drawers before finding a fork, grabbing the juice and closing the utensil drawer with his hip. Walking back to his room, Natsu tried to stab a stray shrimp but found it difficult while holding the bulky bottle and huffed in annoyance. He crawled onto his bed, dragging his laptop from it’s position on his nightstand to beside him as he settled himself into a nest of pillows and his blanket. He then pulled his ageing laptop onto his propped thighs, so the dragon background was level with his eyes. It seemed he had finally been making too much movement for Happy, and the cat muttered disgruntledly as he was jostled from his bed of pink hair, wings sprouting as he flew around the room. He flipped off the lights on one of his passes before settling into Natsu’s side, the sparkling of his wings disappearing somehow calming Natsu.

He’d deal with his magic tomorrow, right now he was going to fucking marathon an episode or two of Game of Thrones before Lucy came home godammit. He needed breaks too.

He couldn’t move.

His arms and legs felt as though they were confined in thick liquid, his muscles straining but unable to shift from their frozen position. He was stuck in a pose that had him stepping forward, arm outreached. To her. To Lucy. She was being held by her hair, golden strands tangled in a man’s pale hand. Her face was twisted in pain, making up for the lack of emotion on the man behind her. Red eyes stared dully at Natsu, black hair melting into the inky darkness that surrounded them. His face had a boyish look, and he could have been considered handsome if not for the dead smirk and flicker of madness in his eyes. His grip tightened and Lucy let out a small cry, Natsu’s teeth grinding and his jaw clenched as he struggled against whatever was holding him back. That bastard was hurting Lucy.

And he couldn’t fucking move.

The boy’s voice stilled his attempt at movement though, the soft and empty tone cutting Natsu to the
bone. “It’s such a shame, isn’t it?” he questioned, sad humor creeping into his voice. Natsu just glared at him, and the man holding Lucy shook his head regretfully. “You never were a bright child,” he says, more to himself, and the condescending tone sets Natsu even more on edge. Before he can bark out an insult the man yanks Lucy’s head higher, bringing her face parallel to his height.

“You’ve had this nasty habit of tarnishing the most beautiful things. Knowledge, magic, and now her. All she had to offer you was love, and what do you bring her in return?”

Horror washed through Natsu, and his struggles took on a new urgency. The boy’s eyes had begun to glow, the red brightening and revealing dark rings within his irises. He lifted a hand slowly and Natsu couldn’t even scream out Lucy’s name as the boy touched his fingertips to her cheek, slowly dragging them down her face. A loud, blood-curdling wail tore from Lucy as their skin made contact. She was screaming out his name. He needed to get to her before... Before...

It was too late.

“Death.”

The man’s tone was final. Blackey-green colour filled her veins, spreading out from her cheek and across her face, down her throat, through her body. Lucy struggled against the poison replacing her blood, but her once bright and hopeful eyes were filled with unshed tears, fear and despair etched into her face. The one that should be smiling or yelling at Natsu. Lucy was never supposed to look like this, never be in this position. Tears poured down Natsu’s cheeks as he heard her whimper his name again, her voice garbled and blood spilling from her lips, dripping down her chin. It seemed some movement returned to Natsu as he was finally able to open his mouth. And scream.

The man who still held Lucy’s limp body watched the scene with detached sadness, as if he were listening to a lecture about past war or human blight. Unceremoniously he released his hold on Lucy, her body falling to the ground and blonde hair trailing through his fingers before settling around her face, still turned towards Natsu. Eyes open and clouding, skin pale between the branches of dark colour. But she did not rest alone on the ground, instead her body had crumpled on top of another one.

A man laid on the ground beneath her, wild red hair fanned around his head and plastered across his forehead blocking his eyes. Scars covered his face, a large cross taking up most of his cheek. A high wail sounded in the space, Natsu unable to comprehend that he was the one making the inhuman sounds. Wet sobs racked his chest, and he felt bile rise in his throat even as the blackness swallowed his vision and senses. The last thing he was able to see was the boy’s arms stretched out to him, as if waiting for an embrace. A tear trailed down his cheek, and an accepting smile pulled at his pale lips as he spoke. The small movement consumed the last of Natsu’s focus before he surrendered himself to the bliss of nothingness.

“Come home, Natsu.”

Natsu shot up in his bed. Still surrounded by darkness. His body was shaking, the small tremors waking Happy and displacing his black-screened laptop further off of him. It was just a dream, just a dream. Everything was fine. Natsu whispered those words to himself several times before bringing his knees into his chest, wrapping his arms around them and tucking his head, curling into a ball. His shaking wouldn’t stop, and Natsu realized he was crying as wetness pooled through the fabric that
covered his knees. Happy’s soft fur brushed between his thighs and calves, the cat’s soft calls of Natsu’s name slowly calming him. He hadn’t had a nightmare like that in ages, and Happy just looked at him in sad understanding, not needing to ask. Happy never asked what Natsu dreamed, only offered him support when they were too dark for Natsu to handle on his own.

Natsu reached a still trembling hand and scooped up Happy, holding him tight against his chest, Happy’s tail wrapping securely around his wrist.

It was just a dream. They were always just dreams.

That didn’t stop them from haunting Natsu though. No, with magic you could never tell when a dream was a message, an omen, or just simply a dream. And while that had worried Natsu before, now it terrified him.

He looked to his left and saw that the clock read 1:30 am, the bright red bars of light glaring at Natsu through the darkness. Like the boy’s eyes had when he-

Natsu needed to check on Lucy. It was just for her safety, after all, and not for Natsu’s personal comfort. He was a grown man. Nightmares did not affect him to that extent. It was just for Lucy.

Yeah. Natsu unwound his feet from the blanket and carried Happy with him as he picked his way through his room. He wasn’t so out of it that he forgot to grab his scarf though, and he wrapped it securely around his neck with one hand as he walked toward the front door. His pace picked up as a chill set into his spine, the darkness in his apartment looming over him.

He brushed his fingertips over the runes inscribed in his door as he paused before it. One design was scratched into the wood, two wavy lines that ran horizontally parallel with the double line striking through it’s right side, two small filled circles on the upper right corner of the line. It was a sound sealing rune, another one inscribed on the window frames of all of his windows, and allowed Natsu to not fear noise complaints about his music or the explosions from spells backfiring. The other symbol on the door was painted, the reddy colour the result of Natsu mixing a drop of his own blood into it. A sealing circle the size of his fist, placed just above the doorknob, intricate overlapping circles and ovals within the thick double ringed border. A large triangle intersected with the outer circle, the point out of it’s boundary. A twin triangle was upside down and mirrored the first, a quarter of it’s base overlapping. This symbol was much more complicated as it was a sealing spell that allowed only Natsu to have access to his apartment, key or not. Not that Natsu ever used a key, using a simple unlocking spell when necessary.

Like how he usually got into Lucy’s apartment. He had used the traditional lock picking technique the first time, but Natsu didn’t want to damage her lock too much, instead simply willing the metal lock to move. He could just as easily melt it, but again with the ‘property damage’.

Natsu blinked blankly down at Lucy’s open door, his hand resting on the silver doorknob. When had he cast the spell? Or even left his own apartment? He looked behind him to see his own door was shut, and ignored Happy’s increasingly worried looks as he entered the apartment. The soft vanilla scent soothed Natsu’s nerves, as did the fact that he didn’t sense any other presence in the apartment. He could probably leave now, but the nightmare nagged at Natsu.

So maybe he was doing this for himself too.

He continued through the well known layout, moon and star light illuminating the open style living room and kitchen through Lucy’s window. She had forgotten to close the curtain again, the white fabric hanging uselessly to the right. He moved quickly and silently to her bedroom door, which was left partially open. While Natsu had explored her apartment when she was gone, he had left her bedroom alone. He figured he should respect at least a few of her secrets, god knew Natsu had some
of his own. Besides, the books in her shelves -that could cause envy to a few libraries- had taken up some of his interest, as had exploring the few odds and ends in her office. Natsu smiled softly as he recalled the strength of Lucy’s kick to his shoulder when she had caught him reading her story, having left her laptop here and open by accident one day. He had no worry that she could take care of herself ordinarily, but nothing about magic was ordinary. And Lucy had no idea what Natsu was slowly dragging her into.

Natsu stepped into her room, the soft carpet pleasant on his bare feet. He looked over her sleeping form, fears finally completely disappearing as he watched the steady rise and fall of the blanket that coated her, blonde hair fanned around her head like a halo on the pillow. A calm expression on her face. Her lips were even turned up a little.

Natsu couldn’t help but wonder if it would be best for him to leave her alone. To let Lucy live her life free of any magical interference, including him. What if his dream was right? What if all he could bring Lucy was pain, and sorrow, or even...

Happy let out a small hiss as Natsu squeezed him even tighter against his chest subconsciously, Natsu quickly apologizing and relaxing his grip. Natsu knew he should leave Lucy alone, but he was selfish. He hadn’t had anyone other than Happy he could talk to in years. He longed for a friend, for a family. And Lucy was offering that to him unconditionally. He could sense it, in her kind smile and bright eyes, her joy at seeing him written plainly across her face even if she denied it. No, Natsu couldn’t leave her. He didn’t want to.

His feet were moving without permission, and soon he was crawling along the empty side of her bed, Happy staring at him incredulously from where Natsu had put him down at the end of the bed as he shifted under the blankets, Lucy’s familiar warmth soaking into his side. He was thankful he had fallen asleep in his sweatpants now, even if he was shirtless. Lucy would break his nose if he wasn’t wearing pants. Well, she’d break his nose if she woke up to find him in her bed, but he would be gone before then. He just needed to be close for a while, that’s all.

He looked over Lucy’s head, following the line of sight she would be looking at, and felt his breath catch in his throat. There was a small boudoir, pink and white paint making it a very ‘Lucy’ item, ink and quills as well as loose paper littering the top. A picture of a smiling couple and a small blonde child beaming at the camera stood beside a wooden box. But what caught Natsu’s attention was that his statue was there too. Placed with what was obviously important things to Lucy, was the bird cage statue.

Wet trails slipped down Natsu’s cheeks, and before he could think he was wrapping an arm around Lucy’s middle, pulling her body flush against his. He buried his face in her hair, trying to hold back his large, watery smile.

“Neh, Natsu,” Lucy mumbled sleepily, melting into his arms. Natsu froze for a second, making sure she was still asleep. So he was a source of comfort for her too, was he? Something swelled in Natsu’s chest at that thought, but it was much too late to worry about, and he let himself drift into a much more relaxed sleep, surrounded by Lucy’s scent and warmth.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lucy always woke up at 7 am, no matter what day. She had ever since she was a child, her father sending the maids to gather her and ready her for private classes 7 days a week. Now it was ingrained in her, and Lucy constantly bemoaned the fact that she could never sleep in without a hint of guilt crawling up her spine when she rolled over in bed. Except now her bed felt far comfier than usual, and Lucy very much wanted to stay in its warmth, even if she didn’t fall asleep again. It was only when she noticed the heavy weight on her middle, and warm air fanning against the top of her head did she realize how unnatural it was. Lucy slowly opened her eyes, and shifted her hand on the smooth texture she felt beneath, fingers dipping along gentles ridges and hardness.

She was curled into a man’s chest.

A man’s bare chest.

In her bed.

Lucy slowly raised herself up, ignoring how nice the muscles on his chest felt under her fingertips or the heat that radiated from his hand on her hip that held her body flush against his. Before she saw his face, Lucy knew who she had been using for a pillow, even if she didn’t know how. Natsu. She started to suck in a breath to begin her lecture and screaming, but then she took a closer look at his sleeping form. His other hand was thrown beside his head on the pillow, his disheveled hair blending into the pink pillow case. His chest rose and fell in a steady rhythm, muscles expanding slightly before collapsing back down. His face was peaceful, head turned towards her own and mouth open, a thin line of what Lucy could only hope wasn’t drool -though there was nothing else it could be. He would have looked the picture of contentment if not for one small fact.

Natsu had dried tear tracks running down his cheeks.

Lucy had seen them on herself in the mirror countless times, and that was the only reason she was able to catch something so delicate and easy to miss. Whatever complaints Lucy held died on her lips, and she gently stroked her hand through his hair, lips pulling into a tentative smile when he hummed in his sleep and pushed his head more into her hand. A small chuckle escaped Lucy as she watched her sleeping neighbour, eyes cautious when his own fluttered open. He gave her a sleepy grin before his eyes widened and he froze, tensing while she continued to stroke his hair.

“I really should just make you a key,” Lucy mused out loud, pulling on a pink lock of hair when he continued to stare at her in confusion. He swallowed thickly, and Natsu shot her a wary glance as he pushed himself onto his forearms.

“You’re not, ya know, mad ?” he questioned, and Lucy just shook her head. She offered a gentle smile, Lucy knew what it was like to need to not be alone. Natsu’s eyes shifted away from hers finally, looking in the direction that Lucy knew was her birdcage. “I had a bad dream,” he said softly, Lucy having to strain to hear. She cupped one of his cheeks and giggled to herself when Natsu’s eyes returned to her face in a second, shocked at her touch. She knew it was intimate, perhaps too intimate as they had only known each other for over a week, but it was too early in the morning for Lucy to care about social boundaries. She had woken up cuddled into his bare chest for Heaven’s sake.
“And my door’s always open when you do,” Lucy said softly before flicking his nose. “But my bed is not,” she continued to chide half-heartedly. Truthfully Lucy knew she would never kick him out when he truly needed her, but she wasn’t quite ready for her relationship with Natsu to reach that point. Not that she was in a relationship with him. Of course not. No matter how adorable he looked with his bed ruffled hair, eyes still partially glazed, and shirtless body nestled in her sheets.

Okay so Lucy had it bad.

A soft purr pulled Lucy’s attention away from her ever growing blush as she held Natsu’s gaze, fur tickling her waist where her night shirt had ridden up. Her hand fell from Natsu’s hair as she scooped up Happy into her arms, cooing to him that he was always welcome to cuddle. The cat’s purr grew louder as he nuzzled her cheek, crawling onto her shoulder and wrapping around the back of her neck. A sudden pull at Lucy’s waist brought her and her new neck warmer back down to the bed, and strong arms wrapped around her to pin her to Natsu’s chest. He sighed happily, even as Lucy felt her face burn and her mind blank in shock. Was Natsu... cuddling her?

A choking noise caught in Lucy’s throat as he brushed his nose into her hair, pulling her closer. “I don’t wanna get up yet,” he mumbled, and Lucy released another strangled ‘eh’. Happy let out a pitiful ‘mrao’ of complaint as he wiggled free from being pinned between Lucy and the bed. Lucy felt the small cat climb over her face and watched as he curled up on Natsu’s lap, blue fur against pink blanket reminding her fried brain of cotton candy.

“Y-you can’t just pull me back to bed like that!” Lucy stuttered, trying to push her way out of his grip. Her struggle only made Natsu tighten his hold on her, muttering a grumpy ‘why not?’. Lucy knew without looking at his face that he was pouting. That giant child. She attempted to stutter out a reply, but no actual words came, though Lucy was mildly impressed with some of the new sounds she made. She managed to free a hand and smacked at his chest, pulling a low grunt from Natsu before he rolled over and successfully pinned her to the bed.

“You’re such a weirdo, Luce,” Natsu sighed, his breathing evening out and warning that he was about to fall asleep. Outrage shot through Lucy, how dare he sneak into her bed in the middle of the night, snuggle her while shirtless, pin her to her own bed, and then call her the weird one. Even if Lucy had to admit that she had been very comfortable when she woke up, and his smoky, cinnamony scent was starting to lull her back into comfortable relaxation...

“How am I the weird one,” Lucy moaned, face burning as she quickly tried to push away any and all thoughts of how nice Natsu’s weight felt pressing against her. Bad Lucy. “You’re the person who snuck into a young woman’s bed without any clothes on!” At her declaration, it dawned on Lucy that she actually didn’t know Natsu’s full state of undress. There was no way he would... Her thoughts turned to unmentionable places, wondering if all of Natsu was as tanned as his arms and chest. If his legs were as muscular as they looked in his jeans. And even what kind of underwear he wore flitted across her mind, or even if he even wore any...

Very bad Lucy.

“You are wearing pants, right?” Lucy breathed, allowing her anger at herself to bleed into her words, her threat finally causing Natsu to freeze as well.

“O-of course I’m wearin’ pants! I’m not a perv!” Natsu squawked out, red crawling along the part of his neck Lucy could see. Well, at least he had the decency to be embarrassed. She heard a soft snigger, and looked down at the cat on Natsu’s lap. His tail twitched in amusement as he watched the two of them, and Lucy couldn’t help but wonder if he understood them. Which would be insane, since Happy was a cat, but the sharpness in his eyes and the flicking of his ears could only bring to Lucy’s mind the image of a young child, hiding his mouth and laughing at their awkwardness.
Lucy felt sweat start to gather on her forehead, pulling her away from her staring contest with Happy. Her comforter was thick enough to keep her warm in her unusually cold apartment, even if all she wore to bed was a pair of sleep shorts and tank. Oh god she was only wearing a very tiny pair of sleep shorts and a tank top. With no bra. Would she have to start wearing a bra to bed? Lucy hated doing that, the wire dug into her breasts and why was she thinking of changing her sleepwear for Natsu Dragneel. Lucy was now thankful for Natsu’s added body heat as it was giving her an excellent excuse to be so red, not that he was paying attention.

In fact it was sweltering under Natsu and the covers, heat radiating from his tan skin. She struggled under his weight, using her hand to push at his face and smushing his cheek. A grumpy groan pulled from him but Natsu didn’t move. Her hand felt like it was burning though, and she paused in her struggles.

“You’re really warm,” she muttered under her breath, pushing his bangs back and using her hand to take his temperature. Sure enough, his forehead was burning. Which was strange as Natsu’s face looked normal when he pulled off her slightly, the stupidly innocent grin on his face from her touches, eyes fluttering open and giving her - a surely illegal- adorable hooded sparkle. Sleepiness looked wonderful on him. But that was besides the point.

“Natsu, are you sick?” Lucy asked worriedly, eyes scanning his face. Natsu seemed surprised by her question, and his brow scrunched in thought. Instead of replying he shook his head and shrugged his shoulders before dropping his full weight back onto Lucy. She let out an annoyed grunt, but now she was worried about his health. When the hell had she adopted a pink haired puppy? Happy meowed in annoyance from his spot beside Natsu, crawling over the shirtless man and curling up in his hair, blue tail flicking over Lucy’s face at times. Or a cat.

“You’re too hot,” Lucy mused to herself, thinking of ways to slip cold medicine into his food. She couldn’t help but feel that Natsu wasn’t the type to play patient easily.

“Heh, you think I’m hot,” Natsu’s smug chuckle broke Lucy’s plans on drugging a certain stubborn free-loader, but she squawked and flailed at his accusation.

“That is not what I meant and you know it!” her voice had risen half an octave and she was pulling at Natsu’s hair in another attempt to dislodge him. Instead he wound his arms under her waist and pulled her closer, cuddling into her and burying his face in her hair.

“Mm-hmm. I know you stare at my butt,” Natsu teased, hot breath sending shivers along Lucy’s neck. Her mouth fell open as she thought of something to say. All that came out was an incriminating squeak.

“I do not!” her voice cracked on the final word, and she covered her burning face with her free hand. She felt her body shake as Natsu laughed, pulling back again to look down at her. Lucy peeked at him through a sliver in her fingers, glaring at his amused and cocky smirk.

“Oh my god, you do,” Natsu sang out the words, and Lucy dropped her hand as she smacked at his chest with both of them. That bastard had been bluffing. “You think my ass is hot, don’tcha Luce?” Natsu continued to trill, Lucy pulling at his face now. “Lushii, why are you hurting mee? Or is there something else you want to be pinching?” Natsu waggled his eyebrows at her, making Lucy’s heart thump painfully in her chest. The longer he was on top of her the more aware she became of where he was pressing on her, and the dark look hidden behind his joking was doing nothing to calm her down. So she pinched the skin of his bicep. Hard. Natsu yelped and jumped even further away from Lucy, finally pulling his weight off of her chest. Now Lucy smirked up at him, cocking an eyebrow at his pout.
“Yes, I think I much preferred pinching you there,” Natsu stuck his tongue out at her victorious tone, Lucy scrunching up her face and returning the juvenile action. Which broke into a fit of giggles and attempted tickling between the two. Which then dislodged Happy from his perch. The cat hissed in agitation, batting at Natsu’s head harshly before jumping off the bed and leaving Lucy’s sight. A loud grumble sounded from Natsu’s stomach, and he grinned sheepishly at Lucy. She brought her hand to cover her mouth as she giggled again, Natsu’s stomach making an even more angry sound.

“Hungry?” she asked, and Natsu beamed down at her in response. Both then realized where their slight rolling around had put them, Natsu caging Lucy’s head with his forearms and his body partially trapping hers, their legs tangled with each other and the blankets. Lucy gaped up at Natsu, and watched as deep red crawled up his neck and along his upper chest, a sudden spike in heat surrounding Lucy. “I, I can make breakfast?” she stuttered out after staring at Natsu for a little while longer.

“I can help?” he offered, and Lucy rolled her eyes at his eagerness. “Fine, but I reserve the right to kick you out if I think you’re a hazard,” she teased, pleased at his indignant huff. A small ‘rude’ mumbled under his breath almost set her into another laugh attack, so instead she gave a solid push and - finally- he rolled off of her and onto the other side of the bed. Lucy sat up, the blanket bunching around her waist as she breathed in the slightly cooler air. Natsu crawled out from under the covers, stretching with his back to Lucy when he stood at the edge of her bed. This gave Lucy the perfect opportunity to stare.

His hair was full and fluffy, the shorter pieces were sticking up at odd angles or curling up slightly, adding to the disheveled state the loose scarf and low sweatpants gave him. The scaly white material of the scarf was wrapped loosely around his neck, one end trailing down his shoulder and stopping just under his ribs. Lucy dragged eyes over the deep caramel skin, muscles still flexing and pulling as Natsu stretched his arms languidly over his head, a deep moan making Lucy bite her lip to stay quiet. He tilted his head to the side, a quiet ‘pop’ sounding and another low moan of relief. Lucy had to avert her eyes when she saw the strong slope of his neck peek between the low scarf and shaggy hair, silver glinting from his two cartilage bands on his left ear. Both of his lobes were pierced as well, but he kept in black studs usually and the silver bands that wrapped around part of his ear just looked so dangerous. Not that Natsu was any more dangerous than a giant living teddy bear. But the illusion was doing things to Lucy’s insides she’d prefer not to think about, so she dropped her gaze back down to his mid back.

And focused on the giant tattoo that sat there.

A large circle that Lucy could easily fit her hand in was in the very centre of Natsu’s back. Around the circle was a scrawled script, Lucy unable to even identify what language. More of those strange symbols were on each side of a rectangle in the centre of the design, running along lines within the circle. Around the ring of the circle and between the strange letters was a band of intersecting circles. There were two crescent moons bowed toward the centre on the left and right side, both completely filled with black. These descended into two more crescents, the smaller black shapes trailing counter-clockwise respectively, all intersecting with the ring of circles and symbols. A deep black rectangle was in the very centre of the design, surrounded by more rectangles, thick double ringed circles, faint ovals and circles expanding from the centre. There was even a lightly shaded diamond with points connecting the two largest crescents and the inner boundary of the largest circle. Random lines and organizations of oval and circles scattered through the sprawling black tattoo, all kept in a mystic looking pattern. Lucy had no idea what it meant, but she knew it meant something.

And then Natsu twisted his back.
The motion was done slowly, skin straining against the cords of his muscles. The shift caused his sweats to slip even further down his hips, dimples becoming more pronounced at the base of his spine and a thin strip of paler skin made Lucy’s mouth water. How could a guy’s ass be that perky?

“My face is up here, Luce,” Natsu purred, eyes mischievous and hooded as Lucy’s face shot up to see him looking over his shoulder at her. A knowing smirk stretched his lips and Lucy started to pray to any god that had ever existed to set her on fire *this instant*. There was no way she could have explained her way out of that. Her eyes were blown wide and she tried to stammer through an apology, but Natsu only chuckled to himself as he made his way out of her room. He did stop in the doorway, and without looking back at her spoke.

“You’re always welcome to pinch me where ever ya want,” Natsu said softly, and Lucy would have missed it if not for the fact that she had forgotten how to breathe, leaving the room in a dead quiet. She made a choking sound at that statement though, a cough and a squeak trying to fight their way out of her throat at the same time. Natsu’s shoulder tops were bright red, but they also shook with more laughter as he finally left her room, Lucy still making strange sounds. Had Natsu really just flirted with her? Did Natsu know how to flirt? Well apparently he did, as Lucy was a flustered mess, frozen in her spot. She heard his voice float in through her open door.

“O-oi! What’dya think you’re starin’ at?” he barked, embarrassment clear in his tone. A judgmental meow followed his exclamation, Natsu soon bickering with his cat. Lucy could just picture Happy sitting on her countertop, tail twitching and the impression of raised eyebrows on the feline’s face. Lucy had never met an expressive of a cat as Happy. The one-sided conversation helped ease her nerves, and she couldn’t help but giggle when she thought about how much of a dork Natsu was. Fearing for her kitchen, Lucy pushed aside her covers and climbed out of her queen bed.

She had to sneak a look of herself in the mirror, patting down her bed head and straightening her sleep shirt. The cotton tank top had a low neckline, dark blue with a starry pattern splashed across it. There was gold lace at the bottom and along the neckline, matching that of the lace on the legs of her sleep shorts. Those were admittedly on the shorter side, the dark blue fabric barely covering her full bottom. She fidgeted a while longer, adjusting her clothing until she was satisfied. With a nod at her reflection Lucy made her way towards her kitchen where she found Natsu and Happy in the middle of a glaring contest. Natsu’s cheeks were still flushed a little, and his narrowed eyes only seemed to further amuse the cat.

“Is he bullying you?” Lucy teased, moving to take a frying pan out of one her lower shelves. She was feeling pancakes this morning. Natsu finally broke eye contact with his cat -who let out a small sound of victory- and pouted over at Lucy as she made her way to the fridge to get out the butter and milk.

“‘Course he’s bullyin’ me! Mockin’ me and shit,” he whined, crossing his arms over his chest. He reminded Lucy of a child who had had their sandcastle knocked over. She rolled her eyes at his statement, tickling Happy under the chin as she walked back to the stove.

“I was talking to the cat. You’re always so mean to him, and look how cute he is!” Lucy chided, pleased when Happy nuzzled her forearm. Natsu let out a strangled noise of hurt, but made his way over to her pantry and retrieved her pancake mix. Natsu knew by know that pancakes were one of her biggest weaknesses. And the only thing aside from eggs she didn’t burn in the morning. He let it drop to the counter with a heavy thud beside the mixing bowl, pointedly looking away from Lucy and at the TV screen. That was still turned off. Lucy sighed dramatically and patted his face while she looked for a mixing spoon. “If you don’t stop pouting I won’t put chocolate chips in the pancakes,” she warned, lips twitching at his disgusted look.
“You can’t not put chocolate chips in pancakes. That's just wrong Luce,” he replied sourly, Happy sounding a small, solemn ‘mrao’ in agreement. She looked at her ceiling and shook her head, wondering what her life had come to. Natsu snorted at her expression and grinned widely down at her. “You’re sure weird, Luce.”

Lucy sniffed and turned back to mixing the pancake batter, motioning with her hand when she was ready for the chocolate to be added. Natsu padded over to her sweets cupboard above the fridge - Lucy liked to pretend that since it was harder to reach she wouldn’t be able to get to them as easily. Suffice to say she had become a master of climbing counters since moving in- and hurried back over, eagerly dropping a generous handful of chocolate into the batter. Lucy had been expecting it though, and continued to stir the mix. She did smack his hand when he went to add another portion of chips, ignoring his whine. She looked at him out of the corner of her eye when he stopped complaining, cautious of his silence. He looked like a chipmunk, with a very self pleased glint in his eyes. The ass had shoved an entire handful of chocolate into his mouth. Lucy shook the mixing spoon at his face, a few drops of batter scattering across his nose.

“No eating chocolate before breakfast! You’ll ruin your appetite,” she scolded, Natsu giving her a chocolatey smile and making her nose scrunch in disgust. And her heart thump with endearment. But mostly disgust.

As Lucy set to work melting the butter in the pan she had Natsu start to cut up fruit for their side dish. Strawberries, cherries, and raspberries were the main fruits in Lucy’s fridge, and Natsu always teased her about only liking red things. She had to agree when the evidence was right before her. Lucy turned on her oven to a low number, putting the cooked pancakes onto a plate she had within, keeping them warm for when she took the large stack to her small table. Natsu busied himself making coffee when he was done with the fruit, setting aside a small bowl of milk for Happy -and thus finishing off the four litres that was supposed to last Lucy the month.

Lucy hummed happily to herself, basking in the quiet sounds of a busy kitchen. When she had lived alone in Crocus she had become used to the silence that surrounded her in the mornings, but now after only knowing Natsu for a week she couldn’t imagine going back to that. She risked a glance over at the pink haired man, who seemed to be having quite the conversation with Happy again, this time about the proper type of chocolate that should go in pancakes.

“No, Happy,” Natsu basically groaned out. “They do not make fish flavoured chocolate. Yes it is a disgrace. No, humans do not have weird tastes,” Natsu waved his hands in the air, the small blue cat glaring up at his master before jumping down to the floor. “Aww come on buddy, don’t be like that,” Natsu grumbled, Lucy giggling loudly as she felt Happy twine himself between her legs, his soft tail curling around her calf. She looked over her shoulder to see Natsu staring up at the ceiling, shoulders slumped in defeat.

“I think you offended him,” Lucy called, Happy still rubbing his cheek into her skin. Natsu’s eyes fell to her face, annoyance clear in his dark eyes. He glowered at the cat slinking around her ankles, before looking back at Lucy. His expression softened by a fraction, and a wry smile tugged at one corner of his mouth.

“He’s always offended when it comes to fish,” Natsu joked, meandering through Lucy’s small kitchen before coming to stand partially behind her. As hard as Lucy tried, she still noticed he was shirtless. Oh so very shirtless in her kitchen. As she made him breakfast. A part of Lucy felt cheated - for reason’s she would blame on her alcoholic workmate Cana- and the other part of her was flustered. Her spine stiffened when Natsu pressed one of his hands gently into the small of her back, looking at her cautiously out of the corner of his slanted eye. Lucy felt like he was testing their boundaries, and forced herself to relax, allowing her body language to let Natsu know it was okay.
The pressure became heavier as he let his hand settle, his chest dangerously close to Lucy’s shoulder and Lucy felt her eyes glaze as Natsu’s warm breath fanned over her ear.

A breathless chuckle pulled her from her mind’s wanderings and Natsu’s hand began to rub circles into her back, her cotton shirt bunching slightly from the small movement and revealing a strip of pale skin. His pinky finger would skim over her bare flesh on a few of the motions, and Lucy shakily exhaled at the contact. The faint smell of smoke made Lucy’s nose scrunch, it wasn’t the campfire smoke that she associated with Natsu. No, this smelt more like the one time she had let Natsu try to make toast...

“Hey Luce, I think you need to flip it,” Natsu whispered, and Lucy started as she realized her pancake was the source of the burning scent. She hastily removed it from the pan, glaring down at it as she thought about the stupid look Natsu surely had on his face. That ‘I know I made you so distracted you burned the food ‘cus you think I’m hot’ look. Stupid Natsu and his stupid hand. He stepped away from her as she let the burnt chocolate chip pancake fall on top of the large stack in the oven, his muffled chortles only adding fuel to her embarrassed anger. She protected her hand with a dish cloth as she took out the plate and turned off the stove and elements. She pointedly ignored Natsu as she walked by him to the small table, noticing the impish gleam that sparkled in his eyes even as he hid his mouth and nose in his scarf. How could he look so endearing and make Lucy want to kick him at the same time?

She set down the two empty plates and forks as well as the plate stacked high with her hard work. The burnt one proudly resting at the very top. Natsu somehow managed to bring over the two cups of coffee and the plate of fruit, Lucy watching skeptically as the plate started to tip from his grasp. He didn’t drop it, though it did land of the table with a dull ‘bang’. He placed Lucy’s in front of her - two spoons of sugar and two pours of milk- before taking a sip of his own. Lucy’s upper lip curled a little as she watched, recalling the one time she had had a sip of his by accident. He didn’t put any cream or milk in it, instead only what Lucy could assume was 6 spoon fulls of sugar. Lucy had gagged and nearly spit the monstrosity out on her laptop. Natsu had choked on his breath at her expression, dissolving into loud ‘guwaff’s and snorts at her pain.

Lucy’s eyes squinted at him from her memory, and she dug her fork forcefully into the burnt pancake before shoving it onto his plate. Natsu raised a pink eyebrow - seriously, did he dye his eyebrows too?- at her, still sipping from his sugar and caffeine concoction. Oh but Lucy wouldn’t let his playful eyes or his god-like cheekbones let him off the hook for this one. Pancakes were something Lucy took great pride in, and she was not to be messed with.

“It’s your fault it’s burnt so you get to eat it,” Lucy harrumphed before stabbing one of the other fluffier pancakes and placing it on her own plate. Natsu slid into the wooden chair, resting his chin on one hand and smirking at her in a way that had Lucy struggling to keep her flush down. When had he become so cocky? She really had to put a stop to this, and soon.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about Luce. You were the one cooking, I didn’t even say anything. Right Happy?” Natsu said innocently, even as the roguish glint grew in his onyx eyes.

Happy made what Lucy counted as a snorting sound, and decided the small cat was on her side. “You weren’t, distracted, by anything, were ya weirdo?” Natsu continued to tease, knowing smile only making him look more in control. Lucy felt heat pool in her lower stomach, something she hadn’t felt in years burning through her blood and resting in her cheeks.

So she swung her foot in his direction under the table.

Natsu let out a loud yelp and jerked his knee up, banging it against the top of the table in the process. Lucy had anticipated his over reaction, and had lifted her mug to take a sip just in time. She looked at
him through her lashes over the lip of her cup, feeling vindicated at the chastened smile Natsu shot at her as he rubbed a hand through his wild hair. He then stuck his tongue out at her. Lucy rolled her eyes as she cut off a piece of her pancake with her fork, mumbling a soft ‘jerk’ before putting it delicately in her mouth.

Natsu shoved half a pancake into his mouth at once.

And that’s how breakfast in the Heartfilia apartment continued. Natsu shoving his face full of pancakes only for Lucy to chastise him or for him to choke on the mouthful and send Lucy into a spiral of giggles. Natsu had about three quarters of the stack and another cup of coffee with so much sugar Lucy feared for his teeth, and Lucy pretended not to notice when Natsu ‘snuck’ Happy a pancake. Lucy was nibbling on a strawberry slice when Natsu leaned back in his chair, patting his abs with a satisfied hum. Lucy cocked her head as she looked over him, taking in the details of his tattoos.

And he had plenty.

Aside from the large black one in the middle of his back, Lucy was aware of 12 others. He had a swirling jewel-red Japanese dragon on his right shoulder, a black pearl guarded in it’s grasp. It took up all of his deltoid and most of his upper arm, encroaching on his clavicle, chest, and back. The detail on it could rival that of the tattoo on his back, in fact all of his larger pieces were extremely detailed and well done. The scales and whiskers on the dragon seemed to actually reflect light a little, the dark talons a lighter shade of black than the pearl they held. The fur was a blood red, the underside and antlers a blush. It’s face was more of a western styling than the traditional Japanese depictions, Lucy wondering if Natsu had drawn it himself. And then there were it’s eyes. They portrayed intelligence flickering behind pitch black irises but it didn’t strike Lucy as a scary expression, more protective than anything. It looked like it was about to fly off of Natsu’s arm and float around her room, taking stock of her hoard of books.

Natsu’s other large tattoo was on his left ribs, and Lucy was starting to see a pattern form. Covering his entire left set of ribs and wrapping from his sternum to scatter away onto his back were scales. Deep red that seemed to erupt from his skin, and with such detail that Lucy still couldn’t fully convince her mind they weren’t real.

All of his other tattoos were much simpler in comparison, simple collections of black lines and shapes on the insides of his fingers, the ones resting on the sides of his thumbs more complex but still with the same idea. Lucy wondered how much they had cost, there was no way such art would be cheap. Her eyes were still flickering over the edges of the scales on his ribs when Lucy heard him clear his throat, but she ignored the soft sound.

“Checkin’ me out again, Luce?” Natsu hummed, a nervous undertone not fooling Lucy. At least his cockiness was gone. Partially.

“You wish,” she retorted, popping the rest of the strawberry into her mouth. “I was just admiring your tattoos. Who did them?” she asked as she lifted her eyes to his face, surprised to see a look of contempt twist his features, eyes unfocused above her head.

“My cousin,” he replied with a sneer. “Stupid Metal Face thought he was being soo funny. Took me a fuckin’ week to notice...” he trailed off in his grumblings, Lucy’s interest piqued as Natsu sunk further into his seat and crossed his arms sourly over his chest.

“What?” she asked eagerly. Whatever this cousin had done, it really seemed to have pissed Natsu off. The boy looked at her in surprise at her voice, and Lucy realized he had forgotten where he was.

“Natsu? What ar-” Lucy started to ask, unable to hide the large smile that stretched across her face.
“Nothing!” Natsu chirped, sitting up straighter in his seat. “So any plans for today?” he asked hurriedly, Lucy only lifting an eyebrow at his change in subject but playing along.

“I was just going to go shopping, but now would be as good as time as any to get that extra key made for you,” Lucy said easily, finger tapping her lip as she mentally ran through the errands she had planned for her first actual day off in months. What with moving and the settling into her two jobs Lucy had had very little spare time, and she was looking forwards to a nice, relaxing day. Lucy felt Natsu’s gaze on her and broke from her thinking to look at him.

The blush that had scattered across his cheeks from earlier darkened, and his mouth was agape slightly. He stared at her with wide eyes, disbelief swirling with the green flecks in his dark eyes. “You were serious?” he breathed out. Lucy was taken aback by his shock, of course she had been serious. You don’t just announce you’re going to give someone a key and then not, that was just rude. Not to mention that it would be the most practical solution as Lucy didn’t see Natsu about to stop breaking into her apartment anytime soon. She nodded at his question, and had to stop herself from melting into a giant puddle at the pure joy that spread across his face, mouth forming a giant smile that showed off his pointed canines. He was so innocent it hurt her a little, and she always wanted to see him look that happy.

“I actually need to go shopping too!” Natsu said as he stood up. He gathered the empty plates and headed towards the sink, a bounce in his step as he walked past her. She hadn't planned on having company, but Lucy really didn't mind her new companion. It would be like an adventure! Lucy smiled at her childish thought, following after him to help clean the kitchen. She heard a crash and tiny ‘sorry’ from the area, making her cringe. Those had been her favourite set of plates, and she really hoped Natsu hadn't broken one. She focused on Natsu standing over a wet frying pan that laid on the tile. He looked up sheepishly as he tucked his face into his scarf, tops of his ears matching his hair.

Lucy managed a smile at him. And then kicked him out of her kitchen.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Natsu, so cute and dorky. If only Lucy knew how much Happy truly bullied him...

Anyhowsies, I hope you enjoyed the latest chapter!
Six

She had a crush on an idiot.

An hour after finishing cleaning the kitchen Lucy had kicked Natsu out of her apartment so she could shower and get ready. While she had been picking out her outfit she had solidified her plan of attack. Key place for the order, groceries, any other errands Natsu needed, pick up key, and then home. With that set aside, Lucy had spent the following twenty minutes deciding on her clothes. She had finally picked out a loose cream t-shirt that tended to pull off of her right shoulder, a pink cat silhouette in the center. She had paired it with a light brown pair of short shorts and white belt, as well as a low pair of cork wedges. Her blonde hair was thrown up into a messy bun, locks framing her face that didn’t quite reach the ribbon she used to tie up her hair, and Lucy had applied minimal make up. She knew she rocked the ‘I didn’t even try’ look, and she had hoped to catch Natsu’s eye.

This thought had abandoned her when she had heard a knock at the door. She really hoped it wasn’t the landlady, she didn’t want to have to explain why her lock was scratched up so badly. She was halfway through a ‘hello’ when she realized she was staring at the most offensively bright and over patterned shirt Lucy had seen in all of her life. Blues, yellows, pinks, and greens were all shoved together in lines and waves going in all directions, black accents burning into Lucy’s eyes for added horror. The top two buttons were undone and the collar was smoothed down, but it was too late.

“Umm, Luce...?” Natsu questioned, Lucy still frozen in her spot at her doorway. The strangeness of Natsu knocking wasn’t enough to break the grip his shirt had on her. Truly, the thing belonged in the incinerator.

“ What are you wearing ?” Lucy gaped, gaze glued to the pattern. She couldn’t look away, it had her trapped. The monstrosity was alive. Natsu shoved his hands into the pockets of the dark leather jacket he was wearing, the black only further emphasizing the manic patterns.

“A shirt?” Natsu answered, but the insecurity in his voice made it sound more like a question. Lucy finally lifted her eyes to his face. His were confused, clearly not understanding the insult to fashion he was wearing. He lifted his hand and pressed it against her forehead, the action making heat start to spread across her cheeks. She swatted at his hand and stepped back a bit, cheeks puffing out in a pout. He didn’t even have to open his mouth, the confusion turning into a teasing sharpness as Lucy held his onyx eyes.

“I am not sick,” Lucy harrumphed, eyes taking in his overall look. His hair was pulled back into a ponytail, the pink strands jutting out in all directions after they were bound. Bangs still framed his face a little, and Lucy had to wonder if he styled it so they poked up a bit. There was no way his hair was that floofy naturally. His signature white scaled scarf was hung loosely around his neck, the leather jacket and mistake combination fitting snugly on his well toned body. He completed whatever look he was going for with a pair of washed out and ripped jeans -not the kind that Lucy had seen in stores either. No, these were genuinely lived in and had gained all the runs and slightly ripped knees all on their own- and a dark pair of combat boots.

Nothing matched.

At all.

It was a mismatch of textures, colours, and patterns, and yet... He looked good. Natsu looked hot while wearing what Lucy would equate with a Value Village throwing up on him. Tattoos, piercings, and pink hair included. When Lucy turned her calculating eye onto his face again, a cocky
smirk had replaced the teasing one, and Natsu’s eyes glinted in a way she knew very well by now.

“And I am not a weirdo!”

Natsu broke into loud laughter at that, reaching into her apartment and dragging Lucy out by force. He slung his arm easily over her shoulders, any protest at being manhandled dying into a tiny grumble under her breath. Staying under his arm Lucy reached into her pink purse, star keychain dangling and chiming when it bounced against the metal clip of her bunny beanie baby decoration. She locked her apartment door quickly, and let Natsu lead her down the stairs. She made a movement towards the elevator, but Natsu hurried past it, talking animatedly about how Happy was sure to leave a mess for Natsu to clean up when he got home, something about the cat feeling ‘abandoned’. Lucy was in shape, so she supposed the 10 flights of stairs down to the lobby wouldn’t kill her. Though she did wish she had worn different shoes.

Natsu didn’t stop talking the entire time the walked, making Lucy relax and giggle as he told her about the time Natsu had been forced to leave Happy behind for a whole day when a client had demanded Natsu come to his place and fix the statue Natsu had made for him. The jerkwad of a customer had somehow managed to drop the metal structure from the third floor bannister - Natsu was pretty sure the guy’s mistress had chucked it out the window for some rich reason or another-and it was dented and needed reshaping. Natsu had needed to make a three hour drive to the guy’s estate, and had received minimal compensation for it. Her neighbour hadn’t been in the best mood when he got home, only to see that Happy had gotten into the fridge and gotten pieces of fish on everything. The couch had scratches in the frame, his desk was a mess and symbology books -hey, sometimes his orders got super detailed and abstract- had been thrown around the apartment. Natsu had lost it and buried himself in his bed for the next several hours.

As silly as his story was and as horrible as his sense of fashion was none of that is what had convinced Lucy that she had given her heart to an idiot.

No, instead it was what Natsu lead them to in the parking lot, beaming proudly down at her. He gestured to the vehicle in front of them, and Lucy brought a hand up to rub at her temple. Because in front of them was not a car, or a truck, or even an ugly and decrepit van. In front of them, and what Natsu apparently intended them to use for the day, was a motorcycle. It was black with flames painted on it’s side, leather seats and handles well used but not abused. Two helmets hung on the bar, each with matching flame decals. The bike itself was a standard motorcycle, nothing fancy but nothing to scoff at either. Natsu was proud of it though, with the way he stood taller and with his chest puffed out slightly, still smiling expectantly at Lucy.

“We are not going shopping on that,” Lucy said flatly. Natsu’s face fell in shock, and he did nothing to hide the hurt in his widened eyes. His lower lip jutted out a little. “Do not look at me like that Natsu! Where would we put the bags, and where would I sit? Not to mention I don’t even know where else you need to stop by,” Lucy explained, Natsu not relenting on the puppy dogs eyes. Lucy looked to the sky for a second, contemplating if she should ask the stars for strength. Instead she wound an arm around Natsu’s middle and led him away from the bike, his body trailing as he looked back at his baby in sadness. At least it explained why we had chosen to wear a leather jacket in 20-degree weather.

With each step away from his bike Lucy noticed Natsu growing paler and paler. He even looked like he was about to pass out when Lucy stopped them in front of her silver Beetle. It was a 2008, not too old but not new enough to be expensive. Lucy liked her car, thought it had character. Lord knew her father never would have let her drive such an ‘outlandish’ car. Maybe that’s why Lucy had taken such a liking to it.
Lucy looked up at Natsu, ready to see the flicker of contempt most guys had when they looked at her car. - *Really, you drive a bug?* - only to see fear. Natsu looked honest to goodness terrified, and was that a hint of green on his face? She gave him a gentle nudge, and his eyes flickered to her before going back to her car. “You ok?” she asked cautiously, worry increasing when he swallowed thickly before speaking to her. His normally smooth voice was scratchy and very wobbly.

“Ye-yeah. ‘M fine,” he said before slowly removing his arm from over her shoulders. He walked towards the passenger side, steps forced and body tense. He shot her an obviously fake smile, “Whatcha waitin’ for, weirdo?” tumbling from his lips. His teasing held none of his usual fire though, and Lucy was seriously wondering what was wrong with him. Was Natsu afraid of cars? No, he would have told her that when she walked him to it, there was no way he would have that much pride. Lucy tentatively unlocked the car and walked to the driver’s side, looking him in the eye over the hood of the car. Barely.

“Are you sure?” she asked again. Lucy didn’t want to be the cause of a panic attack or uncomfort for him, and his grin softened into a real one. The hint of green stayed. He nodded his head before sucking in a breath, as though he was steeling his nerves for something. Lucy shot him another concerned look before slipping into her seat behind the wheel, Natsu following shortly. Hopefully whatever had him so on edge wouldn’t be that bad. Could it?

Lucy had never been more wrong.

“I can’t believe you get motion sick!” Lucy cried out in the parking lot. Natsu was laying in an unattractive puddle half out of her car and half on the pavement. Natsu had been okay when Lucy had first started driving, too quiet for Lucy’s nerves but fine nonetheless. And then she had hit the main road. Natsu had lurched for the side grip, somehow curling his body into a ball in the cramped passenger seat. A pathetic moan sounded from him and a gagging sound. Lucy had instantly called his name, only to receive a louder and more painful moan in response. His face had definitely been green, the only words Lucy able to understand being ‘moving’ and ‘bad’. He had stayed that way, whimpering other things like ‘I hate cars’, ‘Never again’, and the one that struck fear into Lucy the most; ‘I don’t feel good’. Lucy had threatened him that if he threw up in her car she would throw him out of the vehicle while moving. That had just made Natsu retch more.

“Nnnhhhhg,” was Natsu’s response to her statement now. He finally unbuckled his seatbelt and allowed the rest of his body to tumble out of the car. He laid on the ground catching his breath and Lucy came to stand over him, fists on hips and glower pulling at her lips.

“You almost threw up in my car.” she stated, eyes narrowing when Natsu opened his to look at her. He lifted a hand and motioned his index finger as he spoke, voice sounding better already.

“But I didn’t.”

“But you were about to.”

“*But I didn’t.*”

Lucy crouched down beside him and poked his cheek. Natsu let out a sad whine. She poked his cheek harder. Natsu let out a grumpy noise. “How can you drive a *motorcycle* but get motion sick in a car?” Lucy questioned in disbelief. In no way whatsoever had Lucy seen this coming. She had expected Natsu to have a weakness, like say a bird allergy or fear of heights, but never this.

He huffed and motioned to get up, Lucy staying in her crouched position beside his body. His head was now level with hers, and Lucy pouted internally about how much taller he was than her. Natsu
shrugged his shoulders when he spoke, but avoided her eyes in what Lucy thought was embarrassment. His mumbled and sulky tone did nothing to help. “I dunno.”

Lucy rolled her eyes at his answer, shoving his shoulder. “Baby,” she teased as she stood. She reached down one hand, Natsu only pouting at it and remaining on the ground. She rolled her eyes and motioned with her hand for him to take it. “Do you want that key or not?”

In a second Natsu firmly had his hand in hers, using Lucy to pull himself up with a small grunt. As they walked towards the key smith’s he didn’t loosen his hold on her hand and Lucy was unable to smother the grin that spread across her face. Natsu couldn’t see it though, as he was practically dragging Lucy behind him. She jerked back on his hand, pulling him to sudden stop, Natsu looking back at her in mild annoyance.

“What was that for, weirdo?”

Lucy ignored his question, and instead reached up and swatted at the back of his jacket a few times. He had managed to gather streaks of dust and bits of gravel from his previous time on the ground, and Lucy refused to walk into a store with him while he was covered in dirt. The shirt was torture enough. Natsu however was thoroughly confused, mouth falling open to question her when she gave a satisfied nod. This time it was Lucy who brushed past Natsu, pulling him behind her via their connected hands -which Lucy had managed to turn into interlocking fingers. Natsu walked faster so that he was a step in front of her, sending Lucy a sly glance out of the corner of his eye. Lucy walked faster. Natsu walked faster still. Lucy was having to take almost twice as many steps as him now, Natsu’s longer legs able to take wider strides. She glared up at the side of his face, mouth popping open in outrage at the incredibly smug smile that revealed his white teeth. His eyes flickered to Lucy’s for a moment, and it was so on. Lucy broke into a sprint, Natsu only half a step behind her. Neither let go of the others hand as they raced, and soon Lucy was laughing. The loud, boisterous, so-unlady-like-her-father-would-reprimand-her kind of laugh. Natsu was howling too, a deep fondness that one wouldn’t expect to see directed at a girl he had known for a week shining down on Lucy from his onyx eyes. The fondness was overtaken by triumph when Natsu’s free hand was the first to touch the worn metal door.

“I win!” he crowed excitedly, pumping his fist in the air. Or he tried to, as he had not removed his hand from the door and instead chosen to try and lift the hand he was using to hold Lucy’s. Without letting go of Lucy. This resulted in Lucy being pulled towards his torso and lifted at the same time, her arm stretching into the air beside Natsu’s face. The minor burn of the forced stretch wasn’t what Lucy was focusing on though, instead she tried to control her speeding heart at their proximity. Her chest was pushed up against Natsu’s again, her free hand bracing itself on the breast of his leather jacket. Natsu was looking down at her with wide eyes, Lucy close enough to see his pupils were almost fully dilated. Pink was slowly gathering in his cheeks and Lucy felt the heat grow on her face as well. In fact, Lucy felt like she was burning. The air around them became muggy, Lucy fighting the desire to just melt into his strong arms. Her breathing was starting to become laboured from the intense wave of warmth that had hit her, breath hitching when Natsu’s ghosted over her mouth when he spoke.

“Oops.”

His tone held no remorse, the word more of a whisper than a statement as the pair remained frozen. Lucy broke into a fit of giggles that turned into snorts and short laughs. She leaned her head forward and rested it against the god-awful cloth of the shirt he was wearing, still giggling at the ridiculousness of their position. Natsu gave a shaky chuckle and lowered their hands slowly, giving her a light squeeze. The temperature slowly returned to normal too, Lucy embarrassed about how her senses always became so muddled around him. Obviously the space around her hadn’t gone up ten degrees,
no matter how certain she was that a sheen of sweat had built up at the nape of her neck. Things like that didn’t happen in reality.

Still giggling she gave him a playful shove, pushing away from his body so that they weren’t sharing air anymore. “Dork.”

“Heh, sorry,”

“Let’s head in,” Lucy suggested, eyes twinkling with mirth at the fact that Natsu had yet to twitch a muscle. He continued to stare down at her with a dumb grin stretched across his face before blinking a few times. Blush heated the tops of his ears as he gave two quick nods and motioned for Lucy to go first. Unfortunately, Lucy had to let her hand slip from his as she pulled the door open and walked into the building. The inside was much nicer than the red-brick exterior implied, metal sculptures placed on display on the border of the room, the brick walls the same as outside. Black plush seating was available, magazines littering low glass tabletops. Lucy gaped a little bit at the professional setting, two young women seated behind a high white counter, one writing something and the other typing away at a computer. When Lucy had googled high rated key-makers in Hargeon she hadn’t been expecting a decorative metal shop.

She turned back to look at Natsu to find that he had abandoned her in order to inspect one of the sculptures. He was circling it, hands stuffed in pockets and a critical frown pulling at his mouth. The image of a tail poking out of Natsu’s back, twitching with concentration struck Lucy, and she lifted a hand to cover her giggles. He was such a cat. Natsu heard them—somehow—and his eyes shot to Lucy, onyx still hardened begrudging approval. Shoulders hunched, he slunk back over to Lucy’s side and the pair walked towards the front desk.

“It’s good, I guess. I could probably do it with half the stress on the metal, or with steel rather than copper and silver paint,” Natsu grumbled, eyes shrewdly scanning the remaining figures. Lucy rolled her eyes and looped her arm around his elbow, successfully pulling his lips from their competitive pouting and replacing it with a surprised smile. Lucy didn’t know why she wasn’t surprised that his ego saw everything as a challenge, and a part in the back of Lucy’s mind worried if it would be an issue when he met her friends. Not that Lucy was concerned about it. Because it wasn’t like he was her boyfriend and she was searching for their approval. Not that she needed their approval. Or Natsu was her boyfriend. Did he want to be though? Not that Lucy cared. Not at all. Ridiculous.

“Luce?” Natsu asked, an amused glint flashing through his gaze at her high pitched squeak. “She asked ya a question Weirdo,” he explained, shoving her with his shoulder a little. Embarrassment made Lucy’s throat close up, and she looked at the knowing smile on the receptionist’s face with wide eyes. Natsu chuckled under his breath, teasing eyes making Lucy’s face scrunch up in a pout. She shoved him back before returning her focus to the girl in front of her, giving a large smile.

“Hi, I’d like to have a key made?”

“Of course miss, do you have the original?” the black haired woman responded, voice polite and professional. Lucy nodded and unclipped her apartment key from her key ring after a minute of recalling which one was the one she needed. She handed it over with another smile, and the receptionist smiled back at her. “And would you like to pay before or after?”

“After is fine,” Lucy replied easily. “How long do you think it’ll be?”

The woman looked down at her desk and rifled through a pile of papers before looking back up at Lucy. “There are a few projects before yours, so I’d guess around two to three hours. Will that be okay?” Lucy thought for a second before nodding again. Three hours gave them plenty of time to get their shopping done, and maybe even a quick lunch.
“Yes, thank you!” she said politely, and she started to turn around when the receptionist spoke again.

“Your boyfriend seemed keen on one of our sculptures. Would you like one of our pamphlets?” her voice was kind, but her eyes were devlish. Lucy flushed deeply at her words, trying to stammer out that her and Natsu weren’t dating when she was interrupted by Natsu’s cocky snort.

“No thanks. I was checkin’ your guys craftsmanship. You could do to weld at a lower temperature for ten minutes longer when connectin’ pieces to get a more even joint, or wait a few more seconds before manipulatin’ the metal after you heat it. It’s an easy thing to miss, otherwise they were okay,” Natsu tone was bored, but Lucy caught the superior lit in it. She glared up at him before pinching the side of his face and pulling. She sent an apologetic look over to the receptionist before speaking.

“What he means to say is that he is also a sculptor so we’re good, thank you though. And I think the art is lovely. Right Natsu?” Lucy said sweetly, pulling harshly on his check for emphasis. A slurred ‘yes’ turned more into a ‘yish’, and Lucy beamed at him before releasing his cheek with a pat.

“Good! We’ll be back in a little bit, have a nice day,” Lucy chirped brightly, dragging Natsu behind her, not noticing his look of helplessness he shot back at the receptionist and the two girls struggle to stifle their laughter. She did, however, notice his grumbling under his breath.

“You’re kinda scary,”

“Good,” Lucy hummed, turning her face towards his a little. He jerked at her voice, obviously not meaning for her to hear it. Her lips curled up innocently and she winked at him as they walked through the parking lot. “Don’t you forget it.”

Natsu’s face paled a little before turning a bright red, and Lucy lifted her chin a little in pride at the fact that he was the one making a choking sound. Granted her pride turned to empathy as Natsu slowed their steps when the sight of her Beetle came into view. She looked up at him again to see that he was facing forwards, and was pulling at his scarf with agitated movements. The brilliant flush that had been travelling up his neck and face a second ago was gone, replaced with tenseness and the return of the hint of green. Lucy sighed to herself and tightened her grip on his arm. This wasn’t going to be fun.

“I blame you and your devil-mobile.”

“Oh how is it my fault that your stomach hates you?”

“Because you drive like a maniac!”

“I WAS DOING 65 IN A 60 THAT IS NOT POOR DRIVING!”

“Tell that to the kid you almost hit.”

“Natsu he was 3 meters away from the cross walk.”

“AND YOU ALMOST HIT HIM.”

"... I’m going inside now.”

“You can’t just leave me here! Lushiiiiiiii-”

Lucy turned away from the pile of Natsu that was still lying outside her car, eyes looking around the unfamiliar area. While it was true she hadn’t explored her new city yet, Lucy had never even heard about this part of town. The shops that lined the street were dingy, pressed tightly together along the
sides of the two way road. Weeds sprouted up from between the sidewalk cracks and curling up the
parking meter posts. There were no parking lots here, so Natsu was sprawled on the grey concrete of
the sidewalk, Lucy’s small car barely wedged into the tight space she was able to find. He was still
moaning her name, and Lucy was still ignoring him. Her brow furrowed as she looked up at the
gaudy sign above the door Natsu had vaguely motioned to when pulling up.

Ichyaabra Cadabra.

Lucy didn’t even want to try and pronounce it, her tongue getting tied just thinking about it. Lights
twinkled around the periwinkle blue letters, the small picture of a blue pegasus in the right hand
corner. Why in all of the world did Natsu shop here? Strange plants were displayed in the window
case, herbs dangling from the top of the display. No one was on the street besides her and Natsu,
which only furthered served to unsettle Lucy. Speaking of Natsu, the pink haired man had managed
to drag himself off the ground and stood beside her, arms crossed and face turned away sulkily. Lucy
rolled her eyes in exasperation at his posture, hands falling onto her hips without thought. He had
been like this when they had stopped by the grocery store as well, bemoaning his motion sickness
until Lucy took pity on him. He had then proceeded to load her cart with chips and junk food, as
well as bottles of tabasco sauce. Which she had promptly removed. They had bickered the entire
time the strolled down the isles, Lucy only wanting to buy the basics such as eggs, milk, bread, and some
veggies and fruit. Natsu was adamant about meat and junk food. Lucy’s shoulders sagged as she
thought about how much she had ended up spending, even with Natsu paying for half of the bill.

Natsu cleared his throat as he loosely rested his arm across her shoulders. “Where are we even?”
Lucy questioned, squinting at the strained smile that pulled at Natsu’s mouth. None of it reached his
eyes as he looked over the storefront warily.

“It’s ah, where I get some of my supplies for my projects,” Natsu explained, voice uneasy behind a
mask of nonchalance. “Oi, Lucy?” Natsu started as Lucy took a step towards the front entrance,
wooden door in dire need of a new paint job -and new paint colour. Who would choose such a loud
red when the sign was blue? “The guy who owns this place can be a bit... wierd. But he’s harmless, I
promise! Also some of the stuff is gonna be things you haven’t seen, errr, weird paints and stuff.
Yeah! Paint and shit. Anyway the attendants can also be a bit much, and you just tell me if they
bother you ‘kay? Actually, you could probably just wait in the car if you want to, ya don’t have to
come in. I mean, only if you don’t wanna,” Natsu was rambling, arm tightening around her body
from his nerves. His was fiddling with his scarf again, tugging and fist at the white fabric as he
continued to talk. Lucy smiled up at his as she dug her elbow into his ribs lightly. The motion made
Natsu bite his tongue and look down at her, eyes betraying his nervousness.

“Hey, it’s always more fun when we’re together, right?” Lucy asked, beaming up at him as relief and
happiness spread across Natsu’s face. He dropped his hand to settle on her waist and gave her an
appreciative squeeze into his side before he gave her what Lucy had titled his ‘Natsu smile’ -eyes
squinted shut and lips pulled so high they revealed his sharp teeth, head tilted to the side slightly. It
never failed to make Lucy’s heart leap into her throat at the sheer rawness and openness of it.

“Yeah,” he said simply before leading her into the shop.

The first thing that hit Lucy was the smell. It was so herbal and earthy she felt like she had stepped
into a forest. Incense hung from lanterns, and thin isles between book shelves and display cases drew
her curious eyes. She made to walk down one of them but Natsu’s tight grip on her hip stopped her.
His normally happy eyes were darting around the shop, as if he were expecting someone to pop out
and attack them. “Just stay close to me for a while, okay?” he said tersely, not even glancing in her
direction. Lucy opened her mouth to ask why when a voice boomed behind her, pompous tone
setting her already high strung nerves - thanks, Natsu- even tighter. Natsu’s body stiffened beside her
and he turned to the voice, fake smile pulling at his lips.

“Ahhhh, I knew I recognized your parfume, Salamander,”

Lucy turned with Natsu, and saw nothing. She continued to stare at the empty air in front of her in confusion until she saw that Natsu was looking down, and followed his gaze.

There stood a short and stout man, 5’o clock shadow in major need of shaving, and a smug look that betrayed a high sense of vanity. Which was incomprehensible as Lucy had seen more pugs she would rather kiss than the man in front of her. There was no way that was his natural hair, orange like a Cheeto and trailing half way down his face. Lucy actually recoiled when he sniffed his oversized nose in her direction, short arm crossing over his tacky white suit as he bowed in her direction. Who bowed anymore, what was this, the 12th century?

“Ahhh Salamander, so you finally bring a guest to see us. And what a lovely girl she is, simply delectable parfume,” He drolled, eyes twinkling in what Lucy supposed was meant to be a flirtatious way. Lucy’s nose scrunched as she attempted to give a small smile at the strange man in front of her. He turned with a flourish towards the counter to their left, and Lucy met Natsu’s eyes, lifting a blonde eyebrow. He gave her sheepish grin. Lucy mouthed ‘Salamander’ at him in question. Natsu rolled his eyes and shook his head.

Don’t even mention it.

Lucy leaned into his chest in support, and also as a barrier between her and the small man who was now looking at them expectantly.

“Any specific spe-” He started to ask, Natsu quickly cutting him off.

“Supplies! Ahaha, yeah, I need some more supplies , Ichyia,” Natsu’s voice was strained again, forced laughter starting to annoy Lucy. The man - Ichyia. What a weird name- raised a thin orange eyebrow at Natsu. He gave a condescending smile and wiped at non-existent dirt on the white cloth covering his shoulder.

“Well, you know where your supplies is found. We had some new shipment come in, men.” Lucy looked up at Natsu in bafflement, and Natsu scrubbed at his face as the pair walked away from the front of the dimly lit store. Lucy studied the books on the shelves that looked so worn they could have been fourth-hand, never mind secondhand. Once Lucy thought they were clear of his ear shot, Lucy tugged at Natsu arm.

“Did he really say ‘men’?” she whispered harshly, a bashful look crossing over Natsu’s expression.

“Ichyia has some, quirks I guess. But he’s a good guy, I promise,” Natsu explained, scratching at the back of his head with his free hand. He froze suddenly, and Lucy would have said Natsu let out a low growl if she didn’t know better, “These guys on the other hand...” Natsu trailed off, pulling Lucy even tighter into his side. Fear pricked under her skin at Natsu’s statement, what kind of people could set him so on edge? Shadows stretched across the wooden floor in front of them, Lucy holding her breath.

And then letting it out in a gasp of surprise.

Because in front of her -and who Natsu was sneering at- was a group of three young men. The tallest had skin darker than Natsu’s, black hair pulled back into a high ponytail. He wore a pale yellow shirt underneath a black suit, the other two in similar dress. To his right was a dirty-blond haired man, Lucy guessing he was only a few inches taller than Natsu. He had a flirtatious smile on his lips and his eyes were slow in taking in Lucy’s body, blue collar of his shirt folded neatly. The final man was shorter than even Lucy, innocent wide eyes peeking at her through a fringe of light blond hair. His crisp pink shirt and tie only added to the image of a young socialite in Lucy’s mind. The tallest one spoke, bringing his hand to press his fingertips into his forehead and push away a part of his bangs.
while speaking.

“Tch, I could show you around, not that I’d enjoy it,” he muttered, looking away in disinterest as a blush popped onto his cheeks from nowhere. Lucy blinked at him, smile frozen on her lips.

“Eh?”

Natsu snorted beside her, and Lucy blinked at him a few times, face still unable to move. Pride glinted in his eyes and he smothered a mocking snigger as he looked over the men in front of them. The other two seemed undeterred by Lucy’s apparent confusion. Before she knew what was happening she was ripped from Natsu’s protective embrace, an angry ‘oi’ sounding from Natsu. The second tallest man held her hand in one hand, the other on the small of Lucy’s back.

“Ignore Ren over there, it would be an honour to show you around our humble shop, My Princess. Your faithful knight Hibiki is here,” he purred, Lucy fighting the urge to slap him. She wasn’t particularly annoyed or offended, there was just an air of narcissism about him. She sensed more than saw Natsu’s glower, a dark presence creeping over the group of men as Natsu approached them.

“A-ah, I would love to show you around too, Miss. If that would be alright with you of course,” the final one spoke, voice higher than the others and portraying a youth Lucy wasn’t sure was truly there. Lucy gave a hard shove to the chest of the man who still held her, -Hibiki he had called himself- and broke free of his embrace. She held up her hands and backed away towards Natsu.

“I’m fine really! Thank you though, I think,” Lucy replied warily. The smallest shot behind her though, eyebrows raised as he cornered her back towards the other two.

“It’s not everyday our affection is brushed aside. Oh what a strong woman we have to fawn over today!” he awed, an arm wrapping around Lucy’s waist and making her squeal in surprise.

“She’s not that amazing,” Ren said haughtily even as his arm tightened around her. Lucy tried to remove it from her middle, more fearful of what Natsu was going to do to these men than their attempts at wooing her. He looked murderous blocked by the shorter man. His teeth were gritted and Lucy was partly surprised the men hadn’t burst into flame at the intensity of the glare Natsu was giving them.

“Oi! She ain’t gonna fall into your stupid spells so ya can shove off!” he barked sharply. Hibiki lifted his hands in surrender, bowing slightly to Natsu. Really, what was with all the bowing? Lucy managed to shake Ren’s hold of her while he was distracted, slipping back into her place beside Natsu. He wrapped a protective arm around her waist, Lucy unable to fight the feeling of rightness that settled into her as his warmth enveloped her. At her contact with Natsu the air around them became dry like a desert’s, Lucy certain that the temperature had spiked. The three men began to look uncomfortable, pulling at their collars and sweat starting to build at their hairlines.

“Calm down Natsu, Eve meant no harm. There’s no need to over react like this,” Hibiki patronized, submittance clear behind his condescending tone. Lucy now glared at the men. Why were they apologizing to Natsu and not her, she was the one they had harassed! She went to march over and give them a piece of her mind when Natsu’s hand squeezed her hip in a placating manner. She pouted up at him, somewhat pleased to see the anger had faded in his eyes. Instead a boastfulness was clear, victorious smirk twisting his features devilishly.

“Hah, like Lucy would ever be entrapped by one of you. She’s stronger than that!” Natsu bragged, Lucy blushing under his praise. Even if she had no idea what he was talking about. The three men looked over Lucy in perplexity, eyeing her with caution. Out of the corner of her eye she watched as Natsu pulled down on lower lid of his left eye and stuck out his tongue at the men before turning on
his heel and leading Lucy down a new isle. Now she was the one staring at Natsu baffled. Where had that *childishness* come from? He was still glaring at the plants before them, rummaging through them as he muttered to himself. Lucy could have sworn she heard the word ‘sirens’ in there, but that wouldn’t have made any sense.

“Hey, who were those guys?” Lucy asked after a few minutes of silence. Natsu shot her a dry smile before he continued to pick through the plants, taking stems and flowers and leaves, each into a different small bag.

“Just some guys who work here, always tryin’ to woo some poor sop. But they won’t bother ya now that they know you’re unaffected,” he said easily. His movements slowed and his eyebrows pinched together as a thought struck him. “They shouldn’t, at least.” The worry in his tone made Lucy giggle, and she picked a leaf - green with a hint of blue shimmering through it’s veins- that she had seen Natsu searching for. She dropped it into it’s appropriate bag before nudging him.

“Hey, you’re the one who said I was too strong for them right? Nothing to fear!” Lucy soothed, Natsu sending her an appreciative grin as he returned to his task. Lucy didn’t know why he was picking at these plants, some that she recognized - borage, cattail, lupine,- but most that she didn’t. Colourful leaves and exotic scents filtered through the planted greenery, petals and leaves of every shape overlapping. Her eyes scanned over the rows with muted interest, curiosity spiking when she saw a bowl filled with crystal clear water and a delicate blossom on top. She wandered away from Natsu’s side, her neighbour too busy focusing on what he had collected and what he needed to notice her leave his side by a short distance.

The flower had soft looking petals, a brilliant aquamarine with golden accents and specks littering the flower. It’s roots floated daintily in the water underneath it’s blossom. The backside of the petal almost looked scaled, each petal breaking off into two tips like a fish’s tail. Lucy looked at the scrawled writing on the indicator beneath the small bowl.

*Mermaid’s Tail*

Lucy hummed to herself as she looked over the flower again. She had the strongest desire to buy it. As she reached to pick up the bowl she was jerked back, a warm hand latching onto her elbow.

“Whatcha doin’ there Luce?” Natsu questioned, eyes nervously examining the flower. Lucy glared at the man behind her, shaking his hand from her skin.

“I was going to buy this flower,” she explained through her teeth, irritation growing as his eyes widened and he swallowed thickly.

“I-I don’t know if that’d be a great idea Luce,” he warned, gaze flitting between her and the flower.

“And why not?” she asked sharply, hands on hips and leaning forwards in challenge. Natsu scratched the back of his head, eyes looking above her in search of an answer.

“Ahh, no offense but...” he trailed off, lower lip caught between his teeth as he struggled to finish his sentence.

“*But*,” Lucy supplied, glower narrowing as she stared up at Natsu. He gulped audibly under her angry glare, and his hand dropped from his hair to his scarf.

“You have a black thumb?” he squeaked, answer sounding desperate to Lucy. She reached up and yanked at a lock of his bangs, a small yelp of pain escaping Natsu.

“I do *not* and you know it,” she bit out before releasing her hold on his hair. She turned to pick up
the bowl again, but Natsu stopped her once more.

“Please Luce, just trust me, okay? It’s best if you don’t get it,” Natsu pleaded, his eyes sincere as he looked over her face. Lucy tilted her head in consideration, bringing a finger up to tap on her lips.

“Hmmmm,” Lucy started before a wide smile broke across her face. “Nope! Still gonna get it,” Lucy sang, turning and picking up the bowl in a gentle flourish. Natsu’s shoulders sagged and he looked up at the ceiling. Even his knees gave a little as he looked up in defeat, Lucy rolling her eyes at his dramatics. Lucy gave a comforting pat to his shoulder as she passed him, heading towards the front desk. “Come on, you drama queen. You have more stuff to pick out right?” Lucy called over her shoulder, giggling to herself as Natsu trailed after her dejectedly, still muttering to himself under his breath. Lucy had a skip in her step as she walked through the store. This day was definitely something she looked forward to writing to her mother about.
“Lu Lu!”

“Hey Levy!” Lucy waved at her laptop screen, joy radiating off of the petite blue haired girl on the other side who kept bouncing in place. Levy and Lucy had yet to video chat, Levy’s few hours off from the Crocus Library - where she worked as the head coordinator and had written several papers already on some of the ancient texts that were found there - always seeming to clash with Lucy’s schedule. Until today of course, as both had set aside time specifically to talk. The three hour time difference didn’t help matters either.

“So how have your jobs been going? On the road to publishing already?” Levy asked excitedly, fixing her orange hairband when it was finally jostled out of place by her constant movement. Lucy giggled at her friend before breaking into a long explanation about the intricacies of her new job, and how just yesterday she had been given the small promotion of becoming one of the preliminary editors to one of their largest magazines, Sorcerer’s Weekly. Lucy still didn’t fully understand the odd name, but was excited and proud nonetheless. She still had her other duties to attend to at the firm, running small errands and setting up appointments and interviews for her boss Jason, not to mention her other serving job. She was currently in the middle of telling Levy about the time she had lost balance when serving what she guessed to be at least eight glasses of wine. She had put too many glasses on one side and the tray had tipped when she had taken one to place on the table, spilling one white glass on the paying customer - a judge of all people - and the other seven reds and whites on herself in an attempt to overcompensate. In the middle of the lounge side. Levy’s cackling had spurred on Lucy’s dramatic reenactment with her hands, motions wild as Lucy told her story. The two girls continued to laugh together as Levy informed Lucy that she had caused a miniature book avalanche trying to reach a book on the fifth shelf, soft titters lingering as they calmed down from their latest fit. Lucy rubbed her now sore stomach as Levy wiped away a stray tear from her eye, repositioning the laptop on the pillow that rested on top of her knees while she sat crossed legged on her living room sofa.

“So when do you meet up with Gray for lunch?” Levy questioned, Lucy’s eyes flickering to the time in the bottom right hand corner. She was set to meet him at Cana’s bar at one, which gave her another two hours to get ready and be there.

“In a couple hours, so what have you been up to? Any cute guys catch your eye?” Lucy replied, eyes glinting at the mention of any potential lover’s for her friend. Levy rolled her eyes at Lucy’s sly grin, waving her hand at the screen.

“You know I don’t have time for boys right now, Lu Lu. I have that follow up paper to my theory on mystic relation to languages and characters, and I’m waiting on that new draft of yours,” she said easily, eyes narrowing at Lucy’s small ‘eep’ when she remembered she hadn’t added nearly enough to her story that would be worth sending to Levy. “You have been working on it, right Lu?” Levy needled, brown eyes twinkling and a devious smile forming on her own lips now. “Unless..."

Lucy swallowed hard at Levy’s knowing look. She could never hide anything from Levy, the small bookworm knew Lucy too well. “Unless there’s some reason that’s been taking up your time?” Levy finished, leaning forward towards the screen.

“Uhh, nope?” Lucy laughed shakily, shrinking as Levy’s eyes blew wide. The small girl opened her mouth to start her squealing and pointed her finger at Lucy but Lucy held her hands and waved them in a shushing movement. “There’s nothing going on really! I’ve just been busy,” Lucy said, shoulder’s slumping a little at the verbal admittance that there was nothing going on between her and
Natsu. At least, nothing official. He had slept over both nights since their shopping adventure, always invading Lucy’s privacy and ending up tangled under the sheets together. She might have slapped him in shock this morning when she had woken up to his face buried soundly between her breasts, but that wasn’t something to be thinking about when she was on call with Levy.

Speaking of Levy, the other girl was giving Lucy an understanding look. “At least tell me you’ve been working on making friends?” she asked in concern, and Lucy gave her a timid smile. Lucy had clicked easily with Levy, but most of the time found it difficult to pull herself from her jobs or her writing to form a deep friendship with other people. At least, that had been an issue in Crocus. How was she supposed to tell Levy that she had made essentially a new best friend within forty eight hours of moving in?

“Oi, Luce, who’re you talkin’ to?”

Lucy froze as she saw Natsu lean over her shoulder in the small window showing Lucy her own screen. Levy’s eyes widened again as Natsu stared at her in confusion, toweling off his hair. Lucy slid her eyes to her left looking at the side of Natsu’s face while he continued to look at her computer. Pink strands stuck out from under the pale yellow towel, drops of water trailing down the side of his face and dripping off of his chin onto her shoulder. He finally looked at her from the corner of his own dark eye, lifting his eyebrow at her petrified gaze. “Whatcha starin’ at weirdo?” he asked lethargically, a mocking smile in his eyes. Lucy unfroze and shoved a hand into his face, causing Natsu to topple over onto the carpet and his ass.

Lucy squawked in shock, throwing a pillow at him as he glared up at her. “Oi! What the hell was that fo-,” he barked out, Lucy throwing a hand up to block him from her view.

“How many times do I have to tell you to get dressed in the bathroom after a shower Natsu!” Lucy’s face was bright red at his lack of propriety, legs spread and arms behind him from when he fell, only the towel that had been wrapped around his waist shielding Lucy’s innocent eyes. She was currently peaking from her hand, Natsu’s high whine drawing her attention from Levy. He was sitting with the bottoms of his feet touching, the pillow pulled firmly onto his lap and being hugged in a sad manner.

“But Lushiii, it’s all steamy in there after and my clothes stick,” he complained, eyes sad and bangs falling into his face as he pouted up at her. A child. She had a crush on a giant, extremely well muscled, pink haired, tattooed, pierced child.

“I don’t care! At least put on pants!” Lucy screeched, still hiding behind part of her hand. Natsu’s eyes narrowed up at her, sweat forming on Lucy’s brow under his critical stare.

“If you don’t like it then why’re ya lookin’?” he questioned, a victorious smirk revealing one canine. Lucy turned bright red before throwing a second pillow, hitting him squarely in the face and toppling him backwards, leg flying into the air.

“Just put on some damn pants!” Lucy wailed, fully covering her face with both hands. A mumbled grumble was her only reply, Lucy guessing Natsu was still laying on his back and with the pillow on his face. She slowly lowered her hands as she heard him stand up, watching as he stalked away, towel pulled tightly around his hips and other hand rubbing at his nose. He stuck his tongue out at Lucy as he walked by and she blew a raspberry at him in return before her eyes drank in the sight of his bare back and wild hair as he walked away.

“So he doesn’t dye his hair,” Lucy murmured to herself under her breath as he rounded the corner into her room.

“Lucy...” a high voice chimed, clever eyes staring at her and suggestive smile spreading across her
pixie like face. Lucy paled at the salacious tone, knowing she needed an escape before Levy got her nails too firmly in Lucy.

“What was that Lev, I can’t seem to hear you I think Skype’s acting up I should go anyway it’s been great talking,” Lucy babbled, reaching to close her laptop when she saw Levy’s face contort in anger.

“Oh no you don-” was all the blue haired girl had managed to make out before Lucy hit the ‘end call’ button, quickly closing her laptop to make sure Levy wouldn’t call her back. Lucy sighed as she moved the computer off of her lap, she was going to pay for that next time they talked.

“Natsu Dragneel you are so dead!”

“Happy, protect meeee!”

A soft bell chimed as Lucy pushed open the heavy wooden door, alerting the few customers to the presence of their joiner. Lucy looked around, eyes scanning through the stray men already hunched over the polished mahogany countertop -with a beer in hand- until they found a shock of raven dark hair, seated at one of the short wooden tables by a large window that bordered the long room. Lucy passed by a dozen empty stools set against the bar to her left, thin metals bands set in symmetrical designs and a royal blue leather seat perched on top, most flattened with overuse. The cabinets behind the bar were three shelves tall, filled with a range of liqueurs, spirits, and other types Lucy had never even heard of, all with polished mirrors set behind the singles rows. Stacks of all kinds of glasses sat between fruits and mixers on the counter, Lucy almost impressed with the excess as she made her way towards her friend. Lucy passed by a dozen empty stools set against the bar to her left, thin metals bands set in symmetrical designs and a royal blue leather seat perched on top, most flattened with overuse. The cabinets behind the bar were three shelves tall, filled with a range of liqueurs, spirits, and other types Lucy had never even heard of, all with polished mirrors set behind the singles rows. Stacks of all kinds of glasses sat between fruits and mixers on the counter, Lucy almost impressed with the excess as she made her way towards her friend. Lucy pulled out the chair opposite of him, laughing a little as he jumped from the small noise the chair made against the concrete floor. The man gave her a sullen look as Lucy continued to laugh behind her hand, sitting easily down onto the comfortable chair, blue leather upholstery matching that of the stools by the bar.

“I don’t know why you wanted to get lunch here,” he grumbled, shrugging off his jean jacket, leaving him in just a green checkered hoodie and white tank top with black letters printed across it.

“Gray, your clothes,” Lucy sung, smiling at her nails as she heard him curse under his breath and quickly replacing the jacket on his body. She ignored the small scowl and pink dusting across his nose as she continued to speak. “And you know perfectly well why I choose here. What kind of friends would we be if we didn’t support Cana?” She looked around the room again, taking in the high ceilings with the metallic pipes uncovered and the airy setting of the bar in midday. The large windows that took up most of the outer walls made the room seem open and made up for the low lighting that was scattered around the room, partially covered shades hanging from the ceiling. Over all the bar had a classy rustic feel, deep colours the woods and concrete bar and walls accented by the heavy blue colour of the seats and window shades - which were only to be drawn when the bar was closed-. 

“Shitty is what ya’d be,” a voice drawled beside her, and Lucy looked up and over her shoulder with a smile. A brunette carrying two menus and two glasses of water winked down at her as she placed the items on the dark wooden table top. When she straightened she rested a hand on her cocked hip, blue bikini top and dark brown capri combination leaving little to the imagination as she smiled sultrily down at the pair.

“Cana!” Lucy said happily as way of greeting to her friend, the brunette responding with an easy ‘yo’. She swayed a little in her spot, hazed eyes moving to Gray when he gave a low ‘tch’.

“Drunk again I see,” he said blandly, Cana’s smile widening as she looked down at him.
“Drunk still, you mean, Fullbuster,” she corrected, Lucy rolling her eyes. She flipped over the single page menu to the lunch side rather than the bar snacks page that she was currently looking at.

“Ya know Yoda, that ain’t exactly something to brag about,” Gray said shortly, jean jacket once more gone and the hoodie half way down his arms. Lucy just hoped he didn’t lose his jeans again. Cana shrugged her shoulders and flicked her high ponytail over her shoulder.

“Ya gonna order or just nag me?” she asked. Lucy ignored their daily bickering and let her eyes skim over the menu, picking out a nice Italian salad and chicken item. She informed Cana of her order, followed quickly by Gray’s choice of tomato gazpacho. Cana nodded her head at the orders, turning a flirty eye on Lucy and leaning forward enough so that if she wanted to Lucy would have a nice view down Cana’s skimpy top. Lucy herself had used the move to get a few discounts, so she was practically immune to it, though that didn’t stop Cana from trying.

“There anything special I can get you to drink, cutie?” Cana asked, a light purr in her voice making Lucy flush under the attention.

“Oi, quite trying to get her drunk ya alcoholic,” Gray snapped, scowl deepening as Cana let out a bawdy laugh. She flicked him on the ear as she passed by, speaking in a sing song voice.

“You’re just jealous cus you aren’t the one tapping this fine ass anymore.”

“Yeah well, Lucy doesn’t wanna get any of you either. Why don’t you go shag Bacchus in the back, if the both of ya aren’t too drunk to remember what goes where, that is,” Gray called at her retreating figure, Cana throwing up the middle finger without looking back at the pair as she sauntered into the kitchen.

“Gray,” Lucy said in warning, eyeing him over her water glass as she took a sip. At least his tank top was still on, silver cross pendant glinting from the midday sun as it peeked from under the loose material. The man ignored her, drawing in the condensation of his water glass. Sighing, Lucy rested her chin in her hand as she watched Gray sulk. Why was she surrounded by adults with the mindsets of twelve year olds? Clearing her throat she smirked a little at his put upon apathy, his electric blue eyes partially hooded and schooled into a bored expression. Really, Gray would be much more handsome if he smiled, a strong jaw that came to a slight point, sharp nose and full lips drawing the eyes away from a mop of black hair that hung just in his eyes, wild and spiked downwards. In fact he was almost the opposite of Natsu, with his wide, expressive dark eyes, wild pink hair that seemed to defy gravity, nose that turned up just the smallest amount and strong cheekbones that Lucy just wanted to caress, oh and she couldn’t forget about his lips and how the bottom one was a little bit fuller than the top and just looked so biteable ...

“Earth to Lucy,” Gray said, mild concern in his voice and amusement hidden in his eyes as Lucy physically jolted, ripped away from her -very bad Lucy- fantasies of Natsu. “You zoned out there for a bit,” he explained as she flushed further, grin slowly stretching across his face when he saw the opportunity to tease loom in front of him. “You had that dopey look you get whenever a hot celebrity does an interview for Sorcerer,” eyes sharpening as Lucy slunk down her seat, “or when ya get a text from mystery man.”

Lucy squeaked as Gray guessed correctly, keeping her eyes focused on the intricate grains on the table top. He flicked water at her, cold droplets making her squeal as they struck her face, Lucy flicking cold water at him in retaliation. Gray shied away from the spray, a loose grin pulling at his lips before he caught it and put his face back into a neutral expression.

“Seriously Lucy, what's going on with this guy?” He asked, looking at her intently through his dark fringe. Lucy fiddled with her silver ring on her middle finger, looking down at her hands as she
spoke.

“Nothing's going on, I think. I mean, we haven't really talked about it, and I don't know if he likes me that way and why do I feel like I'm back in high school?” Lucy moaned, burying her head in her arms on the tabletop. She heard Gray make a sound of pity before a hand gave her a rough few pats to the top of her head, most likely messing up her low pigtails. She swatted at his hand without moving from her spot, grumbling as she heard his low chuckle.

“I still can't believe you fell for an artist,” Gray said, lip curling a little at the final word. Lucy raised her head and glared at her friend, noting vaguely that his tank top was now gone as well.

“Like you're one to talk Mr. Head-of-fashion-department. Besides, he's really down to earth if you ignore the motorcycle and tattoos,” Lucy replied, raising an eyebrow when Gray’s face pinched and his eyes turned serious.

“What?” he asked quietly, back straightening in his seat from his previously hunched position. Lucy rolled her eyes at his dramatics, straightening her own body as well.

“Relax, he's harmless. His cat is probably the one you should be more worried about. Always ending up in my fridge or drawers,” Lucy said sourly, recalling how she had found Happy curled up peacefully in the middle of her underwear drawer. And Natsu’s following red face -Lucy could have sworn that a drop of blood was leaking from his nose- when a lacy black thing had found its way onto her floor. She had managed to kick the both of them out without much screaming and threatening, Natsu too much in shock to do anything other than be pushed out the front door. A small part of her had pitied his flustered stammering, a larger part of her mortified that he had seen her 'date underwear'.

“How is the cat getting into your place?” Gray questioned again, leaning forward in his seat. Lucy dragged her fingertip around the edge of her glass as she snorted.

“Natsu brings him over, duh,” she replied, looking up at him. The more Lucy talked about him the more Gray's expression seemed to darken.

“What kind of name is ‘Natsu’?” he asked, Lucy bristling at his scathing tone.

“I think it’s a very nice name and it matches his hair. Who would have thought someone could be a natural pinkette. Is pinkette even a word?” Lucy replied, finger coming up to her lip as she thought about the strange word. Gray’s sputter brought her back to the table, and she eyed him curiously as blush spread across his nose again.

“How do you even know it’s natural? Pink hair? So this guy has pink hair, tattoos, drives a motorcycle, and doesn’t have a real job? Yeah, real catch there Lucy,” Gray seethed. Well only Lucy could tell he was seething, his jaw was twitching a little and his eyes were pinched underneath his mask of indifference.

“He also has piercings,” Lucy snapped, “and I don’t understand why you’re being so, so rude about it! Sure he’s a bit eccentric, what with the weird shops and colognes, but he’s sweet, and kind, and goofy. And he’s a perfect gentleman, hasn’t even tried anything in the nights he’s slept over,” Lucy defended, blushing a deep red when she realized what had just slipped out. She hadn’t meant to tell Gray that Natsu had been basically living at her place for the past few days. Gray’s eyes were the widest she had ever seen them, blush spread across the tops of his cheeks and ears. Recovering quickly, Lucy started to tell Gray about her shopping adventure with Natsu at Ichyabrada or whatever it was called.
“I mean the shop was just so strange,” Lucy squeaked, talking quickly so that Gray didn’t have the chance to get a word in as his jaw continued to gape like a fish’s. “There were all these flowers that Natsu said he used for his ash paintings, which he makes plenty of money with, but I had never seen most of them. Weird books and jars full of all sorts of coloured powders, I think I even saw a few pieces of bones on display,” Lucy’s voice had slowed, turning more into a hum as she reminisced about what she had seen in that quirky little shop. A sly smile pulled at her full lips as she recalled her second purchase from the store. “I even bought Happy some catnip, oh you would’ve thought I had just killed a puppy from the look of horror on Natsu’s face,” Lucy chuckled. He had gone even paler than when he had to get in the car, fully begging Lucy not to buy the small bag of herbs. Which he really should have known would just egg Lucy on.

“Where was this shop?” Gray interrupted, his previous state of embarrassment gone. Now there was a sharpness in his eyes, and an unexpected tightness in his body. All of his movements were stiff as he waited for Lucy to answer him, unease soaking into Lucy’s skin.

“Umm, down in the Garden’s, I think,” Lucy said warily, watching as Gray sucked in a sharp breath.

“That’s a bad place Lucy. You shouldn’t go there again, it’s not safe,” he warned, voice serious even for him. Lucy looked at him puzzled, Gray continuing to speak in hushed tone at her confusion. “You don’t want to be caught up with their type.” he hissed, eyes narrowing.

Lucy’s face turned into a scowl, she did not do well with being told what to do and even less with bigotry. “What ‘type’ is that?” she bit out, shoulders straightening as Gray let out a huff of exasperation.

“Lucy, the people there are dangerous. They’re not normal, they fuck around with things that people aren’t meant to understand,” Gray explained slowly, only serving to confuse Lucy more. She was saved from asking what the hell Gray was talking about when a plate of food was lowered in front of her, looking up to see an amused expression on Cana’s face.

“He going on about magic and bullcrap again?” Cana asked, knowing smile twisting her lips and sparking mischief in her dark brown eyes.

“It ain’t bullcrap,” Gray growled out, teeth clenched and eyebrows drawn. Cana rolled her eyes and waved her hand at his expression, giving Lucy a conspiratorial wink.

“Sure sure, ’cus witches are real and there’s a man on the moon. C’mon Gray, you know that stuff is just for kids. That’s like thinking I can predict the future,” Cana sighed, wiggling her fingers in Gray’s face at the last sentence. He scowled down at his soup and Lucy threw a piece of lettuce at Cana’s head.

“Be nice, I think it’s sweet he believes in magic,” Lucy said, pouting when Cana threw back her head in a cackle, swaying on her feet.

“And you guys call me the drunk, might want to double check the juice that you’ve been drinking,” she stated, pulling up a chair from the table behind Lucy and sitting on it so that her arms rested on the back, legs on either side of the seat. “And don’t get it wrong, cutie, he doesn’t believe in the happy-go-lucky puke fest of Disney. No, the guy with the stick up his ass over here’s all up in arms about voodoo and spells and demons. Nothing ‘sweet’ about that mess of crazy,” she finished, looking out of the corner of her eye at Gray as though daring him to speak up. Lucy shifted uncomfortably in her seat at the sudden tension in the group. Magic couldn’t be real, that would just be ridiculous. No matter how every time Natsu and Lucy came into contact for too long the temperature around her rose, or that Happy seemed far too intelligent to just be a simple cat. But it was just silly things her mom used to tell her about when she was a child. Magic didn’t actually exist.
Putting on a smile Lucy turned to Cana, voice overly cheery and inquisitive. “So Cana, how’s the new review of that wine place in the West District?” The rest of the meal was filled with laughter and bickering, each nagging the other about a looming due date for a piece or telling stories about their latest interview. Cana was a freelance food and beverage critic, the constant glass of alcohol in her hand making her a connoisseur when it came to the more adult drinks. Gray was chief journalist for Sorcerer’s fashion articles, always somehow knowing what was up and coming in the world of couture, which was ironic considering he was always trying to get naked. Not that it was on purpose, it was just that Gray had been born in a colder climate and was constantly overheating when he had first moved to Fiore. The stripping habit had stuck unfortunately, even over 15 years later.

“Gray, you better not be undoing your belt,” Lucy chimed before taking a bite of chicken off of her fork. Gray froze in his spot, belt unbuckled in his hands and almost pulled from their loops on his black jeans.

“Ah fuck, not this shit again,” Gray cursed under his breath, cursing his habit and looking around for his shirts. Cana let out a low whistle as her eyes traced over his bare chest, red spreading on his shoulder tops as he avoided her coy smile. Lucy had to admit he was well toned, prominent ab muscles and strong arms with skin almost as pale as Lucy’s stretched tightly over the cords. Her nose wrinkled at Cana’s obvious enjoyment of his show, a put upon pout working onto the brunette’s face as Gray shrugged on his hoodie once more. She took a sip of her drink - when had she even gotten a beer? - and Lucy gave Gray a sympathetic smile. Once Cana had no more eye candy from Gray she turned her attention to Lucy, and the blonde couldn’t help but wish that Gray was still naked.

“So, any guys gotten lucky enough to feel that nice rack of yours up yet Lu?” Cana asked, voice rough and eyes glinting in a way that made Lucy draw her thin white over shirt tighter around her body. “Or maybe any girls?” Lucy sputtered a little under such a coquettish look, Gray rolling his eyes at how easily Lucy was flustered by sexual attention.

“Oi, ya perv, if she was interested she would have taken ya up on it by now,” he barked out, a small grin pulling at his lips despite his harsh tone. Cana grinned back at him, words starting to slur a little as she finished her drink.

“Eh, always worth a shot. Especially when it comes to little miss cup size E here,” she purred, looking at Lucy through her lashes again.

“Ca-Cana!” Lucy shrieked, arms coming up to cover her chest. She wasn’t shy about her body, but having her sizes said aloud in front of Gray made her anxious, like if a brother had found her underwear. Gray covered his ears at the same time that Lucy yelled at Cana, sending daggers with his eyes at their drunk friend.

Cana lifted her hands in self defense, shit eating grin never wavering on her face as she spoke. “Hey, I’m not the once wandering around in a pink halter top with pretty black lace popping out,” she said sweetly, Lucy flushing a deeper red. She had liked her outfit this morning, and maybe she had appreciated how Natsu’s gaze had wandered a little too low for little too long, but who didn’t need a little confidence boost every now and then? The fact that is was from a particular pink haired male having nothing to do with it. None.

“Yes, you do actually,” Gray said in a flat tone, obviously implying the shirt that was essentially a bra that Cana was currently wearing. She shrugged and smirked over at him, stealing a piece of the toast that came with his soup. Lucy relaxed again and the three fell into easy conversation, Lucy’s cheeks starting to hurt from their constant smile.

She couldn’t wait to introduce them to Natsu.
Eight

3 months.

Natsu had been sleeping over, raiding her fridge, invading every aspect of her life so fully that Lucy didn’t think the two were separable anymore, for 3. Damn. Months.

And the bastard still hadn’t kissed her.

Now Lucy would be the first to admit that she was oblivious to men’s and women’s attentions -never fully able to decide if someone was flirting with her or just being nice- but even Lucy knew there was something going on between her and Natsu. They were constantly touching, holding hands or cuddling on the couch, bumping shoulders with one another or even playing footies when one of them was feeling particularly brave. Lucy may have become addicted to running her hands through his wild hair, detangling knots with her fingers and twirling the long, fluffy strands around her fingertips. Natsu was no better, constantly taking down her hair only to put it back up in new arrangements of pony and pigtails, Lucy having to fight back her sighs of happiness when she felt his rough hands trail through her hair. Now that she thought about it, both of them needed to get their hair trimmed. But that was besides the point, and Lucy had half a mind to grab Natsu by the shoulders and shake him, screaming ‘what are we?’ until he gave a suitable answer.

Lucy needed to spend less time on the internet.

But more importantly, Lucy needed to get laid.

At least according to Cana, but Lucy wasn’t going to be the one to disagree with her alcoholic friend. This wasn’t exactly what she should be thinking about right now, but really it was Natsu’s fault. He had pulled her down so her head laid neatly on his chest as they lounged on the couch, some fake documentary about dragon’s playing in the background. Her body was completely covering his, hips falling between his open legs and one arm buried into the cushions of the couch while the other was dangling off the edge. But it wasn’t their intimate position that had started Lucy down this inappropriate train of thought. No, it was Natsu’s fingertips trailing up and down her spine in lazy movements, heat flaring through her thin shirt with every pass.

She nestled her head higher up so that it was tucked under his chin, shifting one arm so that she was cupping the back of Natsu’s shoulder. She felt more than heard his breath catch at her blatant move, and Lucy felt a small spark of hope grow that maybe, finally, Natsu would get the hint. Instead he settled his hands more firmly on the small of her back and stopped his lazy movements.

Lucy was soon unable to help the large grin that pulled at her lips, though, as ever so slowly his fingers snuck underneath her shirt - that honestly was Natsu’s shirt. Hey, she did his laundry half the time and deserved a few compensations- and spread so his hand was laid flat on her skin. Lucy hummed at the contact, nuzzling the column of his throat with her nose, face buried into his scarf. And that was when the heat returned.

Lucy had recognized a pattern -no matter how strange it was- that whenever her and Natsu had skin on skin contact for too long the temperature around them would spike. It had grown less noticeable the more time they spent together, but Lucy was highly attuned to it now. The way it spiked depended on Natsu’s mood. Dry air made it harder to breathe when he was angry, a hazy warmth when he was relaxed and content, low and heavy waves when he was sad - something that Lucy had only seen a few times when they had talked vaguely about their home lives. Neither went into too
much detail, only sharing with each other that they had basically grown up alone-. Finally there was
the ‘sexually frustrated’ heat, as Lucy had so lovingly dubbed it. Sweltering humidity surrounded
them, making sweat drip down Lucy’s skin and her muscles want to just melt into him and never let

It was her favourite one.

Lucy had made it a game with herself to see how many times she could make this heat come up, her
record being 12 in one week. Lucy was proud of that fact, even if she told anyone they would think
she was insane. And she might be, because the more time she spent with Natsu the more Gray’s
warnings from the lunch made sense. Natsu wasn’t normal. The tattoo’s on his fingers seemed too
symbolic to mean nothing, as did the tattoo on his back, and Lucy had realized at some point that the
herbal and smoky scent that Natsu carried with him wasn’t some cologne but rather the result of his
projects. His clothes always reeked of the stuff when Lucy had to wash them -she really needed to
teach Natsu how to do proper laundry- and strange splashes of colourful liquids always managed to
find their way onto his sweats and tank tops. Not to mention the runes that Lucy had found on some
of the presents he had given her over the weeks.

Nothing was ever as extravagant as the birdcage, -Lucy had made sure to lecture that into Natsu’s
skull the one time he asked if she wanted a full size center piece- instead he showered her with
miniature figures, bookmarks, small drawings or paintings, and even a few simple pieces of
jewellery. Lucy had attempted to refuse the last ones, but Natsu was adamant, giving her puppy dog
eyes until she accepted. At the thought of it her favourite piece, a simple silver band shaped to look
like a dragon curling around her finger that sat above her mother’s engagement ring on her middle
finger, began to warm, a soothing feeling to remind Lucy that it was there. For some reason it made
her feel protected, as though the dragon would bite out anyone’s eyes who tried to hurt her.

She had a feeling Natsu had made it like that.

She also had a feeling Natsu was a witch.

One of Natsu’s hands had left her back, trailing through her loose blonde hair at the nape of her neck
instead. The temperature around them returned to almost normal, Lucy’s mental distraction giving
Natsu time to cool off, literally. His hands slowed their ministrations as he ghosted along the skin of
her neck, running curiously over a pattern.

“Hey, Luce?” Natsu questioned as he brushed aside her hair, shifting a little so he could clearly look
at the back of her neck. Lucy made a sound to let him know she was listening, fingers trailing
through Happy’s fur as he rubbed himself against her hand hanging from the couch. “What’s the
thing on your neck?”

Lucy giggled at his vague statement, lifting herself onto her elbows on Natsu’s chest, cooing a little
at Happy as he let out an unhappy -heh, funny- whine at the removal of his scratching hand. She
looked at Natsu again, giving a small smile. This subject was always hard for her to talk about, but
maybe it was time.

“It’s a tattoo of a key in white ink,” she said softly, “I got it the day after I ran away from home.”

So maybe that wasn’t the best way to announce she had been homeless for a few months, but Lucy
really didn't think there was any right way. Natsu’s eyes were wide as he started down at her, and a
light giggle erupted from her stomach as she could practically see Natsu try and figure out what to
say.

“My mom used to say ‘The key to’ whenever she was teaching me a lesson, whether it was about
happiness, success, or just something random like magic,” Lucy continued, keeping an awareness in the back of her mind for Natsu’s reaction to the last word. She’d catch him eventually. “So when I ran away I got it, kinda like she’d always be watching over me,” she said, eyes glazing over as she thought of her mother. Layla Heartfilia had been a large part of Lucy’s life for the short time she was in it, loving and supportive and warm. Lucy still kept her mother’s writing desk and reading chair, placed in the office so when Lucy wrote she was surrounded by her mother's spirit. Just like how she would always carry the reminder of her on Lucy’s skin.

“Why would you want her to be with you if you ran away?” Natsu asked tentatively, tone cautious as his eyes explored her face. Lucy gave him a small smile, eyes closing and head tilting into his hand when he tucked a stray tendril of blonde hair behind one ear.

“She died when I was younger, two weeks after my tenth birthday. I loved her so much, she was my best friend. I was homeschooled, stuck in a giant mansion with no other children, so my mother would humor me, playing my make pretend games and reading stories to me. We even played fairy princess, where I would cast spells and she would ooh and awe,” Lucy’s voice was faint, lost in thought of easier times and a warm home. “Father was always busy with work, but he was happy when he was able to see us, encouraging our games and my imagination. But Mother got sick suddenly, and we lost her within a month. Father was never the same, burying himself deeper into his work. He hired more servants to look after me, angry old men and women who would use the rod if I spoke out of turn or did too poorly on a test. I was to be raised to be ‘a proper lady’, fit to be married off to whichever business partner my father saw as most profitable. It was lonely, but I had my books and my mothersmemories. That was enough for me, until Father actually tried to introduce me to my betrothed on my sixteenth birthday. Like we were in the 1800’s. I couldn’t take it, so I ran away. Mother never would have let him do that to me, I know it. So I packed a bag and snuck out one night after he left on a business trip.”

Lucy fell silent now, remembering the fear and nerves that had plagued her as she scaled down the three story rose lattice. Her hands had bled through the cloth she had wrapped around them, - sneaking gloves from the gardener had proven too risky- but had continued on. She had taken a bus across town, and moved between shelters for the first two months, always cautious in case she was recognized. Not that anyone in the shelter was likely to be familiar with the face of the Great Jude Heartftlia’s shut-in heiress, but it wasn’t a chance Lucy was willing to take. A rough pad stroked across her cheek, and Lucy lifted her gaze to look at Natsu.

A warm fuzziness grew in her chest, one that was both Natsu’s making and not. Maybe he had cast a spell on her with his open onyx eyes, or the honest quiver in his lip as his gaze traced her features, but Lucy didn’t care. The ‘L’ word was coming closer and closer, and Lucy wasn’t sure how much longer she could beat it back. Lord knew the tenderness with which he cupped her face only served to push her farther towards the edge. Trying to shake the thoughts from her mind Lucy gave him a misty smile, toying with the ends of his scarf.

“Hey, it’s not all bad right? Sure I was homeless for a couple months, but that’s how I met Gray! He was volunteering at one of the centers I stayed at some times and offered to let me stay with him. It let me have a warm place to sleep and address to give to jobs. The next year I went to highschool with him and met Cana and Levy, and the rest is history,” Lucy finished with a large smile, hoping to dispel the sad mood that was made known through the gentle heavy pulses of heat that circled them. Natsu really was an open book. For example he couldn’t hide the curiosity in his dark eyes, or the fact that he was debating asking his questions. Releasing his lip from his teeth he brushed the the back of his knuckles along her cheek, eyes pulled in a furrowed expression.

“Ice Dick’s parents were okay with him bringin’ a random homeless girl to their place?” he asked, disbelief clouding his voice. Lucy smacked his chest lightly at his nickname for Gray before
“Gray doesn’t exactly have parents. He was living with Cana when he found me, I guess you could say we made our only little mismatch family over the years,” Lucy said, suddenly nervous. She didn’t know why, considering Natsu had admitted that he had been homeless for a while too, except much longer. Oh god, here she was complaining about running from her privileged life and finding a new family when she didn’t even know what Natsu had gone through. He’d been on the street for years he said, and she was whining like a spoiled brat. Lucy hung her head as her nerves morphed into shame, trying to shrink into a small ball on his chest.

If Natsu noticed he didn’t say anything.

“And what about your dad?” he asked instead, tilting her chin up to look at him when she released a bitter laugh. Shock and uncertainty filled his eyes, dulling the green flecks Lucy was close enough to see. Lucy shifted her hand so that she could play with the silver bands on Natsu’s left ear, looking away from his gaze as she spoke.

“Father most likely didn’t notice until I missed the second meeting with Dan. The teachers and servants liked me well enough by then to not mention it on the few days he was home, so it took several months. They were punished when he discovered they were covering for me,” Lucy’s lip curled a little as she recalled learning that the entire staff had lost their jobs because of her. No, not her, because of her father. “He was very displeased with my lack of obedience, hiring a black market group to return me to him. Honestly I never thought Father valued me enough to think I could help the business to offset the cost of hiring mercenaries. At least I broke one of their noses when he dragged me off,” Lucy mused aloud in a flat voice, a glimmer in her eyes when she thought about how satisfying it felt to sink her elbow into the man’s face. Really she had done him a favour, resetting his already crooked feature. Natsu however had gone very pale and a chill made Lucy shiver as all heat was sucked from their air.

“He what?”

Lucy’s eyes were drawn to Natsu’s, the blankness and quietness of his voice making Lucy uneasy. His eyes were sharpened with a cold anger, looking so intently at Lucy she had to fight the urge to lean back from his hand, frozen mid caress on her skin.

“Well it’s not like I was going to leave willingly. First breaking in our door, dragging me from my room, hitting Gray. What kind of grown man takes a swing at a 17 year old boy? It’s not like I even knew how to fight, it was more wild kicking and scratching and screaming, they really didn’t need to send a pack of five,” Lucy continued, stopping when Natsu shook his head slowly from side to side. “I meant your dad Lucy. He hired underworld mercenaries to hunt you down and drag you back?” his tone was a harsh whisper, words pushed through clenched teeth as an arm wrapped protectively around her back and his other hand cupped the back of her head. He pulled her towards him until their foreheads touched, his eyes holding a hint of danger when he spoke again. “Did they hurt you?” Lucy shifted a little, palming his neck with both hands and looking at the freckles on his nose. They had spent the day at the park yesterday, taking advantage of the warm weather and playing in the sun. She had been surprised to see the dark dots along his nose and shoulder tops when they got ready for bed, teasing him about how cute they were. Now they provided a good distraction until he called her name firmly, his lips thinning into a scowl when she looked up at him through her lashes.

Losing the staring contest Lucy sighed and lowered her head to tuck back under Natsu’s chin before she spoke. “They didn’t exactly like it when I spat at them, or caught their leader in the balls with my knee,” she said, forcing humor into her voice and hoping Natsu would drop it. His heavy silenced showed that he wouldn’t. “It wasn’t that bad really. Most of them avoided my face, don’t want to
break the package before you deliver it you know? Just a few fractured ribs and a sprained knee from a two story fall. That one was my fault, thought I could jump out the window with my hands tied behind my back. Wasn’t exactly smart but hey, worth a shot right?” Natsu’s arm tightened around her and his hand fist ed in her hair, crushing her to his chest. Natsu didn’t seem to find the humor in her story. Twisting her arms from between their bodies Lucy stretched them above his head to play with his hair. Taking a deep breath through her nose she took in his comforting cinnamon and smoke scent before continuing. She was this far in, might as well finish it.

“At that point they decided I was worth more money than Father had promised and increased their cost. Unfortunately he didn’t have the extra money to spare, so I was held for another week. Turns out he never did have to pay them, what with me managing to escape. It’s amazing how dumb men believe girls are, especially just because I’m blonde,” Lucy huffed, frown pulling at her face from the memories. “Convinced one to untie me and then I waited for him to fall asleep and snuck out. I was almost offended with how much they underestimated me, even if they did think I had broken my leg. That was a bitch and a half to walk on,” Lucy started when she felt more than heard a low sound rattle in Natsu’s throat. Was he growling? He was, Natsu was growling and clinging to her as she told him about her encounter. A ghost of a smile flitted across her face at his display of concern, no matter how odd.

“How did you convince him to untie you?” Natsu asked quietly into the silence that Lucy left behind. Her body tensed at his question, and Natsu’s hands gripped her harder in response. “Luce?” his voice was soft, asking more if she was okay than for an answer to his question. Lucy curled her body into a ball slightly, tucking her knees under one of Natsu’s thighs, shame making her blood run cold again.

“I may have, implied, things. Stuff that couldn’t be done if I was shackled by my hands to a wall behind my back,” she said in a small voice, fearing Natsu’s reaction. He was going to push her away in disgust, she knew it. It didn’t matter that nothing had actually happened, but the fact alone that she had offered her body as a chance to escape made her skin crawl with disgust and the seed of self hatred flare up in her mind. She hadn’t told anyone that, always leaving it vague to the police and her friends how she escaped. So why had she told Natsu? Blinking away the tears she looked at Happy, who stood on the coffee table at full attention with clear concern in his eyes. Were those tear tracks in the cat’s blue fur? Her mind was yanked back to Natsu when he shot up on the couch, pulling Lucy firmly into his lap and winding both arms solidly around her.

“Oh god Luce, they didn’t, he didn’t...” Natsu asked, horror in his voice as he clung to her. Confused, Lucy shook her head against his shoulder, letting her hands rest passively on his shoulders.

“No, nothing extreme at least. A few hands...wandered. But nothing bad. Nothing unforgettable,” Lucy breathed, trying to forget the perverted grin when one had rested a hand on her bare knee, or the way another had tucked a strand of dirtied hair behind her ear. She hadn’t remembered those moments in detail since she had stopped having nightmares a few years ago. She was past it. Natsu, however, was not.

“Who were they?” he asked sharply, tugging Lucy up to look at her face. “I’ll fuckin’ kill them,” he snarled, lip pulled back in a sneer and eyes filled with rage. His hands were gentle when they cradled her face again though, as if he were scared she might break under his fingertips. And Lucy felt like she might, the outrage he was displaying, the pain and anger for her was enough to make her lip quiver. He wasn’t repulsed by her, and that thought made her heart soar. She trailed her hands until they rested on his forearms, shifting in his lap so that she could wrap her legs around his waist.

She was so far over the edge it wasn’t funny.
“It’s not important, Natsu, it was years ago anyway” she said softly, eyes tracing the tight lines around his eyes and taking note of the way his nose was flaring and his jaw was straining. Grinding his teeth like that couldn’t be good for him.

“Like hell it ain’t important Luce! I’ll fuckin’ leave them in ashes for hurtin’ you,” he snarled, furious eyes boring into hers. She gave him a large smile, unable to hold back on the joy that she felt at his protectiveness.

“You sound like Gray,” she teased, trying to distract him. It wasn’t working though, and Lucy already knew that when Natsu got an idea it was like trying to pry a snake off of a tree.

“At least I can agree with that bastard ‘bout something,” he said flatly, leaning his forehead against Lucy’s once more. She nudged his nose with her own, a small smile tugging at his lips from the motion. “Who hurt you, Lucy?” His soft voice pleaded with her, anger dying to a gentle simmer as his worry shone through wide, onyx eyes. Lucy counted the multitude of his dark lashes as she tried to recall fuzzy memories. They had eventually hit her head a few times, and parts were still a blur, not like she tried too hard to remember.

“Phantom something I think. Kings?” she answered. Nose scrunching while she thought. His hands dropped from her face, cupping her waist instead and he looked at her with urgency, leaning even more into her space.

“Phantom Lord?” he breathed in question, a small hiss from Happy making her look between the two. She nodded, baffled when he started to swear profusely as he pulled his face back from hers. Some of those combinations Cana would be proud of. He was muttering to himself, Lucy having to strain even though they were so close.

“How goddamn deep did he go to get that sack of shit coven? Fuckin’ wonder they didn’ kil-” Lucy interrupted his strained mutterings with a call of his name, searching his face for an answer when she spoke again.

“What are you talking about?”

“They’re bad Luce. Real bad. Tried to recruit me when I was on the street, even tryin’ to threaten me when I told them to piss off,” deep onyx bored into her intensely as he spoke, as if he were trying to drill the thought into her brain of how bad those men actually were. “It’s amazing you got away Luce,” wonder filled his eyes as he looked over her, and she blushed under his look that was slowly shifting to adoration. A small smile pulled at one corner of his mouth, and Lucy felt her happiness fade away as Natsu’s eyes glazed over.

“My dad would’ve liked ya.”

His voice was tiny, gaze unfocused as his hands began to rub up and down her back again. Using her hands, Lucy slowly lead him so he was laying back down on her couch and she shifted in his grasp until her back was pressed firmly into his chest. Propping her feet on the armrest Lucy bent her knees, still seated comfortable between his spread thighs. Giving a small nudge to his jaw with her nose, Lucy hummed when a ball of warmth settled on her stomach and she ran her hands through soft fur. A low purr from the cat filled the room as Lucy let her breathing sync with Natsu’s before speaking.

“What was he like?” her question was gentle, and Lucy was fully prepared to wait until he was ready to talk. They had already settled in for the night anyway. So she was shocked slightly when he nuzzled into her hair, one hand coming to play with Happy’s fur as well.
“He was amazin’ Luce,” Natsu said quietly, pride in his voice as he began to talk about his father. “He was the smartest man I’ve ever known, brave, kind, horrible sense of humor. I mean how can you not laugh at my jokes, I’m hilarious,” he huffed, wry grin able to be heard in his voice.

“Did you set something on fire?” Lucy questioned, unable to bite her tongue. Natsu responded with a sullen ‘yes’ and he pinched her hand lightly when she tittered at his tone. She couldn’t help it, he was just too adorable.

Anyway, he was the one that started to teach me how to craft. Oh god some of the shit I made at first was so godawful I still cringe thinkin’ about them, but ya never would have guessed with the way Dad reacted. Igneel would beam and brag about my ash paintings and ya would’ve thought I’d created the next masterpiece from all his boastin’, fondness coated each word as he spoke, and Lucy felt her eyes start to sting. Their relationship sounded amazing. ‘Pretty sure he drove his co-family insane with it. And we used to get into b rawls about me weldin’ at two in the mornin’. He’d kick my ass each time, but I stood my own a few times.”

Lucy was content to lay there and listen to Natsu talk about growing up with his dad for the whole night, and they did for the next few hours. Stories about his first burn or the time they’d travelled over half of Fiore in one day - that had been when Natsu discovered his hatred of all things moving-flowed seamlessly into one another, Lucy sometimes telling a short story about her mother when Natsu’s voice lost it’s expressive vigour and became melancholy. Happy had fallen asleep at some point, and Lucy herself was fighting to keep her eyes open. Natsu was still going through one of the stories about his father, something about getting clay on the ceiling trying to use a pottery wheel.

“Hey Natsu, can I ask a question?” Lucy mumbled. “You don’t have to answer it if you don’t feel comfortable, honestly.” Natsu made a small noise of acknowledgment, and Lucy took a few seconds to gather her courage before she spoke again.

“You keep using past tense when you talk about Igneel, and your home life seemed so much better than mine so I don’t think you ran away. Natsu... What happened to your dad?” Lucy regretted the words as the thick silence swallowed them, her teeth capturing her bottom lip and worrying subconsciously. She flinched when Natsu finally began to move, startling Happy and Natsu, whose movements became slower and more pronounced as he gently tugged his scarf loose. Even more surprising was when it was draped lightly over Lucy’s neck, winding around the two of them and allowing Lucy to rest her head against the entirety of his bare throat. She looked up at him - not that she could exactly see his face from this position- and felt as his adam’s apple bobbed harshly. She looked down at Happy as a solemn mood swept over her, the cat’s eyes fully open and resigned, almost mournful when they raised to Natsu’s face. She could have sworn Happy gave Natsu a nod, and she momentarily forgot about her feelings of unease as she narrowed her eyes at the feline. Happy definitely wasn’t a normal cat.

“I loved him. I still love him so much, Luce. And I know he loved me, even if I was just some brat from off the street,” his voice was rough, jagged edges completely opposite of the normal smooth low purr he spoke with. Lucy twisted onto her side and slipped between Natsu’s body and the back of the couch, winding her arms solidly around his chest and back. Happy was silent during her shifting, and Natsu used the time to try and even his breathing. “Ya should probably know that Igneel was my adopted dad. My mom and birth dad died or somethin’ when I was a baby, leaving me to be raised by my older brother. But there was somethin’... not right with him. He tried to teach me and drag me down into his cult bullshit, but it scared me. I mean, I was just a seven year old kid, what the fuck was I ’posed to do about demons and blood sacrifice and a whole shit ton of other things I’d rather forget. So I ran, and Igneel found me in some dirty, rat infested alley. And he took me in, Lucy, arms open.” Natsu’s voice waivered as he spoke, finally cracking when he registered a wetness gathering on his shirt. Lucy wasn’t even embarrassed to be crying, what Natsu had gone
through was horrible.

“I lived with him for the next seven years, learning and going on all sorts of adventures. Igneel used to tell me he was actually a mighty dragon disguised as a person, and he would roast anyone that tried to take me away from him, even my brother. He was the one that gave me my tattoo on my back for my thirteenth birthday. Said it showed I was becoming a man, just like him,” Natsu’s grip was bruising as he clung to Lucy, but she was too focused on the pain and wistfulness in his voice to even notice. She rubbed soothing circles into his chest, his skin almost burning her through the bright orange material. Lucy opened her mouth to tell Natsu that he didn’t have to keep talking if he didn’t want to, but his next sentence ripped the breath from her lungs in an instant.

“And then, on my fourteenth birthday,” Natsu said distantly, emotion slowly draining from his voice with each syllable, “he was gone. Taken. Everytime I think about that night everythin’ is fuckin’ fuzzy but intense at the same time. Sounds crazy, I know, but it’s the truth,” Natsu took a deep breath, and Lucy’s fingers gripped at the fabric of his shirt, the muscles stretching taunt below her with the heavy inhale. “Like, I can’t remember why I was hurtin’ but I can remember it feeling like my body was trying to shatter and burst into flames from the inside. And I can’t remember the bastard’s face but I know I saw his cloak trailing out my window,” Lucy’s chest ached as she fought to try and bring air back into her chest, her face twisting more and more in horror as her brain started to understand what Natsu was saying. “But no matter how hard I try and forget, I can still see his body. Just laying on the floor like some k-kinda doll. His hands were burnt all the way up to his fuckin’ elbows, and, a-and,” Natsu broke off in a quiet sob, arms pulling Lucy back so that she was lying firmly on his chest again.

“I still get nightmares sometimes,” his voice was nothing more than a scratchy whimper. Lucy breathed out his name, and in response she heard him take a wet, ragged inhale. It was a sound Lucy never wanted to hear Natsu make again, because it was the painful kind of breath that a person would take right before they broke. Lucy was amazed he was keeping it together as much as he was.

“So I ran. I grabbed the emergency bag he always made me hide, and I just fuckin’ booked it. I used to hate carryin’ that shitty thing ‘round, I never understood why I needed it,” his voice turning from bitter to that of a lost child’s as he continued on. “He was ‘posed to be a mighty dragon, so powerful that nothin’ could ever k-kill him.” Natsu lifted a fist to his mouth and Lucy took it as her cue to move. Slowly, like how he had moved when he wrapped his scarf around their necks, Lucy pulled her body up so that she could look at Natsu’s face again.

Tears were welled up in the corners of his glazed eyes, a few solitary tracks running down his cheeks when he closed his eyes under Lucy’s gaze. He was biting hard enough into his tan skin to leave stark white indentations along his knuckles, Lucy’s gentle touch enough to make his eyes fly open and his fist fall from his mouth. “S-sorry,” Natsu rasped, Lucy gently cupping one side of his face as she lowered her forehead to his. It had comforted her before, and she hoped she could give him at least a small part of that feeling.

“Shhh, shhh, you have nothing to be sorry for, Natsu,” Lucy cooed, running her hands through his hair as she comforted him.

“I hate cryin’,” he laughed out shakily, giving Lucy a weak smile as she cooed at him more, fingers gentle as they traced over his face. He took a few more minutes to allow himself to sink into Lucy’s touches, breathing becoming even until eventually he was able to scrub at his eyes with the back of his hand. “Ya know,” he started softly, clasping her hand in his gently and bringing it to brush against his lips. Lucy pulled her lip in between her teeth partially as his soft but chapped mouth ran over her skin, eyes locked into Natsu’s deep onyx as he continued to speak. “I can’t remember the last time I cried in front of someone. Thanks for not, like, lookin’ down on me or somethin’.”
Lucy’s eyes narrowed at his mumbled thanks, and she brought her hands to squish his cheeks together and lift his face back up after he had ducked away from her. Lucy pulled back so that he could appreciate her glare, self consciousness and confusion written plainly on his face. “Why would I ever think less of you for crying, Natsu?” she questioned. She had to fight hard not to return his boyish -and smushed- grin as he looked up at her, all earlier embarrassment gone.

“Emotions aren’t exactly a sign’a strength on the street, ya know? I guess some habits are harder to break than others,” Natsu answered easily, hand coming up to twirl one lock of golden hair between his fingers. Lucy pinched at his cheeks, pulling at them as she pouted down at Natsu. A small noise of pain sounded in Natsu’s throat and she couldn’t help a small smile at the pathetic noise.

“Well you better break that habit. I don’t want you to keep anything that you’re feeling from me, got it?” Lucy said sternly, smile growing as Natsu beamed up at her.

“’Course,” he hummed, Lucy releasing his hold on his cheeks to trail her fingers down to his neck and play with his loose pink strands that gathered there. Comfortable silence fell over the two, a small chuckle breathing past Lucy’s lips when Happy stretched out on the curve of her back before settling himself there. Natsu’s face became pensive, and just as Lucy was about to ask him what he was thinking about he spoke, eyes staring up at the ceiling.

“For as crappy as being homeless was it was still better than going back to him,” Natsu mused aloud, a sour expression pulling at the skin around his eyes and mouth. Lucy continued to look at him in question, her silence pushing him to elaborate. “My brother. I thought I had gotten away from him when I was a kid, but I was wrong. Apparently that psycho had been stalkin’ us, and I know it was him that killed Igneel. Or had him killed. Either way, it’s Zeref’s fault,” his voice was a low hiss when he said his brother’s name, and Lucy couldn’t even begin to think of what to say. Natsu’s own cult leading brother had hunted him down and took away his family? Natsu was still looking at the ceiling, glare strong enough to make a part of Lucy wonder if he was going to burn a hole through her roof. “They would’ve given me back to him if I’d stayed. That’s why I took my bag and ran, I refused to be part of his sick idea of ‘family’. That bastard has no idea what it means to actually care ‘bout somthin’,” he scoffed lowly, eyes blinking quickly as his emotions started to overwhelm him again. Without thinking Lucy leaned forward and pressed fluttering kisses along his cheeks, large eyes pinched tight.

“He’ll never get you now, Natsu,” Lucy whispered in between her kisses, the boy frozen still in shock over her blatant affection. Her lips ghosted over his freckled nose as she continued to speak, tracing his features with her mouth in peppered closed-lip adoration. “You’re safe here, and I’ll never let him take away your family again,” Lucy promised, moving to brush her lips over his forehead. She heard his quiet but sharp intake of breath and rested her forehead against his once more. “I’ll kick his ass if he tries,” Lucy said firmly, gaze strong as she looked deeply into almost-black onyx, emerald green flakes made all the more pronounced by the darkness surrounding them. Kind of like how Natsu’s joyful and silly attitude was made all the more important by his tragic past.

“You’re amazin’ Luce,” Natsu whispered, pride and something stronger than just friendship in his eyes as they flitted over her face before locking with her deep chocolate ones.

“I know,” Lucy teased before leaning down to press a firmer kiss to his cheek. Except Natsu had shifted his head slightly while looking over her, and Lucy’s lips brushed over the corner of his mouth, warmth washing over her skin as Natsu’s breath rushed through parted lips. Flustered, Lucy remained still as her brain tried to process what was happening. It seemed Natsu’s had also over circuited as he didn’t move a muscle either, and the growing redness that Lucy could see swelling in his cheeks gave her confidence the push it needed. Pulling back enough to remove her lips from where they touched his, Lucy closed her eyes as her nose pushed into his while she ghosted her lips
gently over his bottom one, barely able to feel the warm skin against her smooth lips. Lucy was stopped from pulling back farther when Natsu’s hand fisted cautiously in her hair, his face chasing after hers to press his mouth more solidly against hers.

Gentle experimentation quickly turned into something more fiery as Natsu slanted his lips roughly against her mouth after a few shy kisses, Lucy’s tongue pressing questioningly at the seam of his lips in response. Hungriy, his mouth fell open and Natsu cupped the back of Lucy’s neck to tilt her head slightly, allowing him better access when his tongue poked into her mouth, movements still a little shy and awkward as the two slowly fell into a natural rhythm. Lucy pulled back for a breath, grin stretching her bruising lips as Natsu nipped at her lower one and pulled her mouth back to his. Her hands pulled at the roots of his hair, soft strands winding between her fingers as their tongue explored one another’s mouths, heavy sighs swallowed when Lucy ran her tongue tentatively over his sharp teeth or when Natsu forcefully pushed his into her mouth as movements became more demanding between the two. A low moan purred in Lucy’s throat as one of Natsu’s hands skimmed along her back and gropped at her ass, strong fingers kneading the soft flesh. Lucy pulled back and strung rows of open mouthed kisses along his neck in appreciation as his other hand lowered to it’s partner and squeezed sharply on her other cheek.

A cocky -but breathless- chuckle sounded beside her and Lucy mewled and arched her ass harder into Natsu’s hand as he nipped at her ear at the same time he gave her a particularly rough squeeze. Not wanting to be outdone, Lucy pulled away from his neck and guided his head to the side with one hand on his jaw, exposing the silver bands wrapped around the cartilage of his ear. Lucy tongued a them, victorious smirk coating her face when a sensual growl sounded in Natsu’s throat before pulling it into her mouth with her teeth. Lucy lapped at the flesh trapped in her mouth with her hot tongue, satisfaction rolling off of her in waves as Natsu squirmed beneath her, one hand coming up to fist at her long hair again.

“Lucy,” Natsu groaned, voice cracking as Lucy roughly sucked on the metal bands and turning into a whine as he tried to tug her mouth back to his. Relenting, Lucy allowed Natsu to guide her lips back to his, a hungry gleam in his eyes as the two looked at each other through hooded eyes. His tongue was pushing back into her mouth before their lips were even squared, movements becoming more controlling as he dominated her mouth. Natsu would play with her tongue and lead it into his mouth before sucking it roughly or scraping it along his teeth again, Lucy’s hips jerking against his involuntary in response.

With a gasp Lucy pulled back, heat pooling in her stomach at the erotic flush coating Natsu’s cheeks and the hot intensity that bore into her eyes. Her chest heaved as she struggled for breath, finally becoming aware of the almost blistering heat that was making her clothes stick to her skin and a sheen of sweat gather at the back of her neck. “Fuck,” Natsu growled as his eyes took in her mussed appearance, -familiar warmth indicating that she too had red spread across her face- and she struggled to keep her eyes open to continue looking at him.

“Yeah,” Lucy breathed, voice roughened from their unexpected make out. A loud and irritated meow to their side startled both of them as Lucy started to lean into Natsu again, and Lucy almost gasped in horror at the displeased and -very judgmental- look Happy was giving them.

“Ohh, Happy I’m so sorry we forgot about you,” Lucy murmured, climbing off of Natsu and taking Happy into her arms. She nuzzled the cat as she walked to the kitchen, continuing to soothe the small blue animal. A loud whine sounded from the couch where Natsu still laid, but Lucy ignored him. She had neglected Happy first, after all, and it must have traumatized the poor thing to be there for the -rather sloppy- make out. “How about a bedtime snack of salmon, hmm, buddy?” Lucy questioned, large smile lighting her face when Happy let out a chirp in agreement.
“But Lushiiiiiii,” Natsu called, sullen eyes poking out from above the back of the couch. A small giggle erupted from Lucy -who quickly covered her mouth at his unimpressed glare- and she spoke over her shoulder as she readied Happy’s apology fish.

“It’s late anyway Natsu, we really should be turning in soon.” A grumbled reply was her only answer but Natsu trudged to her kitchen diligently, shoulders hunched and grey grandpa cardigan falling to almost completely cover the bright orange tank top that Natsu was wearing. Lucy still had no idea where he found such offensively coloured clothing. Her eyes were quickly saved, though, when Natsu wound his arms around her middle and pulled her back against his chest. Resting his chin on top of her head Lucy pretended to not hear his mutterings of a ‘tiny blue cockblock’ as the pair watched Happy scarf down the last of the pink fish.

Peace washed over Lucy as Happy gave a pleased meow to signal that he had forgiven them, Natsu’s ring on her middle finger heating comfortingly as she fiddled with it. No matter how odd her little family was now, Lucy knew that she would never change a single hair on their bodies, magical or not.
As a rule, Lucy always woke up after Natsu. It wasn’t that Lucy had started sleeping in, but more that Natsu got up before the goddamn sun. And Lucy knew this as the first few times Natsu had tried to leave her bed in the dark he had woken her up, and while Lucy liked to consider herself a morning person she was none too pleased at being awoken before the stupid birds were singing below her window.

Natsu had learned his lesson. The hard way.

He was much better at leaving her blankets without disturbing her now, going for his early morning workouts. He never told her as much, but Lucy had put two and two together after he kept showing up as she made coffee. Beads of sweat trailing down glistening caramel skin, muscles sometimes still twitching as he came down from his adrenaline rush. Lucy having to fight back the urge to drag her tongue along the slick skin of his collar bone or rib cage...

Anyway.

Lucy was used to waking up to an empty bed again. Well, Happy was there curled at the foot or on Natsu’s pillow, but he didn’t take up nearly as much space as the pink haired man.

Which was why she was pleasantly surprised to feel Natsu’s warm body curled along her back as she slowly blinked the sleep from her eyes. Both were on their sides, Natsu’s knees causing Lucy’s to bend with them, one arm slung across her middle and holding her tightly to his chest. Natsu nosed sleepily at her ear as she shifted her legs into a more comfortable position, and he murmured unintelligibly in his sleep when she settled again. Hot air caressed her ear as he exhaled slowly, the soft heat reminding her of how it almost swallowed them yesterday. When they kissed. No, it was more of a complete and utter make out session. Lucy had never been kissed like that before, the closest thing being an awkward peck on the lips after a truly horrible date in 11th grade. But her kiss with Natsu had been... Amazing. Passion and need and affection had consumed her when she kissed Natsu, and she knew in her bones that he had felt the same. Gentle flutters in her stomach broke out as she kept replaying the memory in her mind, one hand coming up to ghost along her lips. A large smile couldn't be forced down, and her giddiness made her restless, squirming a little to press her body closer to Natsu’s.

And then she felt it.

Lucy wasn’t an idiot - anyone that knew her for more than five minutes would tell you that- and she knew what the hard thing digging into her lower back was. She had heard of morning wood before, she had just never, umm... experienced it. And boy, was she experiencing it now. Slowly shifting again, Lucy ground experimentally against the hardness pushing into her ass, lip caught between her teeth as Natsu made a low noise and pushed back into her lazily.

Natsu nuzzled further into her neck, past her hair and lips brushing against the sensitive skin on the hollow of her neck.

“Lucy,” Natsu's sleep roughened voice groaned, the deep growl enough to turn her bones into jelly.

Lucy’s gentle hum at the feel of his lips turned into a sharp inhale when she felt a rough squeeze to her breast, Natsu’s hand having snuck up her front while she was distracted. Groaning as he stretched his legs slightly, Natsu continued to knead the supple mound in his hand, Lucy’s chest arching and her legs squeezing together as desire flared in her blood. Heat was surrounding her
again, Natsu's breath on her neck, his body wrapped so tightly around and rubbing against her, the heat growing at the apex of her legs.

“Mornin’,” Natsu said gruffly, lips pressing a gentle kiss onto her pulse point. Lucy felt the smirk on her neck as she mewed, Natsu's other arm squeezing between the bed and her body to push her tightly against him and causing his length to press - *wonderfully lewdly* - against her ass. Twisting her neck, Lucy breathed out a soft greeting before pressing warm lips sweetly against his. “I like that noise you make,” Natsu murmured after he pulled back a little, devilish glint in his drowsy gaze at Lucy’s confused expression. Giving a rough roll with his hand into her breast, Lucy's eyes fluttered shut and she gasped a heedy sigh as Natsu palmed her hard nipple.

“Yeah, that one.” Natsu leaned forward and caught her lip in his teeth mid moan, pricking at the plump flesh with their sharpness. Lucy pushed forward, claiming his lips hungrily and swallowing his noise of surprise at her sudden movement. Despite his early cockiness, Natsu’s reaction time was still dulled by sleep and Lucy used it to take the lead as she kissed him. Her tongue slipped into his mouth, rolling with his and she took her time exploring the wet hotness. Natsu seemed more than happy to let Lucy control their pace, his hand still slowly squeezing and roaming her body. Twisting her body out of it’s awkward position Lucy rolled so that her chest was pressing against Natsu’s bare one, only her thin sleep shirt acting as a barrier between their skin. His warm hands now rested on Lucy’s back, their play things having left their grasp.

Lucy peppered gentle kisses on Natsu’s kiss swollen lips, a hum of contentment making Lucy grin as she ran her nails along his scalp with languid motions, combing through his wild, bed messed hair. One of Natsu’s hands trailed from her back and ran along the bare skin of her arm, calloused fingertips brushing pleasantly on her soft skin. “Ya know,” Natsu drawled, mouth free as Lucy was currently nibbling on one of his earlobes, surely and steadily making her way to those enticing silver bands located on the top. “I’d be more than happy if ya wanna wake me up every mornin’ like this.” Lucy giggled a little and released the flesh she had been rolling between her teeth, lowering her face to look at Natsu through her lashes, batting them a little as she drew her own lip into her mouth.

“Well as long as I’m not bothering you...” Lucy teased, fingers trailing gently over his face. Her index finger traced the outline of his lips, poking in slightly as his mouth fell open and his tongue flicked out to lick it. Lucy drew back her hand with a sharp ‘eep’, pouting up at Natsu as he cackled at her sound. “I guess I’ll just stop then,” she stated before rolling over onto her other side again. Natsu’s hands were frozen in the air above her body as he tried to understand what had just happened, and Lucy tried her best to hide her prideful smirk.

“Lushii, don’t be like that,” Natsu whined as he curled around her again. Dropping his head into the crook of her neck, Natsu nosed at her ear and huffed as Lucy continued to ignore him. He called her name again, drawing the word out over several seconds and squeezing her body tighter against his. Lucy couldn’t help it and broke into soft laughter, Natsu’s happy sound as she finally broke her silence spurring her on. An idea sprung into Lucy’s thoughts as Natsu continued to hug her, and she would have been rubbing her hands together like an evil cartoon villain if it wouldn’t alert Natsu. Rolling her hips sharply back into Natsu’s Lucy hummed triumphantly as she heard him curse lowly, one hand digging into the flesh of her hip. Purposefully rubbing herself against him a few more times, Lucy waited until she felt the sticky hot air start to surround her again and Natsu’s rough movements back against her made her mind blank for a second before she remembered her plan. Lowering her hand to cover his, Lucy bucked harshly into his crotch, sighing audibly as his cock ground into her ass. Natsu grasped at the skin where her sleep shorts had ridden low, fingers reaching underneath the waistband and toying with the strand of lacy material hidden beneath, hissing in pleasure at the pressure against his hardness.
And then Lucy rolled away from him.

A big enough space for a third body laid in between them, Lucy looking at Natsu with wide, innocent eyes. Natsu’s were also enlarged, but betrayal and sexual frustration were the main emotions in the dark colouring. Lucy blinked at him, feigning dumbness at his irritated whine and dodging the hand he reached out to her. Her bed was large enough so that when she rolled away from him Natsu’s hand was barely able to reach her. Natsu pouted at her as he let his hand fall onto the pink sheets, fingertips ghosting Lucy’s cheek. “Why’re ya teasin’ me?” Natsu questioned, brows pulled into a petulant look. Lucy sat up on her elbows and gave Natsu a warm smile.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, Natsu,” Lucy replied lightly, her mask of innocence remaining. Natsu gave a low noise of warning as he saw through her look, fingers stretching towards her again. His eyes narrowed and he huffed irritably though his nose as she dodged him once more.

“Stop it,” he groused, voice still rough with desire and sleep.

“But where would the fun in that be?” Lucy asked, tilting her head and looking at him with large eyes, clever grin finally pulling her lips up. Natsu made another noise of complaint, letting his body lay listlessly on the mattress as he tried his best to make Lucy take pity on him. His eyes were sad and he looked at Lucy through his lashes, utter defeat written on his face. At least that was what he tried to portray to Lucy, but she knew him better than that by now. The second she gave into his puppy dog look he would have her pinned to the bed and would tickle her until she was begging him to stop.

She may have fallen for that look one too many times before.

“But you’re so cute when you’re frustrated,” Lucy cooed, having to bite her lip to hold in her laughter at his outraged look.

“I ain’t cute,” Natsu yowled sourly, voice falling into a low muttering as he half buried his head into the pillow, arms pulling it in a hug against his head. “I’m fuckin’ badass. Or sexy. ‘Cute’’s for girls and pussies,” he grumbled to himself, sharp eyes glaring at Lucy when she couldn’t hold in her snickering. Natsu opened his mouth to complain louder at her -very cruel- treatment of him when a grating vibrating sound to the left of Lucy’s bed sounded. Her face fell into blank shock in a second, Natsu’s eyes lighting up at his chance for revenge. The phone was on his side of the bed.

“No,” she said firmly, but Natsu’s face only twisted into an evil grin at the challenge. Both lunged for the phone at the same time but Lucy was too slow and far away, the starry blue case pressed against his ear as he answered her phone, boasting smirk proudly on his face. He cockiely eyed Lucy as he spoke, confidence dripping in his tone.

“Yo,” he said simply, Lucy groaning and falling to the bed in a huff at his poor phone etiquette. Natsu’s perturbed expression at her dramatics sinking into one of fear as he continued to talk to whoever had called her. “A-ah, hello Erza,” Natsu’s eyes were wide in horror as he sat frozen to the bed, gaze pleading with Lucy for help. “Uh huh, this is Lucy’s phone. I know it’s early, you’re the one who called at the shit- yes ma’am. Well her phone was on my side of the bed. No-not that I sl-slept o’re course! ’Cu-cus Lucy and I ain’t marri- Oi! The fuck you mean by that? You sayin’ that I’d hurt her, ‘cus that’s just retard- Erza I’m sorry don’t kill mee,” Natsu’s panicked voice and wild hand movements signalled Lucy that her door was about to be broken down by an angry redhead on a warpath if she didn’t take over soon. Taking the phone from his grip Lucy rolled her eyes as Natsu cowered behind her and glared at the phone warily, as if Erza would jump out of it and attack him on the spot.

“Good morning Erza,” Lucy said calmly, trying her best to hide her exasperation at the interruption.
It was only 8:00 AM.

“Lucy, is he attacking your purity?” Erza’s voice was deadly serious, Natsu pale when Lucy snuck a glance at his face from the corner of her eye. She would have sputtered and rambled in embarrassment at the implications of her friend’s question if it wasn’t so early and if she wasn’t used to Erza’s odd mannerisms.

“No Erza, everything is fine,” Lucy mollified, Erza’s disbelieving voice interrupting her sentence.

“It’s not proper for a young lady such as yourself to have a man sneak into her bed. I can correct his behaviour for you if you wish,” Erza offered, Natsu gulping loudly behind her and sinking further behind her back at her threat. Lucy looked over her shoulder and down at his large eyes, raising an eyebrow at his cowardice. ‘Don’t let her castrate me,’ he mouthed at her, Lucy having to slap a hand to her face to cover her snort at his pathetic plea. “Lucy?” Erza questioned, tone suspicious at the blonde’s silence.

“No, no that won’t be necessary, thank you though Erza. Natsu would never try anything, and if he did I can take care of myself. You are my teacher, after all,” Lucy said easily, reaching behind her with her free hand to ruffle Natsu’s hair at his breath of relief. He was so silly, as if Lucy would let Erza hurt him before she had fully explored all of his assets.

“This is true,” Erza said in agreement, kind tone quickly replacing her dangerous one. “Anyway, Kagura called to say she wouldn’t be able to teach sparring with me this morning and you’re the best after her. Would you be able to to come in for 10?” Erza’s words made it seem less like a request and more like a demand, and Lucy shook her head with a smile as she talked.

“No problem Erza, I’d be glad to help.”

Natsu was less than happy with Lucy’s agreement, and made his complaints apparent after Lucy hung up the call. Lucy shushed him with a chaste kiss, cuddling onto his chest. “I still have an hour and a half to get ready, no need to be so pouty,” Lucy chastised. She chuckled at his continued mutterings and placed a few innocent kisses onto his shoulder and pectoral muscles, Natsu’s hands finally coming up to play with and twirl her loose hair.

“I don’t see why ya had to agree with helpin’ that devil lady when you’d obviously rather be here,” Natsu teased smugly. Lucy swatted at his chest before pulling away, arms crossing over her chest in a huff and looking away as heat flared along her cheeks and ears. She hadn't meant to be so blatant about it. “‘Sides, nothin’ wrong with not bein’ able to keep your hands off me,” Natsu continued to say, cheeky glint in his eyes as they roamed over Lucy’s kneeling body. In her shifting away from him she had left the blankets, revealing her in her pink and frilly sleep tank and shorts. She narrowed her eyes at him in embarrassed anger when he only continued to smirk at her, arms bent behind his head.

“You're the one who wouldn't stop kissing me last night,” Lucy grumbled, recalling the dozens of stolen kisses Natsu had snuck as the pair tried to fall asleep. Natsu reached out and tried to tug Lucy back to his side, but she stubbornly refused to leave her kneeling position. Natsu rolled his eyes at her set glare, tugging on her a bit more firmly.

Lucy didn't move.

Lucy cocked her head to the side in confusion as Natsu suddenly lowered his eyes from hers, fidgeting under the blanket. His hand loosened his grip on her arm while still resting on it, warmth flowing through her body from the contact. “Natsu,” Lucy questioned, having to bite her cheek to hold back her smile at the blush crawling up Natsu's neck.
“I kept worryin’ that it was just a dream or somethin’,” Natsu mumbled, Lucy's mouth falling open at his admittance. He still refused to look at her, and his body was shifting uncomfortably next to hers, clearly not used to saying something so vulnerable.

“You’re so adorable,!” Lucy squealed as she dove back into his side, unable to fight back her giggles as Natsu loudly objected her comment. “You're like a giant cuddly puppy!” Lucy continued to tease, voice sweet.

“O-oi!” Natsu yelped, “I ain’t no fuckin’ puppy! I’mma dragon!” He sulked, shoulders drawing into himself. Lucy brought herself up and pressed a chaste kiss into his flushed cheek, irritation melting off of Natsu at her caring gesture.

“Then you’re my giant cuddly dragon,” Lucy hummed, beaming up at Natsu’s fond gaze and small smile. He lifted a hand to cup her face, thumb tracing the top of her cheek as he spoke in a soft tone.

“I can live with that.”

Lucy stretched her arms above her head, shoulders popping as the bones resettled and her tendons pulled at her tight muscles. The kid she had been sparring with at first had been too cocky for her taste, but she had agreed to spar with him for fear of a lawsuit if Erza had been his partner.

It would not have gone well.

It didn’t go well with Lucy either, the boy getting frustrated that a ‘blonde bitch’ was able to block and counter his - barely adequate- attacks, and after he had thrown a particularly violent roundhouse kick and sucker punch combo Lucy was one muttered comment away from throwing the teen’s ass out onto the curb. Instead he had challenged her to an actual match, and after a quick look to Erza for approval she had agreed. The early Saturday morning class had gathered around the ring, all buzzing with excitement at watching a teacher and student have an actual match only for Lucy to lay him flat on his scrawny ass in two punches.

She had then spent the next hour correcting sparring techniques and showing other students how to use the equipment properly, her sparring partner too scared to come near her, fear of another bloody nose written plainly in his murky blue eyes.

Erza would have broken it -or knocked him out- but Lucy didn’t tell him that. She may have had to cut back on her lessons to once a week, what with her two jobs and yoga classes, but the four classes a week she had taken in Crocus for three years had made her a powerful fighter. Nothing compared to Erza, but the red head was the owner of the studio.

“Lucy,” a voice called behind her, tone kind and strong. Lucy looked over her shoulder, blonde ponytail slipping off of her shoulder and ends tickling the skin on her lower back revealed by her tight black sports bra. Erza was walking towards her, hips swaying with the baggy red material that swallowed her legs, a white sports bra the only thing she was wearing on top. Her own fiery red hair was pulled into a high ponytail as well, bangs falling to cover half her face.

“Thank you again for coming in,” Erza smiled at her, brown eyes softening as they looked at Lucy. Motherly pride peaked out as Erza clapped a hand on Lucy’s shoulder, other hand on her hip. “I’m impressed with how much you remembered, I have to admit I was fearful that your training had slipped over the past few months. I know I don’t spar with you one on one often enough when you have class, but my studies in Vovinam are during the same slot. You must forgive my weakness as your teacher,” she bowed her head in shame as she finished, Lucy waving her hands in disagreement.
“Really, it’s fine Erza! You’ve done enough for me, being my trainer in Crocus and then opening up a place for me when I moved out here! Not to mention our weekly yoga dates, I’m surprised you still have time to master all these fancy martial arts and run the studio. I couldn’t possibly ask any more of you, and you said yourself that I haven’t lost any skill,” Lucy said, voice straining as she tried to ease Erza’s sudden guilt. She was still smiling forcefully and waving with her hands when Erza nodded suddenly, patting her shoulder before heading towards the office.

“Good! Swordsman ship class start next, if you’d like to try your hand at using a blade,” she said as she strode away, tone back to being full of confidence and commanding. Lucy was left standing in the middle of the entrance hall, hand frozen and fingers limp in the air beside her head. That woman’s mood swings put Lucy’s to shame, and even she knew how volatile she could be. Natsu’s expression was enough to tell her if she should be mad or not when she wasn’t listening, the pale fear making an inner voice in her mind cackle as it crossed Natsu’s face.

Speaking of Natsu, he should be waiting for her outside. Adjusting her equipment bag on her shoulder Lucy walked through the double glass doors, eyes squinting at the bright sun. She scanned the parking lot until she saw him, black leather jacket and torn blue jeans regular enough clothing for a motorcycle rider, which he was currently leaning against. His helmet was tucked under one arm, the other with pink flame decals resting on the handlebars- and his hair was pulled back into a ponytail, hairs long enough to start to be pulled down by gravity finally. Lucy stood outside the doors for a few more seconds, watching him. His shoulders were rolled in on himself like when he thought too hard and his face was pensive and drawn, eyes unfocused as they stared at the sidewalk in front of him. His head raised to look at her and his onyx eyes sharpened and lit up when they caught sight of her, large smile breaking across his face and hand starting to raise to wave at her. He froze in the middle of the motion though, features giving way to fear and awkward twist marring his usually impish and carefree grin. Only one person other than Lucy was able to draw that panicked mood from the young -witch- artist.

“I still don’t like how close you are with him, Lucy.”

Lucy fought rolling her eyes at Erza’s disapproving tone, turning to look behind her and at her friend. “And I don’t like how you look down on him,” Lucy said flatly, protectiveness of Natsu over riding her natural fear of confronting Erza. Surprise made Erza’s eyes widen, and her lips pulled down slightly as her eyes flickered back to Natsu for a second before settling on Lucy.

“I do not look down on Natsu,” Erza defended, tone serious but confused. Lucy’s grip on her bag strap tightened, her hand flexing around the rough material as she tried to collect her thoughts. Erza noticed Lucy’s struggle, and a small smile replaced her thoughtful expression. “Natsu is an excellent young man. Exuberant, loyal, kind. But he is also reckless and childish, and I know he is not being truthful with you, Lucy,” Erza said, warning flashing in her eyes as Lucy snorted and looked at Erza with amused exhaustion. She had lost count of how many times her friends had tried to talk her out of being so close with Natsu.

“And what is he lying about, Erza?” Lucy asked, keeping her tone even and polite. Erza only had the best intentions for Lucy, and she had no reason to snap at her friend.

Erza’s brows drew together by a fraction and she fiddled with the band on her loose pants, putting Lucy on high alert. Erza only fidgeted when she was hiding something. “It’s more of a lie of omission,” Erza said slowly, eyes looking over Lucy’s shoulder and in Natsu’s direction, solemn. Lucy looked over her friend’s anxious face before shrugging her shoulder and looking back at Natsu.

“Then he’ll tell me when he’s ready. Everyone has parts of themselves they like to keep private,” Lucy said kindly but definitively, ending the conversation. “I’ll see you Wednesday at yoga.”
Natsu’s eyes were wide in disbelief at her lack of fear of Erza as Lucy walked towards him, smug pride coating his features when he threw her helmet at her. Lucy rolled her eyes as Natsu made a face at Erza before yelping and jumping on the bike, nervous movements spurring Lucy to move quicker. He really did have poor impulse control, and he had a tendency to hide behind Lucy when he pissed off Erza. As though the blonde could provide some sort of shield from her friend’s wrath.

She wrapped her arms firmly around his waist, cheek pressing into the sun warmed leather on his back as the bike roared into life. She ignored the strange expression Erza wore as the pair sped off, and had no idea that kickboxing instructor stood there for several more minutes, staring in the direction they had disappeared.

“Mraow”

“Yes Happy, I’m sorry we ignored you this morning.”

The cat stared at her with aloofness, tail twitching as he sat on the counter while Lucy had him a plate of fresh salmon. He made another noise before falling onto his side, paws stretching into the air and revealing the white patch of fur on his stomach. Lucy tickled his chin and smiled when Happy gave a soft purr before remembering he was annoyed at her and slinking away from her hand. He definitely was a cat, no matter how smart he seemed at times.

“I think you’re more needy than Natsu,” Lucy hummed in amusement as Happy rubbed his head against her forearm but darted away from her when she reached out a hand to pet him. She shook her head as she finished fixing his plate, damp hair sticking to the nape of her neck, still wet from her shower an hour ago. Natsu had left her with only one towel as all the others were in the wash, which she had used to dry her body. She had then left the wet material on Natsu’s side of the bed. It was petty -and Lucy knew she had only really done it because the sheets needed changing anyway- but it was what he deserved for making her compromise her beauty routines. Her hair was already starting to frizz, and the blow dryer would only make it worse no matter how many products she put in it. Curse her thin and delicate hair.

An indignant noise behind her broke her of her reprieve and gave her half a second of warning before arms coiled around her center. “I ain’t needy,” a low voice grumbled in her ear, pout clearly noticeable in his sullen tone. Lucy lifted a hand and pat absently at his face, fingers brushing over his nose and cheeks while she continued to watch Happy eat. She felt Natsu’s turned down lips and the crease in his forehead, his chin resting heavily on her shoulder as he continued to sulk.

“Sure you aren’t,” Lucy placated, a noise of frustration pushing from Natsu’s nose at her coddling tone. He continued to grumble but Lucy ignored him, opting to play with Happy’s ears and tail as the cat had accepted her apology lunch and was now mewing in dry humour while she twitched his pointy ears. She could almost hear a high pitched voice in her head chiming about how weird she was, and she stuck her tongue out at the cat’s imaginary insult. Happy let out a sound that sounded strangely like a laugh, high pitched chirping melodical. Natsu had fallen silent and Lucy turned her head to watch his face, faraway smile resting on his lips as he watched Lucy and Happy play. His eyes shifted to hers when he felt her stare rest on him for too long, and Lucy returned his easy and content grin. A thought sparked in his eyes and he pulled back from her suddenly, one hand unwrapping from the back hug to dig in his pockets.

“Aha!” he said as he brought his hand up in front of Lucy, a small key chain dangling between his fingers. Lucy took a sharp intake of breath and reached out to finger the latest present.

“Doggy,” she giggled lightly. A small figure about the length of her thumb swayed in the air, all white aside from a pointed orange nose and black eyes. It was in a standing position, little paws at
the end of each limb splayed out. It had no ears or tail, but it distinctly reminded Lucy of what she had first thought a dog had looked like before her mother had shown her a picture book. Lucy still secretly liked her version better.

“Ummm, no. It’s ‘posed to be a snowman Luce,” Natsu said slowly, wary and confused as he looked over her expression. Lucy shook her head again and gave him an impish smile.

“Nope, his name is Plue and he’s a doggy,” she stated, ignoring the look Natsu shared with his cat. Let them think she was weird, the small figure Lucy was gently cradling reminded her of happy times with her mother. Like the first time she had heard Layal laugh so hard she cried - which had been when a four year old Lucy had a drawn a very crude picture of what she had imagined a dog to look like-. 

“Did Erza kick ya too hard in the head,” Natsu asked doubtfully, eyebrows raising in submittance and wry grin tugging one of corner of his mouth up at Lucy’s sharp look. “Fine, fine, it’s a doggy,” he relented, arm settling back around her waist after he let the figure drop into her hand. It was lighter than some of the others, which meant Natsu had carved it from wood this time, the smooth varnish covering the paint hiding any of the rough texture of the wood.

“So what should you refuse in terms of payment this time?” Lucy mused aloud, lips quirking at Natsu’s dry snort. “Money? A vacation? Or maybe you want me to make you homemade stuffed peppers?” her tone was teasing now, waiting for a joke about how she didn’t need to pay him or that her cooking wasn’t nearly worth the effort he put into his gift - a flat out lie considering the way Natsu had three helpings of whatever she made- but Natsu suddenly became tense behind her, movements fidgety and unnatural. “Natsu?” Lucy called, twisting in his arms to face him. Or rather, his chest, as Lucy had tilted her chin up to see his face at their proximity.

Her eyes widened slightly when she noticed the soft red on the tops of his ears and the way he worried at his lower lip. His eyes darted around the counter behind her, settling on her questioning ones when she touched her fingers to his chest. He licked at his lips before taking a steadying breath, worry pulsing through Lucy now at his strange behaviour. Why did Natsu look so, not-Natsu like? She had never seen this level of anxiety from him before, not even the night they had kissed.

“I was, erm, wonderin’ if maybe we could have dinner. Like, only if y-you wanted to I mean. As payment. I mean, fuck, you don’t have to. I just, I, shit,” Natsu rushed out, blush growing darker the more he rambled until he looked away with a low curse. His entire body was stiff, eyes guarded and glowering at Happy as she heard that strange chirping laugh behind her. Was Natsu... asking her on a date? She cocked her head to the side and lifted her free hand to turn his face back to hers.

“Did you really make me this as an excuse to ask me out?” Lucy asked him slowly, forcing herself not to let her giddiness shine through. Natsu would really sulk if she accidently called him adorable while he was struggling to ask her on a date. As it was Natsu paled and gulped harshly.

“I, ah, no, I mean yes, I m-mean maybe? ” Natsu squeaked out, Lucy biting down harshly on her inner cheek to stop from grinning like an idiot. Oh god he was just too cute when flustered. “I noticed that you kept picking the wrong key after getting those three new ones, and that you sometimes left’em in the bowl, so I made ya that to help. And as an excuse to, you know.” Natsu hadn’t stuttered this time, and Lucy couldn’t hold back the fondness she felt rush through her. He noticed little things like that?

“Yes,” Lucy said simply, chuckling to herself when Natsu’s face whipped back to hers, hope growing underneath the flustered embarrassment. “Although I don’t see why it’s such a big deal, we’ve gone out for food more times than my bank account is comfortable with,” Lucy teased, tone half serious as she tried to subconsciously lecture Natsu about their spending. Natsu tugged at his
scarf, colour finally returning to his face along with a more subdued nervousness.

“I was actually thinkin’ of cookin’ you somthin’ in my flat this time,” Natsu explained, eyes watching her face intensely as the offer hung in the air. Natsu was inviting her over to his place? To cook for her? Maybe she had taken too hard of a kick from Erza in sparring earlier, because there was no way that Natsu could purposefully be romantic. He scratched at the back of his head, pink hair still pulled back in it’s usual ponytail as Lucy continued to stare at him in baffled silence. “I mean you’re always makin’ stuff for me and Happy, and we kissed before I took ya on an actual d-date,” Natsu stumbled over the word, blushing cutely and clearing his throat. “And I know how important all that romance cra-stuff is to you, so I figured even if I did it in the wrong order I could at least try.”

Without speaking Lucy launched herself at Natsu, lips crashing clumsily into his. Natsu froze for a minute before sinking into the kiss, both sets of lips pulled into too wide of smiles to actually achieve anything. Lucy pulled back and beamed up at Natsu, both too lost in their own world to notice Happy making a sound of disgust and rolling his eyes as he dropped from the counter, time spent falling a little too long and landing a little too gentle for a normal cat.

“Come over in like two hours?” Natsu asked before leaning down to peck Lucy on the lips. She gave a short nod, humming as Natsu pressed his lips on hers again, and again, and again. Each time a little more firmer until the two were properly kissing, Lucy’s hands running through his loose bangs and Natsu pulling her chest tightly against his. A loud and exasperated meow sounded by the door, Natsu pulling back with a grin and speaking while Lucy peppered kisses on his lips. “Two hours,” he reminded. Untangling himself from Lucy, a cocky grin appeared for a second before melting into a loving one when Lucy pouted, standing alone in her kitchen. A swaggering bounce in his step made Lucy roll her eyes as he walked away, even if she did like the way it made his ass sway. Lucy turned away and patted her cheeks when she heard the door close. She needed to pull herself together, she only had two hours to make herself presentable for her date. With Natsu.

*Oh god she only had two hours to get ready for her date with Natsu.*
Natsu couldn't stop pacing. The pasta bake was in the oven, one of the simplest but still ‘romantic’ recipes he had found while trying to make his way through -the truly fucking horrible- websites that had popped up when he googled romantic date ideas. He couldn't tell whether Lucy should be thankful he had subjected himself to that gag-inducing horror or if he shouldn't never speak of it again. Considering some of the gross sex tips he had seen on -Cosma, Kosomo, whatever- he would go for never speaking of it again. But his fear of burning yet another oven apart wasn’t what had him so on edge.

Instead he was mentally going through every single magical thing he owned, and making sure it was shoved into his spare room. His bookshelves seemed more barren to him than usual, but he had enough herbology and mechanic books to make it seem presentable, not to mention the multitude of statues and odds and ends he proudly displayed. Even if Lucy didn’t know their true value she should still know what was important to him. Natsu had a feeling she would like that. All of the bones and stranger ingredients were tucked away in the spare room, along with his work bench, scrolls, extraction setups and spare materials. He nervously tugged at the edges of the long sleeves on his tight black shirt, trying his best to brush off the blue cat fur that clung to his top and his nicest - aka the ones with the fewest holes- pair of jeans. He was still unsure if he should wear shoes. Was it normal to wear shoes in you house? Of course not, but this was a date , and more importantly it was a date with Lucy and oh god what if he fucked it up what if the oven actually did catch fire again-

A gentle weight settled on his head, sparkles dancing through the air as Happy's wings dissolved. “It'll be fine Natsu, just take a deep breath,” the cat’s high voice sighed, tone almost pitying as he tried his best to get his witch to relax. Somehow Happy did help though, the comfort reminding him that if Lucy hadn’t run away screaming in the last few months of being with Happy and Natsu then she wasn’t going anywhere anytime soon. “I don’t even know why you’re nervous,” Happy continued to say, more confused than annoyed, “Lucy’s almost as weird as you. You should have seen the way she kept looking at your butt.” The small feline began to snicker, Natsu feeling his nervous grin melt into a more confident one. He already knew the way she looked at him, but the reminders were nice.

“I know buddy, its just... What if she sees something that freaks her out? Or realizes how much more amazing she is, or...” Natsu started to ramble, yelping when sharp claws dug into his scalp. He quickly detangled Happy from his hair, holding the unimpressed cat by the armpits and watching as his tail flicked in agitation.

“You're doing it again,” Happy said dryly. Natsu narrowed his eyes at the cat, just because he was panicking -and was maybe in danger of setting his kitchen on fire- didn't mean his cat should assault him. Happy rolled his eyes at Natsu’s glare, squirming as he spoke, “Why can't we just tell her,” he whined, finally wiggling free from Natsu’s hold and wings sprouting as he fell to the ground. The feathers tickled as they ran across Natsu’s nose, his face wrinkling as Happy continued to fly circles around his head. “Pleaseeeeee Natsu,” Happy sang, “can't you just imagine what her face will look like when she hears me talk! She's gonna look so weird,” Happy sniggered to himself, eyes sparkly. Natsu however was not looking forward to that introduction, and swatted at the air around his head until Happy flew off and perched on the counter.

“No,” he said bluntly, eyes serious. Happy pouted up at him and sat down on his hind legs forcefully. “I'm serious Happy, its not safe. And I'm not ready yet. Someday, I promise, but not today. At least let me have one normal date?” Natsu tried to compromise, but Happy's eyes were set
in the way that Natsu knew all too well. Happy had already decided he was going to talk to Lucy finally, with or without Natsu's approval. Which meant Natsu was going to have to accept it.

Or lock Happy in the magic room.

“You can't go into a relationship based on lies!” The cat howled from the other side of the door, loud scratching sounds and the gentle pop of failed spells making its way through the wood.

“Why won't you just let me have this,” Natsu sighed, back pressed against the door and his head banging lightly on it.

“I want to talk with her Natsu! Lucy’s so funny and sweet and weird and new! You can't keep hogging her! She's my friend too!” Natsu groaned at Happy's loud -and fair- arguments, running his hands through his loose hair. Lucy had said at one point Taft she liked it when he left it down, so now the pink strands were free to be wild and fluffy to their hearts content. And hopefully Lucy’s.

“If you’d never mentioned the fact that I hadn't taken her on a date yet then we wouldn't be here! This is your own fault!” Natsu barked out, finally taking out his short pocket knife and starting to carve a small silence rune into the door frame, right below the simple sealing one. “Fuckin’ goin’ ‘bout normal couples and how I was messin’ shit up before she even knew what I was,” Natsu grumbled to himself under his breath, Happy still angrily shouting out protests until Natsu sent a short spark of magic into the rune. Silence fell over the apartment, and Natsu sagged in relief.

He was going to owe Happy a lot of fish to make up for this. He rubbed at his temple as he walked away from the door, slowly making his way to inspect his bedroom for the 4th time. His floor was easily visible now, the most important of his magic books and tomes tucked and locked safely in his father's trunk, placed underneath his window at the foot of his bed. All the clothes were either put away or in the wash - Lucy, his personal hygienic angle- and all food containers were thrown away way. The dark hard wood of his floor felt odd on his feet as he was used to the plush carpet Lucy had laid in her own room, and Natsu couldn’t help but compare the two rooms. Natsu’s was quite sparse in comparison, only a double bed on a shitty black bed frame from Ikea, a desk, his trunk, and a small wardrobe decorating the space. Most of the time Natsu had spent at home had either been in the living room or the spare room, working on his projects, working out, or playing with Happy. He eyed the fresh gray cotton sheets on his bed, the small piece of furniture looking nowhere near as comfortable as Lucy’s did.

Flicking the pocket knife open and closed in his hand, Natsu ran his thumb over the magical rune Igneel had carved into it when he gave it to Natsu for his 10th birthday. It was meant to easily create runes, seeding part of the magic so the witch would have to use less of their own or even bypass saying the spell out loud if they wanted to. The rune was fairly simple compared to some of the ones Natsu had seen, especially for what it was meant to represent. Magic itself. Two filled in crescent moons created a circle, two triple lined diamonds sitting in the center of the circle and perpendicular to one another. On the poles of the circle sat two filled small circles and on each corner of an invisible square around the central circle was the symbol for each base rune with a line through it’s centre. A triangle for fire and energy, two wavy lines for air and gentleness, a rectangle for fluids and control, and an oval for the earth and strength. Even the symbols within the circle meant something, the crescents created darkness and chaos, the diamonds light and order. All sealed with the circle that contained and held all of magic, and life. Natsu had remembered being confused and a little scared when he had first seen the crescents, images of the runes Zeref had shown him and used flashing through his young mind. Igneel had then explained to him that magic wasn’t inherently good or bad, but was rather a part of life with it’s own unique story that only a few could read. Magic was made of both light and dark, peace and disorder, and everything that fell between the two. The circle not only contained the pulse of the spell, but also represented that everything was connected, and that
order and chaos were as similar as they were different.

It had gone straight over Natsu’s head.

Now he understood what Igneel had been trying to tell him, and a small smile tugged at the corner of his mouth as he continued to study the worn knife in his hand as he thought about how easily Lucy would understand it. She was far smarter than he was after all, always reading and an answer ready for whatever random question popped into Natsu’s head. She never got angry with him for asking questions, patient and encouraging with her answers, even roping Natsu into debates and shit. He had never thought of himself as the smart type - street smart, sure- but the way Lucy praised some of his ideas and opinions had him glow with pride. And she looked adorable in the reading glasses she had to wear when she used the computer too long.

The longer Natsu thought of Lucy, the more he could envision her sitting cross legged on his bed, typing away on her laptop either about her novel or her latest article. She would be wearing one of his old shirts that she didn’t completely hate - he honestly had no idea why she had taken such a personal vengeance against his clothes, they covered his body and did their job. Who cared if they matched or had holes?- and her hair would be pulled back in a high and messy bun. Natsu would be trying to get her attention back on him, growing bored of tinkering with a small order. He would make small flames dance in his hands or a light show appear, multicoloured sparks swirling around and smoke circling his fingers in intricate patterns. Happy would be sleeping on the foot of their bed, ignoring Natsu and Lucy’s antics, in need of his midday nap. Lucy would eventually give into his distractions, laughing and ooh-ing at his magical displays as she pushed aside her laptop, opening her arms to him. He could see it so vividly, he would tackle her to the mattress at her invitation, small whispers of love and teasing traded between the two before Natsu would claim her lips with his own. Lucy, in his clothes, in his room, surrounded by his magic. The thought made something warm ache in his chest, and Natsu forcefully shook his head to clear his mind, watching as the images faded slowly until all he was looking at was an empty bed once more.

He should be focusing on making sure the first date went well, not daydreaming about the future. Their future, together. Natsu shoved the closed knife into his front pocket, leaving the room. It was just wishful thinking, no matter how real the vision of them on his bed had felt. Besides, Natsu could rarely see the future, his discipline was focused more on fire manipulation and bewitching.

A soft knocking on his front door made him pick up his pace, no apologetic look spared on the door that held Happy and all of Natsu’s world. He’d tell Lucy. Someday. Right now though, he was going to treat her to the most fucking romantic date she’d ever been on.

He pulled the door open, slightly breathless from his growing anxiety and rush to the door. Natsu knew he looked like an idiot standing in the doorway and gaping at her, but damn. Lucy obviously had more of an idea what to wear to a date to impress him, the pink tank fitting nicely to her curves, plunging neckline -thank god for Lucy’s odd taste in clothing- accentuated by the way the shirt stopped just below her ribs. A pale strip of her stomach was exposed between her shirt and high waisted shorts, the jeans also short and with patches of a starry pattern sewn in places. Lucy also wore a shoulderless soft grey cardigan, sleeves resuming mid upper arm and billowing around her wrists, delicate hands swimming in the excess fabric. The back of the material fell to her knees and the front ended about mid thigh, fabric dancing gracefully around her body as she shifted from side to side in front of Natsu, smiling nervously up at him. A pink ribbon was tied around her slim neck, matching the one that pulled a part of her hair into a side ponytail, the rest falling smoothly down her back.

“Hey,” she said softly, sudden shyness new to both of them. Why did it feel like he was meeting her all over again, the way his heart raced?
“Hey,” Natsu breathed, and he continued to stand there and gawk. How did something this gorgeous agree to go out with him? Her soft tinkling laugh made Natsu focus on her large brown eyes, familiar playfulness sparking in their depths as she spoke again. Natsu felt his smile relax and grow the longer he looked at her.

“Can I come in?” she asked, lips pulling up in a teasing grin. Natsu started and stepped aside, gesturing for Lucy to come in before scratching the back of his neck and grinning sheepishly at her.

“Aha, yeah, come in,” he rushed out, letting the door fall closed after Lucy bumped him with her shoulder, comfort calming his frantic heart at her familiar touch. It was just Lucy, no reason to act like a lovesick idiot. Even if he was one. He followed her as she walked slowly to the middle of his living room. She was staring at a specific spot on the wall, eyes narrowing as they studied it.

“Natsu,” Lucy called gently, head turning slightly over her shoulder in his direction but eyes not leaving the darkened spot on his white wall above the couch, “is that a burn mark? On your wall?”

Natsu tugged at his scarf, his mind yelling at him that he knew he should have hung a picture over that.

“Yes?” he said, voice tense. Laughter bubbled in Lucy’s eyes as she finally looked at him.

“Why?” she asked, voice cracking as the first few laughs escaped her. Natsu rolled his eyes at her, shrugging his shoulders as the usual easiness he felt around Lucy warmed his bones. He grinned down at her, arms crossing behind his head before he looked at the mark on the wall, trying to remember why that one was there.

“I think a spark from fire I was usin’ for as ash paintin’ escaped and landed on a blanket that I used to have. Blanket wasn’t saved, but the couch was. And the wall, mostly,” he mused, snorting when he remembered Happy flying around frantically before they shoved the smoldering material into the sink and ran water over it. Natsu was honestly a little relieved the blanket was lost, that thing was scratchy as fuck.

“You think?” Lucy asked.

“Eh, shit like that happens all the time,” Natsu waved his hand, sticking his tongue out at Lucy when she shoved his shoulder again.

“And to think, I’m willingly letting you cook for me,” Lucy teased, snorting at his offended pout. “What are you making me anyway?” she questioned, trying to peek inquisitively around his shoulder and at his kitchen. Natsu tutted at her and placed his hands on where her skin showed through her sweater - whatever it was. He honestly had no idea- to turn her away from kitchen. He rested his chin on her shoulder, smirking as he ran his hands down her arms and pressing his chest into her back.

“No sneak peaks for being so rude,” he chastised, fingers skimming over her stomach as she giggled at his tone. “I am being a gracious host.”

Lucy broke into loud laughter as Natsu suddenly tickled her, crying out in between gasps of breaths and laughter for him to stop. He picked her up instead, her pink and white star patterned socks made visible as she kicked her feet in the air, still yelling at him to put her down. With a huff he did as told, Lucy turning in his arms and winding hers around his neck. Natsu lifted a hand and gently wiped at a stray tear in her lashes, Lucy smiling heart meltingly up at him.

“Ass,” she said sweetly, raising on her tiptoes so that she could rub his nose with hers.
“So loud,” he complained over-exaggeratedly, smiling down warmly at her and returning the loving gesture. He released her reluctantly as she pulled back, moving to inspect his bookshelf. Her finger trailed over the wooden shelves as she looked at the titles, soon lost in one about lizards and another about dragon mythology. As Natsu looked over the trinkets on his shelves he cringed a little, finally noticing now much of it was dragon related. What if he made himself look like an even bigger dork? It wasn’t his fault that his hands naturally formed little dragon figurines as he practiced his skills and new techniques, the more life like ones safely tucked away and flying around the spare room with Happy. Ash sketchings that turned out to be a dragon in motion after the person looked at it long enough, all colours of dragons in all types of poses displayed between plants and candles and books. Even some of the older less magical knickknacks Natsu kept in the open to remind him of Igneel were leaning towards the dragon or fire theme.

Oh god he was a fucking dragon dork.

“This is so amazing,” Lucy cooed, gently cupping the sister of one of the statues he had made her. Her dragon had been a pastel pink -darker than the birdcage- front lowered in a playful pose like a cat. This dragon was white and raised on it’s back legs, front paws in the air as though it were mid pounce. He had meant to give both to Lucy, but something in the back of his mind told him to keep it, the need for a matching set of something with Lucy making his stomach warm. “Did you make all of these yourself?” Lucy questioned, Natsu grinning as he walked over to her.

“Most of them, yeah. How’d ya tell?” he questioned, thumb brushing over the muzzle of the dragon she was still holding.

“You have a style,” Lucy explained, smile widening at Natsu’s shocked expression. “The lines are always flowly and fluid, but there’s still a sharpness to the edges and hardness that somehow works with the way they seem in motion. It’s in everything you do, if I look close enough.” Lucy hummed as she leaned her head against Natsu’s shoulder, not noticing the way he was still gaping down at her. Even he hadn’t noticed that pattern, only making what he envisioned and felt that the material wanted to become.

She was so amazing.

Lucy blushed as she looked up at him, nervously twirling a strand of hair between her fingers, sleeve dropping to reveal the multiple rings she was wearing. One of which was Natsu’s. “What are you staring at me like that for?” she asked, lip caught between her teeth when Natsu gently lifted her chin up. Slowly he lowered his face down to her, praying that his mask of confidence wasn’t about to break. If he was ever only going to be smooth once in his life, please God let it be now.

“Can I not just look at my girlfriend?” he whispered, grin revealing a pointed fang as Lucy’s eyes widened and red raced across her cheeks. Fuck did Natsu love making her all flustered and blushy, it was almost as good as watching her get riled up. Gently he placed his lips on top of her open ones, Lucy still trying to process how easily - HA! Natsu had nearly stuttered as he said girlfriend - he had called her that. As Natsu moved to pull away from her lips Lucy finally thawed, one hand lifting to cup the back of his neck and pull him towards her. Natsu chuckled against her lips as he let her take control, Lucy nipping at his bottom lip in retaliation. So that’s how she wanted to play, huh? Without warning Natsu scooped her, Lucy shrieking even as her legs wound around his waist. She smacked playfully at his shoulder as he walked towards the couch, sitting down ungracefully but still keeping Lucy firmly in his lap. He hummed in contentment as Lucy slowly raked her hands through his hair, his own hands slipping under her cover and thumbs running along the revealed skin on her back.

Lucy leaned forward, trailing her lips over his jaw, Natsu letting his head fall against the back of the couch. He could have burst out laughing when he felt her tongue trace the outline of his cartilage
piercings, each one helping advance his eye sight so that he could faintly see the magical aura around his objects. As a byproduct it also made his eyes a fuck ton better than a regular humans, but Natsu wasn’t complaining. He also wasn’t about to complain about Lucy’s strange fascination with his piercings. Natsu made a low noise of complaint and cracked open an eye when he felt Lucy pull away, dropping his hands to squeeze at her ass in an attempt to spur her -wonderful- mouth by into action. She laughed at him, running her hands up and down his arms in a soothing matter.

“You know, Happy usually interrupts us by now,” she mused thoughtfully, pointedly looking at Natsu as she tapped a finger against her lower lip. Natsu laughed shakily, looking away from Lucy and studying one of his plants. The Phoenix Flower looked like it was almost ready to seed. Lucy cleared her throat and raised her eyebrows as Natsu shrank under her gaze, shrugging his shoulders.

“You locked him in the bedroom, didn’t you?” she questioned flatly, amusement making her struggle not to laugh.

“Well not the bedroom,” Natsu mumbled, sticking his tongue out at her sharp laugh as her concentration broke.

“You’re being very presumptuous, Mr. Dragneel. Usually someone asks before calling a girl their girlfriend, and leaving your room available on the first date,” Lucy teased, bringing her hand to rest on her chest in mock offense, dramatic gasp following quickly. Natsu’s forehead creased as he examined Lucy for any hint of seriousness.

“But aren’t people who make out and go on dates boyfriend and girlfriend already?” he questioned, ignoring what Lucy was implicating about his bedroom being Happy free. Even if the thought had been sitting in the back of his head. Screaming at him. You know what, you try being a 21 year old virgin and see how quickly your brain goes to the less than PG places when you have a beautiful girl who is interested in you coming over -sure to wear something that barely covered her- that you were already in love with. Yeah, that’s what he thought.

“It’s still nice to be asked,” Lucy explained, fingers playing dainty with his scarf. Natsu lifted both hands and cupped her face, looking Lucy dead in the eye. Her beautiful, melted-chocolate brown eyes.

“Lucy,” Natsu asked, voice low and sincere, “will you be my girlfriend?”

Lucy smiled broadly at him, nodding her head quickly. “Of course, you dork,” she teased again, leaning forward and claiming his lips with her own. The two melted into the couch, Lucy holding onto his biceps as their kiss deepened. Natsu felt the surge in his magic again, quickly brought back under control from the months of practice. Whenever he was with Lucy he felt stronger, more alive. His magic responded to her gentle touches and breathless sighs the same way his heart did, thrumming and swelling until it felt like it was about to burst. Natsu was currently nibbling on the skin above her pulse point, enjoying the way he could feel her pulse race under his lips and tongue when he remembered about the pasta bake in the oven. He let out a groan as he pulled back glaring up at the ceiling. Lucy made a high whine as the cold air struck the wet skin on her neck, nosing at his jaw and pressing her own kisses into the area below his ear, slowly making her way down his throat and back up the other side.

“I gotta check on the food, Luce” he grumbled, voice roughened and scratchy. Lucy rolled her hips down on his lap in protest. Natsu inhaled sharply at the friction of his jeans rubbing against him, hands automatically dropping and pulling Lucy’s ass down on his own crotch. Damn this vixen and her ability to read him. He felt Lucy’s triumphant smirk on his cheek as she pressed gentle kisses over his face, rolling his eyes at how pleased she was with herself. But he refused to allow the food to burn, he was determined to prove Lucy wrong. Lucy rolled off of him with a pout as he dislodged
her, shifting so she was sitting cross legged and with her arms folded in front of her. “Lucyy don’t look at me like that,” Natsu whined, rubbing a hand over his face as he stood. “I’ll be back in like a minute, ‘kay?” Lucy sighed heavily in agreement, Natsu chuckling to himself as he walked towards the kitchen to make sure the bake wasn’t burnt.

Familiar warmth flared over his face as he opened the oven door, checking over his shoulder that Lucy was distracted with the plants before sticking his hand in and feeling the side of the pan. It needed another 10 minutes before it reached the temperature the site had suggested. He removed his hand, letting the heat dissipate into the air around him so that he wouldn’t burn Lucy when he touched her. He made his way over to her, not much furniture blocking his path as most of it was in the spare room. Probably being destroyed by an enraged Happy. Damn.

“Hey Natsu,” Lucy called, finger trailing over the deep red petal of the Phoenix Flower. “Can flowers give off, feelings?” Natsu stopped in his tracks a few feet behind Lucy, swallowing hard. She didn’t turn to look at him, still inspecting his plants along the windowsill as she spoke. “Because that Mermaid Tail I bought a while ago kinda does. Like sometimes there’s this animosity that radiates off of it, other times just a dull annoyance. That sounds crazy, right?” Lucy laughed at herself, Natsu closing his eyes as he rubbed at his temples. Goddamn flower just had to be the tether for the most fucking annoying sprite he had ever tried to deal, and of course it had chosen Lucy because why fucking not make his life He-

“OH MY GOD,” Lucy shrieked, Natsu’s eyes flying open just in time to see the Phoenix Flower burst into flames, petals curling in on themselves as black ash consumed them from the outside in. When all the petals had reached the eye a column of fire shot up, the image of a phoenix spreading it’s wings clearly visible in the flame. The fire bird dove back down into the flower, burning the stalk with a loud sizzle until all that remained in the pot was a large pile of soot. Silence filled the apartment, horror making Natsu’s blood run cold.

Fuck fuck fucking fuck.

It wasn’t supposed to have seeded so early, there was supposed to be at least another three days before it’s magic reached it’s peak and burned it up! Lucy stood frozen in her spot, hands splayed in around air around it’s pot, eyes wide and mouth gaping as she continued to stare at where the flower used to be. Slowly the ash began to shift and move, Lucy jumping back until she bumped into Natsu’s chest. Together they watched as a pale green vine rose from the dark pile, splitting off into three new stalks and sharp leaves as it rose into the air. When the plant had reached it’s desired stalk thickness fiery blooms sprouted from all three ends, flames licking at the edges of the petals as they unfurled and drooped down. Three layers of petals with vibrant red and yellow colours glowing and shifting in moving patterns relaxed, two thin appendages rising from the center with a pale blue flame replacing where the pollen usually sat.

Natsu forgot about the fact that Lucy was still there, shocked at the number of blooms. Usually the plant only had enough magic in it for one flower, and it was unheard of to see three.

“What the fuck.”

Natsu’s spit caught in his throat as he struggled to answer her, panic making his mind white and his mouth of incapable of speaking. All he had wanted was one normal date with Lucy -and the possibility of her staying the night- but noooooo his goddamn flower had to out him. What had Natsu done to deserve this? He was saved from stumbling through a shitty explanation when Lucy whirled on him, finger stabbing into his chest and eyes bright.

“I knew it! I knew it, I knew it!” she chimed, exuberant giggles breaking through as she danced in her own spot.
“Eh?” Natsu sounded in confusion, blinking down at her repeatedly and a concerned smile tugging at his lips. Had he broken her?

“You’re magical!” Lucy crowed, looking up at him excitedly. Natsu balked at her blatant use of the term, fear widening his eyes. She... knew? “I mean, at first I thought I was crazy, because magic couldn’t exist,” she continued to ramble, joy and sanity clear in her large eyes. “But then there were all those weird liquids and spills on your clothes, and you always smelt of herbs and smoke. Plus those weird symbols on some of my gifts, and then there was the heat,” Lucy giggled again, finally focusing on Natsu’s shocked face. “Is, is it okay that I know?” she asked timidly, excitement disappearing as suddenly as it came. Worry made Lucy shift in her spot, her eyes muted and lips pinched together as she looked up at Natsu.

“Hey, hey yeah. Don’t make that face, please Luce?” Natsu soothed, running one hand along her hair. “I just, I just didn’t want you to find out like this,” he sighed as he pulled her towards him into a hug. “I don’t know why I didn’t expect you to take it so well.”

Natsu laughed dryly at his own stupidity, of course Lucy was smart enough to figure it out on her own. He let Lucy lead them to the couch, both gently sitting down on the worn grey material. Lucy tucked into his side and Natsu fitted himself into the corner, causing her to lean into his chest. “Well, I think it’s amazing,” Lucy said slowly, Natsu pressing a soft kiss to her forehead in appreciation.

“Looks like you’re datin’ a witch,” Natsu joked, forced grin softening to a real one at Lucy’s light laughter. He and Lucy held eye contact for all of three seconds before they burst out laughing, tears slowly trailing down both cheeks as they howled and dissolved into snorts and laughing fits. “You’re not freakin’ out?” he asked after they had calmed down, gaze still hesitant as he traced Lucy’s face with his eyes. She shook her head no, beaming up at him as he let out another shaky laugh of relief.

His conscious finally rolled over him, and he let out another groan. “I have someone that wants to meet ya,” Natsu said tiredly, standing up and holding his hand out to Lucy. She took it with only a questioning look, trailing after him as he led her to the spare room. He stopped in front of it, Lucy’s concern growing in her eyes as Natsu took a deep breath, preparing himself. He lifted his free hand and rubbed his thumb over first the silence rune and then the magic sealing rune, both disappearing as light spread across the lines and vanished, taking any trace of them with it. He pulled her back cautiously so that their backs were pressed against the wall opposite the wooden door, a hint of a proud smirk on his face at Lucy’s look of awe as she watched him do magic. After a few tense seconds of silence the door was thrown open, a blur of blue and white flying out of the room and circling Lucy’s head.

“Lushiiiiiiiiiiii,” Happy cried as he dove into her chest, a loud yelp coming from the blonde as Happy buried himself into her cleavage. “Natsu was so mean to me and tried to keep you all to himself and wouldn’t share and I’m your friend too right?” The cat mewled in his tinkling voice, looking up at Lucy with wide, tearful eyes. Lucy ‘awwed’ at him before hugging the cat tightly to her chest, murmuring gently in a soft voice.

“Of course you’re my friend, you silly kitty,” Lucy assured, Natsu looking away in a huff as Happy stole Lucy’s attention. So much for their date.

“And he didn’t feed me before,” Happy continued to complain, Lucy looking over his blue furry head and mouthing ‘He can talk?’ at Natsu, giving him a wry smile at his sheepish shoulder shrug. “He’s starving me Lushiiiiii, that’s animal abuse!” Happy whined pathetically, climbing onto her shoulder and nosing her cheek, wings stretching into the air and disappearing in a puff of sparkles. Lucy laughed and scratched under the cat’s chin, giving Natsu a knowing look. He grumbled under his breath and led them to the kitchen, where the pasta bake would be done soon.
“Fine,” he sighed as Lucy cleared her throat. “Happy, would you like to join us?” he asked the cat, wincing a little at Happy’s glare.

“I guess,” he said haughtily, nose turned up and sniffing at the scent in the kitchen. His little nose screwed up and a lip on his muzzle curled. “You didn’t use fish,” he pouted. He looked at Lucy, large eyes completely serious as he spoke and tail lazily swinging back and forth, “I told him that fish would impress you. Nothing says ‘love’ like a good tuna steak.”

Lucy nodded at him solemnly, rubbing his head comfortingly as she spoke. “He tried his best, and that’s what counts.”

Happy sighed and shook his head before sounding his agreement, looking at Natsu pityingly. “He’s lucky he found someone as nice as you. And almost as weird as him.” Natsu’s teeth gnashed at the cat’s high pitched words and Lucy’s smothered giggles.

At least Happy was going to have a good date with Lucy.
Natsu drummed his fingers idly on the coffee stained table top, half filled cup standing in front of his hand. Lucy had been right in recommending it to him, mostly made out of chocolate and sugar. Natsu could barely taste the bitter coffee underneath the layers of cream and chocolaty sweetness. A small smile pulled at his lips dreamily as he thought about how well she knew him. He let his head tip back with a long groan, eyes staring blankly up at the grey sky he was currently sitting under while he waited for Erza at a small coffee shop two blocks away from his apartment. He was bored, waiting for her to show up.

Of course he had been 20 minutes early, which meant he was half an hour early in Natsu time, but still. He had been the one to call Erza while Lucy was in the shower after they had woken up this morning -in his bed, Lucy basically acting as his blanket the way she had been draped over him- and he was filled with anxious excitement. Not that he was looking forward to this necessarily, but more in the way that his muscles screamed for release or movement. Natsu looked away from the abnormally sunless sky, exhaling an agitated breath in a huff as he examined his hands, leg twitching under the table and making the chair squeak quietly from the jerky movements. Where was she?

Natsu continued to amuse himself when the cream colour of his cardigan reminded him of Lucy’s exasperated and horror filled cries she had let out as they had returned all of the magical objects from the spare room to their proper places after dinner. Except it hadn’t been any of the scrolls or flying figurines or intricate set ups that had sent Lucy into near hysterics -in fact Natsu had caught her more than once curled up on the floor or couch, nose buried in a tome or playing with a dragon that had perched on her shoulder instead of helping him refill his shelves-. No, it had been Natsu’s closet. Natsu had never seen Lucy so ready to burn something before, and that included her monthly rent reminder letter in the mail.

So this morning he had taken his time choosing an outfit, giddy in excitement as he watched Lucy slowly pale each time she tried to sneak a peek at what he was deciding to wear for the day. He had put it all together while she had showered -in his shower- and had walked out just in time to make Lucy spit her coffee back into her mug in the kitchen. He had actually had to dig into the back of his closet to find a pair of olive green cargo pants, Natsu’s normal choice being jeans as when he got holes in them people didn’t assume he was homeless. Again. He had paired that with a white tank top with a large flame design in the center, a cream over sized wool sweater, and his scarf. Lucy’s monotone ‘go change’ still had Natsu snickering, as did her look of disgust before she gave him a quick kiss goodbye and her refusal to say anything else when he asked which shoes he should wear. Happy had been crying he had been laughing so hard at Lucy’s face.

And then he had continued to howl because no matter what Natsu did the cowlick in his hair refused to leave. So now he was wearing an army green beanie. Happy’s choice after Natsu had so ‘rudely’ refused to allow the cat to groom him.

He was drawing with droplets of coffee on the table when Erza finally showed up, ignoring her disapproving gaze as Natsu finished the messy outline of a fairy. Natsu looked up at her with a lazy grin, stretching his arms above his head before he leaned back in the chair.

“Bout time ya got here,” Natsu said in way of greeting, smiling warming at Erza’s amused facial expression while she seated herself across from him, heavy bag dropping to the cement ground. While Erza terrified Natsu to his bones, she was the only one Natsu could stand seeing at the bi-monthly coven meetings and yearly gathering. As the main representative and delegate of the coven Fairy Tail, Erza was often the scout for them, trying to recruit and help any emerging witches or
magical talent. Hence why she was stationed in Hargeon rather than Magnolia, where her coven was located. It would be harder to solve issues that brewed between the covens -ranging from scalping members to trading tomes and spells to taking each other’s herbs by accident- if the half day commute would have to be taken every time a squabble appeared. Hargeon was a trading city and often saw a fair share of occult foot traffic, a hot spot for wiccan bars and stores. It was also in neutral territory, so that meant the gatherings held place here, and it made more sense for a coven as prominent as Fairy Tail to keep a yearly representative in case of emergency. They did like to change it every so often, as Fairy Tail was known for their large focus on family and making sure that everyone knew their value. Or so Natsu had been told. Repeatedly.

Damn recruiters.

“So,” Erza said calmly, shoulders tense and back straight, “Lucy knows about you."

“Yup,” Natsu said, letting the ‘p’ at the end of it pop and smirking inwardly as Erza’s eyes narrowed fractionally. His smartass mouth was going to get him pierced through with one of her swords, but damn was it too tempting to pass up. “Don’t worry though,” he sighed, Erza staring at him intensely until he spoke. “I didn’t tell her about you.” The miniscule tension released from her shoulders, and Erza’s face relaxed into a more friendly deadpan. At least he didn’t have to worry about spilling his guts, literally. Erza folded her hands over one another on the table, watching Natsu curiously as he took a swig from his now cooled liquid sugar. It was still warm to a normal person, but Natsu liked it just below boiling.

“So what did you tell her?”

“I didn’t so much as tell her as a flower showed her,” Natsu drawled, shrinking back as Erza’s glare once more sharpened on him. “Oi, don’t look at me like that! That damn thing wasn’t ‘posed to bloom when she came over but then she touched it or somethin’ and I don’t even fuckin’ know, ‘kay?” Natsu snapped, slinking into his seat and folding his arms over his chest in a pout. As much as he was happy to finally have Lucy know and to have her full acceptance Natsu was still a little pissed about the flower. Now he would have to put that guy’s painting off until the petals were ready to be harvested, and that customer in particular while a regular, was also a regular pain in the ass. He was not looking forward to emailing him and having to let him know about the delay. Bastard would probably demand a price reduction in ‘compensation’. Dick.

Erza however gave less than a millisecond of concern for Natsu’s plight, and she leaned forward over the table in a rushed movement, palms pressed flat on the cold concrete.

“Lucy’s touch made the flower bloom?” she asked firmly, Natsu’s face scrunching at her sudden agitated energy. He gave a short nod, brows furrowing deeper in confusion when she sat back in her chair just as quickly, muttering to herself. “I knew I wasn’t wrong, Master just refused to listen. No wonder witches and magic alike were drawn to her, that much raw energy in a single body... I knew Phantom had chosen her job for more than money...”

Natsu called out Erza’s name forcefully as he sat up, causing the red head’s face to snap to his, bangs falling to reveal her right eye. Tension ran through his muscles and made him clench his fists in and out as he thought about the piece of shit coven that had hunted down Lucy all those years ago. Hearing Erza mention them made his blood boil anew, because even though he had guessed Erza had been aware of them hearing her mention them affirmed it, and made the Natsu want to scream at her for not gathering Fairy Tail and storming in to rescue Lucy. His Lucy.

“What’re you goin’ on ‘bout over there?” he asked through a clenched jaw, gaze strong as he held eye contact. Erza looked him over calmly before lifting her chin.

“Nothing that is of your concern, Natsu. It is coven business, and you have made it perfectly clear
you have no desire to join one. Thank you for this meeting, it’s been nice seeing you,” Erza said in a tone that made it final, moving to gather her things as Natsu sat there gaping at her.

“Bullshit!” he barked, voice loud enough to make the waitress at the other end of the patio jump. Erza sent him a glare telling him to drop it, but Natsu slammed his fist down on the table instead, raising partially out of his seat. “Coven business my ass,” he continued in a harsh whisper, “this’s Lucy we’re talkin’ bout. She is my girlfriend, and I ain’t gonna let you do anythin’ that I don’t know ‘bout!” Erza sat back down in her chair, back straight and knuckles white as they held her bag. Natsu slowly slid back into his seat as well, magic brimming under his skin from his outburst. Even when she wasn’t there, Lucy gave him a surge of strength Natsu was still learning to control.

Dragging his fist back from it’s place on the table, Natsu ignored the thin fissures that zig-zagged out from where he had struck it seconds ago. The two continued to stare each other down until a smile flitted across Erza’s face, apprehension making Natsu’s lips thin and his jaw clench more. It didn’t seem like a challenging smile, more of an understanding and fond one, but Natsu wouldn’t let his guard down. He had a 21.7% chance of beating her at his best, never mind if she caught him off guard. “What?” he asked gruffly, biting his cheek to stop from pouting when she chuckled gently and brought up one hand to lean her face on, chin in palm.

“My, my, Natsu. I don’t think I’ve ever seen you get so worked up over something that didn’t have to do with your father,” Erza said in amusement, respect in her eyes as she looked over his face. Slowly, Natsu’s muscles uncoiled and his magic fell back into a dull hum in the back of his mind. He eyed her skeptically and shrugged one shoulder, taking a sip of his drink so that he didn’t have to speak. “You really care about her, don’t you?” she asked softly, eyes returning to the normal seriousness.

“Yeah,” Natsu replied after swallowing his sip. “I can’t even describe it, and I know it don’t make no sense, but even though I’ve just met her it’s like I’ve always known her. It’s just so easy and right, y’know? My heart beats all fast and shit, and my magic just... fuck I can’t even put it into words. That’s always Lucy’s thing,” Natsu sighed, soft smile of his own relaxing his face and eyes sparkling as he spoke about Lucy. He coughed awkwardly when he caught Erza’s knowing look, intelligent gleam in her eyes and watchful smile. He hadn’t meant to ramble, but he did have a tendency to get distracted when he thought about Lucy. His girlfriend. The thought made him have to smother another shit-eating grin.

“I care about her too, Natsu, though maybe not in the way that you feel for her,” Erza placated, explanatory tone making Natsu’s eyes narrowed. There was a ‘but’ coming up soon. “But,” she continued, “Lucy obviously isn’t normal. Only the most magically gifted individuals can release that much energy subconsciously, reacting on whatever object calls to them. And Lucy is one of those.” Natsu blinked slowly at Erza, seconds ticking by as she waited for him to understand what she was saying. Natsu snorted and a large grin spread across his face. “Nah,” he said easily, Erza raising an eyebrow at his blatant dismissal. “Lucy’s weird, but she ain’t that weird. I spend like twenty-four-seven with her, I’d think I’d know.” Erza hummed, small smile tugging at the corner of her own lips again. Unease shifted along Natsu’s skin, Patient Erza was almost scarier than Angry Erza.

“You said she affects your magic right?” Erza questioned, continuing after Natsu gave her a hesitant nod. “Does it feel like it’s grown so much that it’s almost bursting out of you, stronger, louder?” Natsu blanched a little at how accurately she was describing it. How did she know? “Is Happy drawn to her? And you said that the flower bloomed after she touched it. What do you think all that means Natsu?” Erza asked kindly, nodding to herself when Natsu fell back in his chair as understanding sunk in.

“Lucy’s a witch."
His voice was barely more than a whisper, but his own words echoed through his head. Lucy was a witch, just like him. And Erza. But how could Happy not have known, and if he had how could he not have told Natsu? Did Lucy know? Obviously not, but then how would she? Magic was passed down through blood, and seeing as how her father had sent Phantom Lord after her Natsu was going to take a wild guess that it wasn’t the paternal side that she got it from.

“So now you see why I have to take her to Fairy Tail,” Erza stated, offering Natsu a warm smile as he looked at her blankly.

“No,” he said softly, shaking his head. He lifted a hand and rubbed at his temple, eyes falling shut. “No Erza. Lucy may be magical, but I don’t think she’s a witch. Happy is tuned to find witches, even if he’s drawn to all things magic. I trust him, not to mention that Lucy just found out magic’s real in the first place,” Natsu sighed, groaning as he leaned forward and rested his elbows on the table, face buried in his hands. He looked up, trying to make Erza understand through his solemn expression. “Sides, why is only my magic goin’ nuts. You’ve been ‘round her way longer, not to mention Kagura. So why me?” Natsu continued, concern blanketing Erza’s face as she played with the fringe of her bangs.

“I... don’t know,” Erza said slowly, “that is odd though.”

“So let me and Happy and Luce work on it for a while, ‘kay? I’ve already been lookin’ into it for a while now, ever since my magic first went batshit,” Erza shot him a wary look, and Natsu held up his hands in allowance. “If we can’t figure it out, then we’ll come to you and I’ll go with you guys to Fairy Tail. Been awhile since I last saw Gramps anyways,” Natsu finished with a grin. Erza still seemed unsure, and she made her concerns known as she held his gaze.

“You said so yourself, Natsu, Lucy is still new to magic and this world. And you know how searching for answers about these kinds of questions can lead you anywhere across the country, what if sh-“ Erza said, agitation leaking into her words as she spoke before Natsu cut her off.

“Luce’s practically a genius, and if we do stir up trouble then I’ll be there to take care of the bastards. Not to mention Lucy is a badass on her own,” Natsu said, pride coating his tone as he bragged about Lucy. Erza gave a dry snort, leaning back in her own chair finally.

“I am well aware of how ‘badass’ Lucy is, I have been training her for years,” Erza replied loftily, her own pride about Lucy’s accomplishments shining in her visible eye.

“I know,” Natsu said as he rolled his eyes, “I’ve been on the receivin’ end of a few of her kicks. Thank god she’s such a good mark otherwise she might’ve clipped my head a few times now. Girl’s got legs,” Natsu said nonchalantly, one fang peeking out from under his lip as he smirked. Fuck, he loved that girl.

“You haven’t seen her with a whip yet,” Erza said smoothly, smile turning into a smirk as she watched Natsu’s face. “I’d dare say Lucy’s better than me with it.” Natsu gulped softly as the image of Lucy holding a whip flashed into his mind, face confident and body radiating power as she grinned down at him. Natsu blinked quickly, lifting his scarf to cover his nose as heat spread across his cheeks. Damn Erza. She chuckled at his sudden bashfulness, sighing as she continued to sit and stare at him. He shifted uncomfortably under her eye, confidence from before gone and part of him praying that he wasn’t about to be knocked unconscious and locked in his apartment while Erza dragged Lucy off to god knows where, or worse, talked with Lucy about him.

“Fine,” Erza said simply, Natsu startled from his horror filled daydreams about what the redhead could have been plotting. “I will let you and your new family try and understand what is happening, but I am still obligated to inform Master Makarov of what I have learned about Lucy.” Natsu nearly
chocked when Erza referred to Lucy and Happy as his ‘family’, even if it was the word he would have used himself. He also couldn’t believe Erza was conceding to him and his ideas.

If this didn’t prove Lucy was magic then nothing would.

“R-really?” Natsu blurted out, covering quickly as Erza hid her laughter behind one hand. “I mean, sure, sure, ‘course. Why wouldn’t ya?” Thank god Lucy already knew he was a giant idiot.

Erza stood from her spot, picking up her overly large bag and walking over to Natsu. Giving him a sisterly rub on his head and dislodging his beanie, Erza smiled down at him as he yelped and tried to fix the green fabric over his hair. “Yes Natsu, after seeing your little outburst I believe in your feelings for Lucy, and your desire for what is best for her,” Natsu gave an uncertain smile to Erza, flinching as she lowered her head so that it was beside Natsu’s ear, more so that no one else could hear her rather than making sure that Natsu did. She was aware of his advanced hearing after all. “But so help me if you ever hurt her,” Erza said in an overly sweet voice, grip becoming bruising on his shoulder. “I will end you.”

Natsu turned pale white and looked up at his friend in horror, Erza smiling comfortably down at him and once more patting his head.

“It really was nice seeing you again Natsu. I’m afraid I’m set to return to Magnolia for a few months in a bit though, so we won’t be able to meet up more than a few times before I leave. Remember, even if you refuse to join a coven Fairy Tail will always open it’s doors to you, and Lucy.” Natsu let out the breath he had been holding as he watched Erza walk away, a sense of safety returning with every step. On the one hand, his life had just been threatened and he had had to bargain with someone he was almost certain could take down Hell itself, but on the other, now Natsu could go home to Lucy. His girlfriend.

Even just thinking about it made him smile like a fucking idiot.

And he really couldn’t care less how he looked.
“Are you sure?”

“Yes Natsu, I’m sure. You said the reason my plant hated me was because there was a very angry *sprite* that lived in it and choose me for some reason."

“But Lushiiiiiiii, she’s *scary*. She smells like fish but she’s not one and it’s *confusing!*”

Happy’s loud wail made Natsu and Lucy share a look, Natsu agreeing with Happy and Lucy telling him that if he agreed with his cat there would be no more kissing today. Which Natsu could not live with.

“I’m sure it’ll be fine buddy. Somehow...” Natsu tried to placate, but his own unease was noticeable in his voice and Lucy rolled her eyes at the two.

“Ok, so how exactly do I... summon her? I guess?” Lucy asked, looking questioningly between the two. Lucy and Natsu were sitting on the sofa, Lucy sinking into the space made by Natsu’s legs as he sat cross legged in the center. Happy flew around their heads anxiously, unable to sit still, or maybe staying ready for a speedy getaway. Either way Natsu couldn’t blame him. He eyed the plant warily again, the glass bowl sitting harmlessly on the coffee table in front of them.

“Just ask her to come out. She will, if she wants to that is,” Natsu explained in her ear, resting his chin on the shoulder that her braided hair didn’t fall over. He nuzzled the soft wool on her shoulder as she took a deep breath, a soft grin cracking his worry-pinched lips as Lucy mumbled about his dramatics. She settled more into his lap, and Natsu gave her an encouraging squeeze to her hips as way of support.

“Okay... Aquarius, would you please come out?” Lucy asked, voice wavering slightly from her nerves. She had taken the news that her plant housed an other worldly sprite surprisingly well, but Natsu guessed that even Lucy had her limits, amazing as she was. A soft gasp made Natsu pull away from his fawning over the girl snuggled in his lap, her already large brown eyes growing wider as she stared at the flower before them.

A bloom of golden light was rising from the center of the flower, sparkling transparent petals unfurling until a soft burst of light similar to Happy’s wings disappearing rained golden sparkles that dissolved into the air around the glass bowl. But the shower of magic dust was only barely noticed, as Lucy was left gaping at the figure floating before her. The image of a mermaid with a blue tail and aquamarine hair floated in the air, finned tail twitching in annoyance as Lucy continued to stare at her.

Natsu had only seen her the one time before, but nothing about the sprite had changed during the months that had passed. Three gold rings descended along her tail below her waist, made of the same material that banded around her upper arms and formed the back of her circlet, delicate silver weaving and a purple garnet resting in the center of her forehead. Moonstone earrings stood out against the bright blue of her hair, as did the leather wrist bands and belt that hung against her pale blue fin surrounding where her tail met her creamy skin. Her upper was bare other than a thick dark blue choker and thin bikini top, same colour of the choker bordered by white wave designs. A black tattoo of the celestial sign of Aquarius stood prominently along her collarbone, mark stretching from shoulder to shoulder. Aquarius sighed irritably and used her tail to splash some of the plant’s water at Lucy, causing the blonde to sputter and lean back into Natsu.
“God, and I thought you were annoying when you didn't know I existed,” the sprite snapped, blue eyes narrowed as she glared at her master. “I mean really, I would rather you go back to whining to that computer friend of yours than you sitting here looking at me like an idiot. ‘Does he like me’?, ‘He keeps giving me presents’, ‘He’s so cute!’; ‘I want to lick his ab-’,” Aquarius mimicked in a high pitched voice, transferring a large ceramic pot from one hip to the other as she mocked Lucy. Lucy for her part turned a bright red and made a loud sound over top of Aquarius’ speaking, arms flailing and avoiding Natsu’s raised eyebrows and impish grin. What had that last part been?

“And really do you need to eat that midday piece of chocolate? You should be watching your weight, I can see the rolls on your back when you walk around here naked. No man’s going to date you like that,” Aquarius continued on, one hand lifting to half hide her snigger as she finished, cruel glint in her eyes. Lucy turned an even deeper shade of red, one hand reaching between her and Natsu to feel the bare skin on her back revealed by her crop top.

“I don’t have rolls,” she mumbled, face pinched in concentration. Natsu stared blankly at Lucy, that had been the part she was concentrating on?

“You walk around here naked?” Natsu asked, voice cracking on the final word. Lucy bashfully looked away from him again, redness spreading to the tops of her breasts visible through a large hole in her sweater.

“Well it is my place,” she mumbled. “And it was only when you were busy with a client or project,” she defended more intensely. Natsu held her gaze as he felt his ear tips burn.

“Sometimes Happy was here,” he said softly, watching as agitated confusion grew in her eyes.

“Yeah? He’s just a cat…” Lucy retorted, confusion disappearing into horror as her eyes flew to follow the blue cat still circling them lazily in the air. “Oh my god Happy was there,” she whispered, more to herself. The small cat snickered as he finally settled on Natsu’s head, wings disappearing with a soft glimmer of sparkles.

“Don’t worry Lucy, all humans look weird to me,” the small cat comforted, ignoring Lucy’s strangled noise that caught in her throat. “Although,” he said, eyes narrowing in thought as he tilted his head, “it’s weird how you don’t have fur anywhere but your head.” Lucy made another high pitched noise of distress, Natsu choking on his spit at what Happy’s words implied. Now he was the one avoiding Lucy’s eyesight.

“Anyway,” Lucy said forcefully after coughing into her hand, Natsu’s mind still reeling from the new information Happy and Aquarius had shared with him. Natsu pulled her tighter against his chest, her arm leaving the space and her hand resting on his bare forearm. The only thing Natsu was currently wearing being a black tank top and his grey sweats, scarf moved from forehead to neck before calling Aquarius. Natsu had finished sketching out a design for an ash painting a woman had ordered, Natsu deciding the horizon of a forest being the best for the enviro freak. At least he knew she tipped well, so he liked to put more thought into her pieces than a random persons, and had been just about to start grinding the needed leaves and plants for burning when Lucy had burst in, saying she was done living in fear of her flower.

Turned out three days had been long enough for Lucy to start talking about her demon plant again.

Natsu almost just went back to grinding his plants, but his girlfriend had grabbed him by the scarf and dragged him back to her apartment, Happy following while asking if they needed ‘Adult Time’ which distracted Natsu enough for Lucy to gain the upper hand and shove him through her doorway. So here they were, Lucy curled up on Natsu’s lap –partially because they couldn’t go for more than an hour without some sort of physical contact while in the same room and partially to act as weight to
pin Natsu down- and staring down at what Natsu could only assume was anger incarnate.

“I just wanted to ask you, Miss Aquarius,” Lucy said cautiously, having reigned in her embarrassment from before. “Did I do something to offend or upset you?” Aquarius looked over Lucy haughtily before letting out an exhausted sigh, glaring up at the blonde. Natsu was just thankful he had somehow blended into the furniture.

“Honestly you’re just as whiny and stupid as you used to be, I mean the signs were all there and it took you three months to figure it out?” the sprite huffed, irritation slowly melting off of her as she swam around the air above her bowl. “Although I guess a normal person would have taken much longer, if ever,” Aquarius sniffed, finally coming to float in one place.

“What do you mean ‘normal’?” Lucy asked, Natsu shrinking into his seat a little and chin resting heavier on her shoulder. He had forgotten all about that, desperate as he was to catch up on the orders he had been neglecting in favour of figuring out what was going on with his magic. Aside from puberty -which he had already gone through, thank you very much- there was no explanation to be found, even after scouring through forums and forums on witching websites. Natsu had stopped looking after the eleventh recruitment message. So he had not gone looking with Lucy like he had told Erza, in fact he hadn’t even mentioned his fucked up magic to her. Whoops.

“Do you really think I’d allow just anyone to hold my Tether?” Aquarius scoffed, Lucy’s nose scrunching like it did when she was confused. She was so adorable. Natsu was ripped away from sighing blissfully as he stared at Lucy when Aquarius turned her glare on him. “Have you told her nothing?” she seethed. Grumbling under her breath Aquarius started her agitated motions once more, “Fucking hopeless, the both of them.”

“Umm, Miss Aquarius?” Lucy called out, flinching when the mermaid sprite turned to her sharply. Her blue eyes looked over her master for a few seconds before the tension drained from her shoulders and her face took on a less murderous expression.

“Just Aquarius is fine, brat,” she sighed, cold tone betrayed by the gentle curve of her lips. “I guess I should explain what I am to you, considering the idiot of a boy you’ve decided to link with,” the sprite ignored Natsu’s ‘oi’ of complaint, focusing on Lucy as she spoke. “I am a sprite. I exist above this realm, but my kind has been coming and going from this world for eons. We need an object to act as a bridge, most choose shells or stones, trees even. Something immovable or easily carried but not destroyed. These are called Tethers, and are chosen by the sprite.” Natsu was fully focused, his dad had never explained more than the basics about sprites to him as Natsu had never cared before, and Igneel probably had been more focused on fire magic himself. “Sometimes we choose a master, sometimes we don’t, it depends on if the sprite deems someone worthy of controlling their magic” Lucy nodded, finger tapping on her lower lip in concentration.

“So you’re a being of pure magic,” Lucy started, looking at Aquarius for confirmation. When the mermaid gave a tiny nod Lucy continued on, “And you come from a different realm but are connected through a tether, which I’m assuming is the flower right now?”

“Tether,” Aquarius corrected, cutting off Lucy. “It is more than a simple connection, the object holds part of our essence in order for us to use it.” Natsu’s eyes widened as he took in the delicate looking flower, set on a slow rotation in the bowl from the sprite’s movements before. Something that flimsy held part of her soul?

“Tether,” Lucy repeated, nodding to herself again. “And you choose a master, someone of magical ability I guess... So is Natsu your master then?” Lucy asked, looking between Natsu and Aquarius. Natsu snorted in denial, Aquarius’ short bark of laughter making him narrow his eyes.
“Like I’d let that flame maniac near my flower,” she half chuckled, rude tone making Natsu bite his inner cheek. Fuck did he hate this sprite.

“So you’re masterless?” Lucy pressed, full lips pouting at the mermaid’s loud sigh.

“No you dimwit. I’ve chosen you as my master, but now I’m regretting that. Do you know what it’s like to promise your magic to someone and then find out they’re a whiny brat?” Lucy’s mouth fell open, surprise lighting her chocolate eyes.

“Me?” she squeaked, pointing a finger at herself and ignoring Aquarius’ insult. “But I mean, I’m not a witch, or magical?”

“Do you really think I’d let you be my master if you weren’t magical you idiot?” the sprite groaned, rage filling her eyes. “Why I even allowed you to pick my flower I’ll never know, gut instinct my ass. Maybe I liked the way you mocked Pinky here or maybe it was your likeness to your mother, but damn,” she hissed, a small jet of water sprouting from her jug and striking Lucy in the forehead. Happy hissed loudly and flew away from the water droplets rebounding off of Lucy, both her and Natsu yelping and sputtering as the cold water struck their skin.

“The fuck was that for?” Natsu snarled, bringing one hand up to wipe the water from his face. Lucy stared at Aquarius, too transfixed by her words to do more than absently scrub her face.

“You knew my mother?” she asked breathlessly, attention fully enraptured with the mermaid.

“Yes, but that is a conversation for another time. I must admit, it was pleasant and unexpected to see you after so long. I used to be your favourite, despite you constantly annoying me” the sprite replied, small grin and pride shining her eyes before her mask of contempt fell back over her angular features. Lucy continued to gape at Aquarius, and Natsu rubbed one hand along her upper arm in a soothing motion, encouraging her to let it go for now. If there was one thing he knew about sprites it was that there was no pushing them further than they wanted to go.

“So Luce’s a witch?” he asked skeptically, trying to divert the women's attention to a new topic. Aquarius seemed to understand and shot him what he suspected could be interpreted as a thankful look, but Natsu wasn’t sure. Her facial expressions ranged from murderous to slightly annoyed.

“No,” she said simply, jug switching to her other hip again. Lucy finally seemed to have had her patience worn down enough and spoke in an exasperated tone, her own irritation showing plainly.

“Then what am I?”

“No need to be so rude,” the mermaid chastised, eyes narrowing on the blonde. Lucy held her gaze, the sprite floating up so that she was level with Lucy and Natsu’s faces. “Boytoy is a witch. You are something much rarer, Lucy,” Aquarius’ tone became serious, and Natsu noted it was the first time the sprite had used Lucy’s name. “You are a Holder.”

“You really think so?” Happy chimed, eyes curious as he settled in Lucy’s lap. Aquarius rolled her eyes at his question, eyes narrowing when Lucy defended her friend.

“Would I have said it if I didn’t, hairball?” she sneered, eyes widening when Lucy defended her friend.

“No need for naming calling Mi-, Aquarius.” she said sternly, lip pulling between her teeth and catching Natsu’s eyes before she spoke again. “But what is a Holder, anyway? Natsu?”

Natsu shrugged at Lucy’s question, just as lost as her. Igneel had never mentioned the term before,
and he hadn’t seen it in any of his texts or searches.

“Well first,” Aquarius said smugly, readying herself for the lecture on magic, “I guess I’ll have to explain what magic is, if your tiny brain can focus long enough that is.” Lucy pouted at the sprite’s rude words, but held her tongue. Something Natsu wouldn’t have been able to do. “Not everyone can use magic, only those that are bo-,” she said as she raised her nose in the air, air of irritation melting into a condescending one. Natsu, however, had wanted to explain magic to Lucy himself and there was no way in hell he was about to let the bitchiest sprite he had ever met steal that from him.

“Magic’s like’a language,” Natsu interrupted, victorious glint in his eye as he smirked at the angered mermaid. There was a large possibility she was about to shoot a jet of water at his face, but it was a risk Natsu was willing to live with. “Igneel used to tell me magic itself was neutral, and that the people that used it were the ones who made it good or bad. It can only be spoken by a few of us, and that’s why it’s so important to always use it for good. ‘Cus not everyone can fight back.” Lucy had turned in his lap to look at him as he spoke, and her fingers played with his when he had laced his hand with her smaller one. Her large brown eyes looked at him so heart-wrenchingly warmly, and a small smile made her full lips curl up gently. Natsu had been focused on Lucy as he spoke, and he started when Aquarius made a sound of reluctant agreement. Damn annoyance had to ruin the moment.

“I guess that’s not too bad,” she admitted, “but it makes sense that it came from your old man instead of your brain. There’s more chance of blondie here getting a competent boyfriend.” Lucy said Aquarius’ name in warning, the sprite flipping her hand in dismissal of Lucy’s disapproval. “Fine, fine, she could do worse. Happy?” she retorted, gagging when Lucy pecked Natsu on the cheek. “Gross, if I wanted PDA I’d be with more own boyfriend. Who is much hotter and smarter, but not everyone deserves perfection.” Natsu rolled his eyes and wound his arm tighter around Lucy’s waist. He couldn’t wait for this to be over, he was in serious withdrawal of Lucy-snuggles. Or bugging her, or even just joking around with her. Maybe he was just in Lucy withdrawal, period. It was hard to get alone time when his magical cat could apparate in any room at any time.

“So what’s a Holder then?” Lucy asked, worry in her tone making Natsu focus on the conversation again.

Aquarius’ expression softened, and an almost kind look passed through her eyes before she spoke again, snobby tone prominent as always. “Well what flamer here said about magic is true, if you like that magic is a language’ idea. A witch can read and speak it, but a Holder is something different. They can only read it, and they have much, much more magical potential than an average witch,” Natsu’s brow furrowed as the sprite talked. He had never heard of this before, and he wasn’t sure how to feel about that fact. “Oh don’t look so sad, little lizard,” Aquarius said in an over the top comforting voice. “A Holder hasn’t been seen in hundreds of years. As rare as they are they are often harder to find as the Holder themselves are not aware of their magic. And with the influx of all you little witches a Holder’s large magic can be lost in the crowd unless you’re highly trained, and let’s be honest, no one these days is highly trained in anything.” A conceited smile pulled at her pale lips and made Natsu want to shove her back into her stupid flower by force. “A witch would study the earth for decades and master their talent, us sprites guiding them when needed. Oh, if only you could have seen what is was like before all you humans ruined the world. Trees and streams, my pure lakes and oceans. So untouched and so easy to look after. And to think, I’m letting my third master be this brat,” her tone soured, and she swam through the air and circled Lucy’s head as she continued to speak.

“No even my type,” she muttered to herself, Natsu fighting the urge to laugh at Lucy as she swerved her head in order to keep an eye on the malicious sprite.
“Your type?” Lucy questioned. Aquarius rolled her eyes, though not as largely as she had done previously. Seemed to Natsu the mermaid was getting tired of pretending to hate Lucy. Natsu couldn’t fathom how she had lasted this long, Lucy was impossible to be anything but loved.

“Not all magic is the same. Your current seating cushion for example uses energy magic, particularly fire. There are six main types of magic, and too many subsets to ever try and count. There’s energy magic, strength magic, chaos, order, manipulation, and psychic magic. All of these are most displayed in fire, earth, darkness, light, air, and water, which is mine and obviously the best.” Natsu pulled at his scarf with one finger, his eyes narrowing on the sprite again. It was close to what Igneel had said, but it was also very different, and Natsu didn’t like the idea that Igneel had been wrong.

“Psychic magic?” Lucy questioned, her nose still scrunched when Natsu looked at her. “Like mind control over things?” Aquarius scoffed, sending a short spurt of water at Lucy’s temple. The blonde squeaked and shied closer into Natsu’s chest to escape the burst of water, Natsu biting his tongue so as not to snicker and draw Aquarius’ attention to him. Funny as it was to see Lucy get soaked, Natsu had no desire to be on the receiving end of the mermaid’s anger.

“You humans just have to butcher everything, don’t you? Psychic can also mean spiritual, or to do with the soul. People who have this magical affinity tend to be extremely emotional, or with an ever changing soul. Like how an ocean can become a stream, and the sea can be still one moment and a hurricane the next.” Lucy nodded her head in thought, Natsu too distracted to notice the way she was worrying at her lip and how red the flesh was turning. So Igneel hadn’t been wrong, it was about control, or brief control rather. About things ever-changing, like water.

“So then,” Lucy said slowly, still working the words over in her head as she spoke, “if psychic magic is yours, then what am I? You said before that I was different from you?” Aquarius looked over her quietly, a satisfied look in her eyes as she answered Lucy’s question.

“Looks like you’re not as dumb as you let people think when you speak, huh? You’re right, my speciality is water, and your’s...,” she trailed off, her expression becoming blank and the irises fading from her eyes. Lucy made a noise of panic and reached out to the mermaid, but Natsu caught her wrist and pulled her arm back, placing it gently on her lap. He shook his head when she looked at him, his heart clenching at the worry in her eyes for her new sprite. She really was too caring.

Aquarius gave her head a short shake as she returned from her stupor, irises returning and eyes deglazing. “You,” she said bluntly, “are chalk full of light energy. It’s like staring at a fucking star,” she mumbled, rubbing at one eye in agitation. Natsu let out a low whistle as Lucy looked blankly between them. Aura looking was hard enough, but if someone’s overwhelmed you it would be a while before the inner eye would be able to see again. And that wasn’t even Soul looking.

“So I have order magic?” Lucy pressed, obvious displeasure at not knowing what had happened making it through. Aquarius sent another blast of cold water at Lucy, the blonde quickly apologizing.

“Don’t use that tone with me you brat. And no, you’re not order magic. You are very much energy, in fact, you have it’s most base form. That is very rare, you understand girl? Base magic is extremely powerful, and even more reactive. No wonder you linked so quickly with his.”

“I knew I recognized it!” Happy mewled, chiming voice finally entering the conversation again. He curled up in Lucy’s lap, large yawn revealing his bright white teeth. “Lushiii I’m bored now,” he whined, conversation suddenly switching. “Can we make fish?”

“Whaddya mean you ‘recognized it’?” Natsu cried out, his left eyebrow twitching as he tried to control himself. How much did Happy know?
“Calm down, Natsu,” the small cat hummed, stretching out and rolling onto his back in Lucy’s lap, white coated paw batting at the end of her braid. “I couldn’t remember where I had seen two magics interact like that, I just thought it was your souls. Soulmates are much more common than Bonded.” Happy purred while Lucy ran a hand through the fur on his stomach. “It’s been over a century since I’ve seen a connection like yours, and even then I’ve never seen the two combined. Not my fault,” the cat explained away easily, pushing his head into Lucy’s hand when it froze.

“‘Over a century’?” Lucy repeated in a low whisper, shock widening her eyes. Natsu was too busy focusing on the part where Happy had implied he and Lucy were **Soulmates**.

“That blue thing there is a familiar,” Aquarius cut in, Happy content with no longer talking. “He is also a being of magic, though not as highly regarded as a sprite. He just took the form of a cat,” she sneered, obviously displeased with Happy’s chosen form. Happy mewled when Lucy twitched his ears, Natsu grinning at how cute he and Lucy were. His little family.

“That’s because when I’m a cat I get fish. Fish is the most amazing thing,” he sighed, tail flicking in pleasure as he thought of his favourite food. He sighed dramatically when Lucy continued to look at him, wide eyes resting on Natsu before he rolled over and kneaded at Lucy’s thigh.

“I’m not Happy’s first charge,” he explained, hand rubbing soothing circles into the skin at Lucy’s waist. Natsu almost became too distracted by it’s softness to finish his thought, but the curiosity in her eyes egged him on. “He’s a familiar, like she said. A familiar is something that helps along a witch, with knowledge or encouragement. Not everyone gets a familiar, in fact I only know a few people who do,” Natsu said, voice trailing off as he mentally listed the people he knew with familiars. Five? No, six. Six people, including him.

“We’re only drawn to very strong magic,” Happy purred, nuzzling into Natsu’s side and proceeding to climb his arm and nestle into his scarf. “Like sprites.”

Lucy hummed in thought, finger tapping against her lip again. Natsu scratched at Happy’s head, gentle smile at his friend’s compliment growing larger as he watched Lucy think. “So what’s so special about being Bonded?” she asked Aquarius, head tilting a little to the side as she looked at the sprite.

“Using the language analogy, if a Holder can only read alone, and a witch can read and speak, then together, Bonded can sing. Their power is increased, and they don’t need runes or spells in order to activate their magic. It just flows naturally, sometimes without thought on behalf of the user. It allows the Holder to use magic as well, while giving a giant boost to the witch. Because of this is it is highly sought after by those who are aware of it, though it can never be forced,” Aquarius explained, this time looking between Natsu and Lucy. After she saw what Natsu hoped was understanding she let out a heavy sigh, examining her nails.

“I’m done here now,” she stated bluntly, returning to above her flower. “I expect that you’ll leave me alone for a while, I have a date to go on with my amazing boyfriend. Oh, and put me in your office. I want to buy Layla’s magic, and the flower doesn’t need sunlight,” she commanded before her form was surrounded by golden petals, the soft light scattering as they fell and struck any surface, golden sparkles left and dissolving into the air.

“Well that was fun,” Natsu said dryly. Lucy bit at her lip as she continued to watch the bowl and flower, Natsu lifting a hand and tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear. A light blush dusted her cheeks and a warm smile released her teeth from her lip as she looked at Natsu from the corner of her eye, his fingertips brushing idly on the flush skin of her cheek to her jaw.

“I’m getting fish from the apartment,” Happy announced suddenly, launching from Natsu’s shoulder.
and flying around the room. “You two don’t be gross while I’m gone,” Happy called as light surrounded him, a low pop and silver bubbles left in the room where he had been as he apparated into Natsu’s apartment. Natsu blushed hard and avoided Lucy’s gaze, not that it was difficult as she was also looking in the opposite direction too. Little blue fucker.

“What do you think he means by gross?” Lucy asked in a husky voice, Natsu swallowing hard as he looked down at her in time to watch her bat her eyelashes at him. He cupped her face with both hands, bringing her lips to his slowly, and speaking softly before claiming her mouth.

“He always makes a face when we kiss.”

Lucy hummed into his mouth, lips parting quickly when Natsu pushed against the seams. He chuckled to himself at her eagerness and wound one arm around her back, pulling her closer. Her tongue played with his, soon pushing into his own mouth and exploring. Natsu let his hands ghost over her body as she shifted to straddle one of his thighs, palms settling on her ass afterwards. One slim hand pulled at his hair, pink strands falling free of their low ponytail and tickling the side of his face. “He definitely doesn’t like it when we sit like this,” Lucy purred into his ear, heavy pants falling from his mouth as her teeth pulled roughly at his piercings. That was going to turn into a thing for him if Lucy didn’t watch out.

“Or when you get too loud,” Natsu growled, squeezing roughly at her ass with one hand and nipping at her barely exposed collarbone. His fingertips dipped under the bottom of her shorts, rough pads caressing the smooth skin they found there. He was rewarded by a gentle moan from Lucy, but it wasn’t enough. “Louder, I think,” he encouraged as he sucked on her earlobe, his other hand fisting in her hair and yanking her head back.

“You’re not too quiet yourself,” she shot back before she ground her hips down into his, a low hiss escaping through Natsu’s teeth. He stole whatever she was about to say from her mouth as he roughly slated his lips over hers, both trying to hungrily claim the other for their own. Lucy pulled back suddenly, Natsu chasing after her mouth and pouting at her when she placed a finger on his lips.

“Dinner,” she said breathlessly, Natsu letting his eyes crawl along the red flush of her chest and her disheveled hair and kiss swollen lips. He nipped at her finger, grinning wolfishly when her eyes clouded over in lust as he pulled her finger into his mouth.

“What do you think I was tryin’ to do?” he asked roughly before he released her finger and quickly covered her mouth with his own again. Lucy kissed him back roughly, pushing him backwards so he was leaned completely against the couch, her chest pushing firmly into his. Hands tangled in his hair again as Lucy dragged her tongue over his sharpened canine, and Natsu swallowed her moan as he guided her hips against his with one hand. She broke from the kiss again, pushing her forehead into his shoulder and hands gripping his biceps tightly.

“Dinner first. Date,” she panted, gentle shives trailing her body as Natsu let his hands explore her back. He let out a whine of complaint, he would much rather eat Lucy than any other food. But Lucy was set on an order of things so he let it be, placing a gentle kiss on her temple.

“Fine,” he groaned, ‘but Happy’s staying at my place tonight.”

Lucy pulled back, letting her hands splay on his chest as she looked down at him with hooded eyes.

“Good.”

Natsu nearly pulled her back down to him at the sultry look she gave him, heat making his ear tops
and face burn, whatever blood not heating his face rushing south. God fucking dammit did he want her. He strained against his jeans, eyes narrowing at Lucy’s playful expression as she gently rocked on his lap. She was making it really difficult for Natsu not to pin her to the couch right here, right now.

“Luce,” he groaned as his eyes slid shut and his head tipped backwards, fingers digging into her waist and sinking into the soft flesh exposed by her pink crop top. Natsu knew he had no idea about fashion, but the idea of a turtle neck crop top with what was essentially a boob window and full sleeves made no sense, even to him. But damn did he like it when Lucy wore it, and a part of him glowed with pride because she was his. In fact all of her outfits were provocative, Natsu still unsure of why -other than spite for her previous life- as Lucy became flustered whenever anyone tried to flirt with her, and that was only when she caught on. Lucy would definitely kick him if she ever found out how many guys he had scared away with a simple look when he noticed them ogling her, even before the started dating. He had told himself it was because she deserved better than some guy who looked at her like a piece of meat, but he knew it was a lie. Happy singing it while Natsu worked on a piece over the last few months had not helped.

Natsu hummed and leaned into her touch, the nonsense patterns she was tracing on his jawline gently making his magic ebb and flow under his skin. If Natsu thought about it, he would start blushing at the intimacy of being Bonded. He was connected to Lucy in a way no one else could ever be. And they were soulmates. He had talked to Igneel about them before, when his father had tried to give him ‘the birds and the bees’ talk. Everyone had multiple soulmates, people that made your soul glow and intertwine with, but it was still a connection that should be treasured. Natsu wondered if someone could be bonded to more than one person. Honestly, he really hoped not.

His face turned and he chased Lucy’s lips as they gently brushed across his cheek before she pulled away. His lower lip jutted out in a pout and he cracked an eye open, trying to convince Lucy to keep kissing at least for a little while longer. She giggled at his sad look before flicking his nose.

“You’re going to be even more cranky if you don’t eat and you know it. Not to mention you always slip up on not starving yourself when you’re working,” Lucy chastised, teasing grin softening as she climbed off his lap. Natsu let out a sad groan to let Lucy knew he understood but wasn’t happy, the blonde breaking into full laughter at his noise. He let his eyes travel up and down her figure as she walked to the kitchen, eyes lingering on the pale skin revealed along her midriff and the slip not covered between her brown shorts and black thighhigh socks. Somehow the cloth made her legs even longer, and the image of slowly rolling them off and revealing her skin to him made Natsu wet his lips. Oh god, now he had another fucking kink, and it was all Lucy’s fault. He’d have to thank her, somehow.

Feeling bored and oddly cold without Lucy on him, Natsu stood from the couch and made his way into the kitchen, feigning a limp when he caught Lucy’s eye. She held up a fork she had been using to mix the vegetables in the sauce, eyes sharpening on his face splitting grin. “One insinuation about my weight and Happy won’t be the only one not coming back into this apartment tonight,” she warned, tone deadly.

“But Lushiiiii,” Natsu whined, standing straight and walking normally the rest of the way towards her. Lucy pushed him back with a finger, ignoring his hurt look as he let her push him away. At least she hadn’t used the fork.

“Nuh uh, every time you’re in here something burns,” she complained, eyes rolling as he darted past her and stole a piece of half cooked zucchini from the pot. The two continued to argue with their eyes, Natsu extremely pleased with himself as he chewed on his still warm contraband, Lucy’s fists sitting on her hips. He rolled his eyes in defeat, hands lifting in submission. Lucy gave him a nod and
Natsu returned to in front of the stove top, effectively turning her back on Natsu. Never a smart idea, and an evil grin pulled at his lips. It soon disappeared as he considered what his punishment would be if he tickled her and their dinner spilt on the ground, or worse, on Lucy. No it would be better to wait until she wasn’t holding a weapon in her hands to attack. But the opportunity was so tempting...

Settling on a compromise Natsu gave a sharp squeeze to her butt before heading to gather plates to set the table, her high squeak making him cackle.

“Excuse you!”

Natsu looked at her over his shoulder, roguish smirk revealing his teeth. Deep red coated her cheeks and she was doing her flustered pout - almost as cute as her angry pout -. “What was that?” she demanded, voice high still and weight falling onto one hip. Natsu felt his grin falter, and he shrugged.

“I felt like it?” he said, sudden wave of unconfidence making it sound more like a question. Lucy’s lip pulled into her mouth, white teeth made more obvious as her lips darkened from the abuse. She placed the fork on the counter, arms crossing in front of her. “We touch all the time,” Natsu defended, increasingly feeling worried he had overstepped some boundary he hadn’t known about. Lucy raised an eyebrow, Natsu too nervous to notice the twitch in her lips.

“Like that?” she asked incredulously, red slowly fading from her cheeks until it was a soft pink. Natsu turned to face her fully, hands shoving into the pockets in his pants.

“Well, yeah. I do everytime we kiss,” he mumbled, eyes growing wide as Lucy walked towards him slowly. He officially had no idea what was going on. “Did, did I do somethin’ wrong?” he asked softly as she stopped inches from his chest. Lucy hummed in thought, both hands coming to play with his scarf.

“You said you grab my ass everytime we kiss,” Lucy stated, looking at him through her lashes and allowing a sly smile to appear on her face. “So I think you cheated me a little there, don’t you?”

Natsu's eyes widened as relief crashed through his stomach, arms winding around Lucy and hugging her to him.

“You can’t tease me like that,” Natsu growled as he bumped her nose with his own. Lucy licked her lips hungrily, whispering a soft ‘sorry’ while looking extremely unapologetic and very pleased with herself as her arms wrapped around his neck. Lucy’s mouth pushed against his already parted lips. The large curves just fit so perfectly in his hands, the heavy weight satisfying to squeeze and massage. Natsu leaned into her space, twisting their bodies so Lucy was pinned between him and the countertop, One hand wandered up and tugged at the tie at the end of her braid. Lucy's eyes fluttered open and Natsu pulled back to watch his hand run through her golden hair, strands soft and curling around his fingers, framing her flushed face. Gently she lead his face back down to hers, Natsu letting Lucy lead the slow but passionate kisses. Without warning Natsu gripped her waist and lifted her to sit on the counter, her legs instantly spreading and her arms pulling Natsu between them. Natsu groaned into her mouth as she pulled his hips closer with one leg, the other heel digging into the back of his thigh and rubbing against him.

“Na-Natsu,” Lucy panted as he ran one hand up and down her thigh, fingers hooking and slowly dragging down the black material. Natsu nipped at her jaw, watching from the corner of his eye as the milky skin was slowly exposed as he pulled down her sock. Fingers guided his chin back up, Lucy nibbling on his pulse point beneath his jaw and up to silver earrings as Natsu wrapped his hand under the now bare skin of her middle thigh. His hips jerked forward when Natsu felt cautious.
fingertips explore his stomach under his shirt, when had she even lifted the dark material up anyway? Lucy moaned into his hair at the pressure from his movement, and Natsu repeated it while lifting his free hand to grope at her large chest. He panted into the air and closed his eyes as Lucy continued to tease his ear, rolling her breast in his hand. Lucy’s head tipped back fully as he pushed at her hardening nipple with his thumb through her clothes. Lucy tore at his scarf, Natsu letting the scaled material fall to the floor as Lucy left a string of marks down his neck. Natsu gave a rough roll timed with a deep grind in return, Lucy mewling and clutching as his shoulders. Lucy was suddenly pulling at the hem of her sweater, Natsu using both hands to help her. He flung the pink material somewhere behind him, letting his eyes roam over her now exposed skin.

White lace cut across pale skin, low cups offering little support and leaving her breasts threatening to spill over the fragile material. Natsu licked his suddenly dry lips, raising his gaze to Lucy’s shy one as he gently cupped her with one hand, flesh warm and heavy through the thin material. He watched as she sighed breathily when he palmed at her nipple, eyes concentrating on her dark lashes and full lips and he repeated the motion with a rougher grip. His mouth stopped her third moan and he pushed his tongue between her lips and toyed with her own, wet heat making his mind blank except for the tanginess of Lucy’s mouth. Lucy pushed back on his intruding muscle, and she gave his tongue a rough suck when he pinched at her through the white material. Natsu’s hand slipped from under her thigh and ran along her ribs, fingers trailing up and down her exposed side before he cupped her other breast. Lucy clawed at his scalp, lips falling open as she mewled when Natsu groped her chest harshly, soft skin spilling between his fingers above the bra. Natsu pushed his tongue dominantly into her mouth, exploring it as Lucy dragged her hand down his back, nails leaving marks where his shirt had ridden up. One hand gripped at his while he massaged her breast again, feeling the weight push into his hand when he played with them.

“Nah~ nggh,” Lucy cried, her head tilting back and fully exposing her neck to Natsu, eyes cracking open to look down at him as he made his way along her throat with his mouth and finding himself in the valley of her breasts.

“Fuck Luce,” Natsu growled, hips jerking as Lucy rolled hers against the hardness Natsu was pressing into her thigh. “What happened to dinner?” he teased darkly, lips ghosting over the swells of her flushed breasts.

“Fuck dinner,” was all Lucy replied, one hand sinking to grab his ass. Natsu chuckled against her skin, mouth opening to suck on the creamy flesh above the lace. She whimpered as Natsu left trails of red marks along the border of her bra, nose pushing in between her chest and allowing Natsu to inhale her scent deeply. Vanilla filled his senses and he exhaled through his mouth, tongue flicking out to trail the seam of her bra and other breast. Lucy arched into his mouth, Natsu grinning as he pulled a nipple between his lips, lacey bra and all. He sucked on it, one hand moving to support her back as she twitched under his ministrations. Her hips ground against his, Natsu pushing further against her body. Sweat slicked their bodies and made Lucy pant harder, Natsu not even trying to control the heat radiating from him as he lost himself to her sounds and her scent and her hands.

Blood pounded in his ears as Lucy let out a strangled wail, Natsu’s teeth teasing at her through the thin fabric. Lucy yanked at his hair, dislodging Natsu from her chest and glaring at him with flushed cheeks and lust clouded eyes. “Now who’s teasing,” she hissed, tongue flicking out and swiping across her lower lip. Natsu’s eyes followed the motion, head leaning forward to nip and pull at her lower lip with his canines, pressing a soothing closed lip kiss to the flesh before he pulled back.

“Sorry,” Natsu said cheekily, head falling down to return to the wet spot he had left. He was able to suck and push it against the top row of his teeth while he rolled the other one between his forefinger and thumb before Lucy yanked his head up fully. She panted heavily, taking one hand and guiding his to the back of her bra. Natsu grinned lazily as he let his fingers trace the clasp there, Lucy
returning her hand to run through his hair.

“You sure?” he asked, voice thick and low, Lucy’s breath hitching at his tone. She nodded jerkily, warm smile pulling at her lips as she leaned into his chest and gently pressed her lips to his before pulling away. “What?” Natsu asked, hand releasing her breast and skimming along her bare back, other resting on the clasp of her bra.

“Nothing,” Lucy giggled, fingers cupping his jaw on both sides and her eyes flitting across his face aimlessly. “Just... happy,” she sighed, Natsu beaming at her and pressing a kiss to her nose before resting his forehead against her sweaty one.

“Me too,” he whispered, Lucy’s legs tightening around his waist as he lifted his other hand to try and unhook her bra. Natsu almost had it too -and he would have had it sooner if Lucy had stopped distracting him with sweet kisses- when horror made him freeze.

“Natsu?” a low voice said in warning and sounding from behind him. He squeezed his eyes shut, head falling into the joint between Lucy’s neck and shoulder as she gasped and her limbs locked around him.

He knew that voice.

That voice should not be here.

He would be dead in five minutes if that voice was truly there.

Lucy, however, did not live by Natsu’s ‘pretend it’s not happening and it will go away’ strategy, quiet voice a mixture of disbelief and fear.

“Erza?”
Thirteen

Natsu was fucked.

And not the good kind that had been a growing possibility seconds before his heart had stopped. No, Natsu was about to be murdered in the most grotesque and horrible way known to man; in the arms of a beautiful girl and sporting a semi. God fucking hell, why was Erza even here? Glaring over his shoulder Natsu almost lost his nerve at the outrage radiating like aura outward from Erza. Natsu couldn’t even read those and he could see it. Well, seeing as he was dead either way, he might as well go for it.

“What the fuck?” He snarled, ignoring Lucy who had finally come back to reality and had buried her face in his shoulder and attempted to hide behind him. Her cowardice would have been enough to make him snort if he wasn’t using all of his mental strength to keep the blood from leaving his face.

“Excuse me?” Erza asked, voice deadly quiet and fear making Natsu shrink into Lucy. Oh god he was going to die a virgin. And he had been so close. “How dare you hold her in such an intimate way. Step away from her right now, you lecherous mongrel.” She ordered, Natsu’s body reacting automatically at her words. She didn’t even need to voice her threat, Natsu had been on the receiving end of ‘punishments’ one too many times to completely disobey her. He frowned when Lucy brought her hands to cover herself, hands splayed desperately over her disheveled bra and her chin tucking into her chest, face burning with shame and mortification.

Lucy was supposed to be happy, and she looked almost in tears to be seen in such a state. Natsu didn’t fully understand why -considering some of the things she used as clothes- but he knew he hated it. He stepped back in front of Lucy, fixing his shirt while he held Erza’s gaze and blocked Lucy from her sight. Lucy wrapped her arms around his torso in an appreciative hug, her voice floating over Natsu’s shoulder when she finally found it.

“Erza, there’s no need to be so rude. We are dating and in my apartment. We can embrace ‘intimately’ whenever we want!” Lucy reprimanded, Natsu paling at her tone. Screw him, Erza was going to kill Lucy. His attention was diverted from the risk of double homicide when a monotonous voice drawled behind Erza, Natsu’s lips pulling into a sneer and his arm shielding Lucy more. What the fuck was he doing here?

“Gray.” Lucy said in warning, Natsu leering proudly when Gray flinched back under her cold tone. He then remembered she was in a bra and very short shorts, hiding behind him. Looking around Natsu began to panic when he couldn’t find her top, and there was no fucking way in hell he was about to let Gray see Lucy looking all -almost- sex mussed and disheveled. Even Natsu barely deserved to see that holy sight. Natsu sighed heavily as he stripped off his shirt, Erza stepping forward in warning and Lucy squealing behind him.

“Take it,” he told her, glowering at Gray’s disgusted and surprised expression. And Natsu thought he couldn’t get uglier. Lucy started to sputter protests but Natsu just motioned at her with the shirt again. A small smile tugged at his lips when he felt her take it, small ‘thank you’ making his chest puff out.
Gray’s face twisted in a stupid way, Natsu sticking out his tongue in return, which only spurred Gray on to pulling the lid of his lower right eye down. Natsu was one second away from tackling that stupid stripper -who had also lost his shirt, but for much more perverted reasons, Natsu was sure- to the floor and punching that dumb glint from his droopy eyes when Lucy’s slim arms wrapped tighter around his chest in an appreciative hug. Natsu’s face heated and his expression softened as he covered one of her small hands with his own, their fingers interlacing as Lucy rested her head on his back.

Erza started stuttering apologies and backed away with a red face.

Gray made a gagging noise.

Natsu wanted everyone to fuck off and leave him and Lucy alone.

Lucy was even more done with their friends shit.

“Why are you even here?” Lucy asked in a tone that bordered on whining, lifting her head to peek slash glare at Gray and Erza. “I told you yesterday that Natsu and I were going to attempt at a first date tonight.”

Natsu raised his eyebrows at that, he kept forgetting how close Lucy and Gray were. A twinge of jealousy flared in his chest, Natsu’s grip tightening on her hand and Lucy giving him a gentle squeeze back. The small action helped push back the petty emotion, and Natsu was thankful. He didn’t normally feel useless crap like that, but everything was new with Lucy. New and exciting and weird, and Natsu wouldn’t change any of it.

Erza’s forehead furrowed, serious eyes downcast in thought. “I was not aware of this. Gray suggested we bring you Boscan so that you wouldn’t have to cook tonight, with how stressed you’ve been about your latest book review. Congratulations on the new section, by the way, Lucy.” Natsu opened his mouth to curse out Gray when he was suddenly stumbling forward. He looked to his right just in time to see Lucy storm past him, not even giving him the chance to gawk at her in his loose white tank top. Fuck was she hot.

“Gray Fullbuster,” Lucy growled, hands bunched in fists and she walked towards the dark haired boy. Gray just shrugged a shoulder carelessly, smirk lifting one of corner of his mouth as he watched Lucy stomp towards him.

“My bad, was that this week? Must’ve slipped my mind,” he drawled, hands stuffed in pocket and unapologetic glint in his eyes. Erza and Lucy -who had stopped walking when Natsu had rested a hand on her hip- were shooting him equally scathing looks, Gray barking out a defense when he noticed the redhead’s glare. “What?” He asked, eyes sliding over to Natsu and looking him up and down, bored disdain evident on his stupid face. Had Natsu called his face stupid already? Oh well, it was true. “Like you’re not thinking the same thing, Erza.” he snarled, “Look at him! He’s covered in tat’s and piercings, rides a motorcycle, doesn’t have a job! Lucy can do so much better than this fuckhead! He even has a stupid unoriginal one down his side, what is that, Calean for ‘hit it and quit it’?” Natsu looked down at his bare side, frowning. He felt Lucy shift forward in his hand and tightened it in response, holding her in place still.

“It doesn’t mean that,” he mumbled to himself. Three weeks ago Natsu had gotten a brilliant idea to help him work on his latest craft project; glass blowing. And while heated hands were good for shaping the glass, it wasn’t the ideal for creating bubbles and blowing. Hence, his new tattoo. Five runes ran from his sixth rib to his waist, staring at a rune for fire protection, followed by one for fire storage, then fire manipulation, fire creation, and an increased healing rune at the end. Some of these symbols had already been placed on his skin, but Natsu had wanted extra protection if he was going
to create a furnace inside himself. He would really prefer not to die when his life wasn’t horrible, and
the closer the rune was to where it was supposed to be protecting the better.

The hit Natsu took to his self esteem at the truth behind Gray’s words was instantly washed away
when he looked at Lucy, the pure rage that he saw growing like fire in her chocolate eyes melting his
heart and causing him to tug her under his arm and into his side. She made a small ‘epp’ at the
sudden motion, but settled quickly into his embrace while still glaring at Gray, who was holding her
look with his own sullen one. “What, don’t you think I’m smart enough to decide whether someone
is ‘good enough’ for me? I want to be by Natsu’s side, and I’m sure as hell going to stay there
whether or not you approve .” she said coolly, hissing the final word and making Gray flinch slightly,
even if he held her gaze. Natsu figured the sudden hostility had to do with their pasts, and it piqued
Natsu’s curiosity more about Lucy when she was younger. He couldn’t give a flying fuck about Ice
Dick.

“He’s bad news,” Gray shot back, low tone and harsh eyes as he looked at Natsu. “All he’ll do is
drag you down and hurt you, get you mixed up in whatever shady bullshit he’s part of.” Natsu
flashed back to his dream months ago, his brother’s voice still ringing in his ears . Death. His
shoulder’s rolled inwards, looking down at Lucy. Would she be safe with him, even if she
wanted to be here? He wasn’t given long to brood as shock and outrage turned to murder on her face, Lucy
breaking free from his side hug to stalk towards Gray.

Fear finally crept over his cocky sneer as Lucy picked up her pace, Natsu stepping forward and
snagging the back of his shirt in time before Lucy was within punching range. She would be upset if
she hurt her friend, no matter how much Natsu thought the prick deserved it. Besides, if Natsu knew
Erza at all shit was about to go down in three, two, one...

“ Gray Miles Fullbuster. ” Erza seethed, Gray turning even paler and freezing in his place. Natsu bit
his tongue to hold in a cackle, Lucy still straining against his hold on her -his- shirt. Gray’s thin eyes
grew large as he looked between an enraged Lucy and an even deadlier Erza, Natsu mouthing ‘
You’re so fucked’ to him when the two boys made eye contact. At the same time that Gray took a
step back in panic Erza swung, catching the boy in the jaw and sending him to the floor. Lucy made
a hiss of pity while Natsu’s face scrunched in something less than sympathy, he knew what it was
like to be at the end of Erza’s sucker punch. Natsu waved mockingly as Erza dragged him out of
Lucy’s apartment by his hair, Gray calling strangled apologies and howling for Erza to let him go
and Erza lecturing him on the sanctity of romance and knowing all the facts before speaking.

Lucy and Natsu continued to stand where they had been for several more moments as they listened
to their friends racket disappear down the hallway. Natsu hoped Erza threw Gray down the steps.

“Ignore him,” she said softly as she turned around, Natsu schooling his face into a cocky expression.
He shrugged, grinning as he looked down at her.

“Pssh, like I give a rat’s ass ‘bout what that stripper thinks of me.” Natsu said easily, smile straining
as Lucy continued to look at him with seriousness in her eyes. She walked forward, hugging Natsu
tightly and making him freeze, arms hovering over her before he enveloped her and hugged her just
as tightly in return. He laughed at himself as he breathed in her soothing vanilla scent, face resting on
the crown of her head. Not even Happy could read him as well as Lucy could.

“I know, Natsu. And nothing bad is going to happen to me. I’m going to stay by your side for as
long as you want me.”

“That’s gonna to be an awfully long time,” Natsu mumbled, smiling when he heard her gentle laugh.
“Could even be for forever.”
“When did you get all romantic?” Lucy teased, smacking his chest and Natsu pulling back to look down at her.

“Oi, I can get a perfect gentleman when I wanna,” Natsu grumbled, frown cracking when Lucy laughed loudly and rose on her tiptoes to press a kiss to his chin.

“A gentleman and a dragon?” Lucy asked innocently, Natsu pretending to think for a minute.

“You’re right, who’d want some stuffy borin’ guy when you could be lovin’ a dragon!” Natsu exclaimed holding her tightly as he twirled her around. Lucy squealed and giggled, wiggling in his embrace and yelling at him to put her down even as her voice shook with laughter. Natsu did as told, humming when she linked her arms around his neck and leaned into his chest.

“Oh, but I don’t think I’ve loved a dragon yet,” she breathed into his neck, lighthearted mood leaving him instantly and making Natsu grip her tighter. “Even though I’d very much like to try.” With that, Lucy pressed her lips against his throat, Natsu feeling her grin as he swallowed harshly.

“I can fix that?” Natsu tried to keep a smooth tone, but the voice crack at the end made him wince and Lucy snort.

“Are you asking me?” Lucy teased, playful glint in her eye as she looked up at him, breasts pushing heavier against his chest. He tightened his embrace around her, lowering his head to press his nose to hers.

“I can fix that.” Natsu grumbled, Lucy's lip catching between her teeth at his low tone and wandering hands. He kissed her then, slowly moving his tongue against hers and exploring her mouth. Natsu didn't think he would ever get tired of feeling Lucy’s mouth on his tongue or the way she would move and push hers back against him. Her lips slated hungrily against his, nails digging into his bare chest after trailing over his shoulders. Natsu lifted one thigh, holding it tightly against his hip and pressing her closer to him, Lucy eagerly hooking her leg around him. Natsu chuckled darkly when Lucy used her hold on his shoulders to lift herself and grip her thighs on either side of his waist, Natsu's hands falling to support her by her ass. They gripped her tightly as Natsu walked backwards until he felt the counter behind him, leaning against it as he let his fingertips slip under her shorts, exploring the full curve of her backside as much as they could.

Smoke filtered into his nose through the vanilla and honey scent that swam around Lucy, Natsu scrunching his nose and burying further into her hair, saturating himself in Lucy’s sweet smell. It felt so right to hold her so close to him so that he could feel her heart beating in harmony with his, her skin soft in his hands, scent wiping his mind blank of anything but her, her teeth tugging at his piercings before her hot tongue lapped at them with lewd strokes.

And then she pulled back shrieking something incomprehensible and flailing in his arms. Natsu let her go, confusion and self preservation for his heightened hearing quickening his movements. He stood frozen as he watched Lucy rush to the oven, removing the pot boiling over with pasta sauce from it’s element, red paste burned to the still hot stove top. Natsu finally moved when he heard her hiss and curse, cradling her hand to her chest after letting the messed pot clang on the counter. With one hand Natsu turned off the heat on the stove, and the other was gently prying Lucy’s hand away from the burn. With cautious guidance Natsu inspected her hand, a large red streak covering her palm and even Natsu could feel the heat radiating off of the burn. He looked at Lucy as he rolled over her hand to see if there was any other damage, her gaze pained and focused on her pale skin. Natsu frowned further when a small laugh bubbled up, even as tears gathered in her thick lashes.

“Every time you’re in here something burns,” she giggled, eyes still tight in distress and tone more tinny than Natsu had heard it before. Natsu felt his shoulders slump, heavy weight settling in his
stomach. Denial was on the tip of his tongue, but Gray’s words were still in his head. Was this really his fault, had he been the one to hurt Lucy, even just by being in the same space? Natsu’s grip tightened on her hand before he let it slip from his fingers, his head ducking away from her face.

“Sorry.” He said softly, hands pushing into the pockets on his sweatpants as he put distance between him and Lucy. You’ve had this nasty habit of tarnishing the most beautiful things. More words whispered in the back of his head, the voice soft and convincing as it echoed under his consciousness. He made to gather his scarf from the floor, but he paused when he felt light touches on his forearm.

“Oh, Natsu, no. No, I was just joking,” Lucy rushed out, eyes pleading when he looked at her. He stayed where he was as she moved closer, hand settling on his wrist and tugging his hand free from the pocket, intertwining their fingers as she looked at him with wide eyes.

“It’s true though,” Natsu sighed, looking down at their joined hands. Lucy was still holding her injured one to her chest, and Natsu felt his frown deepen at how she cradled the pale flesh against his white shirt, the bright colouring making the edge of the burn all the more obvious.

“Well maybe it’s because you’re so hot everything overheats,” Lucy said lightly, washing away his worry and making love warm his chest. Natsu chuckled at her put-upon pout as he untangled his fingers from hers, instead holding her curious gaze when he brought both hands to cup her injured one. Gently he unfurled her fingers, bringing her palm to his lips. Natsu took a deep breath as his lips brushed against the heat of her burn, imagining he was drawing in the heat to his own body, eyes falling shut in concentration. When he exhaled he let his breath carry with it the hope of healing her, eyebrows furrowing as he felt the unpracticed magic swirl under his skin. Fire magic always warmed his blood, but the healing spell he was vaguely recalling felt like power just under his skin, easier to share and less controllable. He felt his magic spark and race through him, warmth from her burn pooling in his lower stomach and lips tingling as he pulled away, eyes fluttering open to look at Lucy as he felt her cool skin rest against his parted lips.

“Looks like Aquarius wasn’t bullshit’, I don’t need runes and spells to use magic when I’m with ya.”

Lucy continued to stare at him with wide eyes, red blush traveling across her cheeks and shoulders. Natsu decided that he liked that red on her, the rosy soft glowing kind rather than the blistering red that had been on her hand seconds before. “Ah,” Lucy sounded, Natsu smirking as they remained in their spot and Lucy’s eyes unfocused the longer he kept her hand to his mouth. Her hand was slow as it shifted in his grasp, fingertips trailing over his lips, smooth skin pleasant against his chapped lips. “My boyfriend has magic lips,” Lucy breathed to herself, smile growing with Natsu’s as they looked at one another. He leaned his forehead against hers, pressing his lips into a kiss against her fingers even as he began to laugh.

“Your boyfriend has magic everything, weirdo. I am a witch,” he teased, Lucy’s eyes melting and the miniscule tension leaving her body when she saw Natsu return to his usual self.

“I like it when you say that,” Lucy hummed, grinning up at Natsu as she trailed her fingers along his jaw before settling them on the back of his neck, other hand resting on his chest. Natsu let his rest on her hips, his shirt bunching under his rough hands.

“Witch?” Natsu asked in surprise. He didn’t really get it, but maybe it reminded Lucy of how smart she was, figuring it out before he told her. Or maybe Natsu was wrong, judging by the way the kitchen filled with tinkling laughter.

“No dummy, ‘boyfriend’.” Lucy corrected, headbutting Natsu lightly. Natsu’s grin widened, and he
ran his hands up and down her sides, Lucy squirming and holding in giggles at his touch.

“Now is that anyway to talk to your boyfriend, Lucy?” Natsu grinned, tickling her harshly. Lucy twisted in his grasp, howls and cries mixed with loud laughter and slapping hands, Natsu chanting ‘boyfriend’ over and over, crooning the word in her ear and dodging when she threw her head back and almost caught Natsu in the nose.

“It is when he’s a giant dork!” Lucy wheezed, laughter breaking apart the breathy words. Natsu hugged her tightly in retribution, Lucy squealing loudly and kicking her feet in the air in front of them. “Put me down you dumb dragon!” Lucy called loudly, words harsh but her voice bursting with giddiness and joy. Natsu did as he was told, noise of surprise swallowed when Lucy spun in his arms and pulled his mouth to hers by a tight grip in his hair. Natsu sank into the kiss, Lucy strong and confident as she pressed her lips to his. Natsu pouted when she pulled back, eyes still shut as he chased after her and bumped her nose with his again.

“How you get me all fired up, Luce.” He growled, lips twitching in a grin as red raced across Lucy’s face. So she liked his rough voice, eh? Natsu was going to keep that in his back pocket when his puppy-dog eyes failed him. If he couldn’t make her pity him he might be able to distract her.

Lucy cleared her throat and looked over her shoulder, Natsu’s grin sharpening as he won. “Hope you don’t mind burnt food,” Lucy mumbled, shoulders slumping as she eyed the sauce pot on the counter and the pasta still cooking on the stove. Hopefully that part wasn’t ruined too, or Natsu would feel really bad. Lucy was adamant about having a real date, and had even offered to cook this time.

“You kiddin’?” Natsu asked, tone light as he slung an arm over her shoulder and they both faced the almost ruined kitchen. “I lived off burnt food before Happy couldn’t take it anymore and forced me to read a cookbook.” Lucy sent him a grateful smile, taking a deep breath before setting her shoulders and lifting her chin.

“Heh,” Lucy tittered, leaning further back as Natsu opened his eyes.

“Alright, time for dinner!” Natsu laughed to himself quietly as he watched his girlfriend - his girlfriend! - stomp over to the pot with determined steps, words more of a battle cry than invitation to eat. His Lucy sure was weird, and he loved every second of it.

Natsu dropped down on the couch, arms thrown over the back and legs splayed. “Lushiixx how do you manage to burn something and still make it taste better than my cooking?” Natsu whined, stomach full and a pleasant ache settling in. The kind that meant he had -more than- enough food and could indulge himself. He let his head fall back so he was watching Lucy walk around upside down, possessive heat curling in his chest as he took in the sight of her.

Her hair had remained loose, blonde strands wavy from the braid and framing her face like a pale halo. Her thigh high socks were uneven where they rested, Natsu recalling how it felt to tug the cotton down her soft thigh and reveal her milky skin to him. His tank top was loose on her, her shorts barely peeking out from underneath the loose white material and her lacy bra easily seen when the top shifted too low on her front or under her arms. Damn did she look good in his clothes. He might have to ‘accidently’ do her laundry more often.

“I wasn’t sure if it was good or if you were just starving with the way you inhaled three portions,” Lucy said dryly, not turning to face him as she gathered the dishes and placed them in the sink. Natsu pouted when he heard the water start to run, calling Lucy’s name loudly and drawing it out as long as he could. He heard her sigh heavily, eyes lighting up when she finally looked over her shoulder at
him. Natsu cackled internally as she didn’t even bat an eye at his pose, instead looking at him expectantly. “What is it Natsu?” She asked in mild amusement, try as she did to hide it behind agitation. “I have to do the dishes.”

“But we’re on a date,” Natsu complained, drawing out ‘date’ so that his point was equally made and annoying Lucy. “You’re posed to pay attention to me.” He kept his face serious as she snorted and rolled her eyes, putting her fists on her hips as she turned to face him more squarely.

“You could always come over here and clean up with me,” Lucy offered, knowing smile on her face as Natsu furrowed his brow and continued to look at her upside down.

“Don’t wanna. Ya have to come over here and watch a movie with me!” Natsu countered, grinning at her when he finished. He could tell by the way her hands relaxed from their fists that he was winning, even if she refused to admit it for another minute. Natsu crowed in victory when Lucy sighed her acceptance, leaving the dishes to soak in the sink. Natsu righted himself and bounced slightly on the sofa, reaching for the remote and flipping through the settings on the TV until he was on Netflix. He pouted when Lucy plucked the remote from his hand, walking between him and the screen to pick up a blanket before she settled into his side. Natsu looked at her with an entertained glance as she laid the blanket over them, Lucy ignoring his questioning eyebrow lift. She knew that he could easily heat them if she got too cold.

Natsu let her cuddle into his side without comment, groaning loudly when she picked a chick flick and increasing the volume of his unhappiness when she swatted his chest. He stared sourly at the screen as the movie began to play, arm wrapped around her shoulder playing with her hair idly as his nose scrunched in disgusted boredom. He didn’t know if he could take an hour and a half of this mushy feelly bullcrap. He was distracted from horrors of trashy acting when Natsu felt lips brush on his neck, Lucy’s hand tangled in his scarf and tugging it loose from it’s wrap. He let his hand fall lower so it rested on the small of her back, fingers pulling up the tank top she wore so that he could brush his fingertips over her smooth skin.

“Figured you’d want a movie we didn’t have to pay attention to,” Lucy said softly, lazy grin and half lidded eyes looking up at Natsu and making it difficult for him to swallow. He grinned down at her, nipping at her jaw and trailing his mouth over the side of her face and corner of her mouth as he spoke.

“Why Lucy, were ya plannin’ on seducin’ me?” He asked innocently, shock in his tone but eyes dark as he looked at her.

“Yes.”

With her simple answer Natsu’s eyes widened, curious fingers traveling dangerously close to the flap in his sweatpants. “Lu-Luce?” He choked on her name, voice questioning as she grinned impishly at him. Lucy pressed a gentle kiss to his cheek before she was sucking and kissing his neck, scarf resting on the back of the couch. Natsu’s eyes slid shut as he struggled to control his breathing, groaning when Lucy flicked her tongue along his cartilage piercings. Yeah, that was a definite thing for him now.

Lucy squeaked when Natsu groped harshly at her ass, hand squeezing her and fingers digging into the flesh that spilled from the bottom of her shorts in her kneeling position tucked into his side, making her jump slightly more towards his body. Her hand splayed on his lower abs, fingertips bracing on muscles before they relaxed. Lucy hummed in contentment, exploring the ridges of his stomach muscles and the dip of his waist into his sweats. One finger trailed up and down the defined line, slipping under the band before retreating to safer places only to repeat the motion. Without warning Lucy was pressing her palm against his crotch, Natsu hissing and hips jumping into the
“Someone’s excited,” Lucy mused, pulling back with a smug smile as she ground her hand against Natsu’s hardening length. Natsu only released a low swear before he gripped the back of her head and pulled her mouth to his forcefully. Their teeth clacked but Natsu was soon pressing apologetic kisses and running his tongue along hers, exploring her already familiar mouth as his hips jumped into her hand again. He felt her smirk against his mouth, Natsu nipping at her lower lip and putting even more passion into the kiss so that he stole her breath. He swallowed her moan as his hand tightened in her hair, ego bursting at the lewd noise muffled by their tongues playing and chasing each other into the others mouth. He felt her hand venture under his pants, Natsu pulling back and panting, one hand resting on her curious one.

“Do you really want to?” Natsu questioned, needing to be completely certain that she wanted to touch him as much as he wanted her to do it, because oh gods did he want her to touch him. So much that he would beg if she asked. Lucy beamed up at him, nodding and slowly inching her hand further down his pants. Natsu licked his lips as he watched her face, hand falling to his side as he allowed her to continue. Her fingers drew back in surprise when they met his base, Natsu pulling his lip between his teeth at the soft sensation. It was like she was teasing him, her touch nothing more than a ghost.

“No! Fuck, no, Lucy, that was good. So good, maybe even tighter.” Natsu panted, hazy gaze focusing on Lucy’s blush and shy smile. Her hand resumed its place on his cock, grip tighter as she moved up and down his length. Natsu made a sound of encouragement, biting harshly at his lip and looking at her through cracked eyes as her thumb swiped curiously over his head, lewd moan and jumping hips following immediately. Natsu tried to control his breathing as she continued to explore his cock, testing different grips and poking and playing with his slit and ridge of his head. “Lucy,” Natsu groaned, head tipping backwards as Lucy kissed his neck again, her tongue dragging languidly along his pulse as she crawled so she was half over his lap, hand still stroking him under his pants and the blanket. As pathetic as it was he was close already, her hand softer than he had imagined and so different than his own touch it was driving him insane in all the right ways.

In fact he was so distracted by Lucy and the sweat drops sliding along her collarbone and between her breasts from the heavy heat his magic emanated that he didn’t hear the gentle pop of magic that signalled they were no longer alone.

“Lushii,” a high voice called, Natsu’s eyes snapping wide and following scramble to separate between him and Lucy sending Natsu tumbling to the ground in a mess of flailing arms and legs and blanket. He laid there, panting heavily on his back and sporting a large tent, Lucy forcing a pleasant expression as she looked at Happy who was perched on the back of the couch, his wings
disappearing in a puff of sparkles. “I’m bored and Natsu doesn’t have any good fish.” He said in a
sad voice, tears forming in the corner of his large eyes as he looked up at Lucy. Natsu let his head fall
back on the carpet with a dull thud, eyes unfocused as he stared at the ceiling. Lucy and Happy’s
conversation fell into the background noise, Natsu barely acknowledging as Lucy scooped up Happy
and hugged him to her chest as she made her way to the kitchen.

To get that stupid cat his fish.

Natsu had been.

This.

Close.

And he had been cockblocked again, by a fish-obsessed ball of blue fur and white wings. Natsu
covered his face with his hands, willing away his boner while simultaneously cursing every god or
goddess or deity he could think off. Was it really too much to ask for? Just one tiny orgasm by
Lucy’s hand. Or mouth. Or body. Fuck at this point if she said the right things her voice could
probably get him off no problem.

Natsu was a good person, really he was. And he loved his friend and familiar very much, Happy had
been Natsu’s best friend and only family for years. But right now... He craned his neck, groaning to
himself as he still saw the large bulge, proud and decidedly unhardened. So much for date attempt
number two.

“Lucy, why is Natsu laying on the floor like a weirdo?”

Fuck Happy.
Natsu watched as the crushed plants in his hand went up in flames, face twisted in a scowl as not even the multicoloured sparks and thrum of his magic in his blood lightened his mood.

“Natsuuuuu, I said I was sorry.” Happy chimed above him, voice apologetic and movements agitated as he flew in circles around Natsu’s head. Natsu huffed as he let the ashes fall into the mixing bowl in front of him and pile on top of the dark green paint. Angelica root, eucalyptus leaves, and pear blossom flowers were now reduced to ash and mixed together, charms of inspiration, protection, and comfort started earlier when Natsu had been grinding the plants before Lucy had barged in. Natsu was thankful he had been in a better mood when he had been casting the spells heightened by the natural plants, as his mind was in no place to comfortably cast magic.

“Have ya ever been blueballed, Happy?” Natsu snapped, mixing the paint more harshly than necessary as he refused to look at his friend. “No? Well it fuckin’ hurts.” He continued to grumble, shoulders relaxing slightly as a gentle weight settled on his head, Happy nuzzling into his scarf tying his bangs back.

“Why don’t you go back then?” Happy asked tentatively, guilt lacing his high voice.

“’Cus the moment was ruined and there’s only so much my dick can take,” Natsu explained dejectedly, the last remnants of his irritation melting away as he put a cover on the paint. If he tried to make anything right now the strokes would be harsh and angry, not the ideal for a forest at dawn. The other paints were mixed, and Natsu had set aside dried spiera to dust the painting with afterwards to add the effect on light dancing between the dark single colour of the trees’ horizon.

It would mainly focus on the details of the border of the foliage rather than the colour, but the hippy lady he was painting for was into that modern look, and Natsu enjoyed the opportunity to experiment and try new styles. Granted, he would probably stab the canvas with the brush if he tried right now. So much for working on his orders.

He debated going back to Lucy’s like Happy had suggested, but cringed inwardly when he felt himself rub against his pants. In this state he was likely to jump her in his sleep, and he wasn’t about to risk her trust or a broken jaw just to fall asleep beside her. He would return to her bed tomorrow after some ‘cool down’ time -read: jacking it as many times a humanly possible. With a hint of sadness he eyed the blank canvas, fingers twitching in the need to do something. Glancing at a can of unopened red paint, he debated practicing his style and technique for a few more hours. A small smile tugged at his lips when Happy gently voiced his encouragement, seeing his witch’s pause and guessing his thoughts. Natsu let his cheek lean on Happy’s head when the cat crawled onto his shoulder, perched there like it was his rightful throne. Natsu snorted at the idea of ‘King Happy’, and he ignored the cat’s amused -if confused- look.

He had energies to focus, and he might have just found the second best outlet for tonight. What was the worse that could happen, Natsu would waste a few hours and a fresh canvas?

Natsu ran into the room, crudely made figure of clay in his hands and bare feet slapping on the wood.

“Igneel, Igneel, Igneel! Look look look! I made a thing like you do!” He shouted, bouncing on the balls of his feet when he came to a sudden halt in front of a man seated at a tall workbench. Natsu
could barely see above the counter, and he rose on his tip toes to see what the older man had been working on before Natsu had barged in. He yelped as he was shoved down by a rough hand ruffling his hair, the large hand remaining in his wild short spikes as Natsu glared up at the man.

“No peekin’ squirt, this is grown up shit I’m workin’ on right now.” A deep voice chastised light heartedly. Natsu whined loudly as he tried to push against Igneel’s hand to look at what the man had been fiddling with, curiosity making him forget about the object in his hands.

“Come on Igneel! Ya can tell me, I’m 8 now! That’s almost an adult, ain’t it?” Natsu complained loudly, eyes bright as he struggled against the hand still resting on his head. The hand slipped from his hair and Natsu crowed in victory, missing the way Igneel’s eyes widened in shock as he gripped the edge on the desktop to try and gain some more leverage. He was stopped from examining the twisted and bent hunk of metal closer by a heavy hand on his shoulder turning his body to face Igneel’s. The man had moved from his stool to kneel in front of Natsu, their eyes now level. Natsu blinked in confusion at the seriousness in Igneel’s dark eyes, sun and age lines around his nose and eyes more pronounced by the lack of his usual smirk and dark skin. Thin working glasses were pushed past his forehead and resting on a scaled scarf that held back Igneel’s unruly mane of flame red hair.

“What do you mean you’re 8 now? When was your birthday?” Igneel asked, searching Natsu’s face with concern. “I would have done som-”

“Oh nah, it’s today!” Natsu interrupted, reminded of the object in his hands at the change in subject. He thrust it closer to Igneel’s face with a toothy smile, basically vibrating with energy as he showed it off. “But that don’t matter anyway, not like it’s ‘portant or anything. Look, look! This is what I wanted to show ya!” He pushed it into Igneel’s face again, smile falling as Igneel continued to ignore the statue and pushed Natsu’s outstretched hands away with one of his own.

“Hell you talkin’ ‘bout it not being important?” He asked gruffly, eyes narrowed, right one thinner than the left due to the large ‘X’ scar on his cheek. Natsu shifted uncomfortably, statue falling dejectedly in front of his body.

“Ze never did nothin’ for it, so it don’t mean nothin’. Just the day I was born or whatever. But it’s also the day I met you, so it ain’t all bad I guess! A-and look! I made this, like you!” Natsu explained, forcing cheeriness as he lifted the statue to his chest. He looked up at Igneel hopefully, bouncing when the older man’s eyes finally looked down at what Natsu was holding.

It was a badly built cartoon dragon, disproportioned head and tail with one wing dropping lower than the other. Natsu had spent hours on it, looking through Igneel’s statues and drawings to try and make something as cool as he could. The small seed of pride he had felt in his chest was slowly being snuffed though, as Igneel continued to stare at it without a reaction.

“You... made that?” He asked slowly, looking up at Natsu with a curious expression. Natsu nodded, lowering the statue slightly as he looked away.

“Ne-nevermind, it was stupid anywa-” Natsu mumbled ducking his head as he tried to turn away, Igneel’s firm grip stopping him.

“Hey, hey, don’t get like that on me!” Igneel barked, Natsu shrinking back instinctively at Igneel’s outburst as he murmured a small ‘sorry’. “Fuc-shit, no, Natsu, ya don’t have to be sorry, really kid. I just want to get a better look at your... umm, frog?” Igneel said in a softer tone, voice gentle like one would use to soothe a cornered baby animal.

“It’s a dragon!” Natsu squawked, eyes furrowed as he scowled at Igneel indignantly.
“Ha!” Igneel spat out a sharp laugh, amusement clear as he looked over Natsu’s sudden return to his regular lip and fiery attitude. “Damn straight it’s a dragon!” He said with a hint of smugness and smiling encouragingly when Natsu beamed up at him, obviously glowing under the praise.

“Uh huh! And I made it for you!” He continued proudly, chest puffing out as he pressed it into Igneel’s face again, smiling widely when Igneel tentatively took it. “It hasn’t been baked yet ‘cus I couldn’t get the kiln started and the chair kept wobbling when I tried’a stand on it and then I fell but I didn’t squish it so I figured it’d be good enough like that and I didn’t break the chair I swear the one leg’s always been shorter than the others—” Natsu rambled excitedly, hands clasped behind him as he rocked in the spot.

“But why?”

Natsu blinked blankly up at Igneel, the man holding the clay carefully and tenderly. Igneel had left his hand on Natsu’s shoulder this whole time, fingers squeezing him slightly as Igneel continued to search Natsu’s face. “Why what?” Natsu asked, head cocking to the left and small eyebrows furrowing. Why was Igneel acting so weird?

“Why’d ya make me something? I love it, don’t get me wrong kid this is going on the front mantle. But... why’d you make it in the first place?”

“So you won’t get rid of me.” Natsu said simply, growing restless when Igneel’s body froze and his eyes grew into large circles.

“Natsu, how could you ever think I’d wa—” Igneel asked in a hushed voice, grip tightening on Natsu’s shoulder and making the boy stumble closer.

“‘Cus I overheard ya talkin’ to Uncle Meti,” Natsu interrupted, looking at his feet as he kicked at the wooden floorboards. “He was sayin’ that Shavin’s Breath was helping him ‘round the shop and that at least he was puttin’ in the time, a-and then I heard ya say you didn’t know w-why you were keepin’ me ‘round and I—” he choked up, Natsu lifting a small hand to scrub at his eyes as he continued to avoid looking at Igneel. “I don’t wanna leave,” he whispered to the floor, “I k-know I get in the way and th-that I’m annoying and loud and ya didn’t have to t-take m-me in, but I can do stuff too!” He looked up at Igneel suddenly, eyes passionate and watery and making Igneel jump back by a fraction.

“I, I can learn shit! I can build and help and practice magic like you and Ze! I can be useful!” Natsu stared up at Igneel after he had finished, tear trails running down his cheeks and nose snotty from the raw emotions, but his young eyes were serious and a little bit pleading.

It was Natsu’s turn to be shocked when Igneel sat the statue on the ground gently before pulling Natsu into a crushing hug, the boy blinking rapidly as his face was pressed into part of Igneel’s hair.

“Uh-umm, what are you doin’?” Natsu asked slowly, arms remaining by his side as the seconds ticked by. He grunted -because boys do not squeak, no matter how young they are, and especially not Natsu- when Igneel tightened his hold on him, one hand gripping Natsu’s head and holding the boy against his chest.

“I, I can learn shit! I can build and help and practice magic like you and Ze! I can be useful!” Natsu stared up at Igneel after he had finished, tear trails running down his cheeks and nose snotty from the raw emotions, but his young eyes were serious and a little bit pleading.

“Natsu, you listen real good right now, ‘kay?” Igneel asked in a rough voice, Natsu nodding mutely, confused and feeling uneasy by the sudden tension in Igneel and his strange behaviour. “Never, never think that I don’t want you. You’re part of my coven now, got it? You have been since that day a year ago when I found you, and you always will. Havin’ you ‘round made me realize how much I was missin’ in my life before, and I’m grateful everyday I’m with ya.”
Igneel pulled back then, eyes misty and he wiped the back of one hand across his face before he thumbed at his crooked nose. Natsu’s lower lip was trembling as he tried to stop himself from crying more, because men didn’t cry and he was gonna be just like Igneel but maybe if Igneel was crying it would be okay for Natsu to as well. Igneel’s eyes lit up with an idea, and he tagged the scarf from around his head off in one motion, standing and muttering to himself as he searched his desk for something. Natsu didn’t have time to collect himself enough to ask Igneel what he was doing before the man was kneeling in front of Natsu again, match in one hand and scarf in the other.

Natsu watched with wide eyes as Igneel began to mutter an incantation, a white flame lighting suddenly on the match and red smoke rising. Igneel waved the smoke under the scarf a few passes as he continued to repeat the spell before he brought the flame until it was almost touching the white scaly material. A symbol with circles, lines, triangles, and diamonds appeared on the white material as Igneel burned it into the fabric, the entire scarf shining bright red for a few seconds after Igneel blew out the match, the scarf returning to its original colour and all visual trace of magic disappearing with red sparks.

“Happy birthday, Natsu.” Igneel said softly as he wound the scarf several times around Natsu’s neck. Natsu fist at the gift, looking down at it in awe before he looked back up at Igneel, speechless. No one had ever given him a present before. “It’s enchanted with a symbol for safety, so that whenever you wear it you’ll know how much I love you and you’ll never have to be scared of bein’ alone, ‘cus whenever you wear that scarf it’ll be like I’m with ya.”

“Thanks, Dad.” Natsu sobbed before he threw himself at Igneel, arms wrapping tightly around the older man’s neck.

“No problem... s-son.” Igneel whispered huskily, picking up the statue in one hand and holding the small of Natsu’s back with the other as the boy gripped Igneel’s middle with his short legs. “C’mon, it’s past your bedtime.” He muttered, chuckling at Natsu’s sullen reply.

“You don’t have a bedtime.”

“Well I ain’t a cute little kid like you.” Igneel shot back, laughing loudly as Natsu squirmed in his arm and banged his fists on Igneel’s chest.

“I ain’t ‘ cute ’,” he roared, “I’ma badass like you!”

“Awww, you really think that, don’cha brat? I got the cutest son in the world!” Igneel crowed, putting the statue on the side table beside the stairs when Natsu started to yank on his hair and face. Igneel pressed his fist into Natsu’s hair and gave him a noogie, the two falling to the floor in a scuffle as Natsu continued to fight him.

“I ain’t fuckin’ cute old man!”

“Where’d you learn that foul mouth?” Igneel lectured, Natsu squirming from his hold and climbing onto his back, Igneel trying to keep a disapproving look even as he caught Natsu by the back of his shirt and brought him to dangle in front of Igneel’s face.

“Where’d you think?” Natsu huffed, feet kicking in the air futilely. Igneel eyed his pouting for a moment after Natsu folded his arms in front of his chest and tucked his nose into his new scarf.

“You wanna see me work on a new spell?” Igneel asked, cocking an eyebrow when Natsu’s head jerked up, eyes filled with excitement and childish wonder.

“Really?” Natsu asked eagerly, forgetting about Igneel’s hold on his scruff momentarily.
“Would I offer otherwise?” Igneel snorted, placing Natsu on his shoulders and tilting his head back to look up at the young boy. “Come on, maybe we can fu-mess around with Uncle Meti’s sh-stuff while we’re in the shop.” He winked conspiratorially up at Natsu, the young boy bouncing in excitement and grinning down impishly at his father.

“Well what’re you waitin’ for, Dad? Let’s go!”

“Dad?”

Pain burned through Natsu, fire hotter than anything he had ever created or felt before seemingly trying to use his blood as it’s fuel. He clawed at his skin, particularly the center of his back where the pain originated from. He twisted in his sheets, sweat making the thin cotton stick to his overheating skin and curls of steam leaving his body when the cool air struck him.

“Dad?” Natsu called again, rasp barely audible as he gasped for breath when another surge of pain tore through him. Vision returned to him in patches, edges blurred every time he was conscious enough to understand what he was seeing. His door was open, light from the hallway flooding into his room. Natsu threw his body onto his side, fisting at the pillowcase as he struggled to push his chest off the bed. If he got to the door maybe his father could help him...

Natsu looked down and screamed when he felt another pulse of pain hit him, this time running along his spine and the base of his skull. His eyes focused after a few seconds, and Natsu felt any pain that remained in him fade to a dull white noise at what he saw before him.

“D-Dad?” Natsu whimpered, using his hands to pull him to the edge of his single bed. “Come on Dad, get up.” He sobbed. Igneel laid on the ground with his limbs splayed around him uselessly, his vibrant red hair covering his face partially so that Natsu couldn’t see his eyes. With the pain fading to static came the return of other senses, and he almost wished for the all-consuming torture to come back.

The scent hit Natsu and he retched beside his bed, everything in his stomach hitting the floor and the acidic scent of his bile mixing in his nose with the scent of charred flesh. Igneel’s forearms were burnt all the way to the elbow, skin blistered and blackened, Igneel’s fingers frozen in a casting position. Those fingers that Natsu had watched work on such delicate spells and statues and metalwork for 7 years...

“IGNEEL” Natsu screamed, body contorting in agony as the fire returned, spreading like a poison from his protection tattoo. He had to help, he had to do something. He hit the ground with a thud and he forced his arms and legs to make him crawl the few feet to where Igneel laid in the center of his room, collapsing on the man’s chest as pain made Natsu lose his vision and dry heave, nothing left inside to throw up. “Igneel, pl-please, wake up. You ca-can’t leave me. Please.” Natsu begged, forehead resting on his father’s chest and a fresh sob ripping from him when he heard no heartbeat, felt no rise or fall of his chest.

“No no no no no,” Natsu whimpered to himself, shaking his head in denial and gripping desperately at Igneel’s shirt. The pain in his blood had faded, but it was nothing compared to the feeling of his heart breaking and his soul being ripped to shreds inside him. Movement to his side caught his attention, and Natsu blinked tears from his eyes as a dark shadow slipped out his open window, curtains fluttering in the late summer breeze.

“Get back here you bastard!” Natsu cried, unable to leave Igneel’s body both due to pain and shock. “Zeref! I’ll kill you, you hear that! Why couldn’t you just leave me alone? We were happy! I was happy...” His voice dropped to a whisper as he looked down at Igneel again. Sobs tore through
his chest and he collapsed on Igneel’s body once more, clinging to him. A part of Natsu kept waiting for Igneel to put his arms around him and hold him like he used to when Natsu had nightmares. “I’ll kill him,” Natsu whimpered to himself.

If it was the last thing he did.

“Hello Natsu.”

Natsu bolted up, hands shaking and hyperventilating.

“If you’re tryin’ to get me to kill you that’s a hell of a way to get started.” Natsu growled, gaze sweeping until he saw what he was looking for. Zeref.

“Well you’re not wrong,” Zeref said, tone almost amused and lips twitching as though they were about to form a smile. Instead though, his pale features returned to their neutral indifference, bangs falling into his piercing red irises. “But if I were you I’d be focusing on more pressing matters.”

“And what the fuck would that be?” Natsu snarled, rising on shaking legs and slowly stepping towards his brother. He froze when Zeref lifted his hand from the sleeve that fully hid it, ancient looking rob black and adorned with gold embroidery on the edges, white sash on his left shoulder and wrapping loosely over his middle in many layers, the only thing separating his body from the death-like blackness that folded in with his heavy cloaks swimming around his feet. Natsu’s fist clenched painfully as he watched Zeref’s hand rise slowly to rub at his temple hidden under loose black bangs. The dark haired man tutted as he shook his head, disappointment clear in his madness hazed gaze.

“How quickly you forget about those you claim to love,” he sighed, motioning with his chin to the ground by his feet. Panic closed Natsu’s throat as familiar blonde hair covered the face of the kneeling girl beside Zeref’s feet. With a calm hand Zeref reached down and yanked at the girl, forcing her to stand and pulling her head back to reveal her face in one motion. She cried out in fear and pain, hands holding the hair between Zeref’s hold and her scalp. “Really Natsu, your priorities have never made sense to me. You would think such an asset like her would mean more to you, and yet you still obsess over the dead.”

Natsu refused to look at where Zeref motioned with his other hand, already knowing the image of Igneel’s body laid between the two brothers.

“Lucy is more than an assest and Igneel wa- is my father. If you had an ounce of humanity or sainthy inside of your fucked up head you’d get it.” Natsu hissed, inching closer and reaching a hand to Lucy, all while never taking his eyes from Zeref’s.

“Possible,” he relented, shaking Lucy through his grip on her and lifting her so that her toes barely touched the ground. Natsu couldn’t tell where they were, the scene shifting constantly from alley ways to living rooms to ancient mystic huts to blackness. “But, oh Natsu, if only you could understand. There’s so many things to be created, to play with. Just think about what we could do with her magic, with her blood.” Zeref hummed, eyeing Lucy’s throat wistfully and a flicker of a gleeful smile making Natsu’s blood run cold.

“Don’t you fuckin’ touch her, you psychotic bastard.” Natsu warned, body twitching in his place for fear that any movement too large would make Zeref act.

“Where’d you learn that foul mouth?” Zeref asked in a teasing tone, eyes kind as they slid from Lucy to Natsu.
“DON’T YOU SAY THOSE WORDS!” Natsu screamed, catching himself when Zeref rose an eyebrow with muted pleasure. “Don’t you dare fuck with my head and take what was his. He didn’t deserve that, any of it.” He said in a quieter tone, voice just as cutting as before.

“And whose fault was that, Natsu? Who brought him his death other than you? You sealed his fate the day you ran from our family.” Zeref said coolly, eyes tight as he stared down Natsu.

“Igneel was my family.” Natsu whispered, unable to look away from Igneel’s body any longer. Tears pricked his eyes and he ripped his gaze away, looking at Zeref once more.

“I am your family.” Zeref seethed, Natsu flinching under the rage and madness in his eyes, black rings standing out in the pulsing red of the irises before he calmed down. He looked at Natsu with pity before he turned to Lucy with disdain pulling his lip up by a fraction. “Not this Soulmate or a Bonded. Who would have thought it was even possible for a being like you to have one?” Zeref mused out loud, ignoring Natsu’s panicked call as he brought his hand up to touch Lucy’s cheek softly, tracing the outline of her jaw with his index finger.

“Lucy!” Natsu cried, stepping forward with one foot. She opened her eyes and smiled at him, tears streaking her pale cheeks but no rotting green filling her veins.

“I’m your family now Natsu, you’ll never have to be alone. I love you.” She whispered, grinning weakly at him when Natsu felt his lower lip tremble.

“Impressive,” Zeref hummed thoughtfully as he looked at Lucy studiously. “Even in my world she is not completely under my control.”

“Your world?” Nasu choked out. “Bu-but this is my dream. Nothing that happens here can affect anyone but me.”

Zeref rolled his eyes and smiled condescendingly at Natsu, humor in his red eyes making Natsu’s stomach roll in horror. “How are you still this unaware? You never were able to understand the complexities of our rituals, I suppose. Such a simple child. Ah well, some things don’t change. No Natsu, this is my world, inside your head. Anything that happens here will affect those I bring into it. For example,” Zeref sighed tiredly, hand moving quicker than his eyes could follow to release her hair and grip her neck. “This.”

Natsu howled like a dying animal when he watched Zeref twitch his wrist, sickening crack echoing through whatever space they were in and Lucy’s body going slack, eyes wide in shock even as they drained of light.

“No no no no no,” Natsu whimpered, eyes fixated on Lucy’s clouding ones. Carelessly Zeref tossed her body aside, dull thump sounding as she struck a wall and collapsed to the ground. Not again. This wasn’t happening, Zeref was lying. Not real not real not real.

Black tendrils spread from Zeref’s sleeves as he lifted his arms to his sides, pale finger tips standing bright amongst the darkness surrounding them. Natsu broke into a sprint, over Igneel, under Zeref’s embrace. He had to get to Lucy. She couldn’t... she wasn’t...

“C’mon Luce. Y-you gotta... Lucy...” Natsu wept, cradling her body against his chest and running his shaking hand through her hair. He pulled her tightly against his body, her skin cool already and hair still smelling of her vanilla and honey shampoo as Natsu buried his face into the crown of her head. A heavy weight settled on his shoulder, blackness seeping into his vision and stealing his senses again as Zeref’s voice floated through his mind even as Natsu fell into unconsciousness.
Natsu was frantic as he fell from the couch, stumbling as he tried to right himself and his knees gave out. He had to get to her, Zeref had been lying. It wasn't real she was okay it wasn't real.

“She's alive she's alive,” Natsu kept chanting to himself, leaving his door open and unlocking Lucy's with a flick of his wrist, magic responding automatically to his wishes without spells or runes or even concentration on the witch’s part. He reached out with his magic, leaning against the doorway and clutching at his heart when he felt the soothing pulse of Lucy, her magic so amazingly large but gentle that Natsu didn't know how he had missed it at first. He felt it twine soothingly with own, Natsu's eyes sliding shut as he focused on the fact that it meant she was alive.

His feet moved without thought, sending him stumbling into her room and crawling on her bed, scooping her into his arms as he sat with his back to the headboard and sobbed.

“I'm sorry oh Gods I'm sorry Luce, he...he... A-and I couldn't stop it and it was my fault everything is my fault if you get hurt or ki- my fault,” Natsu sobbed, burying his face into her hair as he cried and trying to surround himself with her.

Lucy was silent as she hugged him back tightly, hands rubbing calming circles into his back and gentle coos and words of assurance making Natsu take ragged breaths as he tried to collect himself. It had been too much, reliving the memories of his father and then the talk with Zeref. He knew he was scaring Lucy but he couldn't talk just yet, he just needed to hold her, hear her breathe and listen to her heartbeat, strong and steady.

Lucy shifted in his arms and a fresh wave of panic flared in him, Natsu tightening his hold on her and tangling his fingers in her hair to hold her face to his shoulder. Her hands ran up and down his arms in gentle strokes, Lucy speaking in a soft tone.

“Shhh, shhh Natsu. I'm just trying to get more comfortable. It's okay, I'm not leaving. It's all going to be alright.” Natsu relaxed as she whispered into his skin, nodding with silent tears and he forced his arms to loosen around Lucy. She stayed in his lose hold as she pulled him down to the bed, Lucy propped slightly on her pillows and Natsu tucked under her arm. He curled into her side, chin resting on her breast and arms firmly wrapped around her waist. She stroked his hair tenderly as he calmed down more, cooing as small shivers still raced along his tight muscles every few minutes.

Natsu made to move away from Lucy's embrace but was stopped by her, settling back into her side after a few seconds. He was ashamed to have broken down in front of her, he had put her in enough danger just by being beside her, he didn't want to add his emotional bullshit onto it. More silence filled the room while Lucy continued to run her hands through his hair and along his arm. It struck Natsu that Happy wasn't here, and he was thankful that the cat had stayed behind in his apartment.

“Sorry,” Natsu croaked, shrinking into her side with a small smile as she made a chastising noise. Vanilla hung like a cloud in his mind, easing him to complete relaxation. With his scarf in his hands
and Lucy hugging him so lovingly Natsu felt safe.

It had been a long time since he truly felt safe.

Lucy's fingers started to play idly with his, intertwining and coming apart, gentle brushes outlining his tattoos before her thumb rubbed small circles into the multiple light scars that covered his knuckles. He watched her pale and delicate fingers move with his own tanned and calloused ones, a flashback making him flinch as he envisioned her pale hand curled lifelessly as her body laid in a heap where Zeref had thrown her after bre-

“Tell me about your tattoos.” Lucy said suddenly, Natsu stopping his whimpering that he didn't remember starting in the first place. He blinked rapidly to clear his eyes of the fresh tears, taking a wet breath deeply to compose himself.

“Yeah,” he mumbled, shifting their positions once more. Now Natsu was sitting up fully and leaning against the mountain of pillows and her dark wooden headboard, Lucy’s back pressed tightly against his chest and her knees drawn up partially in between his own bent legs. His elbows propped themselves on his knees so his hands could hang loosely in front of Lucy, her slim digits resuming the earlier fiddling with his.

“What does this one mean?” Lucy questioned as her index finger ran along the pommel of Natsu's right thumb. A version of a fire manipulation rune, three horizontal ovals of descending size leading to two shallow wavy lines which sat directly above an upside down triangle with lines that extended shortly past the lowest apex, sat below a large triangle with a single line running parallel through it’s left side. All this was bordered by a double ringed circle that sat beneath the overlaying rune.

“This’s a fire creation rune,” Natsu explained, moving his hand to show off the other four tattoos on the insides of his fingers on his right hand, Lucy touching each as he spoke. “Then there’s a fire protection, heat protection, fire manipulation, and a strength rune.” The first was two upside down triangles with a double line down their center. The second a double line slanted and used as the right side of two upside down triangles, the lower triangle’s lines extending past their joints and the left side double lined as well with two close lines parallel to the first double line extending from the bottom double line. The third was a fire manipulation without the excess sealing part, and the final rune on the inside of his pinky was two ovals intersecting at the lower quarter with a smaller oval floating just above the right edge of the cross.

“This one's different than the one on your right,” Lucy noted, taking his left hand with both of her own and running her thumbs along his other larger tattoo. He nuzzled into her hair with a smile, breathing her in deeply as his eyes closed.

“Nothin’ gets past ya,” he hummed, kissing her hair sweetly when he sensed her smile. “That one’s a heat creation rune. Sometimes fire would be too much to, like, dry shit and stuff, or if I wanna less stress creatin’ way to form the metal than heatin’ it witha flame.” It was similar to the fire creation rune, with the heat protection rune under two ovals of steeply descending length which itself was under a large triangle, this time the right and bottom edge with the parallel lines striking through it. All of this sat on top of a double ringed sealing circle.

“You're so smart,” Lucy sighed as she leaned her head against Natsu’s shoulder and let it lean towards his face. Natsu couldn't help the dry laugh that fell from his lips, eyes pinched as he stared at his hands intertwined once more with Lucy's.

“I really ain't Luce. Ya hear how I talk, and I never actually went to school, let alone got a degree. I ain't intelligent or good with words and people, like you are. I'm just some hermit witch who lives alone with his familiar and has a crappy online business that barely pays the rent. Sometimes I feel
like I'm just waitin' for you to wake up and see how much better you can do. How much better you deserve.” Natsu sighed heavily, biting his tongue when he realized he had vocalized his thoughts. He was always too caught up in his own thoughts after an episode, one of the reasons why he hid even from Happy after a bad one.

Her grip tightened harshly on his hands, Natsu keeping any hint of pain to himself. “Natsu Dragneel if I ever hear you put yourself down like that again I will sit you down and force you to write out all of your amazing qualities. You understand?” She asked in a quiet voice, shoulders tense as she looked at their joined hands as well.

“I love you Lucy,” Natsu whispered as he felt his eyes prick again, hugging her tightly to his body and burrowing his face in her shoulder.

“I love you too Natsu, more than I think you know.” Lucy sighed, resting her cheek on his head. Silence filled the room as they stayed wrapped in each other's presence, comfort and love and the fledgling of hope surrounding them like a cocoon. “So tell me about your other tattoos, bad boy.” She teased, cuddling into Natsu’s bare chest, taking the scarf that laid beside her and winding it around his neck in a loose single loop.

Natsu snorted at her nickname for him, eyeing her humorously as she blinked at him innocently, faint smile lifting the corner of her full lips. “Does that mean I'm a phase?” He joked, tucking a strand of golden bed head behind one of her ears as Lucy brought her finger to tap on her lower lip in thought.

“Depends,” she said slowly, “do phases last for someone's entire life? Because if they do then yes.” Natsu grinned broadly at her, rubbing his nose against hers and humming when Lucy pressed her lips to his softly. “But I wasn't joking before, I really do want to know what your tattoos mean, Natsu.” Lucy breathed seriously as she pulled away, one hand cupping his jaw tenderly. Her chocolate eyes were calm and loving, Natsu losing himself momentarily as he felt her warmth sooth the ache inside him he had learned to ignore.

“Well, you've seen my dragon. He's for my dad, I started him on Igneel’s death day in honour of him. And then there's the healin’ rune on the back of my neck, and then a series with fire protection, fire storage, ‘nother fire manipulation, fire creation, and increased healing down my ribs to help me eat and breath fire,” Natsu felt shivers run through him as Lucy trailed her fingertips along his new markings, pausing on each rune when Natsu gave the meaning.

“What about your scales?” Lucy asked as her skimmed her hand to his other side, tracing the outline of few of the scales and avoiding his gaze. Natsu would have smirked at the pretty red that was crawling up Lucy’s neck if his ears hadn’t been burning just as much.

“Ahh, yeah. I got them 'cus people kept calling me the Salamander and I wanted to spite 'em.” Natsu said, lips twitching into a sharp smirk at Lucy’s dry laugh.

“Why'd they call you the Salamander?” She questioned, hand resting flat on Natsu’s abs. Natsu ignored the subtle placement with a sly raise of his eyebrow. He coughed awkwardly, scratching at the back of his head as he mumbled his answer. “What was that?” Lucy prodded, impish glow igniting in her soulful eyes.

“I said, it’s ‘cus I tried to do a transformation spell into a dragon and kinda... failed.”

“You didn’t.”

“You know what, a salamander can get into a lot of shit before it gets caught! I was able to fuck up Gajeel’s metal stash and dump his favourite cereal on the floor before he caught me!” Natsu barked
sourly, sinking into the pillows as he sulked at Lucy’s loud laughter. He gave a resigned smile as he couldn’t help but feel his mood lift when he was surrounded by Lucy’s tinkling laughter and tiny snorts. “He wouldn’t quit callin’ me that dumbass name, and then other people thought it was ‘cus I was always playin’ in fire and then that changed to me havin’ a dragon spirit. Which most people think is impossible ‘cus people’s spirits hafta be an ‘actual animal’ or some bullshit.” Natsu explained, looking down at Lucy when he noticed her curious look.

“You have a dragon spirit?” She asked, parts impressed and intrigued. There was no doubt in her voice, no questioning look and Natsu grinned brightly at her faith in him.

“Yeah, like my ol’ man!” He declared proudly, watching as Lucy’s eyebrows furrowed and her nose scrunched. “What’s that face for, weirdo?” Natsu asked, raising his eyebrows when Lucy answered his question without mentioning his ‘weirdo’ jab.

“What kind of spirit do I have? Are they likes souls? Are they related to magic? Does it dictate the personality or does it grow from what you already have?” Her questions tumbled out, Natsu waving a hand as he was overwhelmed by her need for answers.

“Whoa Luce, ya needa slow down.” He stopped her rambling, grinning subdued by her soft ‘sorry’ and the quick way she lowered her gaze. He knew that look in her eyes, the one where she thought she was boring or annoying him with whatever she was talking about. “Let’s see; I have no idea what kinda spirit ya have ‘cus I can’t read ‘em that well, they’re an extension of your soul but not the same thing, everyone has a spirit like everyone has a soul but only people who use magic can see them, and that’s way too fuckin’ deep of a question for me to answer.” He stated, lifting a finger on his right hand for every answer he gave. “I think that was all of ‘em!” He said lightly, nudging her shoulder encouragingly when Lucy peeked up at him through her lashes. He beamed down at her when he saw a faint appreciative smile appear, hugging her firmly when she twisted in his embrace and clung to his neck.

“Have I mentioned that I love you yet?” She murmured into his scarf, Natsu’s shoulders shaking with silent laughter.

“I think I could stand’a hear it again,” he hummed, holding Lucy’s gaze when she pulled back and looked him in the eye.

“I’m in love with you, Natsu Dragneel.” She stated firmly, voice smooth and unwavering. She settled back into her place tucked under Natsu’s chin, voice quiet but bright. “Back to the tattoos.”

“Aye sir,” he chirped, staring at the ceiling in thought. “There’s the protection tat’ Igneel gave me on my 13th birthday, fire protection on my lip, sun on my ankle for Igneel, dragon on my calf ‘cus it’s badass and has a strength rune in it, and Metal Face’s present.” Natsu sneered the last one, left ass cheek aching and reminding him of the tattoo he sported there for the last three years. “You don’t wanna know,” he said flatly when he felt Lucy’s smirk on his skin, stopping her from talking again when he felt her take a breath to speak. “I ain’t tellin’ ya what it is.”

“I’ll find out somehow.” Lucy purred, Natsu rolling his eyes as he realized she was trying to distract him with teasing kisses along his jaw and neck.

“Probably, but not tonight you ain’t,” he assured, Lucy pouting at his confident tone. “Hey, Luce, what time is it?” Natsu asked in a hushed tone a few minutes later.

“Half after two,” the girl mumbled, Natsu cringing at how tired she sounded suddenly.

“Shit, sorry, I didn’t mean’ta wake you up, I’ll let ya sleep next ti-” Natsu apologized, cut off with a
yelp as Lucy pinched his shoulder.

“Next time you wake up with a panic attack you will do the exact same thing and come to me. I am your girlfriend Natsu, it is officially my job now to look after your mental health because I know you sure as hell aren’t going to and you’re too precious to me to see you hurt. You don’t have to deal with everything alone anymore.” She left no room for debate with her blazing tone, arms holding Natsu’s middle tightly as if she was expecting him to shake her off. Instead he used one arm to hold her body to his and he scooted their bodies down the bed into a lying position, legs intertwined and Natsu lying on his back with Lucy solidly in his arms.

“‘Kay,” he whispered in agreement, snort of victory from the girl in his arms making him grin. Sleep crept in on him in a sudden wave, Natsu fighting to keep his eyes open a little longer until he felt Lucy’s breathing even out and her body relax partially over his. Vanilla scent soothed any lingering fears of dreams and Lucy’s soft breath reminding him of where he was now, and that the future couldn’t possibly be all that bad as long as he had her in his life.
In the morning Lucy set a new house rule: No sleeping in different beds.

She had anticipated that he was going to argue, but was surprised by the lack of conviction in his voice and gaze. She guessed he had probably been able to see the hidden selfish reasons behind it in her eyes, and combined with his own anxieties had made any arguments Natsu had against it for show.

It wasn’t that Lucy had night terrors like Natsu, it was more that whenever one of the rare times occurred that her and Natsu’s schedules forced them apart for a night Lucy had... dreams. Sometimes it was a memory from the time she was abducted, other times a vision of her mother would become warped with her unanswered questions, and the night that Natsu had woken her up in tears and in the midst of a panic attack she had been having her worst dream yet. A strange boy in a black robe and sad eyes had been talking to Natsu, their voices muffled as though she were underwater. The exchange had been agitated, Natsu stepping forward to strike the young man when the boy’s hand had pierced Natsu’s chest. Lucy had screamed for him, only to see the dark haired boy turn his head and smile at her, as though he knew how their stories would end and he had been the one to write them. She had been awoken when the boy had opened his mouth to speak, pushing her dream aside and forgetting it until morning as looking after Natsu had been more urgent to her than deciphering her nightmare.

She also didn’t know why, but she knew that together neither one of them would have to worry about any troubling dreams.

“Lushii, why can’t I come along?”

Lucy looked to her right where Happy sat on the counter, small ears flattened and tail drooping as he stared up at Lucy with large eyes. She cooed and ran her fingers over his head and along his chin, drawing a tiny purr from the familiar as she pet him.

“’Cus ya have a loud mouth and get bored easily,” Natsu interjected flatly, scooping up Happy and placing him in his -still messily displaced- hair. The cat scowled down at his witch impudently, Lucy bringing her hand up to cover her laugh as she watched the two interact. “And this’s Lucy’s job we’re going to, so havin’ you reveal that there is in fact a secret underground society of witches and magic ain’t exactly the ideal, if ya get me buddy.” Lucy’s eyes followed Natsu as he walked to the coffee pot as he talked to Happy, sliding him the Digimon mug which he caught without looking.

“But you get to go!” The cat whined, letting his legs drop out from under him and his body flop onto Natsu’s head in defeat. “You’re way worse than me when it comes to forgetting to be normal!” His large eyes turned to Lucy suddenly, watering and his muzzle twitching like a trembling lip. “Lucy, do you really like Natsu more than you like me?”

Lucy brought a hand to her heart at his warbling voice, opening her arms and calling to the small cat. Happy launched himself off of Natsu’s head in a wailing fit, sending the boy pitching to the side from the force of his jump as he sailed into Lucy’s hug. Lucy giggled and calmed Happy as he nuzzled between her breasts.

“Oi!” Natsu barked, rubbing his head where Happy had used him as a launch pad and glaring at the teary cat Lucy was comforting. She ignored him as she soothingly stroked Happy’s back, rubbing her cheek on his tiny blue furry one.
“You know you’re my favourite, Happy.” Lucy hummed, laughing as Happy gave a pleased chirp, nuzzling her cheek with a deep purr.

“Oi!”

“Oh don’t be so jealous Natsu,” Happy chastised, crawling from Lucy’s arms and winding around the back of her neck, tailing wrapping possessively around the front. Natsu sputtered, eyes darting in disbelief between Lucy and Happy as they shared a look.

“He really doesn’t like to share does he?” Lucy sighed as she eyed Natsu. Happy lifted a paw to cover his mouth, same conspiratorial look in his eye as he spoke in a stage whisper.

“He never has. I’ve been trying to break him of it for years, but he’s still such a fish hoarder!”

“D-don’t you two gang up on me!” Natsu cried angrily, pointing a finger back and forth at Lucy and Happy. Lucy brought her hand up to half cover her snigger, Happy’s tail twitching as he too smirked in humor at Natsu’s overreaction. Lucy was pretty sure he was about to start spewing flames he was getting so worked up. Lucy walked over to Natsu with a small smile, ignoring his raised shoulders and shaking hand, pecking him on the cheek and earning a disgusted sound from Happy. She smiled up brightly at Natsu, who’s look of insulted irritation had turned to shock and then eventually a lopsided grin.

And then she walked back to her previous spot with the pot of coffee in her hand, leaving a shocked Natsu staring at her back.

“You look pretty stupid with that look on your face,” Happy tittered, Lucy giving the small cat a chastising shush as she poured the hot liquid over the cream and sugar already in her cup. She placed the pot on the counter, stirring the contents with a spoon before she held up the utensil for Happy to clean and took a sip of her drink.

She watched Natsu through her lashes as she drank her coffee, keeping her expression innocent as he switched from grinding his jaw to looking as if he were trying to say something. She watched him curiously as he stormed over to her, squeaking when he wrapped one arm roughly around her back and pressed a searing kiss to her lips. Lucy’s eyes fluttered shut and she melted into the kiss the longer Natsu hungrily claimed her mouth, hand with the spoon falling to hang loosely beside her.

She panted in a daze as he broke the kiss, eyes hooded while she blinked up at his wolfish smirk.

“You may have stolen my coffee, but there are other ways for me to get my fix.”

Lucy’s breath hitched at his shameless claim, leaning heavily into his chest as she debated kissing him again or playing it coy. Her fate was decided though, when Happy hissed at Natsu before jumping to the ground. He and Natsu had a silent stare down, Lucy blinking in confusion when Natsu wound his other arm around her tightly and pressed his cheek into hers. “Mine.” he growled lowly before he was pressing his mouth over hers once more. Heat flared around them as Lucy automatically moved her mouth against Natsu’s, whimpering when he bit at her lower lip roughly.

Lucy rested her forehead on his chest, hand fisting at his pineapple patterned shirt, sleeves rolled up and buttons left undone to reveal a white tank with ‘Bad Boy’ written across it in blocky letters and an angle. Lucy chose to ignore the way the pale violet colour clashed with the yellow and green fruit that dotted his shirt in slanted patterns, deciding Gray would mock him enough when they got to the interview. If Lucy let the black haired man open his mouth that is.

“Did I kiss away your ability to talk, Weirdo?” Natsu teased, body stilling when Lucy tilted her head up at him, smile tight and left eye twitching.
“Actually, I was debating kissing you or kicking you, but I think I might make up my mind depending on what you do next.” Lucy said sweetly, grin sharpening as the blood drained from Natsu’s face. She knew it was mean, but it was too fun to tease him, not to mention her confusion over how she felt when he was so possessive. Normally Lucy would rage over someone claiming her the way he had, but when Natsu did it.. Her heart sped up. She swooned in his arms -which was something Lucy did not do- when he became like that, all protective and selfish. Maybe it was because she knew Natsu respected her without any doubt, or maybe it was her love clouding her judgement, but either way Lucy was not ready to give up the pretense of independence.

“Lushi’s scary,” came a sombre chirp from below them, Lucy sticking her tongue out at Happy.

“Aye,” was Natsu’s serious response, Lucy pouting up at him as he sided with Happy.

“Oh I don’t know why I even bother with you two,” Lucy huffed as she pulled out of Natsu’s hold, grabbing her coffee from the counter as she made to head to her office. She had already finalized her interview questions, but it never hurt to triple check. Especially when it was the first interview the author had done in 10 years. She made it a step and a half before a warm hand had wrapped itself around her free wrist, tugging Lucy so that she was crashing into a solid chest the next second.

“It’s because you loooove us.” Natsu crooned, squeezing Lucy tightly in a bear hug. Happy made a high sound of agreement as he flew around their heads before settling on Lucy’s head, purring as he nuzzled -and sufficiently messed up- her hair. Lucy couldn’t find it in her to do more than a half-hearted swat at the silly cat, relaxing into Natsu’s warm embrace. The questions would be there when she was done basking in Natsu’s affection.

“I do.” She sighed, hearing Natsu swallow thickly and smiling to herself at how easily flustered he became at times. There never was a rhyme or reason to Lucy, and so Lucy tried to hardest to commit his stammering and blushing to memory. He was just too adorable like that. The three of them stayed like that for several minutes, Natsu dropping his chin on top of her head beside Happy. She tried to pull away but was stopped by his strong arms, wiggling until she remembered something she had forgotten since the first day.

Natsu was ticklish.

How could she have forgotten that piece of ammunition?

Natsu barked out a squawk as Lucy ran her fingers up and down his sides under his top shirt, ducking his flailing arms as she continued her assault. It was quickly ended though, when Natsu scooped Lucy over his shoulder, one hand resting just above her backside and the other on her thigh to hold her in place. He whooped as he danced around her kitchen, Lucy half yelling half laughing as she banged on his back. Happy circled them in the air, his own light laughter harmonizing with Lucy’s and Natsu’s and his eyes filled with joy when Lucy made eye contact with him.

“Oh, Happy! Don’t ya think Lucy needs some payback for ticklin’ me like that?” Natsu hollered up, Lucy paling at the devilish sparkle that took over the cat’s once content gaze.

“I will buy you fresh Mackerel for a week if you don’t do whatever you’re planning on doing!” Lucy cried, smirking victoriously over her shoulder at Natsu when Happy paused in the air.

“The expensive kind?” Happy questioned in awe, eyes narrowing at Lucy as he continued to think. “How do I know you’re not going to just buy it once?” He interrogated, flying low so he was level with Lucy to stare at her severely. Fish was no laughing matter to the blue cat. Lucy spoke at the same time as Natsu in response to Happy’s question, his ears twitching as he listened to both Natsu’s yowl and Lucy’s sincere words.
“Don’t fall for her wiles!”

“I promise.”

Happy beamed at Lucy before he flew away, settling on the top of the fridge where he watched Lucy and Natsu continue to move around the kitchen, the blonde still struggling to be put down and Natsu trying to stop his hands from wandering up her short skirt.

“Traitor.” Natsu hissed, Lucy giggling at his dramatics. She twisted awkwardly as Natsu faced his familiar, watching the cat shrug indifferently before speaking and cleaning his paw.

“Lucy promised, and Lucy always keeps her promises. Sorry Natsu.”

Natsu groaned as he dropped Lucy to the floor, holding her waist as she settled from the abrupt change in position.

“I can’t believe you were able to bribe my cat.” Natsu sulked, Lucy rolling her eyes and pulling at his cheeks.

“All’s fair in love and war,” Lucy sang, smug smile softening as she continued to look up at Natsu. His scowl also evened out until a humorless smile tugged at his mouth, hands moving lazily on Lucy’s hips as hers twined around his neck.

“Cheater,” he whispered, dropping his forehead to rest on hers.

“Sore loser.” Lucy teased back, gently brushing her lips over his in a chaste kiss.

“Gross.” Happy moaned, the couple ignoring their peanut gallery as they continued to look at one another. “You two are gonna miss Lucy’s thing if you don’t stop being so weird,” Happy warned with disinterest. Lucy jolted, eyes flying to the clock -Natsu had made her- that hung above the stove.

“Oh Gods he’s right we need to leave!” She shrieked, flying from Natsu’s hold and into the study. She scooped up the loose stacks of paper and shoved them into her black laptop bag along with her ageing computer and notepad, ignoring the dull sounds of Natsu’s and Happy’s bickering in the kitchen.

She rushed back around the living room, flipping through coats and shoes. “Oh, its too warm for this one, but there's a nasty wind coming later. No, no, why do I even own thi- ah! This would be perfect, but the colour clashes with my look, but it would look so cute with these boots and-” Lucy mumbled to herself, holding a fitted green blazer in her hands and eyeing a matching dark brown pair of heeled ankle boots.

“Why does it even matter?” Natsu moaned behind her, redoing her interlacing braid that pulled her hair to the right that he and Happy had messed up before. She turned an icy glare at him before looking back at the clothes in her hand.

“Just because some people choose to get dressed in the dark doesn't mean all of us have to look like a walking eyesore.” Lucy sniffed, lip pulling between her teeth again before she continued to mull out loud. “I'm wearing a white blouse which gives a spring feel to the outfit but the black skirt and socks give the green and brown a posh fall look, but maybe that counters with the spring to look put together but not like I put too much effort in it. But the green seems so sudden and I still don't know if I want to look out of season and-”

“Holy crap Luce, you sound like Popsicle Breath. If ya want more green then put a ribbon at the end
of your braid and the brown goes with your eyes and that shirt makes your boobs like great. Done.” He groaned tiredly, giving an irritated pull to the end of her braid when he finished. Lucy turned to look at him in shock, hands still holding the fitted blazer. “What?” He asked defensively, light pink travelling along his ears as Lucy continued to blatantly stare at him.

“You do understand fashion,” Lucy breathed to herself, eyes narrowing as they flashed to his shirt. “Why in Heaven’s name do you wear shit like this?” She asked, gesturing to his shirt as she spoke. Her jaw dropped as Natsu shrugged, tone bland but eyes twinkling in glee at her foul word.

“I dunno, never really cared what people thought.” He looked at Lucy, reluctantly intrigued when she snorted and rested her fists on her hips.

“But you’re hot Natsu, why wouldn’t you play that up? You would have girls and boys flocking to you if you wore basically anything other than what you do.”

“Well I don’t care if people wanna stare at me or not, I mean I already get weird ass looks ‘cus of my hair and shit. All that matters to me is if you like’ta look at me, and obviously you do goin’ by that ‘hot’ comment.” Natsu said with false boredom, expression tight and shoulders tense as he looked away from Lucy. He had tried to make his tone light and teasing at the end, but Lucy could still see the unease in his eyes and the way his hands were stuffed in his pockets. She looked at him, confused by his strange behaviour. Natsu mistook her bemused expression as pushing for more answers, and sighed heavily while scratching the back of his neck.

“I didn’t exactly have a shit ton of, y’know, options ‘bout what I wore when I was on the street. I’d raise some money makin’ trinkets and small pieces of art for people passin’ by, and whatever I didn’t spend on food or Happy is what I used for shoppin’.” Natsu said in a soft voice, still avoiding Lucy’s understanding gaze. “This one guy tried’a save me clothes that were my size at ‘is shop, and so I was just thankful for shit to wear that wasn’t completely gross. People paid better if their art wasn’t comin’ from some dirty hobo child.” He cracked a dry smile when he looked at Lucy from the corner of his eyes, and Lucy finally understood where his unease had been coming from. Natsu was almost... ashamed. And he was scared Lucy was going to think less of him. Because of clothes.

“Dummy,” Lucy chastised as she grabbed his face in her hands, blazer forgotten on the small sitting bench beside them. “Don’t make that face, I think it was very responsible how you set your priorities. I’m proud of you Natsu, no matter what you wear or hair colour or what you look like.” Lucy said sincerely, lips quirking in a soft smile as a dopey grin revealed his pointed canines at her words. “Besides,” Lucy sniffed, looking away as she fixed the collar of his hideous shirt, “you somehow manage to still make these fashion rejects look presentable, so no one’s really judging you. Except Gray.” She tacked the last sentence on as an afterthought, not wanting to boost his ego too much. And failing.

“If you like me in this, no wonder ya like it so much when I’m not wearin’ anything.” Natsu purred, arm winding around her lower back and tugging her against his body.

“I like it when my eyes aren’t being attacked by ugly.” Lucy stated bluntly, unamused by his attempt at flirting. Natsu brushed off her dry words, pressing kisses along her neck as he took one of her small hands and led it under the front of his shirt.

“Maybe I’ll have to remind you of what’s under here, then.”

Lucy felt heat race along her chest and neck but she refused to be outdone by him. She batted her eyelashes, leaning her chest into his and dragging her nails along his well defined muscles as she spoke. “Mmm, well I think there’s something a little lower I might like to be reminded of more.” Lucy whispered huskily, fingertips dipping under the waist of his pants while she licked her lips.
Natsu gulped harshly, eyes wide as he looked down at Lucy and face red at her -successful- seduction. He whined when he finally saw the mischievous glee in her eyes, headbutting her gently as a pout pulled at his lower lip.

“Lushiiii, don’t tease me like that. You know I don’t know what the fuck I’m doin’.” He complained, Lucy giggling and letting her lips flutter over his jaw and mouth as way of apology.

“I’m not exactly a seasoned veteran either, Natsu,” Lucy breathed as she pulled back, sticking her tongue out when Natsu used the tip of her braid to tickle her nose and lifting her arms to wind around his neck.

“Yeah, but you’re smart and have a bunch’a pervert friends.” He said flatly, making a noise of complaint when Lucy tugged on a clump of his bangs.

“Firstly, I’m not going to kiss you until you say you’re smart and mean it. Secondly they are now your perverted friends as well. I’m sure Loke and Gray would gladly give you a crash course on dating.” Lucy said firmly, pausing in thought before she cringed and continued to speak. “Actually, no. I don’t even want to know what kind of advice Loke would give you and there is a ninety percent chance you and Gray would kill each other.”

“I ain’t askin’ that frozen emo what you like in bed.” Natsu said with dead seriousness.

“My point,” Lucy rolled her eyes.

“I’d rather chop my dick off Luce.”

“Yes, yes I get it.”

He smirked at her exasperated tone, leaning down to steal a kiss and his face scrunching in confusion when she pulled back. ”What was the first thing I said?” Lucy asked, frowning when Natsu looked at her blankly. They stared at one another for a few silents seconds, Natsu’s eyes finally squinting in understanding.

“You were serious ‘bout that?” His tone was incredulous, Lucy nodding firmly. She felt his body stiffen under her arms, while his grip slackened on her waist. Natsu made a sound of frustration and looked away, eyes cast above her head and red growing on his tanned cheeks. “It means a lot to me that ya think I’m smart Luce, but I-”

He yelped, flinching away from where Lucy had pinched his neck and a high drawn out noise signalling his displeasure at her abuse. Lucy remained silent, looking at Natsu and waiting for a proper claim of his intelligence. They stared each other down for a few seconds, Natsu’s stubborn refusal melting into a soft daze in his dark eyes. He cleared his throat and broke eye contact, looking down at Lucy’s braid as he spoke. Or her cleavage, but she pretended he was looking at her braid so as not to ruin the moment. “I’m good at desginin’ shit and makin’ art with my hands. I’m good at potions and fire magic. And I’m good at bein’ your Soulmate.” Natsu said quietly, avoiding her gaze and blushing harder with each sentence. He peeked at her from his lashes, Lucy’s heart clenching a how cute he looked and feeling herself fall more in love with him. “None of that’s easy, so it means I’m smart, right?” His tone made it sound like a question as he finally looked at Lucy, hope warring with doubt within the dark colouring and his lip caught between pointed teeth while he searched for Lucy’s agreement.

“Yes, Natsu, it means you’re smart. So, so smart.” Lucy let her hand come up and caress his cheek, Natsu nuzzling into the palm of her hand. A bright smile broke across her face as she thought about what a cat he was, his time alone with Happy obvious in his mannerisms. “I love you.”
“Love ya too, Luce.” Natsu said softly, leaning forward again and feathering his lips over hers. Lucy leaned into the kiss, moving her lips against his slowly and eyes falling shut. He was warm and rough to the touch but gentle and loving as he kissed her, a mess of contradictions just like Lucy. She melted into his chest, both hands trailing to rest on the muscles there, fingers curling into his shirt. She felt him smirk and nipped at his lip, Natsu’s arms supporting her as her knees weakened under his throaty chuckle.

“La~te.” Happy sang, watching them from his new spot on her -once spotless- couch.

“Fuck.” Lucy hissed, whipping around in Natsu’s arms and hearing him sputter as her braid whapped him in the face. She jumped as she pulled on her boots, blazer thrown on in a hurry as she grabbed her laptop bag from the floor. “Natsu, come on! I can’t miss this we have to leave right now.”

“But my coffee-!”

“NOW.”

“A-aye sir.”
Sixteen

Lucy sat at the table, tapping her pen idly against the grated surface as she stared dully at the empty chair in front of her.

“I don’t think that dickface is coming, hun.”

Lucy groaned loudly, letting her head fall to her arms. Despite leaving late her and Natsu had managed to somehow get to the coffee shop the author had asked to do the interview in 15 minutes early. Lucy had thanked light traffic and all green lights. Natsu had thanked them not getting into an accident as Lucy did 20 km over the speed limit and wove through traffic.

It had not helped his motion sickness.

She turned her head to look up at Cana, the brunette rubbing a comforting hand on Lucy’s head. “But why?” Lucy whined, lip jutting out in a pout as she once more looked at the authorless spot in front of her. She had hounded this man for weeks to try and get an interview, and had been beyond ecstatic when he finally accepted, setting a date and time instantly. Only to be stood up. Oh gods what was she going to tell Jason?

“Want me to stick Natsu and Gray on him? We have his home address somewhere at the office.” Cana offered, Lucy snorting and giving a shaky and watery laugh. She shook her head, sighing and straightening her back as Cana continued to talk. “I’m serious, ya don’t even need to cry in front of them. Just show them that face and bam, one beat up penisface at your leisure.”

“I know, and honestly I’d rather not have a famous author get a restraining order against my boyfriend and one of my closest friends.” Lucy chuckled, gathering her things and standing from her seat. The pair were out on the patio, flowers in hanging baskets dangling from the white lattices above them and over the sidewalk partially. “Come on, let’s head back inside before Natsu and Gray ruin the place or Erza kills them.”

“Don’t forget about Loke getting beaten up by some random chick’s boyfriend.” Cana interjected, swirling her fruity drink before taking a sip.

“Don’t remind me.” Lucy moaned as they walked back inside. Lucy adjusted the strap on her shoulder, weight settling on her hip as she paused to look over her group of friends. Gray and Cana had insisted on coming to the interview for moral support, Erza and Loke tagging along when they heard that it was to be at one of the more prestigious tea and cake shops in Hargeon. Lucy had dragged Natsu with her in an effort to socialize him more. Like taking a dog to the dog park. Or a dragon to the dragon park, whichever animal wasn’t going to get her a sulky Natsu. Cana had given a rare good review for the place, and the owner had kindly allowed their party of six a last minute place in the busy shop.

Lucy feared he was regretting that.

Natsu and Gray were switching between glaring at one another while whispering obscene insults and smiling fakely and ignoring each other, depending on whether Erza was too focused on her cake to call their names in warning or not. Loke was half leaning out of his chair and in the space of another table full of pretty girls. Lucy almost gagged at the slope of his eyebrows behind his tinted glasses, orange hair spiked wildly and cocky grin permanent, giving him the ideal look of the playful bachelor. He wasn’t the head of the romance column for nothing. Especially with the way the girls were fawning over him.
It seemed Natsu had finally noticed their presence, looking at her with a bright smile. Which quickly faded as Lucy returned his with a subdued one of her own, knowing it didn't reach her eyes. He was out of his seat and walking towards her before Cana could comment, warm hand comforting on her hip as he leaned into her space.

“What’s wrong Luce?” He asked in a hushed tone, looking over her face with dark eyes. “Was he a jackass to you? Do you want me to go beat him up? Imma go beat him up.” Natsu said, scowl pulling at his lips as he moved past her. Lucy shook her head and gripped his wrist, sliding her hand to interlock their fingers as she fought to stop her lip from trembling. She was just so touched by his first instinct to punch anything that made her sad. That idiot. “Shit, are you cryin’? Please don’t cry Luce, I’m serious let me go pound his face in and then we can get ice cream or we can prank Frosty, that’ll make ya laugh, right?” Natsu asked desperately, squeezing her hand and running his palm along her upper arm in a soothing manner.

“No, it’s fine Natsu. He didn’t even show up anyway, so it’s fine...” Lucy laughed, smiling up at her boyfriend and wiping at her lashline before a tear could escape. Rage filled Natsu's eyes and he opened his mouth -probably to curse out the author- but Lucy silenced his oncoming rant with a gentle kiss. When she pulled back his face was serious and he didn’t continue speaking, instead watching her closely with his lips in a thoughtful line. Lucy smiled up at him gratefully, tugging him by his hand to lead him back to the table before she was stopped by a man’s bare chest. Well, almost bare. His baby blue shirt had been unbuttoned and untucked from his leather pants, sleeves rolled to his elbows while his charcoal vest was left lying abandoned on his chair. A silver cross pendant stood out on his pale skin.

“Your shirt Gray.” Lucy said automatically, eyes flitting to his when she heard him curse under his breath and start to rebutton his shirt with quick fingers. She ignored Natsu’s snigger behind her, looking up at Gray expectantly once he was done dressing himself.

“I wanted to talk to Limp Di- Natsu, alone.” He said in a bored tone, his icy gaze moving to look at Natsu behind her. Lucy heard Natsu’s intake of breath to retort Gray’s request, giving his hand a sharp squeeze and speaking before Natsu could.

“I don’t know if I want you to be alone with him after how you treated Natsu yesterday. Whatever you want to say to him you can say in front of me.” Lucy stared at him, daring him to argue with her. Gray scowled at her for a few minutes before releasing a defeated sigh and rubbing his hand on her head affectionately.

She ignored Natsu’s low growl behind her.

“You really do love Lizard Boy, don’t ya?” Gray mused, small smile softening his eyes before he walked past them and to the patio again. Lucy knew that was his way of requesting them to follow, Natsu trailing Lucy reluctantly.

The three came to stand facing one another, Lucy narrowing her eyes when she saw Gray flick out a cigarette from the carton, quickly followed by a lighter. She remained silent, but her friend rolled his eyes at her pointed look.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll quit someday.” He mollified, Lucy huffing and settling into Natsu’s side when he lazily slung an arm over her shoulders. Gray took a long drag, breathing out a stream of hazy smoke as he watched the street to their side.

“So there’s a reason ya brought us out here, Elsa?” Natsu sneered, obviously ready for a fight. Physical or verbal Lucy wasn’t sure.
“Original.” Gray drawled, eyes flashing with his condescending tone. He took another drag of his smoke before speaking, Lucy surprised when he held Natsu’s fiery gaze. “I wanted to say sorry.”

“Huh?” Natsu sounded, Lucy giggling at how lost he looked. There was no way he had seen this coming, and even Lucy was mildly impressed with Gray’s straightforwardness.

“Are you an idiot?” Gray barked, looking back at the street and taking an agitated drag of his cigarette, light pink dancing across the bridge of his nose. “I ain’t fuckin’ saying it again.”

Lucy sigh in exasperation to herself, the truce had been nice while it lasted. She was shocked then, when instead of hurling an insult back at Gray Natsu bit his tongue, words slow as he struggled to process what was happening. “But why’re you apologizin’?”

Lucy watched Gray struggle silently, fingers twitching as they reached for his top buttons. With simple flicks of his wrist, the shirt was once more open, pale skin on his chest and abs exposed to the late spring early summer air.

“’Cus of what I said. Yesterday. At Lucy’s.” Gray grumbled, still scowling and avoiding looking at the couple. “It wasn’t... cool.” Lucy cooed at Gray’s apology, the dark haired boy blushing harder and releasing an embarrassed ‘oi’ as his gaze snapped to Lucy.

“Since when did you care ‘bout my feelin’s?” Natsu asked, still completely confused as to what was happening. “Not that it matters to me what’cha think.” He added afterwards, tone defensive and rushed as he tried to re-establish his pride.

“I don’t.” Gray answered dryly, continuing to speak over Natsu’s started insult. “But I care ‘bout Lucy, and I hurt her yesterday. And I wasn’t fair to you, even if I do think you’re shady as fuck and need a real job.”

“Says the fashion writer who can’t stop stripping.” Natsu spat, arm tense around Lucy. Gray ignored the jab, Lucy watching as his shirt fell to the cobble brick ground. She would most likely have to gather his clothes, Gray often too absentminded to remember until he was several blocks away. Gods she couldn’t wait for him to get a girlfriend or a boyfriend again. Preferably not Cana or Loke this time.

“I talked with Erza a bit after we le-“

“Got your ass kicked.”

“.ft.” Natsu sniggered as Gray’s eyebrow twitched as he continued to ignore the pink haired man. Lucy stepped on her boyfriend’s foot, smiling encouragingly at Gray when she heard the soft yelp to her side. “Look, you care for her, I get it. And as much as I wish it wasn’t true and I could hate you, I know you’d never hurt her. Shit, you practically watch her like she’s a fucking goddess or something.” Natsu made an embarrassed choking noise, Lucy feeling heat burn along her cheeks as she peeked up at the red crawling from under Natsu’s shirt. Natsu got himself together quickly though, ears still pinked as he stood straighter and spoke in an even voice.

“I love her. More than I think I’ve ever loved anyone.”

“Gross, don’t need the Shakespearean declaration there Art Boy.” Gray groused, lip curled in disgust as he looked dully at Natsu. “But I’m glad she has someone that’ll look after her. To have her back.”

Gray said in a softer tone, looking away from them again. Lucy’s brows pinched and she reached out a hand to tug at Gray’s wrist.

“Gray... it wasn’t your fault.”
She saw the way he flinched under her gentle words, but she gripped his wrist tighter so that he couldn’t pull away. The denial in his eyes made her lips pull down in a frown. Had he been carrying this around for all these years? “They were five grown men, there was no way you could have been able to fight them all of. Hell, you got a scar from trying to.” Lucy had been slowly raising her voice the more Gray’s scowl deepened.

“They had you for two weeks Lucy. Two weeks. I kept thinking about what was happening... about what you were going through. I was supposed to look after you, I brought you into my house, and promised you would be safe with me.” Gray hissed the words like venom, self loathing dripping from him as he took a ragged drag from his almost spent cigarette. “I saw the way you would shy away before you realized who I was after we got you back. How you couldn’t be in a crowd with men without shaking. You’re my family Lucy, and I couldn’t... I couldn’t do anything. I’ve never felt so fucking helpless.” Lucy squeezed his cold hand with both of hers, tremors radiating from him to her arms. His normally passive face was twisted in anger, slowly fading to a soft look of pain. “It took a year for your nightmares to stop.” He finally looked at her again, eyes tight and red while his voice was nothing more than a hoarse whisper.

“Gray...” Lucy called softly, the boy interrupting her before she could speak again.

“Erza was able to help by enrolling ya in all those kickboxing classes. Cana could distract you with a sex joke or some random bullshit. Levy helped you write. I couldn’t do anything, so I decided I would be your buffer to the world. You’re strong and smart and incredibly terrifying, Lucy, but looking out for you would be my way of making sure you had time to heal. That you’d never be hurt like that again.” Gray sighed and scrubbed his free hand on his face, going to take a drag on his cigarette and frowning in displeasure to see it was almost at the filter. Flicking it away, he ran a shaking hand through his bangs, pale scar on the left side of his forehead peeking into his hairline shown by the agitated motion.

“If you ever use the word ‘dreamy’ in context about me again I will beat your ass so badly people will have even more difficulty figuring out which end their ‘posed to talk at.” Natsu snarled behind her, Lucy shaking her head as she looked at the ground.

“Ya wish you could look like me, Ice Cube.” Natsu jeered, leaning over Lucy’s shoulder to enter Gray’s space. Gray leaned forward for his part, teeth bared.

“Droopy eyes.”
Both yelped at Lucy’s sharp bark, the blonde having been trapped between the two taller men as they headbutted each other, both trying to dominate the space around them. A small chorus of ‘sorry’s came from the two, Natsu at least having the decency to look slightly apologetic while Gray looked away in a huff with pink racing across the bridge of his nose.

She smiled wearily to herself before Lucy untangled her body from Natsu’s. Gray jolted in surprise when she wrapped her arms around his centre, leaning her head on his bare chest as she hugged him. She hummed when she felt his arms wrap around her, a small brush of his lips placed on the top of her head when she looked up at him.

“I’ve always thought of you as a big brother, if it helps. You and Cana were the first real family I’d had in years.” Lucy said gently.

“It does,” he murmured, eyes twinkling a little when Lucy beamed up at him. Lucy groaned heavily and let her head tip back to look at the vines and flowers lacing the white wooden lattice above her when she felt a burning stare on the back of her head.

“Calm down you sucky, I’m allowed to hug my friends.” Lucy chastised over her shoulder.

“Dunno what you’re talkin’ ‘bout.” Natsu grumbled to himself, Lucy straining to hear.

“Don’t forget your shirt,” Lucy reminded Gray flatly, patting his chest as she pulled away. She rolled her eyes at the following sounds of scramble behind her, walking with sure strides back to Natsu - who had shuffled away during her and Gray’s embrace. His nose was buried in his scarf and he was glaring at the ground in front of him, loose bangs falling into his eyes as his hair was left down. He lifted his head to look at Lucy when she came up to him with strong steps, lips pinched and brow flat. His expression was quickly taken over by shock when Lucy reached behind him, grabbed a fistful of his loose hair, and crushed her mouth to his. Lucy kissed him passionately, tongue flicking along the seam of his lips before pressing in and playing with his. She moulded her body against his, bringing her other hand to tangle in his hair as well when she swiped the tip of her tongue along one of his pointed canines before diving back into teasing the inside of his mouth.

She hummed proudly when she felt Natsu sink against her, his arms winding tightly around her body and one hand digging his fingers under her braid and gripping the back of her head. She pulled away panting, leaving Natsu to blink lazily as he too caught his breath from the unexpected make out. “So jealous.” Lucy teased, tipping her chin to grin up at him as she pressed her breasts tightly against the hard muscles under her.

“You’re the one that kissed me weirdo,” Natsu drawled, hint of smugness entering his smile when his hand not tangled in her hair slowly lowered to rest on the small of her back, fingertips ghosting over the top of her ass.

“Only because I could feel you sulking over here and I needed to remind you of who’s pants I’m trying to get into.” She purred, eyes hooded and hands trailing along the tops of his shoulders and playing with the loose hairs at the back of his neck as she spoke. Lately Natsu had taken to wearing
it down more often when he wasn’t working on one of his spells, and Lucy was secretly reveling in the unadulterated access she now had to run her hands through his fluffy pink locks whenever she wanted to. Gods knew Natsu had no boundaries regarding PDA.

“Well maybe you should be compensated for all of your efforts.” Natsu said in a low voice, pleasant shivers making her knees weak as she looked into his dark gaze, flecks of emerald flashing like the hunger in his eyes.

“And how would you do that?” Lucy prodded, fingers settling in a loose interlocking position around the nape of his neck.

“I could always give ya a massage.” Natsu offered lightly, forehead leaning against hers and his teeth nipping at her lips when she grinned invitingly up at him.

“Well that definitely sounds like a fun idea. And maybe a nice bubble bath afterwards to soothe out any aches. I can’t help but imagine you’d give me a deep tissue rub.” Her tone was almost salacious now, unashamed at her innuendos as she watched the lust pool in Natsu’s eyes, animalistic heat growing in their depths and actual heat flaring around them as Natsu got excited.

“Damn straight. I’ll get all that tension outta ya, somehow,” Natsu growled, hand groping her ass roughly as he spoke and Lucy’s hips jumping towards his at the harsh grip on her full backside.

“If you two are gonna fuck in public the least you could do is invite me.” Lucy squeaked as her and Natsu’s moment was interrupted, Natsu snarling at their friend as he hugged Lucy tightly to him.

“Fuck off, Alberona.”

“Down boy, there's enough Lucy to share. You seem to be fond of that great ass of hers, while I'm more of a tit gal myself. See, all worked out.” Cana slurred, Lucy twisting in Natsu’s arms to glare at the high functioning alcoholic.

“But I know you’d enjoy it,” Cana purred, winking at the flustered blonde and Natsu’s deepening scowl. “Whatever ya prudes, you know how to reach me when ya wanna try something fun.” Cana said in dismissal as she sauntered away, uncaring about Lucy’s loud sputters. Both stared at the doorway Cana had entered the restaurant from again, Lucy still thrown by Cana’s lack of propriety, even after knowing her for years.

“Uhhhh, Luce?” Natsu called, his face still turned to where Cana had stood. “You’re not... interested in that, are ya?” Lucy’s eyes widened even more, face burning and the heat spreading along her collarbone and neck. The only thing that stopped her from screaming at him for asking such a question in public was the panic under his calm facade and his finger tugging in sharp motions at his scarf. Seeing Natsu squirm the longer she was silent, an idea popped into Lucy’s head, and she composed herself enough to press onto her tiptoes and speak into his ear.

“Which part?” She breathed, dropping back on her heels when Natsu’s head whipped to her, eyes
gawking and mouth only able to make incomprehensible noises. She batted her eyes at him, trailing one fingertip along his jawline as his face steadily went through pink, red, scarlet, and was pressing on actually catching fire when Lucy touched a gentle kiss to his cheek.

“Seriously, get a room or come join us.”

Natsu made a strange noise in surprise, a cough and squeak mixed with a startled yell. Lucy burst into snorts of laughter, signalling to Cana -who had peeked her head out the door and was looking at Natsu with an amused grin- that they’d be going inside in a minute. She rolled her eyes at Cana’s lewd wink, turning her attention back to Natsu whose brain had seemed to shut down under Lucy’s flirting and the sudden interruption.

“I’m just teasing Natsu,” Lucy sang, holding his face with her hands and kissing his nose. She smiled at his unimpressed glare, red still coated heavily on his cheeks and temperature fluctuating sporadically around them. “Go join them, I’ll be there in a second.” Lucy’s smile softened under his curious look, rueful laugh making her lower her gaze to his scarf.

“I just want to wait out here for another minute. In case he was only forty-five minutes late.” She knew her tone was resigned, and her thumb stroked over Natsu’s cheek when his eyebrows knitted in concern. He looked over her expression before giving her a solemn nod and a chaste kiss to her forehead. He watched her grimly as Natsu walked towards where Cana had called them from, lips quirking down but eyes understanding at her strained smile.

Lucy let the smile slip from her face when he rounded the corner, looking around the small patio she stood alone in. Five tables with four chairs each sat along a black fence with delicate bars and railing to separate the terrace from the sidewalk. She walked slowly over to the table she had been seated at before, fingertips trailing over the metal grate of the tabletop and her expression wistful. This interview would have not only been her breakthrough piece for Sorcerer Weekly, but also the chance to pick the brain of a famous author for her own writing dreams. She honestly couldn’t even find it in herself to be angry, it was more like her hopes had been shattered and she was left to stare at the broken pieces. She would take a restraining order over this, if she was honest.

She didn’t even have a base idea what her article would be about now. How To Get Your Dreams Crushed By An Idol didn’t exactly have a ‘ring’ to it and was melodramatic even by Lucy’s standards. Releasing a sigh of self pity, Lucy raised her chin and nodded to herself. She was a good columnist! She could think of something besides asking a stuffy old man who was too rude to get a proper restraining order and instead stand her up questions about a book that’s been published for over a decade. Lucy hoped so anyway. No, she would! No room for self doubt, hadn’t she lectured Natsu twice in the last twelve hours about the same thing? Oh gods he would torment her if he found out her own hypocrisy. That adorable idiot.

Lucy was pulled from her mental wanderings -no, she was not obsessed with Natsu thank you very much. She just... liked thinking about him is all. He made her happy. Anyway- by the feel of someone watching her. Her head snapped up and she took a step back, a man only a few feet in front of on the other side of the metal fence.

“How To Get Your Dreams Crushed By An Idol” She asked tentatively. Her warning bells were going off in her head, and Lucy had grown to trust her instincts more than whatever her eyes saw. A man who looked no older than maybe 20 was looking at her with an odd expression, dark hair pulled back in a spiky ponytail. A small smile played on his lips as Lucy stayed where she was in his silence, dark eyes cold as he looked at her. His pale skin had whatever colour he was supposed to have it sucked from him by a white collared jacket and a deep red shirt. Lucy made to take another step back when his hand shot from his pocket, grabbing her wrist tightly.
“You’re close to him aren’t you?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about but I would appreciate it if you wou-” Lucy huffed, shock blocking any anger at being grabbed for the first few moments.

“Don’t play coy. I can see your bo- holy fuck.” The strange boy interrupted, eyes widening and glazed as though they were looking through her rather than at her. It made Lucy feel... violated. They focused again on her face, an excitement lighting his features contrary to the way his hold of her wrist tightened painfully.

“I said let g-”

“Amazing. They weren’t lying when they said this would be worth our time.” His voice was kind but false, a sneer hidden behind his smile as Lucy recoiled and struggled to pull her wrist free.

“Let go of me you creep.” Lucy hissed, twisting her arm to free herself and retreating back into the patio. She knew help was only 10 feet away, but she refused to be that scared child anymore. She was strong, definitely strong enough to take down this handsy bastard. She glared as he chuckled, eyes hardening with a sick joy as they rolled over her.

“Feisty. I like. See you later blondie, and remember: Bad things hide in the shadows.”

“Was that a threat?” Lucy spat, anger thrumming in her blood and her hands curling in and out of fists. He ignored her as he walked away, throwing a hand up in a wave and drawing her eyes to a strange design on the back of his jacket. Lucy blinked and then rubbed her eyes, the sidewalk empty where he had been only a second ago. Lucy leaned over the metal fence, unease settling over her as she scanned the empty street. Maybe he had taken a corner...

“Luce?”

Lucy screamed loudly, jumping and swinging her foot in a side kick. It wasn’t until a yelp and a shock of pink hair went to the ground that Lucy realized she had just kicked Natsu’s knee out from under him. She stammered an apology, hands hovering over her boyfriend who she had just kickboxed into kneeling before her.

“Holy fuck Lucy why couldn’t you have let me get that on video ?”

“Lushiii , what was that for?”

“Sh-shut up Gray! Natsu are you okay?!” Lucy asked quickly, dropping to her knees in front of Natsu. She gnawed on her lip at his strained smile. “Oh my god I hit your bad leg didn’t I?” Lucy asked in hushed horror, eyes growing large as she looked at the side of his leg intently. His eyes switched between pain and amusement as he watched her fret, eventually laughing as tears began to form in the corners of Lucy’s eyes.

“Y’know, usually the person who just got attacked for no reason should be the one cryin’ Weirdo.” He joked, teasing lit to his voice and Lucy flushing under both his and Gray’s suppressed chortles.

“W-well you shouldn’t have snuck up on me!” Lucy defended, rocking back onto her heels and crossing her arms over her chest, glaring at the side walk. She watched Gray and Natsu share a knowing look before breaking into large grins, Lucy flushing at their enjoyment at her expense. Well, okay, Natsu’s expense, but still, she was the one embarrassed. “I’m glad to see you two are being all buddy-buddy,” Lucy sniffed, a clever smile lifting one corner of her lips slightly as both boys paled, looking at each other in realization that they had just gotten along . Natsu made a disgusted noise and fell onto his ass and away from Gray, the dark haired man sneering even as red
ran across the bridge of his nose.

“I’m not-”

“That los-”

“Shitty Popsi-”

“How could you even-”

“WE’RE NOT GETTING ALONG.”

Lucy broke out into loud laughter as both boys shouted at the same time after rambling over one another, faces bright red and voices a mix of anger and desperation. They glared at one another, Natsu shooting up into a challenging position, face encroaching on Gray’s personal space. Lucy sighed to herself as she watched Gray headbutt Natsu, deciding she should end their brawl before she had to pay for any damages they might cause.

Which had happened before.

Many times.

“Yes girls, you’re both pretty.” Lucy hummed, throwing Gray’s discarded shirt at both of their faces. Lucy couldn’t help her giggles as Gray began sputtering and Natsu squawking at her joke, both backing away from the other until a large distance was between them. “Can we go inside now?” Lucy asked, voice lifting in a whine. “I saw a piece of raspberry cheesecake that was calling my name...”

“Are you sure about that?” Natsu asked flatly, Lucy’s head whipping to look at him as she stood stiffly.

“Dude...” she heard Gray breath, her stomach dropping as she continued to look at Natsu’s disinterested expression.

“I’m just sayin’, when you’re embarrassed you like chocolate so you won’t be happy with that fruity crap and then you’ll feel sick if you get both and also I really don’t feel like payin’ for two things here. Have you seen the prices? It’s fuckin’ highway robbery.” Lucy blinked in shock as she continued to stare at Natsu. That hadn’t been what she was expecting, although she did regret considering kicking him again now. “What’re you makin’ that face for? You alright there Luce, you’ve been actin’ weirder than usual.” Natsu asked, eyebrows cocked in question.

Gray interrupted Lucy’s response, low whistle sounding before he spoke. “You’re so fuckin’ lucky Strawberry. If that had gone where I thought it was gonna go you’d be dead right now.”

Natsu looked at Gray in agitation, jaw straining as he folded his arms over his head. “What the fuck you talkin’ ‘bout Freezer Burn? What else would I have mean-” Natsu asked begrudgingly, eyes blowing wide and his tongue catching in his throat in understanding. He looked at Lucy, fear written plainly on his face. “I-I didn’t mean- you know I thi- Lucy don’t kill me!” Natsu stammered, holding his hands in front of his body in a pleading motion. Her heart melted a little under his sincere look, and she smiled as she threw herself at him. She nuzzled his neck as he stumbled back a step, arms hesitant as they wrapped around her.

“You dork,” Lucy breathed, beaming up at Natsu’s unsure smile. She rubbed her nose against his, laughing lightly at his low sound of happiness. Oh dear lord he was purring. Lucy didn’t know if she wanted to cuddle him or fuck him right now if she was honest, but either way a familiar heat
settled in her blood, energy rushing through her limbs as Natsu held her. “Gray stop making that face.”

Lucy turned her chin and rested the side of her face on Natsu’s chest, looking at Gray with a faux stern look, sticking her tongue out at his irritated eyeroll. She could see the corners of his mouth twitching and knew he was hiding a smile. Emotionally repressed idiot.

“Come on you two, before Erza eats all of the strawberry cakes and threatens the baker.” Lucy hummed, winding one arm through Natsu’s and slinking her other around Gray’s, hip checking him as he struggled to hide a fond smile when he looked at her.

She ignored Natsu’s growl.

Again.

Lucy smiled as she pushed the strange encounter with the boy from before from her head, instead focusing on surrounding herself with her little family. Her alcoholic, violent, and competitive family.

Oh gods one of the girl’s boyfriends had Loke by the collar.
Seventeen

Lucy sighed heavily, face turning into her pillow more. Reluctantly she allowed her eyes to flutter open, much more willing to be awake when she felt Natsu press his lips into her skin again. His touches must have been what had woken her up, and she smiled giddily to herself as she realized Natsu didn’t know she was awake, too lost in tasting her bare stomach. She dropped her hands to his head, scoring her nails along his scalp and pulling a low purr from him. She smiled lazily when Natsu rested his chin on her stomach, eyes closed in bliss as Lucy continued to play with his bedhead.

“Morning,” Lucy called gently, running her forefinger along his nose. His freckles had come back, much to Lucy’s pleasure. Her eyes were tracing constellations in the dark spots scattered along his cheeks and nose when Natsu’s finally fluttered open, content warmth seeping into Lucy’s bones at his happy look.

“Morin’, birthday girl. How’s it feel to finally catch up?” His voice was still rough with sleep, a shiver running along her bare skin. That voice would be her undoing.

“You’re only like a year older than me.” Lucy berated, gentle smile at Natsu’s scrunched face. He stuck his tongue out at her, Lucy tapping one finger on her lower lip as she searched for a memory.

“Actually, you’re not even a year older. Today is June twenty first, and you were born what, August sixteenth? Ten months!” Lucy crowed, poking Natsu in the side of the head with her finger.

“Besides you act more like a ten year old than a man in his twenties.”

Natsu pouted at her words, his hands worming under her back so he could hug her body closer to him, side of his face on her belly button and eyes tinged with hurt. “I am twenty one years old. Besides, actin’ all mature and adulty is borin’ as fuck. And if you liked borin’ then you’d be with some other prick ‘n not me.” Natsu stuck out his tongue, wiggling deeper between her legs as if he had just won. Lucy rolled her eyes and ran her hand through Natsu’s bangs while she allowed her legs to be pushed further apart under his bare chest, unable to fight back her small grin.

“Yes, Natsu. I much prefer you driving me insane than being bored.” Lucy hummed, conceding to his imagined victory. “What’s that look for?” Lucy sighed, Natsu looking at her with squinted eyes and a pensive expression. His eyes narrowed more at her question, hold on her tightening and his cheek pressing deeper into her toned muscles. “I’m being serious, you know.” Natsu blinked at wry statement, petulant look falling from his face.

“I love you, you silly boy.”

Natsu pulled himself off of her stomach and crawled up her body until he was looking straight down at her. His dark eyes were piercing in their sudden intensity, Lucy finding it hard to breathe and a warmth thrumming in her blood. “You’re the best fuckin’ girlfriend in the world, Weirdo.” Natsu said just loud enough for her to hear, Lucy flushing under his compliment and looking away. He brought a hand to snag her chin and pull her face back to his before he continued speaking in the same low hush. “It’s been a long time since anyone’s ever been as good to me as you have. Treated me like I was worth somethin’ and made me believe it. I just can’t believe I getta wake up to your snores or fall asleep with ya kickin’ me,” Natsu’s face cracked in a teasing smirk, Lucy resting her arms around his neck and giving one of his ears a sharp tug, cheeks puffing out as he ruined the moment. No, not ruined. Made very much a ‘them’ moment. “We’re Bonded, so even if you ever wanna get rid of me you can’t. But I’m gonna treat you like the princess you are Weirdo, and I’ll try and deserve to stay by your side for the rest of my life.” Natsu pressed a heavy kiss to Lucy’s neck, his words growing huskier as he trailed closed lips down to Lucy’s chest.
“You fell in love with a dragon soul, Luce. Don’t you know we’re infamous for our greed?” Lucy swallowed thickly under his heated look, Natsu looking at her face through his lashes, fangs peeking out in a sinful smirk. Her hands came to tangle in his hair as he traced the top curve of her cleavage, sleep shirt pushed low while also ridding up to just below her bust. Natsu nipped at the milky skin as he moved his mouth along her side, passing over her large breasts to instead drag his tongue along her ribs.

“And I’m gonna treasure everything I can steal from you.” Natsu growled against her skin, kisses becoming sloppy as he moved across her stomach. Lucy’s breathing was growing shallower, lip caught between her teeth as Natsu left small marks on her.

Lucy made a small whimper as Natsu scraped his teeth on her exposed hip bone, soothing licks igniting fire inside her and making her fist at Natsu’s soft pink hair. “Every little noise.” he whispered, hands squeezing her thighs before slipping under and groping her ass roughly. “Every little look.” He pressed a sweet kiss to the spot just above where Lucy’s sleep shorts had pushed dangerously low. “I’ll take everything you bless me with, Lucy.” Lucy made a breathy and needy noise at Natsu’s words, his eyes sharpening and tongue flicking out to swipe hungrily along his lower lip. A shiver ran across Lucy’s skin as the image of an animal waiting to devour it’s prey raced across her mind.

“Because you’re precious to me too.”

Lucy’s body jerked as Natsu pressed his lips to her core through her pajamas. Her legs were slung over his shoulders, inner thighs pressing on either of his ears as he continued to kiss her through the thin layers of silk and cotton. “Ngh- Natsu.” Lucy whimpered, head pressing into her pillow as his hands moved under her shorts and cupped her bare ass, kneading and squeezing the full curves sitting in his palms. Natsu nuzzled his nose into her at her call, mouth opening to press wetter and deeper kisses, Lucy squirming as her own wetness started to mix with the heat from Natsu’s mouth. He was so close to her core, all he had to do was push away the few layers of clothes and then he would reach her. Lucy’s eyes flew open.

She hadn’t shaved for days.

*She didn’t shower yesterday.*

With a yelp Lucy tugged harshly at Natsu’s hair and ripped him from her pulsing heat, Natsu staring at her in lust fogged confusion. Panic soon set in, Lucy speaking before Natsu could begin his usual downward spiral. “No-not ready,” Lucy panted, palms falling to cup his face as she looked at him. “Shit, shit, Luce, I’m so sorry you should’a stopped me sooner we don’t have to do anything you don’t want to oh fuck, I’m so-“ Natsu rambled, eyes pleading and hands pulling back from her like she had shocked him. Lucy pressed two fingers to his mouth to stop him from speaking, her head falling back on the pillow in a huff as she caught her breath.

“No Natsu, I’m ready in *that* sense. Past ready actually,” Lucy muttered the last part under her breath, squirming in her spot on the bed as she tried to think of what to say. “I’m just not...” Lucy groaned, lifting one hand to cover her face before she peeked through her fingers to look at Natsu’s baffled expression, eyebrows pinched in question. “I’m not... *prepared* .” Lucy said slowly, stressing the final word with large eyes.

Natsu cocked his head to the side, still not understanding.

“No clean.” Lucy moaned, both hands covering her face as she faced the ceiling.
“My... mouth... is dirty?” Natsu asked skeptically, frustration leaking through with his confusion.

“Noooo,” Lucy wailed, pushing onto her forearms and turning her face to look at Natsu. She focused on his lips and how they turned down at the corners, unable to meet his concerned gaze. ‘I’m the one... I just- shower .” Lucy pleaded, motioning with her eyes and feeling like her face was on fire. She would rather die than explain it any clearer to Natsu. Thankfully, he finally caught on, eyes growing wide before he snorted, breaking out into loud laughter and resting his forehead on Lucy’s flush stomach.

“Luce, do you really think I care?” Natsu asked with a skeptical smile. Lucy crossed her arms over her chest and pouted, attempting to close her legs but finding Natsu’s body still in the way. ‘Sex ain’t exactly clean from what I’ve heard, so I don’t see the issue. ‘Sides,” Natsu drawled, wicked smirk pulling at his lips as he nipped at Lucy’s stomach. “You smell good enough to eat .”

Lucy whimpered at his low growl, his tongue flicking out and trailing lower until he was teasing the pink lace that showed above Lucy’s sleep shorts. Lucy felt her face heat up more as it dawned on her that he was practically drooling, face hovering mere centimetres from her burning core.

“I was going to get ready for tonight this morning,” Lucy explained in a shaking voice, hands snaking down to twist in his hair. Natsu pressed gentle kisses along the band of her underwear, not venturing further until Lucy gave the ‘okay’.

“For tonight, hmm?” Natsu asked, cockiness sinking into his expression. “And why would you need to prepare for that?”

“Well I figured out what you could get me for my birthday.” Lucy said flirtatiously, Natsu’s confidence boosting her own. “Ah ah ah,” Lucy teased, lifting Natsu’s chin with two fingers when he opened his mouth to speak. She led him back to her, rolling them over so Lucy was straddling Natsu’s lap. “You'll have to wait and see.” She sang the words, leaning down and pressing her lips to Natsu’s lopsided grin.

“Aye sir.” He hummed, both hands tangling in her hair and moving her mouth closer against his, his hot tongue sneaking past her gasping lips and toying with her mouth. Lucy bit at it teasingly, pulling back for breath and smiling down at Natsu before sealing her mouth over his for another passionate kiss.

“I have to go get ready, Gray and Cana are taking me out for a birthday lunch at some fancy restaurant.” Lucy sighed, giggling at Natsu’s noise of refusal. He was leaving soft love bites along her jaw and neck, nuzzling into her and her tangled hair. His legs wrapped around her hips, pinning her to him and she squealed in laughter. “Nattsuuuu, you have to let me go.”

“Don't wanna,” Natsu grumbled, sucking roughly on her collarbone before leading gentle kisses back up to her lips. “Mine.”

“So clingy,” Lucy complained, drawing out the last word and pushing on his chest. She shrieked loudly when Natsu began tickling her sides, rolling them over and pinning her hands above their heads while managing to avoid her wild kicks. Natsu blew a raspberry into her stomach, Lucy thrashing under him as she laughed loudly. Her movements stalled when she blinked the tears from her eyes and looked at Natsu. He had her shirt pinched between his teeth, cavalier smile and impish gleam in his dark eyes sending fire to pool in southern places. “Na-Natsu?” Lucy whispered, swallowing thickly at Natsu’s happy chirp in response.

He held her embarrassed gaze as he slowly leaned towards her, pulling the thin white cotton with him. Her breath caught in her throat when the shirt snagged on her hardening nipples, Natsu giving a
firm jerk of his chin to free them. He let the fabric pool along her collarbone, eyes looking for permission even as he dragged his tongue slowly along his lower lip. Lucy gave a stuttering nod, smiling as Natsu beamed at her. And then buried his face in her cleavage.

“Soft,” Natsu mouthed against her, Lucy trying to cover her face with her hand before remembering Natsu’s hold on her wrists. She tugged on his hold again, whimpering as Natsu trailed his fingers along her smooth flesh until he gripped her ribs, his large hand almost wrapping around her completely and scouring where it rested. Her hands came to rest in his hair, tangling gently in the longer strands. Natsu pressed an open kiss just under a tight nipple, Lucy groaning at the heat of his mouth on her sensitive skin. She held his needy gaze as he looked at her, sensual hunger making the emerald sparkle while he purposefully tongued at her pink bud.

“Nngh-” Lucy hissed through her teeth, hips jumping as molten heat overwhelmed her senses. Her grip tightened in his hair and her nails dug into his scalp, Natsu sucking her nipple into his mouth and gently teasing it with his sharp teeth. A mewl ripped from Lucy’s throat and her back arched off the bed. Her body was desperate to feel more of Natsu, whether it was his hand, mouth, or even just his bare skin.

Lucy panted up at the ceiling, Natsu switching breasts and gently rolling his thumb over her free one, sensitivity increased by the cool air striking the wet skin. She knew if they started this now, there was no way Lucy was going to be leaving the bed in the next few hours. Her words caught in her throat as Natsu groped roughly at her breasts, tongue playing with one nipple and palming the other while her supple flesh spilled between his calloused fingers.

They needed to stop, but gods she really didn’t want to.

“How was the, ughh-, hockey game, by the way?” Lucy struggled to ask, Natsu tentatively pinching her nipple. He paused and looked at her blankly, eyebrow slowly raising and she could practically read his mind as he released her nipple with a lewd ‘pop’. ‘Why?’ He tweaked her nipple as he rested his chin in the deep valley between her breasts, smirking satisfactorily when Lucy’s leg twitched and she bit back a high squeak. “I mean, you were pretty excited about it yesterday, and I didn’t get in from my shift until late.” Lucy pushed with a weak smile, knowing she wasn’t fooling Natsu.

“Luce, if you want me to stop ya can just say so.” Natsu sighed, expression becoming serious as he thought more. “You know I would stop right? You’re not tryin’ to distract me ‘cus you think I’d push you? Oh gods have I been pushin’ you? Lucy you need to tell me these things I swear I’d die if you didn’t trus-” Natsu rambled in a panic, gaze desperate as he spoke. Lucy sighed heavily. This is exactly what she had been hoping to avoid. Again.

Lucy pulled Natsu in for a harsh ‘shut up’ kiss, Natsu squeaking and looking at her with wide eyes before sinking into the kiss. The two softened into one another, movements becoming more gentle and loving than they had been seconds before. Lucy broke the kiss first, looking up at Natsu and pushing his loose hair from his forehead with a tender movement.

“I do trust you Natsu. Hell, if I had even stopped moving for a second you would have pulled back, you’re like scary hyper aware of if I’m okay with what you’re doing. I actually wouldn’t mind if you pushed a little bit harder.” Lucy looked at him pointedly when Natsu’s grin stretched wide and impish light shone in his eyes. Lucy spoke again before he could say anything juvenile.

“I was asking because even though I didn’t want to stop I knew we had to. Unless you’d like to tell Gray the reason I was late was because you were trying to put hickies on my boobs.” Natsu groaned her name loudly, letting his body fall limply on top of hers and rolling off her when she shoved his shoulder.
“Why’d ya hafta mention Frosted Flakes? Now my boner, is like, tryin’ ta die.” He glared as Lucy struggled to hide a laugh. “Is that what you want Luce? For my dick to fall off?”

“Well, I suppose I should keep it around until I get to play with it at least once, huh?” Lucy asked sultrily, eyes half lidded and a finger drawing patterns on Natsu’s chest. She bit her lip as his eyes widened and his face flamed a brilliant red, mouth gaping and strange noises sounding from him. Lucy patted his chest twice and rolled out of bed. Natsu was still in shock.

“And really? ‘Frosted Flakes’?” Lucy questioned as she straightened her shirt.

“What? Coming up with new and creative names all the time is hard.” Natsu shot back, looking away and muttering under her unconvinced glance. “And I’m hungry.”

“Yes well, you seemed to have quite a fun time at the hockey game with your ‘arch rival’.” Lucy teased, gathering clothes to bring into the bathroom with her. There was a cute vest she was dying to pair with pink skirt.

“Oi. Don’t try and act like that wasn’t a trap you set up.” Natsu barked, a faint pink remaining even as his brain restarted. He pointed an accusing finger at Lucy who just shrugged easily, her clothes slung over one elbow.

“But did you have fun?”

“... Maybe. But that’s not the point!” Natsu defended. Lucy rolled her eyes at her boyfriend’s adamant refusal about enjoying time with Gray. She had seen them at half time over the TV, Lucy watching from one of the many flat screens in the bar she worked at. The two had been joking and smiling, at least until Gray had sucker punched Natsu when the Kiss Cam zoomed in on the pair.

Natsu had responded by landing a solid right hook on Gray’s jaw. And starting an entire brawl in section D.

The boys were not allowed admittance for the rest of the season.

“Either way I’m happy you two don’t hate each other anymore.” Lucy smiled, Natsu grumbling about still hating the ‘stripping ice princess’. Lucy walked quickly over to Natsu and placed a kiss on his cheek while he was distracted, dancing out of his grasp as he made to encircle his arms around her. “I’ll be right out in like, forty minutes.”

“I don’t get why I can’t just join ya,” Natsu sighed as he flopped back on her bed, arms resting behind his head and the beginnings of a pout turning down the corners of his mouth.

“Sex first, then we can shower together.” Lucy said flatly as she turned away. She giggled at the sounds of Natsu squawking and the ‘thump’ as he fell from her bed. She didn’t even try to cover her snorts as he whined her name loudly at the closing bedroom door.

“I know that pose.”

Lucy jumped at the sudden voice behind her, looking over her shoulder at Cana and taking the offered drink. A strawberry margarita, as Erza was picking Lucy up after and Cana was the self proclaimed queen of day drinking.

Lucy didn’t even question why Cana was bringing her the drink and not their waiter.

“That’s the ‘I just shaved my hooch this morning’ position. I can tell by the crossed ankles.” Cana
snickered, Lucy blushing and turning up her nose. 

“A lady crosses her ankles.” Lucy huffed.

“That ‘lady’ crap is bullshit and ya know it.” Lucy glared at Gray’s comment, taking a long sip of her –much needed- drink. This was definitely not appropriate conversation for a high class establishment. Even if the restaurant was basically deserted.

“Someone’s getting lu~cky,” Cana sang, sitting in the seat opposite of Lucy and ignoring Gray’s gagging sound. Lucy ripped a chunk off of a piece of bread, chewing as she thought. And ignored Gray and Cana’s bickering about levels of information that needed to be shared. Oh boy was Lucy about to blow that wide open.

She took a deep breath and stared intensely into her drink until she was finding patterns in the light pink swirls. “Yes.” She pushed out, cheeks heating as silence fell over her friends.

“What?”

Lucy’s grip tightened on the glass stem, not looking up at Gray as she answered his question. “Ge- getting lucky. Yes. I am, doing... that. Tonight. For my birthday. With Na-” Lucy rambled, thankfully cut off by Cana’s excited holler and Gray’s violent swearing.

“What the fuck Lucy shit I do not need to know that why in heavens fucking name are you telling me this oh my gods oh gods I’m picturing his tiny dick MAKE IT GO AWAY!”

“Yaaaaas! Finally girl, you tap that hot ass!”

Lucy smiled weakly at the mixed reactions, looking up to see Gray eyeing his whiskey as if he was contemplating blinding himself with it and Cana leaning over the table and getting ready to interrogate her. So maybe Lucy could have found a better way to open this conversation.

“This is your guys’ first time right?” Cana asked eagerly, Gray paling further and sinking into his chair. He was also stripping his dark and form fitting cropped shirt off, chin snagging on the neckline that stopped just above his adam’s apple. Lucy licked her lips after taking another large sip, ignoring Cana’s knowing gaze and coy smile.

“Yeah, and my first... anything really. I mean, I almost gave him a hand job a while back but then Happy interrupted and-” Lucy explained, both girls raising their eyebrows when Gray slapped his hands over his ears and squeezed his eyes shut tightly, reciting fashion designers under his breath.

Cana looked at Lucy over the top of her beer suspiciously, throwing back the last sip and wiping the back of her hand over her lips before speaking. “I thought you and Loke had that night of wild lovin’ last year at the wine conference?”

Lucy snorted and covered her face, memories of the trip that Cana had dragged her, Loke, and Gray on threatening to make her lose her composure. “What?” Cana defended, absentmindedly signaling the waiter for yet another drink. “Loke always denied anything happened pretty hard, which is kinda a red flag that something happened.”

“Oh something happened alright, it just wasn't with me.” Lucy grinned as she looked pointedly at Gray, Cana's jaw dropping in response. She punched his arm, Gray’s scowl deepening and sending an icy glare her way.

“You bastard, we were hooking up on that trip!”
Gray rolled his eyes at her amused exclamation. “You were also fucking Bacchus and Mira. Loke and I just kinda started talking one night and then we got drinks and—”

“Then they ended up in my room.” Lucy interrupted, sticking her tongue out at Gray when he made a face at her.

“Ok first of all, I was trying to get with Mira but she shot me down, and secondly I think you need to start looking outside of our friend group to satisfy those urges. Now they are completely normal for a growing boy, and I know you feel funny when you touch your special place, but—” Cana lectured, Lucy giggling at Gray’s horrified expression and his knee jerk reaction to launch a piece of bread directly at her forehead.

“Like you’re one to talk, Cana.” Lucy teased.

“Not all of us have the willpower to be a Nun, missy. And excuse you I am nowhere near as bad as Mister I-can’t-keep-my pants-on.” Gray swore to himself as he looked down, snarling at Cana when he realized his baggy olive green pants were still on. Lucy gave an apologetic smile to the waiter as he placed yet another beer in front of Cana and gave them all a cautious look before walking away. Lucy’s smile brightened when she realized the waiter’s eyes had lingered on Gray a second longer than the girls and the small nervous straightening of the papers on his tray. Cana -for once- was too busy defending herself to notice a potential hook up for their friend.

“I mean aside from you he has literally done every one of our friends.”

Lucy snorted, but her lofty smile at Cana’s exaggeration fell as she ran through their friends in her head.

“You, Loke, Droy before he got fat, that night with Jet, Mira for like a week…” Lucy prattled, Cana listing the people they weren’t friends with at the same time.

“Oi, you don’t have to use your goddamn fingers.” Gray groused at Cana, slinking into his seat and red ear tops poking through his raven hair. Lucy and Cana ignored him.

“-and I still can’t believe he and Erza had that on again off again thing for a while—”

“She is a considerate and passionate lover.”

Lucy choked on air at Gray’s flat and monotone statement, Cana breaking into raucous howls of laughter and falling from her seat. The few people in the restaurant looked at them, Lucy pounding on her collarbone to try and start her heart again, Cana rolling on the floor clutching her stomach, and Gray watching them with cold disinterest while he sipped his short glass of whiskey.

“Levy!” Lucy wheezed triumphantly. “He hasn’t had sex with Levy!”

Cana and Gray shared a look as Lucy’s alcoholic friend climbed back onto her chair, Lucy narrowing her eyes at them. “You didn’t…” Lucy said in disbelief, squawking and throwing her napkin at Gray when he shrugged his shoulders bashfully. “Really Gray, Levy too?”

Pink raced across his face and he ran a hand through his hair as he spoke. “She came onto me! Sides, it was like two years ago now, and it ain’t my fault that she’s so cute and tiny.” Cana watched with amusement as she drank half her beer in one sip, knowing smile and wink at Lucy when she signalled the same waiter over for another drink. So maybe Cana was paying attention.

“So’s a hamster Gray! What are you going to do, fuck a hamster?”
“Lucy!”

Cana broke into another loud fit of snorts and howls, Lucy staring down a bright red Gray until he looked at his drink. “Don’t worry,” Lucy sighed, taking the beer from the shocked waiter and placing it in front of Cana, “this list started when he was sixteen, and our dear shirtless boy here is not into beasitalty, especially hamsters. I was just making a point. Please, feel free to leave that receipt with your number on it for him still, by the way he was checking out your ass he’d be interested.”

Now Cana was the one choking on her beer, sending Lucy a thumbs up as the blonde blinked innocently at Gray’s even redder face. The poor waiter was stumbling over his words and stammering before looking shyly at Gray, throwing the receipt at him, and literally running away. Gray reached out and de-crumpled the slip of paper before tucking it in his pocket, glaring daggers at Lucy and a slow clapping Cana.

“Now we are even for how you treated Natsu for months.” Lucy said easily, smiling brightly at the still sulking Gray. She stuck her tongue out at his muttered ‘you two deserve each other’, tone becoming placating and pleading as she spoke. “But hey, I got you a date for tonight, so will you please help me?”

Gray sighed heavily, scrubbing a hand over his face -which was finally resuming its pale colouring. Lucy knew he was about to cave by the tick of his eyebrow, and beamed at him with her eyes closed.

“Fuck,” Gray swore, hissing out the word over several seconds. “You’re lucky he was so cute.” Cana snickered at Gray’s grumble, turning to look at Lucy with a strangely serious change in mood.

“Alright girly, whaddya wanna know ‘bout the wonderful world of fucking?”

Lucy walked into her apartment, letting her dazed expression glide over the sight before her. Natsu was practically vibrating on her couch, Happy flying around in a frantic rush trying to string streamers and balloons around her apartment. Books laid scattered on the ground. Her floor was a mess of torn wrapping paper and ribbon.

Lucy blinked as she watched a distracted Happy fly into a balloon, claws sinking into the stretched rubber in surprise and a high wail falling from the cat at the resulting loud ‘pop’. He ricocheted off of one of the tall bookshelves by her TV -sending another two books to the floor- before instinctively speeding to Lucy and burying himself in her chest. Lucy couldn’t help the gentle smile as she cradled Happy with her arms and soothingly pet his back with one hand, the other holding a full bottle of Jack Daniels.

Courtesy of Cana, and a much needed relaxer after the interesting conversation she had finished having before ‘shopping’ with Erza, scarred and strangely unsurprised at what she had brought on herself. By both events.

“Luce!” Natsu squeaked in surprise, hands flying behind his back as he stood quickly. Lucy narrowed her eyes, almost as if she were trying to look through him to see what he was hiding. Natsu gulped under her stare. “You weren’t ‘posed to be home until...” Natsu trailed off as he looked at the clock, shoulders slumping as he saw the time. “Now.”

“Lushi, Natsu’s gone insane.” Happy whimpered, large eyes watery and wide as he looked at her. “First we were just going to make you a present, but then that was boring and you deserve the best so I found some ribbon, and Natsu thought balloons would be fun but he wouldn’t let me make you
fish balloons because they're ‘not appropriate’ for your birthday which is dumb because fish are the best and you're the best and you're weird enough to like them and—” Happy rambled, cuddling deeper into her hug as he spoke, white wings disappearing in their usual puff of sparkles and tickling Lucy's bare forearms.

“And then he tried to put salmon in your cake.” Natsu hissed, glaring at the cat who bared his sharp teeth in return.

“Salmon is way better than strawberry,” Happy shot back in contempt, crawling up to perch on Lucy’s head possessively. Natsu opened his mouth to spit something back at his familiar, but his eyes widened and his mouth froze open as realization crossed his face.

“The cake.”

At his harsh whisper both he and Happy bolted for the kitchen, Natsu vaulting over her sofa and ignoring Lucy's cry of reproach. “I told you to set a timer.” Happy lectured Natsu, the witch somehow glaring at while ignoring the flying cat hovering over his shoulder.

“Well I saved it before it burned so bite me.” Natsu huffed, sticking his tongue out at Happy’s rolled eyes and the small cat’s nose twitching in annoyance. Lucy slowly walked into her apartment, leaving the bottle on the edge of the table behind the couch. A large grin grew without thought as she listened to Happy and Natsu bicker even as they worked together seamlessly to ice her cake, pale yellow frosting uneven and odd patches of fish and cat-head shaped sprinkles littering the top of it.

She stopped in the kitchen, giggling behind her hand as Happy dumped the rest of the sprinkles in the center of the cake, the screw top somehow loosened and falling onto the cake along with half of a container of the sweet candy. Lucy just hoped that the pressed sugar was only fish shaped and not flavoured.

Knowing Happy it was a 50/50 chance.

Natsu spun on his heel, Happy settling in his fluffy and disheveled hair. A blocky ‘21’ candle sat haphazardly in the center of the pile of sprinkles, dark match still unlit. Lucy’s smile grew as she watched them beam at her, cake held out proudly. She couldn't help but cock her head in amused confusion as the seconds passed by, a nervous energy surrounding Natsu and Happy more and more. At least until Happy looked at the cake and batted at Natsu's ear. The pair exchanged hushed whispers until pink flooded Natsu's cheeks.

Balancing the cake in one hand, Natsu’s brow furrowed the tiniest bit in concentration and his lips moved barely enough to catch Lucy's attention. His palm hovered above the wick as his eyes lost focus on the candle, a quick snap ending the trance that had pulled Lucy forward as she lost herself in watching Natsu. Sparks -pink for some odd reason- shot away from the now lit wick, a small and happy looking flame dancing above the wax.

Lucy blinked as she realized all of this had happened in less than half a second.

“You know you don't need to say the spell when Lucy's around, right Natsu?” Happy questioned, tone simply curious rather than berating as it had been earlier. Natsu shrugged, lopsided grin drawing Lucy in again.

“Habits.” Natsu walked forward, cake safely back in two hands and outstretched to Lucy.

“It's not,” Lucy narrowed her eyes at the flame, “gonna be like one of those impossible to blow out ones is it?”
“Aww, that would’ve been hilarious!” Natsu pouted, Happy making a sad sound in agreement and assuring Lucy that neither of them had stopped to consider any possible pranks that could be done with a cake. Lucy giggled lightly as she walked closer to the pair, blowing out the candle before beaming up at Natsu.

“Thanks you two, it was very sweet of you to bake me something.”

“Happy birthday, Luce.” Natsu grinned brightly at her, eyes closing at the fullness of his smile. Happy shifted head tops and snickered as Lucy wiped a finger over the frosting and popped it in her mouth. She hummed at the sugary taste, and made a low and exaggerated groan as Natsu pouted at her. “What happened to ‘ruinin’ your appetite’?” Natsu teased, looking at her dryly when she removed her finger from her lips with a loud ‘pop’.

“You made dinner too?” Lucy questioned, surprise lifting her voice. Natsu chuckled and ducked his head, shoulder lifting as if he was scratching the back of his head.

“We figured you'd have enough fancy food with that lunch thing so I was just gonna order in Enca stir fry. Unless you want somethin’ more fancy and then I could probably call in a favour or five and get a seat at that Pergrande cuisine fusion place. I dunno if I have a suit though, or...” Natsu started to mutter to himself, Happy sighing wearily and snuggling in between Lucy's two top knots.

“He's been like this all day Lucy. I think you broke him.”

Lucy scoffed at the cat’s high pitched statement. “I haven't seen him since this morning.” She defended, sticking her pinky in the cake and holding it up for Happy to clean. He purred at the treat, tail tickling the back of Lucy's neck as it swung lazily.

“Then he broke himself worrying about it. He doesn't even get this worked up over a new spell!”

Lucy called Natsu's name gently, biting her lip to stifle a giggle as his head whipped to look at her with rounded eyes. “I'd love to order in stir fry. Besides, how else would I be able to share Cana's ‘gift’ with my two boys?”

Happy made a gagging sound at the mention of the whiskey on the table. Natsu smiled brightly at Lucy, turning to put the cake back on the counter. And revealing the top of a small rectangle shoved in the back pocket of his jeans. Hey, it's not like Lucy was trying to sneak a peek -this time. Lucy snickered to herself as she darted forwards and plucked the box out of his pocket, backing away when he squawked his outrage. Happy pushed off from her head as Natsu chased her around the kitchen, landing beside the cake and casually sticking his paw in one of the bigger clumps of frosting.

“Lushi, give me back your present!”

“You just said it was my present! ”

“It ain't don't yet! I needa put a fuckin’ bow on it! I practiced!”

“That's adorable .”

“Dragons aren't adorable!”

He lunged at her as he roared his rebuttal, arms wrapping around her waist and crushing her back to his chest. Lucy had tears in her eyes and squealed between peals of laughter. Natsu whined loudly and reached with one hand at the box that Lucy was holding away from her body, Natsu’s fingertips brushing her wrist.
“Na na na na na,” Lucy sang, thumb popping open the lid of the box and revealing her present. Natsu's arms hung limply around her middle and his chin rested on the crown of her head, Lucy squinting at the necklace nestled in the white velvet inside. It was a simple gold chain, fine and delicate with a matching ornate pendant. Golden and silver spirals curled and interlinked in the outline of a heart, hollow inside and no bigger than Lucy's thumbnail. It was also her mother's.

“Why are you giving me my mother's necklace?” Lucy questioned, looking over her shoulder with an expectant eyebrow raise. Natsu sighed heavily, cheek pressing on one of Lucy's buns as he spoke in a mopey voice.

“It was ‘posed to be a surprise, but I remember ya talkin’ ‘bout how it was broken and how it was your favourite so I fixed it.” Natsu chuckled faintly when Lucy's breath caught, his calloused fingers careful and skilled as he shifted the chain of the necklace to reveal the now-repaired clasp. Lucy couldn't even tell it had needed mending, Natsu's repair blended seamlessly with the antique gold. “I even imbued it so it ain't ever gonna break again.”

Lucy bit her lip, eyes watering as she looked at the pale gold draped over Natsu's fingertips and his almost-smug remark went over her head. “Can you put it on me?” Lucy asked quietly, smiling to herself when Natsu hummed in agreement and took the necklace from the box. Warmth bloomed as his knuckles softly ran along the back of her neck after the clasp was closed, and a familiar heat spread along her collarbone where the metal settled against her skin. It was the same soothing feeling her ring gave her, and a tear slipped from her eye.

“Thank you Natsu.” Lucy whispered shakily, turning in his arms to hug him tightly.

“It was Happy's suggestion,” Natsu brushed off her gratitude with an embarrassed cough, but he held her tightly as he nuzzled into her temple. He nosed at her cheek, gently slating his lips over hers when she looked up at him, Lucy sinking into the kiss. She pulled back slowly, peppering kisses along his lower lip before she finally looked at Happy. He was cleaning a paw, yellow frosting matted in his blue fur and on his whiskers, and he paused to smile brightly at Lucy.

“Thank you too, Happy.”

“I could feel how much it meant to you.” He explained simply, pushing off the counter and gliding to settle between Natsu's and Lucy's chests. His wings disappeared again and he nuzzled Natsu's chin, smearing frosting along his jawline and causing the pink haired man to complain with a grin.

She gasped in shock when Natsu rubbed his frosting coated chin along her cheek, hazy yellow dancing out of focus in Lucy’s eye as she gawked up at his proud smile. She broke from his hold with a war cry, scooping a handful of frosting and sprinkles before shoving it in his face. Lucy was pretty sure she got some up his nose by the way he snorted. His grin was evil as he slowly dragged his hand over his face, now with his own ammo. Lucy backed away by a step. Natsu followed. She stepped back again. Natsu's grin grew wider as he followed after her. Lucy blew a raspberry at him as she ducked under his arm, screaming when he caught her by the waist and returned the icing to her via her face.

Lucy licked his palm.

Natsu -instead of pulling away with a sound of disgust like any normal person would- twirled her in his arms and crushed his mouth to her, sugary sweetness melting on their tongues as Lucy deepened the kiss. Natsu cupped the back of her head with his frosting covered hand, and Lucy ran her own through his bangs without thought.

For all the work and thought Natsu had put into her gift, Lucy knew that this was the best gift he and
Happy could have ever given her, surrounding her with love and laughter on her birthday.
Lucy burst into giggles, high and warbling. She didn't know why she was giggling, which made her giggle more at the absurdity of it.

“You’re pretty when ya laugh.”

Lucy smiled down at Natsu, his hands having stilled mid way through taking out her buns. She was laying on his chest again, feet poking at one another’s every now and then, both faces with pink warming their cheeks. “You’re pretty pretty too.” Lucy hummed, gently tapping the end of his nose with her forefinger. Natsu beamed at her compliment, Lucy imagining him doing that little shiver that Happy did to fluff his fur up when ever he got a compliment. Lucy snorted and buried her face in his neck.

Natsu hummed happily and continued playing with her hair. Lucy sighed as the tension on her scalp slowly disappeared as her hair was let down, Natsu careless as he threw a handful of bobby pins on the table. High chimes sounded as the metal hit the half empty bottle of whiskey and both Lucy and Natsu turned their heads to the source.

“I can’t believe ya matched me shot for shot.” Natsu mused with a hint of pride.

“I can’t believe we drank over half a bottle.” Lucy giggled.

“Hey, Luce?” Natsu questioned, looking at Lucy with a concentrated furrow in his brow. “You ain’t drunk, right?”

Lucy shot him a dry look, pinching at one of his cheeks lightly and playing with his face as she spoke. “Cana would be offended that you think I’d be a light weight.” she teased, Natsu smirking up at her as he finished unravelling her other bun. Lucy bit her lip as she felt warmth bleed through her shirt and into her skin, rivers of heat following Natsu’s curious fingertips where they trailed along her back before playing with the hem of her skirt.

“I’d think she’d be more offended I getta grab yer ass and she don’t.” Lucy squeaked when his rough hand groped her under her skirt, the timbre of his voice making her melt into him. That and the heat that sweltered around them. “You pinch my cheeks, I pinch yours.”

Lucy let loose a loud laugh and almost rolled off Natsu, who managed to catch her and snuggle her between his body and the back of the couch, her leg slung snuggly over his hip and hand exploring the creamy expanse of her thigh. He sealed his grin over hers, Lucy pressing her tongue on the seam of his lips and dwelling into the wet heat of his mouth. Lucy let her hands roam his exposed back, his shirt lost some hours ago in a game of strip poker that Lucy had won. She had graciously allowed him to keep his pants on, more for Happy’s sake than anything. She didn’t need to make the poor cat endure her ogling his witch any more than necessary.
Lucy spared an idle thought for where a catnip-glazed Happy had flown off to before Natsu’s hands were bringing her back to the present, firm squeezes under her skirt making her back arch and her hips roll into his. Natsu hissed and pushed his own back against hers. Lucy smiled around a breathless noise. The beginnings of his arousal strained against his jeans and pressed into her hip, Lucy batting her eyelashes at him innocently as she ground against his hardness.

“Is that a wand in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?”

Natsu blinked and snorted at her low purr, one hand grabbing at her ass again and pressing her body tightly against his. “Ya know I don’t use a wand, weirdo.” He nibbled on one earlobe, nose buried in her now loose waves. “Must be somethig’ else ya feel.”

“A paintbrush maybe?” Lucy questioned, lips twitching when she felt him pout against her neck. “Or maybe a tube of Chapstick? Whatever it is it's so small.”

“Now that's just a filthy lie.” Natsu said, nose wrinkling in disgust as he pulled back. Lucy's eyes narrowed when his onyx ones lit with a devious spark, her mouth falling open slightly when Natsu led one of her hands between their bodies and pressed it against the front of his pants. He lifted a smug eyebrow as Lucy bit her lip, hand tentative as it moved along the outline of his impressive bulge. “See?”

Lucy giggled again and let her motions grow bolder as she stroked him through his jeans, Natsu leaning in and kissing her deeply. His hands tangled in her hair, gentle tugs pulling a soft moan from Lucy's mouth.

“Lucy.” Natsu's deep rumble stole her breath, another whimper swallowed by his skilled tongue. He repeated her name again, tone rough and pleased and just a little bit needy. Which was fine with Lucy, because she needed him too. His hands free to move over all of her skin, his gentle smile as he hovered over her, the thick adoration that sparkled behind the emerald flakes in his eyes. Lucy craved all of it.

A different need to simply be beside him thrummed inside her, Lucy having finally recognized it this last week as her own magic reaching out for Natsu. The feeling was light and a warm tingle, something bright and loud and quiet all at once. If she concentrated, she could feel it surge when she was around Natsu, like stepping out of the shadow of a tree on a bright day, no longer shielded from the intensity of the heat of the sun. Her mind drifted back to her first -and so far only useful- talk with Aquarius where the sprite had complained that looking at Lucy's magic was like looking at the star up close. Maybe if hers was the brightness and size, then Natsu's was the heat and energy that kept it alive.

The thought about what they could be together made something clench in Lucy's chest, both worry and excitement mixing together before being pushed away by Natsu's heated breath.

“Stop thinkin’ so hard, yer givin’ me a headache.” Natsu mumbled against her neck, teeth gentle as the teased her pulse before he dipped lower to the hollow of her collar bone. She had lost her vest in the game as well, though she had managed to keep on her white undershirt.

“I was just thinking about our Bond.” Lucy hummed, scoring her free hand through his hair as she resumed her light teasing between their bodies. “I want you so much Natsu.”

Natsu pulled back, bangs falling in his eyes as he looked at her. Lucy brought both hands to cup his face, thumbs tenderly stroking his cheek bones while he slowly rested his forehead on hers, breaths mixing in the little space between them. She knew he understood that Lucy had meant more than just wanting him right now. He was serious as he cupped the side of her neck, his piercing gaze making
her heart race and blinding her to anything outside of them, right there, in that moment.

“I want you too Lucy. I’ve never **wanted** something as much as I want you. I’ll never stop wanting you.”

“I love you.”

Instead of replying Natsu pressed his lips to hers, mouth closed but still conveying the mess of emotions that Natsu couldn't even voice despite the help of the alcohol burning in his blood. They deepened their kiss, lips gentle and soft with familiarity. It was almost lazy, how contently Lucy kissed him, pliant as Natsu shifted them so she was straddling his lap while he repositioned himself to be sitting on the sofa. Or maybe Lucy had been the one to instigate it. She wasn’t quite sure who was doing the pushing or the pulling anymore, or even where she ended and Natsu began. Everything was warm and smoky and carried the scent of *home*.

Lucy broke their kiss long enough to mumble ‘bedroom’ before she was kissing his warm smile, teeth pulling at his bottom lip and her tongue brushing along his when he allowed her in.

Natsu's hand wandered under her skirt again as he stood from the sofa, Lucy hooking her ankles behind his back and squeezing him gently with her knees. She trusted him to hold her, so Lucy used her hands to touch him. She noted in a corner of her mind the way Natsu kissed her deeper when she tugged on his hair, and the way that he gave her ass a sharp squeeze as she pulled her nails along his spine in exploration.

She pulled on his ear when she felt Natsu kick her bedroom door, his placating chuckle making her lean back with a pout.

“Be nice to my stuff.” Lucy chastised, absentmindedly playing with his cartilage piercings.

“We ain't gonna be doin’ anythin' *nice* on your bed.” Natsu purred, fingers questioning as they moved closer to the heat between Lucy's legs.

“Oh, my bed lost its innocence a while ago, Natsu.” Lucy fluttered her lashes and trailed her fingertips along the side of his face, grinning as the confused knit of his eyebrows melted away and Natsu's eyes grew wide. They flickered to the bed before he gulped audibly, bright red peeking through his disheveled hair.

“Wh-wha-... How?” Natsu stuttered, frozen in the middle of Lucy's room and still eyeing the bed in nervous disbelief.

“With a very good imagination and a skilled hand.” Lucy said in her most seductive voice, tone low and smooth and suggestive enough to make all of Natsu's face burn a bright red. He was suddenly taken over by a look of hunger, eyes darkening and face dangerously focused as he dropped Lucy on the edge of her bed.

“Fuck Luce,” Natsu growled, crawling over her and chasing her backward shuffle across the bed, “I needa see that. Just picturin’ it is so hot. Fuck Lucy, I *slept* in these sheets.” Lucy bit her lip in a smile, body bouncing a bit as she finally fell backwards and laid her head on the edge of her pillows. Natsu caged her body with his, the lust plain in his eyes making her rub her thighs together to try and alleviate some of the desire in her blood.

“Did’ya think of me?” Lucy nodded at his hoarse question, Natsu groaning against her mouth as he kissed her senseless into the bed. He settled himself between her legs, slow grinds making sparks fly behind Lucy's eyes. A low moan tumbled from Natsu's parted lips when Lucy returned his rolls with
a harsh buck, his fingertips digging into her side under her shirt where he held her. With a smooth motion Lucy was rid of the thin white material, thrown in the vague direction of her window but Lucy couldn't be too sure.

“I want you so much Luce.” Natsu groaned, more sweet nothings lost against her skin and hair even as he groped her breast roughly. He rolled her heavy weight with a greediness that would make Lucy blush any other time, her already erect nipple pressing into his palm through the pale lace.

“Tell me what you want Natsu,” Lucy sighed, hands fumbling with his button and zipper before slipping under the band and grabbing at her prize. “Cus I want to make you feel so good Natsu. So good.”

Natsu arched into her strokes, Lucy losing herself in his erotic expression as he pulled back to look down at her. His lids were heavy over hazy eyes, light pink mixing with his sun freckles, and his lip swollen and caught between sharp teeth as he struggled to bite back his noises. Lucy released a possessive noise of her own as she dragged one hand along his flush chest before fisting at his hair, pulling him down to her and kissing him briefly before moving on to taste the beginnings of sweat on his neck. Her tongue was pointed as she drew it along his pulse line, nibbling on his jaw for a few pumps before pulling the cool metal of his upper piercings into her hot mouth.

Natsu pulled back with a sharp tug, his ear escaping her playful teeth and Lucy's hand stilled, left wrapped around his cock but now unsure. Any fear of overstepping was instantly brushed away, however, when Natsu spoke, hungry and rough.

“I wanna mark ya.”

Lucy took a sharp breath in, staring up at Natsu and waiting for him to elaborate. Lucy didn't care to think about how the idea of Natsu telling her exactly what he wanted to do to her made heat spike between her legs and coil in her lower stomach. “With my mouth,” Natsu explained slowly, eyes roaming unhurriedly over the parts of her he could see in their position. “If that's ok.”

Lucy swallowed thickly under his heated stare, following the teasing swipe of his tongue over his lower lip without thought. She struggled to vocalize how much okay she was with Natsu leaving love bites and hickeys over her that she would wear for days after. Natsu took her silence as uncertainty, pulling further back off of her and making Lucy whimper at the sudden lack of heat.

One of the corners of his mouth lifted in a knowing crooked smirk, knuckles gently cradling the side of her face as his other hand played with the zipper on the side of her skirt. “It's just somethin’ I want Luce. To see you move and squirm under my mouth and hands. To feel what I do to you.” Natsu brushed his lips over her cheek and jaw as he spoke in a thick whisper. “And then, to see proof that it had been real. Proof that you...” Natsu trailed off, low noise letting Lucy know of his struggle to find the right word. She scored her nails along his scalp, drawing his attention to look at her again.

“That I belong to you?” Lucy finished, faint smile at Natsu's responsive cringe.

“I-I guess, not that ya belong to anyone Luce, but I mean--” Natsu tried to explain, biting his tongue at her light giggle. She released his length from her hand ignoring the slight pout and whine he gave her- and instead played idly with pink locks between her fingers.

“I want to belong to you Natsu, precisely because I know you don't think I do.” Lucy wound her arms around his neck, leading him to her. She hummed as his weight settled over her again, Natsu moving on his own to settle his mouth against her neck. Lucy moaned at his burning tongue on her oversensitive skin, gasping and her eyes flying open when she felt his teeth join in the kiss. Natsu had always been considerate of not leaving any marks that lasted for more than a few hours -the
redness staying on her skin shorter than she would have suspected from his kisses over her body- but now Lucy knew she would be carrying around this badge for at least three days.

Her knees caught on the loose waist of his pants, dragging the denim lower as she writhed under his deep kiss and roaming hands. Her body chased the rough callous on the tips of his fingers, Lucy twitching as Natsu teased her with gentle caresses and feathery touches. Natsu smirked as he pulled back, obviously pleased with himself as he inspected the wet mark along her jugular. “It looks kinda weird like that,” Natsu drawled. “I think it might need some friends.”

Lucy rolled her eyes at his cheeky grin, stopping him as he dipped his head to the other side of her neck with her own movement. Lucy’s hand snuck under his loose jeans and boxers, squeezing a handful of his well defined ass while her own lips moved softly over his thin scar.

“Not if I give you one first.” Lucy hummed, mouthing at the paler skin before sucking on it. She nibbled and traced it with her tongue, Natsu making deep breathy noises as Lucy returned the favour. She shimmied awkwardly out of her skirt, Natsu’s hands almost frantic as he struggled to remove the layers between them, his own pants and her bra tossed desperately over his shoulder. She pulled back enough to tilt her chin up at Natsu, the boy quickly taking up her offer of a kiss. Natsu groaned happily into her mouth, his tongue pushing forcefully against hers and keeping up a passionate pace in time with deep grinds into her hand and against her hip.

Lucy released a choked gasp when Natsu pinched one of her nipples roughly. She felt as he grinned against her flush skin and used the break in the kiss to dart to her neck again, wasting no time in leaving a fresh bruise with harsh strokes of his tongue and heavy sucks. “You make such cute sounds.” Natsu teased. Lucy's pout dissolved when he pulled at her bud again and another high whine sounded from her chest.

“Natsuuu,” Lucy pleaded, releasing his cock and slating her hips against his. Natsu growled at the friction of her cotton underwear rubbing on his stiffness, hips jumping towards hers and his grip tightening around her large breast. “Please, now.”

His hand was at her heat instantly, two fingers rubbing along her slit through her panties. They pushed at her clit roughly before resuming the long and deep strokes, Lucy's legs spreading without thought to allow Natsu better access. He was kissing her again when his fingers tentatively pushed aside the flimsy and soaked cotton, Lucy whimpering at the feel of him on her sensitive lips. Natsu groaned and nosed Lucy's cheek until she looked at him, her breath stolen by the awe and wonder in his gaze as he watched her face.

He held her captivated as he pushed a finger into her core, Lucy's mouth falling open a little and brows knitting at the intrusion. Natsu swore and was kissing her again as he started to thrust his digit into her. Lucy had never had something so rough inside her, her own fingers smooth and soft. And so much smaller than Natsu's she realized now, high whines pulled from her as he dragged along her walls. It was making the coil tighten inside her with each pump, Lucy's hips bucking when he added a second finger. The burn was incredible and Lucy found it hard to focus on anything else, her own hand reaching down and covering his in encouragement. Natsu sped up his thrusts, trying different angles and twisting or spreading his fingers inside her, repeating what made Lucy respond the most.

“You're so gorgeous, Luce.” Natsu murmured as he pulled back, hissing when Lucy wrapped her hand along his bobbing cock again and stroked him roughly. Lucy threw back her head with a loud cry, Natsu having found the spot inside her that made Lucy break. He was relentless as he rubbed at it, his hand buried deeply to his knuckles inside her. ‘You’re so fuckin’ wet. Fuck, are you gonna cum for me, from my hand? You that horny Luce, yeah?”

His words sent sparks of electricity down Lucy’s spine. She could feel the tightness start inside to
peak inside her, and grabbed at his wrist desperately. “Natsu, hng- no, wait!” Lucy caught her breath as Natsu stilled, eyes wide as he looked down at her. Lucy wasn’t sure if he was even breathing. “I wanna, wanna cum with you Natsu. I want you to be inside me when I finish.” Lucy’s voice was thick as she spoke, blushing deeply as Natsu groaned loudly, eyes fiery and sharp with returning lust.

“Gods Luce ya can’t just say shit like that.” he groused, hand pulling from her and leaving Lucy aching for the feeling of being filled. “Just when I think ya can’t get any hotter you go and speak all dirty.”

Lucy nipped at his bottom lip, rolling it between her teeth before darting her tongue along the swollen flesh. She kissed him deeply, both pushing and pulling and exploring in time with one another. She slung a leg over his hip as he laid his body against hers, almost no part of them not touching, hands roaming over each others shoulders and sides, nails scratching at backs and grips bruising hips as they lost themselves in one another's heat.

Natsu was panting as he pulled back to allow Lucy access to the nightstand beside the table. She almost ripped the drawer out of its socket completely as she tugged it open, ignoring Natsu's breathless chuckles and instead tipping him onto his back with a slight push of her foot to his stomach. She continued to ignore him when she felt him return and rest his chest on her back, peeking over her shoulder to see what she was doing. Lucy snuck a glance at him from the corner of her eye, noticing the way his lingered on the whip she had tucked beside her bed -ok so the run in with the weird guy a few weeks ago had set Lucy a little on edge. So sue her.

“See something you like?” Lucy asked huskily, hand closing around the box of condoms at the same time as Natsu cleared his throat and his dark eyes darted towards hers. He was so cute when he was embarrassed. He deflected her question with one of his own, hands running along her upper arms before resting on her shoulders.

“How long have those been in there?” Natsu murmured into her hair, one large hand squeezing a full breast before travelling along her stomach and playing with the band of her underwear.

“Long enough,” Lucy said back, fighting an embarrassed blush at her own eagerness. “I'm honestly surprised it took us this long to, you know...” Lucy sighed. Her thighs rubbed together, her underwear soaked through from her wetness and sticking to her uncomfortably.

“Better late than never, right?” Natsu joked, hand soothing over the top of her thigh. He led her over onto to her back, settling between her legs again as he caressed her sides and thighs with gentle and tender fingertips. Lucy agreed with a small noise, rolling them both so Lucy sat on top of him.

“Definitely.”

Lucy smiled shyly down at Natsu, her hands resting flat on his chest and the box laying beside his shoulder. “I-I know that usually people do their first time with the girl on the bottom, but I, I was th-thinking it would be good to try it like... This?” Lucy asked, one hand coming up to fiddle with the gold necklace she was still wearing. She was also wearing Natsu's rings still, but she didn't think he would mind her wearing nothing but the jewellery he had made her.

“Fuck yeah Luce. I'm so okay with you ridin’ me. Do you even know how sexy ya look right now?” His hands squeezed her hips encouragingly, holding her in place as he started to move. He chuckled deeply at her squeaks, keeping her straddling his lap as he moved to sit with his back to her head board. He smirked at her, sparks igniting in her blood and Lucy gnawed at her lower lip. “Figured you should have somethin’ to scratch at, other than me 'course.”
Lucy blushed and looked down, wiggling on his lap in retaliation. Lucy grinned victoriously as it worked and Natsu hissed lowly while his fingertips bit into the sides of her thighs. “Dummy,” she muttered, grin melting to a smile at Natsu and she looked at him through her lashes.

“Call me whatever ya like Luce, but ya keep lookin’ at me like that and I ain't gonna last that much longer.” Natsu growled, one hand snaking down and reaching behind her to rub at her entrance through her underwear roughly. The unexpected touch pulled a sound of surprise from the blonde, Natsu stopping it with his mouth and humming as Lucy raked her hands through his hair in return.

“You going to be a two pump chump?” Lucy teased, slipping off her underwear as she nibbled on his ear again. She liked the way his breath hitched when she played with the metal bands with her tongue, and well, who was she to deny a mutual kink?

Natsu looked extremely offended as he eyed her, nose scrunched and a small ‘tch’ sound making Lucy struggling not to snort. “Ya should know I got better stamina than that, Weirdo. I might even outlast you.” Natsu smirked cockily at his own challenge, Lucy bringing her finger up to tap on her lower lip playfully.

“You gonna shut up and fuck me or just keep talking about it then?”

Natsu’s eyes narrowed dangerously at her tease, Lucy swallowing a moan at the heated look he was giving her. He offered her a condom between two fingers, Lucy taking it daintily and she opened it with as much pride as she could. His entire aura radiated ‘careful what you wish for’ and Lucy was almost vibrating with excitement. She rolled the condom onto his already slick cock, Natsu covering one of her hands with his when he noticed her small tremors, his smile completely changed to one that was gentle and soft. “It's okay if you don't want to Luce.” Natsu reassured, Lucy raising her eyebrows incredulously.

Natsu chuckled lightly, shrugging one shoulder. “Figured I'd remind ya.” He grinned at her, Lucy smiling herself when she leaned into kiss him. Her fingers flexed in anticipation on his shoulders. She jumped when she felt a hot pressure on her entrance, laughing at her own nervousness and resting her forehead on Natsu’s chin. She relaxed under his reassuring and encouraging murmurs, her lip caught between teeth to stifle her whimpers at Natsu wetting his head along her slit.

“Just put it in Natsu.” Lucy hissed, wiggling her hips to try and alleviate the ache inside her building because of Natsu’s teasing. She glared at him weakly as he laughed at her again. Lucy couldn't look away from his intense gaze, the burn as he pressed into her taking her breath. She took control then, slowly pushing herself down on his cock, inch by inch. He was much larger than anything Lucy had previously known, granted her exploration was limited to her own -and now Natsu’s- fingers. She whimpered again as she felt Natsu squeeze her hips, grip tight and drawing her eyes to his face.

His pink eyebrows were knit in a painful grimace, lips barely parted and dark eyes unfocused. They flicked to her, and his heavy swallow brought goosebumps over her bare skin, sweat unable to cool over her back from the waves of heat that circled them on her bed. She vaguely registered that she had stopped moving. Lucy looked down and blinked, flush heating her cheeks at the erotic view of her -now smooth- pale skin pressed firmly against Natsu's deep tan and coarse pink curls. Natsu has pink hair flitted through her mind, quickly followed by Natsu is inside me. Natsu was inside her. Right now. They were having sex.

But how come he looked like was in more pain than her?

“Are you alright Natsu?” Lucy asked around heavy pants, nails flexing into his shoulders as she adjusted around his fullness, buried deep inside her and both soothing and making her ache. She gave a few experimental rolls of her hips. Natsu snarled then, bringing her focus back to him.
“Sh-shouldn’t I be askin’ you that?” He ground out, and his attempt at a smile fell when Lucy rolled her hips again. “Fuck Luce! If ya keep doin’ that I can’t go slow!” His head tipped back and he groaned, Lucy choking on her breath at Natsu's sudden thrust up. He forced a short ‘sorry’ between his teeth, able to look back at her with only one eye through his heavy lashes.

“Don’t w-worry about me Natsu. That felt... g-good.” Lucy gave another tentative roll, leaning forward and gently pressing her lips to Natsu's. She cried out against his mouth when Natsu lifted her suddenly before pulling her back down on his cock, the edge of her eyes watering as the pain and pleasure fluctuated. Natsu pressed gentle kisses to the beginnings of her tear tracks, Lucy this time lifting herself before lowering back down. The pair moaned together as Lucy started a slow pace, movements controlled but stuttering as she rode Natsu.

They picked up the pace as Natsu took control, Lucy's head dropping back to his shoulder and hands finding purchase on the headboard in front of her. She moaned his name loudly as her hips crashed down on his forcefully. The need to look at him swept over her, and Lucy pulled back again to trail her eyes over Natsu's expression. His eyes were glazed and drooping with lust, cheeks flushed a bright pink, and he had his lip pinched between sharp teeth. Natsu gave her a cocky and loose grin, Lucy rolling her hips harshly with Natsu buried in her to his hilt to make his face contort in the pleasured grimace she was becoming addicted to.

“I love you.” Natsu said, voice so rough and low Lucy almost missed it. She made a breathless noise in agreement, head thrown back with a high wail as Natsu started hard thrusts up to meet her own. Heat surrounded one side of her face, and Lucy forced her eyes open to smile at Natsu, one calloused hand having left her ass to cup her cheek. She moaned loudly and smirked at Natsu, taking two of his fingers into her mouth with a quick turn of her head and sucking them roughly. Natsu's eyes narrowed and turned hungry, watching with fascination as Lucy continued to suck the tattooed digits.

“You like my hand there, Luce?” Natsu purred, thrusting his fingers in her mouth shallowly and gripping her ass with bruising force. Lucy moaned in agreement, sucking harder and picking up her bounces, heavy weight of her breasts drawing Natsu's dark gaze before he looked back at her with a dangerous grin. “Such a dirty girl Luce. Who knew?”

Lucy released his fingers with a wet and shameless ‘pop’, returning his sinful smirk with her own sultry one. “You don’t know the half of it.” She purred, hand dropping to drag along his chest as she leaned forward and pressed a deep kiss to his collarbone. Lucy made her way up his neck, licking the beads of sweat from his smooth skin and nipping at his jawline, allowing herself to become fogged by the scent of smoke and herbs and Natsu's shampoo that still lingered in his hair. She pulled harshly on his piercings with her teeth, a part inside her preening at Natsu's low curses. His other hand had joined its brother in groping her ass, using her full backside to drag Lucy up and down his cock with rough and quick motions. Her head dropped to burrow into his neck again and she wailed loudly when she felt Natsu's thick head dig into the place inside her, not noticing Natsu recognize her reaction and start to angle himself into it with repeated deep and rough thrusts.

“Bi-bit of an oral fixation there, huh Luce?” Natsu teased, sentence broken up by low moans and strings of curses.

“Maybe I just like sucking on you.” Lucy panted back, both hands now dragging along his chest and back as her body started jerking and moving on its own, an intense pressure building inside her like a string being pulled too tight, Lucy waiting for the match that would set her blood on fire and let her burn and shatter in Natsu's arms.

“Holy fuck.” Natsu swore loudly, thrusts losing their rhythm and one hand slipping between their
bodies to rub furiously at Lucy's clit. She could barely hear Natsu's praises of ‘so tight Luce, you're so tight’, and ‘oh my god you're so beautiful’ and ‘you ride my dick so good’ and ‘I'm gonna cum I'm gonna cum’ chanted in her ear over her own incoherent noises.

The coil finally snapped inside her when Natsu pressed his thumb harshly into her clit one last time, and she felt her muscles seize before her mind was thrown into a haze of explosive pleasure and a warm afterglow that kept her vision blurry and her mouth feeling like it was full of cotton.

She vaguely realized that Natsu had stopped beneath her, only their chests moving and pushing on one another as they caught their breath. “T-told ya I'd last longer.” Natsu boasted in a scratchy voice. Lucy chuckled and nuzzled deeper into his chest, eyes still closed as she melted in his embrace.

“By half a second you dork.”

“Still won.”

“Alright Natsu.” Lucy giggled, Natsu making a weak sound of victory and his arms snaking around her waist to hug her close. A few seconds of comfortable silence stretched between them before Natsu spoke again.

“Hey Luce, that was... Wow, for you too, right?” He nuzzled into her hair at his question, voice shy under the forced easiness. She pressed a gentle kiss to his steady pulse, her soft ‘duh’ cut off as she shifted and was reminded of Natsu still inside her. He pulled back at her wince and pained hiss, mouth open to speak when he froze. Lucy looked at him when she felt him stop moving suddenly, her own question dying on her lips when she finally looked at Natsu.

They both found their voice at the same time.

“I know yer ‘posed to have an afterglow but damn Lucy.”

“Why are you on fire?”

Lucy looked at him with wide eyes, her tired mind reeling at what she was seeing. A soft red glow surrounded Natsu, the shape shifting and moving like that of a flame rising into the air, small embers escaping and fizzing out included. She reached out unconsciously, the strange transparent light drifting towards her outstretched hand and enveloping it in a familiar warmth. Lucy blinked and squeaked when she focused on her own hand, a soft glow radiating from her skin with brighter patches moving and fading in and out. Where her light met Natsu's they intertwined and grew stronger, eager to connect and swirl together, almost like it was alive.

“It's our magic.”

Lucy looked at Natsu, his awestruck smile directed at where he had lifted a hand and twirled a lock of her hair in his fingers. He was beaming when he looked at her, Lucy's confusion washed away under the happiness shining in his onyx irises. She continued to flutter her hand through his magic just over his shoulder, thinking out loud. She watched his familiar feeling magic -Lucy never thought she'd say that sentence- dance through her fingers and chase her own light before hers spiralled around his and reached out for it. It felt... Happy. But how could it feel? Was it alive? Were these her feelings or was her magic a different entity inside her and not a facet of her? And how could she see it?

Natsu groaned loudly and Lucy was drawn back from her thoughts, flushing shyly at his knowing look. “I ain't a Soul Seer Weirdo, you know I can't answer your questions.” He grinned at her, drawing her into a hug with gentle arms to bury his nose in her neck. Lucy shrieked as Natsu flopped
onto his side suddenly, dragging Lucy down with him. He shifted out of her, condom pulled from him and tissues passed around as they wiggled under the blankets.

Lucy cringed as the used -and now tied- condom hit her waste basket with a wet sound, Natsu’s gentle fingers stopping her embarrassment before it began. They had finished moving, Natsu using her stomach as a pillow and their legs entangled as Natsu curled possessively around her lower half, his fingers drawing small swirling designs into her cooling skin.

“We’an talk ‘bout it la’er,” Natsu slurred, already falling asleep. Lucy laughed softly to herself, running her fingers through his hair as she listened to his low snores. Exhaustion swept over her as well, Natsu's steady heartbeat lulling her into a relaxed and liquid state, perfect for falling asleep in. Which was exactly what Lucy did.
Natsu woke up with a pleasant ache in his muscles, and the scent of vanilla tinged with an undertone of salt and musk surrounding him. He breathed in deeply, pressing his face deeper into the softness under his face and more of the delicious smell filtered into his nose. It was making his head foggy, and he felt a tightness in his gut.

Well, he felt a tightness return. A large grin broke across his face and he snuggled even more into the warm silkiness under his face, his tired brain finally putting the pieces together. It was Lucy he was using as a pillow, her toned stomach covered by her gloriously soft and vanilla scented skin. And she was naked. Natsu was naked. Because they had just had sex.

He had just had sex with his girlfriend!

Natsu wasn't ashamed to say he felt like a 12-year-old boy discovering his father's dirty magazines as he was instantly hard again. Like, surprisingly so, even for him.

Natsu let his hand skim over her body that he could see, a thick comforter covering most of him and leaving everything above Lucy's hip bones exposed to the cool air. Natsu frowned at that, he knew Lucy hated being cold when she slept, and he figured he could have done with a little suffocation if it had meant she was comfortable. As comfy as Natsu was curled around her waist and with his knees tangled with her feet, he couldn't help but feel bad that he had deprived Lucy of her warmth.

He grinned slowly as he looked up at her content and smiling sleeping face. Natsu knew just the way to warm her up.

Natsu scooted carefully upwards along the bed after extracting his limbs from their hold around Lucy, unable to do anything other than look down on her, her full lips curved up gently, cheeks still a light pink that seemed permanent on her ivory skin, her full lashes even thicker when they swooped over the tops of said pinkness. He blinked when he realized he had started stroking her face absently, but a smile soon replaced his confused concern when Lucy shifted into his hand, murmuring sleepily and nosing at his fingers before sighing and returning to her dreams.

“You're so weird.” Natsu smiled, dropping onto his forearm as he continued to look at Lucy. “I think that's why I love ya so much.”

Lucy sighed again in response, body rolling to press into his side. He snickered. Lucy was even more of a lizard than Natsu was when it came to seeking out warmth. He cocooned her in his arms, her bare chest pressed tightly against his and her head tucked securely under his chin. Lucy mumbled some more, her legs shifting to tangle with Natsu's. “I'm’ot weird.” She grumbled, her arms lazily wrapping around him in a sleepy hug.

He blushed when she paused against him, pouting at her half smothered snicker as she pressed her stomach into his almost fully hard cock. “You didn't wake me up for a midnight fuck, did you Natsu?” Lucy purred, mouthing at his pulse while her hands explored his sides with purposeful movements.

“It's actually two AM,” Natsu grunted back after swallowing heavily, his head dropping to nose at her temple. “And no, I didn't. I just wanted'a cuddle, didn't mean to wake ya up Luce.”

Lucy smiled up at him, eyes not quite fully cleared of the fogginess of sleep but instead full of adoration and joy. “I'm always up for cuddles.” Lucy hummed, settling against Natsu more, her soft
lips feathering over his own rougher ones. He returned her kiss by rubbing their noses, and he pulled her with him as he rolled onto his back. Her head rested in the crook of her neck, her hair tickling Natsu's ear but he couldn't really find the energy to care with the feeling of her creamy and soft skin pressed so flush against his own.

Lucy giggled when Natsu hissed less than a minute later, her thigh slung over his hips and resting directly over his length. Her leg kept shifting, the warm flesh surrounding his shaft and rubbing dangerously on it.

“Lushiiii,” Natsu whined loudly, Lucy's light giggles turning into a cackle at his pathetic complaint. “It won't go away if ya keep doin’ that.”

“Maybe I don't want it to.” Lucy whispered huskily in his ear, and Natsu swallowed a groan as she pulled up, inner thigh pressing heavier against him and her hands flat on his chest. Lucy looked down at him, Natsu lifting a hand to trace her cheek. She wanted to play this game? Fine, Natsu could play.

Not like anyone was going to lose anyway.

He shot a fanged grin up at her, his eyes drinking in her features and the curtain of gold that seemed to cut them off from reality. “Whad’ya wanna do with it then?” Natsu asked with a rough voice, smirk widening when he caught the small shiver that traveled along Lucy's pale skin at his words. It fell slightly however when he saw a shyness enter her expression, her fingers fiddling on his skin as she worried her lip. “What is it, Luce?” Natsu said gently, his fingers idly twirling a strand of her hair before tucking it behind her ear.

“I, umm, wanted to try something.” She smiled timidly, and Natsu gave her a large one of his own in encouragement.

“Anythin’ ya want Luce.” Natsu said firmly, cupping her neck gently with both hands. She smiled at him gratefully, and he cocked his head as he watched her take in a deep breath to steady herself.

“I want to suck your dick.”

Natsu's brain stopped.

He made an odd noise a cross between choking and whimpering.

He was pretty sure his brain broke.

Lucy looked down at him in concern, Natsu watching as her lips formed his name repeatedly, light pink and lush lips that Lucy wanted to trail over his body and wrap around his c- “Yes!”

Lucy blinked once before smiling at him brightly. He felt his cheeks heat a little, but he couldn't really care about how eager he sounded at the prospect of Lucy sucking him off. God, the amount of times Natsu had jacked off to that thought alone...

Would get him a Lucy Kick. Or maybe not, by the way her eyes had become lidded and a deep chocolate, warm and thick and so so inviting as she fluttered her full eyelashes at him seductively. Her voice was a low purr, and one of her fingers was drawing small designs in his chest before tilting his chin to look at her directly. “You like that idea, huh?” She rubbed her thigh harder against his length, smirking at Natsu's jolt and following desperate bite at his lip.
He groaned as her soft skin pulled away from him, eyes following Lucy's movements intensely. She crawled backwards along the bed, one hand holding Natsu's and prompting him to follow her. He walked on his knees until he was at the end, falling onto his ass carelessly and throwing his legs over the edge so he was in a normal sitting position. Naked. At the end of Lucy's bed. As she sank down to her knees and looked up at him innocently through her lashes.

Natsu bit at one knuckle, keening when she wrapped a curious hand around his base. She smiled up at him, holding his gaze as she slowly leaned forward, her lips brushing his throbbing head as she spoke. “You can pull my hair, if you want, Natsu. I don't mind if you get a bit rough with me.”

Natsu reached a shaky hand out, resting it gently on the crown of her head as if he was waiting for her to take it back. Natsu dropped his hand from his mouth and fist to his head when she dragged her hair from his base to the ridge of his head, playing with the small lip there with teasing movements. He hissed through a grimace when Lucy sucked at his shaft, head tilted sideways and lips wrapped partially around the side of his cock, strands of golden hair falling in her face. Natsu was quick to gather them, groaning as he got a better grip on all of her silky hair.

Natsu hummed, eyes closing and she looked absolutely sinful to Natsu, thoroughly enjoying playing with his cock on her knees before him. He whimpered when she licked at his slit, hand steadily working his base with tight and slow pumps even as she toyed with his head again, swirling her talented tongue around his tip but not taking him into the heat that radiated from her mouth. His hips jumped when he realized Lucy hadn't swallowed yet, instead allowing her saliva to wet his cock and pool at the top of her hand.

“Fuck Lucy. How the fuck are you so good at this?” Natsu snarled, hips chasing her tantalizing mouth as she dragged her tongue fully up his length again, crying out as she nipped gently at his sensitive base.

“Remember that thing I told you to do a few days ago?” Lucy asked, head resting on his thigh as she looked up at him. Her other hand joined in pumping his slick cock, thumb dragging along the precum leaking from him and spreading it over his length. Natsu looked at her blankly, partly lost from her vague question and more so lost by the fact that she wasn't even looking at his hardness as she slowly tortured him in the best way.

“Yes yes, I meant about asking our friends for advice about dating?” Lucy replied in exasperation. Natsu bit the side of his cheek, one of her hands now cupping and fondling his balls. He squeaked out a sharp ‘yes’, hands tightening in her hair as he struggled to control himself. “Well,” she drawled, lazy as she trailed wet kisses up his thigh between her words. “I did just that. And Cana and Gray told me a whole bunch of things I found very useful. Things I think you’ll enjoy, and I honestly can't wait to see if your face will make it worth the horror I went through to learn about them.” She paused then, nosing his base and pressing a loving kiss to him there: “I think it will.”

Lucy wrapped her mouth around his head then, Natsu forgetting to breathe at the combination of the molten heat surrounding him and her shameless words. He didn't forget something, however, that he had been trying to voice for the past five minutes. With a tug that seemed to take all of his strength and willpower, Natsu pulled Lucy from his cock, said hardness twitching in deprived pain as he looked down at her tiny pout.

“D-do ya want a condom on it? Before? I-I read that it-” Natsu panted, cut off with a yelp as
Lucy lunged forward and took him into her wet mouth, his cock pressed fully into her cheek and Natsu watched in fascination as she proceeded to bob her head and push her cheek out in erotic pulses. Lucy pulled back, thin trail of saliva connecting her now red lips to his head.

“I want to taste you Natsu.”

And with that Lucy was taking him into her mouth again, Natsu having to let any thoughts of anything but her mouth around him and her deep brown eyes looking up at him with pride and mischievousness and the way her fingers curled into his thigh or wrapped around his length slip from his mind. He fought against the instinct to thrust into her mouth, but her words from before rang loudly through his mind as he watched Lucy suck eagerly on him, his tip pressing into her cheek a few times before she was running the flat of her tongue along the underside of his hardness in her mouth. ‘Get a bit rough with me.’ She looked almost... Happy. No, she definitely looked thrilled to be sucking on him, lewd and sloppy noises falling from her mouth as well as...

Fucking hell, spit was dripping off of Lucy's chin.

Natsu tightened his hold on her hair, thrusting with a quick snap into her mouth. Her eyes widened as Lucy looked up at him, nodding only by a fraction but enough for Natsu to notice. She kept a firm hand around his cock, obviously signaling that she would only be able to take so much of him into her mouth at once. For now. Natsu narrowed his eyes as he pushed that thought away for later, instead matching shallow thrusts of his hips with Lucy's bobbing motions. He felt her suck heavily on him, cheeks hollowing and her tongue pointed as she dragged it over his fevered skin. Natsu knew he wasn't going to last much longer.

He vocalized it between his low grunts and curses, tugging harshly on Lucy's scalp only to find that she took more of his cock into her mouth. Her bobs became quicker, Natsu's hips jumping without thought into her mouth and past her lips. “Ya really like my dick, don'tcha Luce?” Natsu snarled, pressing her face closer to him at her answering hum. “Such a dirty girl Luce, suckin' me like that. You're so good, so goddamn good Luce. But you can take more, I know ya can Luce.” Natsu spoke without any thought, responding to her muffled noises and lust hazed eyes and flushed cheeks. He tightened his hold on her hair even more, words barely more than a growl as he stared down at her.

“I wanna feel you choke on my dick Lucy.”

He then felt the back of her throat on his tip, Lucy's nails digging into his thigh painfully as she made a gagging noise around his length. But she stayed where she was of her own accord, eyes watering at the pressure as she pressed herself just the quarter of an inch closer. She gagged again, and Natsu swore heavily and curled over her head, hands holding her in place as her mouth tightened around his cock and Natsu came into her mouth.

He released her with shaky hands, an apology on the tip of his too-big-for-his-mouth tongue. He paused however, transfixed as he watched her struggle to swallow, her mouth finally falling open in a pant, completely empty. “You swallowed.” Natsu voiced aloud, voice cracking at the eroticness of it. Lucy still knelt before him, tears unshed in the corners of her eyes and cheeks and lips both a glowing pink. Her chin was a mess of saliva and other liquids, and Natsu could die a happy man after seeing that sight. He could build a monument to it. Make it his God and pray to it every day, it was so beautiful.

Lucy laughed and nodded her head, wiping at her chin as a wave of embarrassment seemed to sweep over her. Natsu didn't allow her to have time to question herself, grabbing her forearm and yanking her up to him to press a searing kiss to her swollen lips.

“My turn.” Natsu whispered against her lips, smirking at how Lucy's eyes widened in surprise. He snickered when she squealed loudly, Natsu having suddenly pitched backwards and dragged her
body so she was straddling his stomach. Still not giving her time to react, Natsu hooked both hands under her knees and lifted her through the air in a shallow arc until they were settled into the bed on either side of his head. Lucy was bright red all the way to the tops of her breasts. She stammered, unable to voice anything as Natsu looked up at her smugly, her hips twitching as Natsu greedily squeezed her ass with both hands.

This also allowed him to pull her closer, the pale skin on the underside of her breasts making Natsu's mouth water. As did the musky and heavy scent surrounding him again, and Natsu licked his lips at the thought of finally tasting Lucy. He groaned in pleasure as he buried his face between her thighs, nose pressed tightly against silky soft skin and lips quickly becoming wet from Lucy's lust. He opened his mouth, fingers digging into her pliant muscles as his tongue snuck out and dragged experimentally along her slit. She tasted so good, bittersweet and addictive in his mouth, hot to the touch. Natsu felt like his blood was on fire.

Lucy cried out in surprise, body twitching forward and one hand burying itself in his mess of wild pink spikes. Lucy whimpered his name. Natsu responded by sucking on her clit. She curled forward even more, her hazy eyes coming into view as well as her parted lips forming desperate noises at his ministrations. Natsu flicked her clit with his tongue, trying every movement he could think of between heavy sucks, watching with drunken pleasure as Lucy bucked and twitched and screamed above him. His dark eyes flickered to her biting her lip, white teeth standing out against her flush and her bright red lips. She was fighting back her noises, and Natsu narrowed his eyes. That wouldn't do at all.

With one hand he released her ass -which he had been guiding in deep grinds against his face- and he trailed it over her burning skin, her muscles twitching more under his playful fingertips until he reached his goal. He groped her breast roughly, rolling the heavy weight with a timed suck and nip of sharp teeth to her clit.

“Natsu!” Lucy screamed, head thrown back and Lucy had to balance herself with splayed hands on his ab, nails digging wonderfully into his skin as her hips moved violently, desperate to press herself further into his mouth. Natsu pinched and pulled at her taunt nipple, grinning inwardly at her high pitched wails, one of her hands flying up and covering her mouth. Only small whimpers spilt through her fingers, and Natsu growled against her core.

He pulled back from her enough to speak. “Stop doin’ that. I wanna hear ya Luce. You weren't so shy a few minutes ago.” He felt her freeze on him, Natsu reaching higher up, and after giving her neck a loving squeeze he nudged aside her hand before pushing two fingers into her mouth. “Now I wanna hear ya scream for me.”

Natsu pressed his tongue deeply into her entrance, fingers thrusting in Lucy's mouth to the same rhythm as he used his tongue to fuck her. Lucy moaned through his fingers, one tiny hand gripping his wrist tightly and the other scratching at his hip. He pulled his tongue back and sucked at her clit, feeling Lucy shake above him.

He rolled them over gently, guiding Lucy's head with his fingers in her mouth so she was lying flat on the bed. Lucy whimpered under him, thighs twitching around his head and her heels digging into his back. Natsu slapped the side of her ass before running his thumb along her dripping core, spreading her lips to him and revealing the pretty pink colour. He loved her high squeal and the bashful way she squirmed under him.

He dove back in after grinning at her wickedly, lapping and sucking and nibbling on every part of her, from the junction of her thigh and her hip to her already swollen clit. Pride made him drunk as Lucy's thighs clenched around his head, even if it did make it difficult for him to do exactly what he
wanted to her. Natsu released her mouth, Lucy's full sounds no longer muffled by his thick digits or her own hands - Lucy was too busy holding his face against her core or putting scratch marks into the headboard for that.

Natsu bit gently at her clit and rolled it between his teeth, his now free hand skimming along her flush skin to press onto her lower stomach, successfully pinning her hips to the bed. Natsu thrust two fingers into her at once, keeping a steady and fast pace in time with Lucy's wanton screams and bucks. He curled his fingers in the spot he had found last night, angling them so he could rub at it mercilessly. The bed made loud noises of complaint as Lucy thrashed under him, the pressure on his skull from her thighs almost painful but **sooooo** worth it to reduce Lucy to this. He sucked heavily on her clit and felt her seize under him.

He continued on, high pitched unintelligible garbled falling from Lucy as her back arched off the bed, body twitching hard every few seconds. “Na-Nashuu,” Lucy mewled, hips bucking into his face as he spread his two fingers inside her before pressing into her spot again. “Pl-please, I- **ahhhhh**, I can't stop cumming. Ca-can't, can't, **fuuuu-**”

Lucy choked off, silent screams joining her wild bucks and thrashing head. Her hands scrambled for purchase on anything around her, yanking at his hair or clawing at his wrist before moving on to fist the blankets or add more deep gouges to the wood above her.

Natsu broke focus when he heard a small sob, pulling back panting. He watched as Lucy's body slowly became limp and sank into the mattress, thighs shaking and chest heaving for breath. Rosy red colour coated large patches of her milky skin, and Natsu licked his lips hungrily, need flaring in his gut when he tasted her on his mouth. He sucked the fingers he had been using on her clean, Lucy's eyes finally opening and watching as he dragged his tongue up the side of his middle finger. He wiped his chin at her tiny whimper.

Lucy opened her arms to him tiredly, Natsu crawling to her and nuzzling into her neck at her invitation. Lucy ran soothing hands through his hair, smoothing down some wild tufts she had created in her frenzied grabbing. He loved how she touched him, sure but gentle, familiar and still curious. He lifted his hand, Lucy quick as she tangled her fingers with his. Natsu chuckled tiredly, turning his head to watch as Lucy played with his hand, her own fingers so pale and dainty. Natsu would even call them cute. No, he'd definitely call them cute.

Lucy released a heavy breath, not quite a sigh, but more than her normal exhales. Natsu twisted his neck to look at her face, finding Lucy already looking at him with warmth and a soft glow in her dark eyes. Her hair was a disaster -according to Lucy standards- and Natsu bit his inner cheek to stop himself from commenting on it. If he ruined the moment now, Lucy might not continue on the path they seemed to be going down.

He smiled dumbly up at her, the realization washing over him that he was fine with not continuing on, happy to just be able to look at her and hold her like this.

“What are you smiling about?” Lucy asked softly, her own smile bright and easy, both hands occupied with either his hair or fingers.

“Just thinking about how happy ya make me.” Natsu answered simply, grinning more at the embarrassed blush that covered Lucy's shoulders and cheeks.

She sat up more, Natsu rolling to the side to allow her up, but also resting an arm over her ribs to try and stop her from leaving the bed. He put pressure so she was forced back down, and he proceeded to throw a leg over her thighs and pin her more to the crumpled sheets below them. Lucy struggled to get up again, swatting at Natsu as he snuggled into her side and whined in complaint. “Natsu! We
need to clean up!” Lucy groaned loudly, twisting on her side and somehow ending up on her stomach, Natsu snorting at how she had managed to trap herself worse.

“I think we need to get a bit dirtier before we clean up, don'tcha think Luce?” Natsu reached down and slipped his hand between her legs, cupping her heat and sliding a finger through the slickness he found there. Lucy squeaked, body jolting under his wandering hand. She giggled in embarrassment, Natsu nuzzling her shoulder blade as he slipped a finger inside. She muffled a whimper with her pillow, back arching and granting Natsu better access to her core. He pushed in a second finger, feeling her wrap around him greedily, and he kissed her ear. Lucy groaned loudly at the stretch, Natsu working his hand in and out of her with deep rolls of his wrist.

Lucy whimpered again when Natsu curled his middle finger, the witch pausing as she called his name. “Cl-clean up first, Natsu.” She said quietly into the bedding.

Natsu knew Lucy would cave for him if he pushed, but he also knew he didn't want that. He wanted her to know he respected her. He pulled his hand from her slowly, gripping her hips on either side as he leaned over her back and kissed the nape of her neck.

“Sure Luce.”

She smiled at him gratefully, Natsu's brow knitting at her look. She shouldn't look thankful he had stopped when she wanted him to. It should be expected. He sat up while he dragged her onto his lap. “What’s wrong?” Lucy asked, twining her hands together behind his neck. She looked up at him, and Natsu lifted a hand to smooth the concerned wrinkle from her forehead.

“Ya know ya don't hafta smile at me like that when you say no, right?” Natsu asked lowly, serious as he scanned her face.

Lucy looked at him in blank confusion. “What do you mean Natsu?”

Natsu tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. He rested his forehead against hers, and ran his hands over her upper arms. “Like I'mma hero for stoppin’.”

Lucy blushed and looked down, Natsu's lips thinning as Lucy shrunk into herself and hugged him tighter.

“I know, I know Natsu.” Lucy said quietly, looking at him and smiling weakly. “You know I'll stop too, right?” Lucy asked suddenly, earnest as she stared at him with wide eyes. Natsu grinned then, pressing a dozen kisses over her face until she was giggling with him. “I'll take that as a yes.” She hummed through her light giggles. She stood from the bed, holding Natsu's hands and running her thumbs over his scarred backs. He followed her, standing so Lucy was forced to look up at him.

“So clean up, coffee, and then round two?” Natsu asked eagerly, beaming under Lucy's rolling eyes.

“Round three, and sure.” A spark lit in Lucy's eyes, and Natsu watched her warily as she raised into her tiptoes so she could brush her lips over his jaw. “Want to make it interesting?” Lucy challenged, voice husky and sending shivers over Natsu's skin.

“Always up for a fight, Weirdo.” Natsu countered, smirking down at her pout.

“It's not so much a fight ...” Lucy said slowly, walking two finger tips up Natsu's arm until her hand rested on his shoulder. “More like a bet. Whoever lasts longest gets to make the loser wear anything they want.” Lucy's eyes were sharp as she looked up at Natsu through her lashes. Natsu chuckled lowly, his voice thicker than he had thought it would be.
“You're on. I'm gonna pick out the ugliest things I can find.” Natsu pulled her closer, hands resting just above her ass. Lucy hummed in a pandering tone, mocking smile making Natsu want to kiss it off of her.

“Well I don't own anything ugly, so good luck with that. Besides, just imagine you in a vest and fitted pants. Or maybe just a leather jacket and jeans. I'll have to see what mood I'm in.” Lucy gently tapped his nose at the end, smile darkening and eyes drooping as she pressed her chest firmly against Natsu's. “I might even keep you naked and in my bed.” She purred.

Natsu grinned down at her, escaping her erotic embrace and halfway out the door. “What're we waitin’ for then? I call the washroom first!”

“Natsu you cheater!”

Natsu placed his empty mug on the counter, watching as Lucy hummed to herself while she stirred her own cup. Her hips were swaying to her own tune, the full curve of her ass peeking out from her underwear and Natsu's shirt. He too had thrown back on his own underwear -Lucy had insisted in case Happy popped out of nowhere. Natsu didn't really understand why but he also didn't feel like arguing with her, a twist in his gut making him ready to give her the moon if she asked for it.

The sight of her in his clothes made his bones melt in a way he couldn’t describe.

Impatient, Natsu scooped Lucy over his shoulder, mindful of her full cup of coffee and her bony knees. Natsu didn't need to lose a tooth. Lucy’s squawks and shouts were full of indignant almost-swears, one hand tugging painfully on his hair even as Natsu trotted back to the bedroom.

“You could at least let me drink my coffee.” Lucy grumbled. Natsu paused in the middle of the hallway, and he dropped her down gently, Lucy blinking up at him in surprise and her coffee forgotten in hand as she cupped Natsu’s bicep. He fidgeted under her concerned look, but he spoke before Lucy had to prod him too much.

“I ain’t rushin’ ya, am I?” He asked, Lucy rolling her eyes and a relaxed smile quirking her lips.

“No Natsu, you're just eager is all. It’s cute.” She leaned in as she reassured him, eyes becoming lidded in the way that set Natsu's heart pounding. “Although,” she said in mock seriousness, “not all of us can chug a cup of burning hot coffee. Maybe mine will be cool enough to drink after a quick distraction -”

Lucy's sultry implication was cut off by a loud groan from the office. It was distinctly not Happy sounding, the feminine voice low and irritated. While Natsu reacted appropriately to the familiar voice -shouting in fear and using Lucy as a tiny shield- Lucy walked into the room curiously.

Natsu glared at the open doorway, sighing to himself as he slowly followed Lucy. Why did that stupid little glorified flower have to ruin everything.

The said devil incarnate sat innocently, flower showing no sign of the previous disgusted noise as it sat on the corner of Lucy's mother’s desk. Lucy spoke kindly, gentle voice breaking the uneasy quiet Natsu felt settling around his throat. “Yes Aquarius?”

The sprite emerged from the flower with the same sparkling theatrics as she had the first time. She was also just as pissed.

“Do you even realize how absolutely revolting it is to have to hear you two going at it? You sound like an animal being strangled. Do you even breathe?” Aquarius continued to rant, insults becoming
more obscene and descriptive as she paced -flew? Swam? Fuck if Natsu knew- over the top of the desk. “Not to mention the fucking traces you two are going to be setting into that shitty mattress and frame. Stars above did you have to buy the cheapest one you dumb girl? I'm surprised it hasn't broken with how much it was creaking.”

Lucy blinked at Aquarius' sneers, arms crossing defensively in front of her chest after she rested her cup of coffee on a stack of loose papers. “My bed is perfectly fine! We’ll change the sheets so there won't be any traces or whatever! I'm well aware Happy sleeps there too!” Aquarius rolled her eyes at Lucy's sharp pout, shooting water directly into Lucy's face.

“Celestial moons is there anything intelligent you have behind that ugly face? A trace is an extremely strong emotion that has been connected with an object magically.” Natsu barked a low ‘oi’ at the mermaid’s insult, hand placed protectively on Lucy's shoulder. “An example,” Aquarius started, voice pointedly slow like she were talking with a toddler, “would be the desk and chair in here. Layla left very strong traces here, and you yourself have left your own mark, with your nonsense writing and cry baby outbursts.”

Lucy ran a hand over the wood in front of her, only the barest brush of her fingertips smoothing the surface. Her eyes were glazed, lost in memories of her mother and her connection to the writing desk. “Is that why I never felt alone when I say here?” She asked softly after a minute of silence, looking at Aquarius. The mermaid’s eyes lost their hard edge, and she floated over to rest beside Lucy's fingers.

“Yes.” She said simply. “Your mother loved you more than you know Lucy. Remember that.”

“Then why didn't she tell me about any of this? Why didn't I know such an important part of her? Did I even know her?” Lucy's questions became more desperate as she spoke, her voice quiet and broken. Natsu reached for her hand, squeezing her small fingers in comfort. Lucy continued to look at the desk, and her grip tensed until her hand rested in a shaking fist on the aged wood.

“Of course you knew her you brat.” Aquarius’ sharp words drew Lucy's attention, Natsu feeling a sense of hopelessness wash over him when he saw a tear track on her cheek. Why was he so useless with words? Not that Aquarius was any better. She had thrown a second jet of water in Lucy's eyes. Natsu frowned while Lucy sputtered and wiped at the water on her face, reaching his hand out and thumbing away a few drops from her lashes.

Aquarius sighed, and looked at Lucy with a sad and knowing look. “You knew her as well as any seven year old can know their mother. And she had started to introduce us to you, me and a few other sprites. But I'm assuming that it all became a hazy fairy tale in that mess of a brain.” She sniffed again, but Natsu could see the put upon snideness. Aquarius was trying her best, he supposed.

Lucy smiled weakly at the mermaid, gently trailing her finger along the curve of Aquarius’ tail. “And here I thought I had always had an overactive imagination.” Lucy’s joke made Aquarius snort in contempt, even if her lips twitched upwards slightly. Lucy straightened suddenly, shoulders set back and determined line thinning her lips.

“Will you teach me?”

“What.”

Lucy didn't falter at Aquarius’ blank reaction, instead squeezing Natsu's fingers as if she were searching for strength. Strength Natsu would gladly give her. “About magic? Please, Aquarius.” Lucy held her incredulous gaze, the sprite finally caving and looking away with a light blush.
“Tch, fine, since you’re begging. But you ask any stupid questions and I swear to the stars I will drown you, you hear that brat?” Aquarius bit out, Lucy squealing and clapping her hands together in joy. The mermaid groaned loudly.

“Thank you.” Lucy said after she had calmed down. The sprite’s blush continued under Lucy’s sincere and grateful words, head snapping to the side and her nose turned up.

“What ever.” She brushed off, turning an eye to both Lucy and Natsu, clever grin on her face. Natsu felt a chill go down his spine at the cruel twinkle he saw in her dark eyes. “You won’t be thanking me when you two are training for hours.”

Natsu whined loudly, hiding behind Lucy when Aquarius twitched her water jug in his direction. He hated training, it was so boring, just doing the same things over and over again. Igneel had known Natsu's restlessness, and had spared with him as a way of training and strengthening his growing magic. That and actually having Natsu practice making things with his magic and potions.

“Umm, Aquarius?” Lucy’s nervous question drew Natsu from melancholic memories of smashing clay into Igneel’s cheek. Aquarius cocked an eyebrow, scowling deepening as way of acknowledging Lucy. “So, umm, before you return to... The Sprite World? Oh ah, anyway, something weird happened last night after Natsu and I... We... Err...” Lucy trailed off, stuttering over her words before looking helplessly at Natsu. Her face was bright red in embarrassment, and Natsu patted her shoulder in reassurance.

“We fucked.” Natsu said bluntly, face passive as he looked at Aquarius. Lucy shrieked loudly. Natsu covered his ears, glaring at Lucy, who had turned white as a ghost. He had to drop one hand as Lucy swatted frantically at his chest and arms, Natsu defending himself as he shouted ‘Oi’ repeatedly, Lucy’s screeching overpowering his mono-symbolic grunts.

“You can’t just say stuff like that, she is a powerful and otherworldly sprite from a different dimension oh my god Natsu you don’t need to be so blunt themermaiddoesnotneedtoknowanythingelseaboutoursexlives -” Lucy continued to ramble, her high pitch making Natsu flinch as it assaulted his heightened hearing. Aquarius wasn’t faring much better, Natsu grinning as he saw pain flash across the stupid spirit’s expression. He then burst out laughing as Lucy was hit dead centre in the ear with a stream of water.

“Spit it out before I flood this shitty flat.” Aquarius snarled, Natsu once more retreating to hide behind Lucy.

“Aye sir.” He whimpered, nudging Lucy forward. He shrugged his shoulders helplessly at her cold glare, resting his chin on her after she huffed a sigh and looked back at Aquarius.

“After we... finished, something weird happened.” Lucy said, chewing her words cautiously.

Aquarius snorted and waved her hand, flippant as she inspected her cuticles. “Boys like him can’t do much more than grunt and pass out after, sweetie, you’re just going to have to get used to it after his five minutes of fun.”

Natsu snarled at her, talking over Lucy's stammers. “I fuckin’ blew her world you talkin’ fish bait. I know how to treat my woman.” Natsu wouldn’t just stand there and let this sprite act like he would ever give Lucy anything less than his best. He shrieked in fear when said sprite turned her murderous gaze on him, flying from the table to grab a fist full of his hair and pull. Hard. Natsu fell to the floor face first, the mermaid then pinning him there with a powerful stream of water from her urn, somehow large enough to soak his entire skull. Natsu turned and spat out salt water, gagging.
Fucking sea witch.

“The desk!” Lucy cried out, Natsu turning a soaked and baleful look up at his girlfriend, her hands splayed and reaching out to the aged furniture. The tenseness released from her shoulders as she saw the puddle evaporate as quickly as it had appeared, leaving everything dry and undamaged -except Natsu of course.

“Gee, thanks for worryin’ about me, Luce. Really ‘preciate it.” Natsu grumbled. Lucy cocked a hip as she continued to inspect the inlaid panels on the front of the desk, not even looking at his seated and sulking figure.

“I've seen you fall from a two story window into a pond while punching Gray. I'm sure you'll be fine.” Lucy said dryly, voice not unkind but Natsu still pouted at the lack of concern in its lightness.

Natsu glared at Aquarius, and his eyes widened as she slowly returned to the size of his fist. Apparently the mermaid had deemed it necessary to grow to the size of an adult human to fully unleash her attack on Natsu. Natsu didn’t even fucking know they could do that.

He seriously hated this stupid flower.

Natsu opened his mouth to spew insults and threats, but Lucy quickly covered his snarl with her hand, giving Aquarius a strained smile and talking loudly over Natsu’s muffled complaints as she sank to her knees. “Just... Ignore him. What all this is about is that after we... had sex,” Lucy whispered it, clearly trying her best to sound mature but still fearing what Natsu would assume was the bad end of her tutor’s rod, “we could see each other’s magic. And our own. And then it entangled or mixed or something.” The three of them sat in silence, Natsu watching with narrowed eyes as Aquarius pursed her lips and struggled to hide how her eyebrows inched up and her eyes tightened in the corners, and Lucy still kneeling on the floor beside Natsu with her palm firmly over Natsu’s lips. Aquarius finally spoke, drifting down so she swam in front of both of them.

“You said you could see it, brat?” Aquarius began muttering to herself when Lucy nodded. “Unconscious Seeing is unheard of- ... takes years to master- ... - impossible to gain that level of trust...” Natsu raised his eyebrows at Lucy as Aquarius continued to mutter to herself, Lucy shrugging her shoulders and looking just as lost as Natsu felt.

Both jumped when Aquarius darted to just in front of their noses, scowl deep on her face. The three remained silent, Natsu fearing the wrath of the spiteful demon flower.

“Amazing.”

Lucy blinked at the mermaid’s scathing and incredulous tone, Natsu falling onto his ass as Aquarius pushed forward and into his face. “You two are so stupid you don't even know what you're doing. Just letting your magic spill all over the place and mix with your silly emotions.”

“Well, yeah?” Natsu asked, forehead furrowing in confusion. “Magic’s ‘posed to be super emotional and shit. It is literally all ‘bout intentions and feelin’ and other crap I can't remember right now but I know my old man told me.” His agitation broke through his voice as he glared at Aquarius. Let’s see her try and talk down about Igneel, Natsu was itching for a fight now. Could he punch a tiny mermaid? Yeah she was powerful but the size difference set Natsu on edge, not to mention how Lucy would react to it. Fuck, it would be easier if that shithead Gray were around.

Natsu gagged at the thought of Gray being around when he and Lucy were getting it on. No, that'd be even worse than the mermaid hell spawn in front of him. Though maybe Lucy would be up for a wrestling match... Natsu then let his mind wander into rolling around on the floor with Lucy,
laughter and swears mixed in as Natsu finally pinned Lucy’s wrists above her head and crowed his
victory, swooping down to steal a kiss, and then two, and then five, and then he was ripping off her
shirt with his teeth and his tongue was tra-

“You perverted gremlin, focus!” Aquarius snapped, ripping Natsu from his fantasies and a growl
from his chest.

“You don't even know what I was fuckin’ thinkin’!” Natsu hissed.

“You two can bicker and try and drown each other all you want later, I just want to know what this
‘Seeing’ thing is and what emotions have to do with our magic!” Lucy interrupted, eyes pinched in
exasperation and cheeks on the verge of puffing out in a pout. Natsu loved when she got riled up
enough to pout, Lucy always made the funniest faces.

“Ungrateful brat.” Aquarius flicked her tail as she looked at Lucy, her words lacking the usual
venom and a softness around her eyes that Natsu was slowly realizing the sprite reserved for Lucy
alone. “But fine. Pinky here was right in that Natsu was slowly realizing the sprite reserved for Lucy
alone. “But fine. Pinky here was right in that your emotions and the intent you have while casting a
spell will influence it. If you're happy and drawing a curse then the spell will be less effective, or
might even lead to a positive outcome in the long run for the recipient. Angry or in a spiteful state
and trying to create a potion for relaxation and the spell will most likely fail.

“The words, ingredients, and runes used in spells are as important as the caster's mind and feelings.
Magic is the connection between humans and a higher energy, a bond strengthened by focused
emotion. Spells are a way of realizing that bond.

“Seeing is the ability to see magic energy around a person. Seerers can look at several different layers
of a human, from the basic energy aura to the very soul. Usually it takes years to master, few ever
going past the most shallow layer.” Aquarius paused for a moment, eyeing Lucy to make sure she
was still following. Natsu leaned back on his palms, feeling like he was intruding on a private lesson
as he let his eyes rest on Lucy's face, her brown eyes wide and watching Aquarius with rapt
attention.

“What you two managed to do was a lost way of Seeing. Humans always have a guard up around
their souls, the untrusting and scared little creatures that you are, and so a Seerer will have to actively
look past that wall. You two could see each other's magic aura because you both no longer had that
guard up.”

Natsu blinked owlishly, meeting Lucy's confused blush as she peeked at him from the corner of her
eye. “And what does that hafta do with it?” Natsu asked cautiously. He shrunk under Aqurarius’
scornful look, relaxing when Lucy reached out and rested her hand on his knee.

“It means that you two idiots have so much trust in one another that you can bare your souls.
Honestly, I've only ever heard whispers of a connection like this, even most Bonded keeping some
part of themselves hidden away.”

More silence filled the room as Natsu struggled to process what the mermaid had just told them.
Questions swirled in his head. Was this good? Bad? He had only known Lucy for such a relatively
short time -despite feeling like she had also been a part of his life- so how could they be so
comfortable? The most important question, he voiced first however.

“So are we gonna light up every time we fuck?”

A sharp pain on the back of his head made him jolt forward. Natsu whined loudly, rubbing at the
tender spot as he pouted at Lucy, his upper body remaining curled slightly. Her eyes were closed but
he could see her eyebrow twitching, and her hand stayed perfectly still in the air where she had left it after slapping the back of his head. “You’re no longer allowed to speak.” Lucy said slowly.

“But Lushiiii,” Natsu wailed. He was cut off by Lucy sharply lifting her index finger, the meaning ominous. Natsu shut up, glaring at Aquarius who was feigning hiding proud snickers behind one hand.

“To answer that moron’s question: Maybe. Anytime you two fully open yourselves you’ll be able to see each other’s magic. Which I supposed shouldn’t be too hard for simpletons like you.” Lucy seemed to ignore her sprite’s flimsy insult, tapping a finger on her lips, Natsu watching them move almost imperceptibly as she muttered her thoughts. Natsu had once set a piece of paper on fire in front of her face when she had the same expression while tapping away on her laptop. Lucy hadn’t noticed for a full minute.

He turned to look at Aquarius, who was focused on Lucy with agitated perplexion. “You broke her.” he said flatly, pulling down an eyelid and sticking out his tongue at her sneer.

“Impudent witch.” She hissed, mouth open and water urn tilting in his direction when Lucy’s head snapped up.

“No fighting.” She said distractedly. She focused on Natsu, and he felt his heart skip at the serious gleam she was looking at him with. Lucy leaned into his space, Natsu backing up and trying to fight the heavy heat crawling up his neck. “Are you in danger?” She asked softly, their noses almost brushing as Natsu struggled not to fall onto his back in his awkward position.

“What?” he looked at her blankly, confused by her weirdness. Then again, Lucy was always weird.

“By lowering your walls, are you in danger because of me?” There was a determined set in Lucy’s jaw, and her gaze flickered over his face as though she were trying to read his thoughts. Natsu snorted, before breaking into full howls of laughter and falling onto his back. Lucy was worried? About being a danger to him? The ludicrousness of it went over Lucy’s head and she pouted down at him, hands on her hips until Natsu reached out an arm and dragged her down to him. He held her tight to his chest as he continued to laugh. “I don’t see what’s so funny.” Lucy grumbled, arms crossed as she laid heavy on his ribs. She poked the rune for fire eating on his side and Natsu yelped, but his shoulders continued to shake slightly from silent chortles.

“Because you liiike me.” Natsu sang. There would be other times for him and Lucy to talk about the fact that all Natsu could offer her were secrets and danger, but right now he just wanted to laugh and hold her. He was undefeated at repressing unwanted thoughts and feelings, after all.

“I’m going to have to introduce you to them.” Aquarius sighed heavily, Natsu and Lucy both looking at the sprite that was pinching the bridge of her nose. He ignored her muttered ‘repulsively sweet’ comment and watched as she floated to the edge of the desk and disappeared to the other side. She returned shortly after a muffled ‘pop’, holding two ancient looking golden keys.

Natsu whistled through his nose as he felt the magic power swirl around the room, still gently and airy as it was emitted from the polished metal. The keys were almost as large as the mermaid herself, though she showed no signs of effort carrying them. Lucy and him sat up slowly, the mood of the room subdued once more.

“These were your mother’s portable tethers for her sprites.”

Lucy gingerly reached for the keys, looking at Aquarius in shock as her fingertips brushed the metal. Natsu felt as the magic pressure increased around them, so like Lucy’s but so different. This made his
Happy would check him for a fever if he could hear Natsu’s thoughts.

Natsu was pretty sure it was mainly due to the current lack of blood in his brain, but that was also something he was going to choose not to voice at the moment.

“Have...” Lucy whispered, “Have they been trapped inside all this time? Where were these even hidden?” Her eyes were large and starting to water as she looked at Aquarius and gingerly cradled the keys to her chest. The sprite rolled her eyes.

“Would you stop crying for one day, brat? Your mother left these in a magically sealed part of her desk for you, and no, they have not been trapped to these all this time. Like I’ve said, they are only the tethers, and they do not trap us inside them. Tethers are a bridge, you daft child. And yes, a sprite can have more than one, but that is very rare as it uses more of our soul. We trusted Layla, so it was never an issue to leave a larger portion of ourselves with her.” Aquarius continued to grumble to herself, insults that were too mumbled for Natsu to decipher past her irritated tone. “Knowing you’d try and help your flaming boyfriend with a project or in a fight. Which means I have to reward your stupidity with more sprites, so you’ll at least be useful.”

Natsu peeked over Lucy’s shoulder, the designs for the zodiac Cancer and Capricorn on each key. Ornate designs carried along the sides of shaft and keyblade, coming up to surround the pale white embedded stone that carried the signs of the zodiac. If Natsu was honest, the craftsmanship of the metal surpassed even his uncle Metalicana. Natsu’s lips turned down as he studied the keys closer and he eyed Aquarius suspiciously. “Oi, how come you don’t have a key like these guys?”

“Layla and I had a different contract that is none of your business, Smokey.” she snapped, Natsu shrinking behind Lucy and sticking his tongue out at the angry mermaid.

“Contract?” Lucy questioned, absentmindedly leaning her cheek on top of Natsu’s head as he rested his chin on her shoulder.

Aquarius released an irritated huff, waving off Lucy’s question. “That’s a conversation for when I don’t feel like killing you, blondie. Now just call out Cancer and Capricorn and say hello so I can go back to getting ready for my date.”

Natsu nodded his chin to the keys when Lucy cast him a worried look, her lip caught between her teeth. She breathed out a low and steady breath, and focused on the keys in her hands in front of her. “Cancer? Capricorn? Would you please come out?” Bright light flared around the keys, two sets of chiming noises like a doorbell sounding overtop one another as magical script and runes in large rotating circles expanded from the crests on the keys. Natsu blinked to clear the light spots from his eyes as the room returned to normal. Well, except for the two new floating figures.

“Hey baby. Nice to see ya again.” A tanned male figure waved a pair of hair clippers as hello, his dark hair held back by bright red braids that ended in two crescents on either side of the base of his neck. Six crab legs protruded from his back, dancing slightly in the air as he continued to float in front of Natsu’s nose. His blue pinstripe shirt made even Natsu cringe, and the leather pants reminded Natsu too much of Gray to not cause instant dislike. His gold chain and slight goatee also reminded Natsu too much of the vain witches from the Blue Pegasus coven, although he was sure Ichiya would have a miniature conniption over the slanted black sunglasses the crab sprite wore. Or maybe he would love them. Natsu never knew what to expect with the strange shop owner.

“Cancer, it is inappropriate to greet Mistress Lucy with such familiarity.” The other spirit spoke with
a warm and deep voice, bowing his snout in Lucy’s direction. And it was a snout, because he was a goat. Natsu thought the first one looked weird, but Capricorn was a fucking goat in a suit. And taller than both Aquarius and the crab guy. His fur was white and his dark sunglasses matched his fitted and expensive looking three piece suit, gold buttons and pocket chain and all. “I have been waiting to see you for many moons, Mistress Lucy. Your mother would be proud to see the intelligent and beautiful woman you have grown into.”

Capricorn’s thin ears twitched and he looked at Natsu, who shrunk further behind Lucy as he felt shivers travel along his spine. “Master Natsu.” The goat greeted him, though it lacked all the warmth he had given Lucy and sounded more like a threat.

Fuck did Natsu hate sprites.

“Yo,” Natsu waved weakly, anger spiking at Capricorn’s amused snort. Even if he felt no more animosity coming in his direction from the goat man.

“Umm, you don’t have to call me Mistress.” Lucy said shyly, waving her hands frantically when Capricorn bowed again. “Just Lucy is fine.”

“Ha, told ya Cappy! Our Lucy ain’t like the spoiled little girl Aquarius ranted about fifteen years ago, right baby?” Cancer floated over, resting on Lucy’s head. “So whadya want done? Bob? Curls? Have half the side shaved? I’ve been dying to get my claws in this pretty gold hair since we had those tea parties, baby!” Natsu felt his eye twitch at how loose Cancer was with the word ‘baby’. It wasn’t helping that Lucy was giggling and lifted a hand to pat her new sprite on the head.

“You used to put the prettiest braids in my hair.” she said fondly. Cancer beamed under the praise. Natsu wanted to gag. “And you,” she directed at Capricorn, holding out her finger for him to balance on like some demented parakeet. A goat parakeet. With horns. “You always helped me study!” Lucy’s smile was so bright, and Capricorn grinned at her as he bowed again.

“I’m glad you remember us, Lucy, from the short time we had together.”

“And that’s gonna wrap up our little stroll down memory lane.” Aquarius butted in, flicking her tail in disgust at her fellow sprites. “We’re gonna start draining Mistress Lucy here because of how weak she is if we stay any longer. And blood will be split if I don’t have the proper four hours to get ready!” Cancer and Capricorn shared a look—how, Natsu didn’t know. Seriously, why were they both wearing sunglasses inside. That was just stupid. With a formal farewell and another ‘baby’ the pair was gone, leaving Lucy and Natsu to blink some more light-blind spots from their eyes.

Aquarius was also gone, light sparkles disappearing around her flower and her blunt words hanging in the room.

“Don’t call me for a week.”

“Well that was fun.” Natsu said dryly. Lucy hugged the keys to her chest again, and her large smile was infectious, Natsu standing and helping Lucy to her feet. She stumbled into him, resting heavy on his chest. “Oi, you okay Luce?” he asked worriedly, rolling his eyes at her unconvincing nod.

“Just tired suddenly.” Lucy replied. Natsu remembered what Aquarius had said about draining her magic, and decided that sleep would be the best option for the rest of the night. He guided her to her room, pulling the blanket over them both after they had gotten settled. Natsu found that he wasn’t sleepy though, and so he contented himself with watching Lucy drift off with her new keys held flush to her heart and a tiny smile on her face.
Natsu let the drone of the tattoo gun lull his mind, familiar motions allowing him the chance to mentally wander.

It had been over two weeks since Lucy has gained her two new sprites, and Aquarius had refused to come out of her flower to answer any of their questions. Goat-man had said that Aquarius was simply temperamental, and explained that time moved much more slowly in their realm. Natsu didn’t really give a fuck about the mermaid, considering how his main question had been proven through extensive experimentation.

Natsu and Lucy did in fact glow after they had sex.

Well, to be more specific, they could see each other’s magic aura when they finished together.

While Natsu snickered at how her golden aura was just as playful and bold as his, Lucy blushed and curled into his chest shyly. Natsu found it confusing but also a little funny how strangely Lucy acted sometimes. He was also in awe of how prettily her magic entwined with his, golden light teasing and caressing his wild flames. It was almost like watching the surface of a star dance. At least, Natsu assumed that’s what it’d look like. Or a really wicked firework show gone bad.

It also made Natsu’s heart squeeze in the best way when he thought about the implications of seeing each other’s magic. He never thought he’d have or want the kind of connection he felt with Lucy, and to think that he could literally bare his soul to her… well, it was still a bit too out there for the witch to comprehend.

Natsu looked down and refocused on his hand. Something to distract him from delving too deep into that thought. This new distraction brought its own deep thoughts though, as Natsu’s mind wandered unwelcomingly to the reason for his new tattoo.

It was the seventh anniversary of Igneel’s death.

This new tattoo would remind Natsu that everything cycled, and there was always a new beginning even when an end felt like the final one. Igneel always told him to look towards the future, a full moon created from the blackness of the new one.

Okay so maybe Natsu had gotten the idea from Lucy’s latest addition to her novel.

He had finished the first full moon, starting the edge of the descending three-quarter moon. Natsu was simply following the outlines he had drawn earlier, the steps coming to a new moon in the centre before expanding back into a full moon. This one would reach from his inner elbow to his wrist on his left hand, an easy place for Natsu to do the tattoo himself. He may not be as good as his cousin but Natsu was proud of his own skills.

He knew he could draw flames better than Gajeel anyway.

He looked up before his front door was thrown open, his magic responding to Lucy’s approaching.

“Natsu! Natsu I can’t believe it I had another two sprites hiding in my room you remember that little clock Loke got me and the pretty harp necklace holder I got myself a few months back well according to Capricorn they were drawn to my ma-”

Lucy cut off her excited ramble, eyes growing wide as she watched Natsu resume filling in his tattoo.
“Natsu?” Lucy squeaked, lips pinching at his answering hum. “What are you doing?”

“What does it look like Weirdo?” Natsu asked back with a snort, Happy’s paw swooping in with a fresh cloth to wipe away the few drops of blood and clean Natsu’s irritated skin. Happy flew over to Lucy, falling to the ground where he could twine himself between her legs and rub his head into her calf.

“Hiya Lucy!” Happy chimed, purring against her bare leg once more before leaping into the air and flying towards the kitchen. The cat promptly returned with two juice bottles, one dropped in front of Natsu and the other placed in Lucy’s hand. Lucy gaped at the pair, Natsu snickering to himself at her ghostly appearance as neither answered her question.

“This can’t be hygienic.” Lucy muttered to herself, slowly walking over to where Natsu was seated at his workbench. Neither Happy or Natsu answered Lucy’s statement, instead focusing on their respective tasks. Natsu’s being his tattoo, and Happy’s trying to get Lucy to sit so he had a lap to curl up on.

“Why don’t you go to a professional?” Lucy asked, finally perching on the edge of an overly worn armchair and hand absentely running through Happy’s silky fur. Natsu shrugged his shoulder as he moved onto the fourth shape.

“Don’t needa.” He said simply, making a mental note to add an anti-infection rune to his gun afterwards. Lucy’s hygienic comment was still ringing through his head. “I stole this set from Gajeel a few years back, and his old man was basically a licensed artist. He taught both of us when we’d piss around ‘is metal shop. Mainly to make us shut up I think.” Natsu chuckled at the memories of having to tattoo various fruits and vegetables, and the competitions he and Gajeel used to have in the corner of Igneel’s and Metalicana’s shop.

He looked up when he felt Lucy looking at him, a tiny smile tinged with sadness lifting her lips. “So!” Lucy changed topics, Natsu smiling at her brightness. It didn’t really bother him talking to her about Igneel, but it still touched his heart when she thought about how things might affect him. “What kind rune or spell is this one hiding?”

Natsu chuckled, lifting the needle for Happy to wipe at his freshly tattooed skin before continuing. “Nah, I wouldn’t wanna put any magic intent into shapes like these.”

“That’d be baaaaaad.” Happy said solemnly, flying back to Lucy and perching on her lap and looking at her with large eyes. Natsu hummed in agreement, smiling at the familiar’s light purrs signaling Lucy was giving him chin scratches.

“I thought circles meant sealing and that was good?” Lucy questioned, picking up Happy and walking back over to Natsu. She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, peeking at his tattoo over his shoulder. Natsu breathed in her vanilla scent, letting it relax him before he explained his most recent body art.

“Yeah, but this also has a lot more crescents than circles, and crescents mean dark magic. Not necessarily bad, just… harder to control. And easier to use for bad shit. So it wouldn’t be smart’a me to put magic, y’know, ‘cus of how pissed off I get. Probably blow up the apartment when a figure didn’t work out.” Natsu chuckled to himself at the last comment, looking at Lucy to see her smiling wryly at him. She wasn’t denying it, which Natsu could understand.

“This one’s for Igneel.” Happy said softly, wiping at the tattoo that was now ¾ done. “Natsu tells me lots of stuff about his dad. Whenever Natsu would get sad Igneel would tell him to look to the future, kinda like how there’ll always be a full moon after a new one. Its one of my favourites of his.”
Happy had settled back into Lucy’s lap, cleaning a paw to signal he was done talking. Natsu didn’t mind Happy telling Lucy, it allowed him to concentrate on his work and the small cat explained it much better than Natsu thought he could. He looked at Lucy from the corner of his eye, curious by her continued silence.

“It’s today, isn’t it?”

Natsu smirked to himself. Of course Lucy would pick up on that. “Yeah.” He answered, voice subdued in respect of the weight of the quiet around them, broken only by the drum of the tattoo gun. Natsu looked around, when had his music turned off?

“My mom died today too.” Lucy hummed, arms curling around Happy tightly. An easy silence swam around them again, Lucy’s statement not expecting any condolences or even a response. It was simply a quiet reaffirmation that Lucy could understand part of what Natsu was going through. That he wasn’t alone in this.

Natsu finished the tattoo, breathing out a heavy sigh as he turned off the gun and it’s noise faded into the silence of the room. Natsu put the equipment away, throwing out the used needle. He was stopped from heading to the kitchen to wash the tattoo and put the magically infused ointment on it by Lucy’s hand wrapping around his wrist. He raised an eyebrow at her as she turned his forearm over, inspecting him with curious eyes. She looked like she was holding back from touching it, her fingers twitching in the air beside his hand.

“I really like it Natsu.” Lucy finally said, smiling up at him, her bright eyes tinged with sadness around the edges. Natsu grinned at her. His grin widened into a laugh at Lucy’s small squeak as he wrapped his other arm around her waist and nuzzled into her neck. He pulled away quickly though, as much as he wanted to cuddle into Lucy’s warmth, because he really did need to clean the tattoo.

Lucy followed him to the kitchen, hopping onto the countertop and watching him. Happy had somehow found a large piece of mackerel and was chewing on it while leaning against Lucy’s leg. “I think I might want another one…” Lucy trailed off, playing with Happy’s tail as a distraction.

Natsu’s hand slipped from applying the ointment and he had to grip the counter, baffled and all attention trained on Lucy, who pointedly continued to ignore him.

“What are you asking me to tattoo you?” Natsu asked, needing to be clear before he dreamt up too many designs for her. And where…

Lucy snorted under her breath before looking at him with pinched lips and red cheeks. “I was trying to be subtle about it, but yes. I’ve wanted another one for a while but just never got around to it.”

Natsu didn’t believe her.

And he didn’t think he had ever loved her more.

She was so weird.

“Whatever you say Weirdo.” Natsu teased, cackling at her pout as he finished wrapping the bandages around his forearm. Lucy poked his side roughly when he reached for a mug beside her head, wiggling proudly at his yelp and proceeding to coo to Happy and play with his ears. As old and powerful as the small familiar was Natsu found it funny that he seemed to enjoying being manhandled by Lucy all the time. Maybe he’d give Lucy a cat tattoo somewhere, hip? Shoulder? Lucy seemed like an ankle girl though, so he could imagining paw prints trailing up her calf…

Natsu needed his pen and paper.
He left Lucy in the kitchen, his mug abandoned by the tea kettle that was starting to heat up. He had several mugs laying around, and it had taken him a few too many wrong sips to learn to colour coordinate them. It didn’t really help, much to Happy’s never ending amusement, and so there were sure to be several mugs in each room, each with various states of fullness and drinkability. He was reminded of this as he moved a black mug with a chipped lip and greyish-yellow liquid swirling around off of a notebook. Natsu flipped through it distractedly, making a low noise of irritation as he dropped the completely full sketch book before moving onto his bookshelf. Which held equally brimming pages of several old and beaten books. Natsu glared at the offending stacks, looking around the room for any scrap paper.

How the fuck was Natsu out of paper?

He was a fucking artist.

He huffed louder as agitation turned to anger, Lucy wandering in with Happy tucked tightly against her chest. “You okay?” Lucy questioned, voice litting in amusement as she eyed the mini mess Natsu had made in his search.

“I need paper.” Natsu grumbled, sticking his tongue out at Happy’s snickers.

“And charcoal!” Happy chimed. “We need cedar, witch, and vine wood.” Natsu groaned at the list, knowing this was going to be another supply run, no matter how much he wanted to start on rough sketches of Lucy’s designs. He grabbed Lucy’s hand, dragging her behind him as he headed towards the door.

“Why do I have to go?” Lucy whined, rolling her eyes at Natsu’s blank look and allowing him to continue to lead her to the door. “Maybe I’ll find a new sprite.” he heard her mutter to herself, Natsu grinning at her attempt at a positive outlook.

He knew she was always up for a mini adventure.

Natsu knew there was something wrong before it registered that Lucy’s door should have been locked.

The knob had twisted too easily in his hand before he had slid his key into the lock, and Natsu didn’t have time to react before it was ripped from his hand and a fist was sending him crashing into his own door, head cracking painfully on the wood and sending his vision into a tail spin. The bags of art supplies and groceries scattered around him as the plastic ripped at the collision.

Damn it, he had been too relaxed, too used to Lucy’s presence and the peace she brought over him. He had let his guard down. Natsu had fucked up. It had only been a matter of time too, because when did anything ever go Natsu’s way?

Lucy screamed, too low for fear but still too high to be an angry howl. Natsu spat blood onto the ugly fake tile, snarling when he saw Lucy getting dragged into her apartment by a black tendril curled tightly around her wrist. Black like a shadow, no light escaping it, just like his dream…

No.

Fear took over Natsu, and he pushed off his door hard enough to splinter the wood. His fist caught on fire without a spell even forming in his mind, emotions wild and desperate. He couldn’t take her. Natsu would protect her this time. He would. He had to.

Lucy however, had decided she needed none of his saviour bullshit. Natsu had stepped through the
threshold just in time to see Lucy spin on her heel and slam her right foot into the nose of one of the
men in her apartment. He crumpled with a yelp, his magic finally releasing her and Lucy stepped
back, arms held in ready stance and hands curled into deadly fists. Natsu launched at a different man,
a fat man with green spiked hair and no nose. His fist caught in the man’s gut sending him flying into
the wall. Which he then dissolved into.

“What the fuck do ya bastards want?” Natsu snapped. He paused beside Lucy, eyes trained on what
he pegged as their leader, a tall man with shaggy silver hair. His nose was crooked and hooked, his
grin not reaching his eyes as he ignored Natsu. His black trench coat and knobbed staff pissed Natsu
off even more, the pretentiousness of it grating on his last nerve.

“You’re going to take us to Zeref, and tell us what END is.” He said calmly. “I am Erigor, Master of
the Wind and Esienwald. And we are going to raise the demons of hell and resurrect your brother!”
The two lackies behind him grinned and banged their chests with a fist in victory.

Oh fucking gods it was these guys.

“You have no idea how much I wish my brother was dead, but even if I knew where he was I
wouldn’t tell you dicks! Didn’t the Order take you guys in for human sacrifice?” Natsu tensed in his
stance, his irritation was making flames flicker in and out around him in sporadic bursts.

“The Order is full of nothing but cowards, too fearful to truly understand what magic can do!” The
black haired one stated vehemently, wiping the thin trail of blood trickling from his nose with that
back of his hand. Before Natsu could roll his eyes Lucy gasped loudly, finger shaking as she pointed
a finger at him.

“You!”
The dark witch smirked, eyes traveling Lucy’s body in a way that made Natsu want to smash his
face against a brick wall. “Was wondering when you’d recognize me blondie.” His smirk made
Lucy’s lip curl, a sentiment Natsu shared. “Been dreaming about me? Anything jumping from the
shadows?”

Lucy curled back into herself, even as sparks of light sputtered from her fists. Natsu would think
about what that meant later, but right now there were more pressing things Natsu needed to do, like
making sure his nightmares didn’t come true.

“What does he mean?” Natsu asked, words coming out a snarl as his gaze narrowed to a deadly
point on the man threatening Lucy.

“Didn’t she tell you? We had a nice little talk a few days ago, and blondie gave us the perfect idea.”

Lucy’s scream tore Natsu’s attention from the smug look on the man’s face. The green haired man
reappeared behind Lucy, half protruding from the wall and holding a silver dagger with runes to stop
the sealing of wound carved into the metal. The blade hovered just in front of Lucy’s throat, her hair
captured in his fist as he forced her head back.

“Tell us or your girlfriend dies.”

Time slowed. Natsu felt like his heart had dropped into his stomach at the same time that his stomach
was trying to empty itself. Everything else faded to black as he zeroed in on the blade hovering just
above her unblemished skin. This wasn’t happening. Natsu wasn’t about to lose Lucy because of
some crazy ass dark witches obsessed with his brother.

“You leave a single mark on you and I’ll kill you.” Natsu’s voice was low and steady, emotionless as
he felt himself detach. Fire begged to be released in his hands. The need to feel bones shatter under his fists made his skin itch.

“Big words from a runaway.” Erigor hissed, Natsu baring his teeth back at him. “The mighty Salamander, fleeing city to city every time his brother is mentioned.”

The mocking words pierced Natsu’s chest, eyes darting to Lucy in fear of the disgusted expression she would surely be looking at him with. He had run away, sick of having his life blown apart every time a pack of Zeref followers found him. There were only so many five-on-one, ten-on-one, twenty-on-one fights Natsu could face before it was no longer fun.

Lucy however was snarling at Erigor with enraged eyes, a look Natsu would almost call murderous on her face.

“You know nothing.” She spat.

“Shut up.” The black haired boy said, walking until he was standing in front of Lucy. “You need to learn to keep your bitch in her place.” He smirked at Natsu. He lifted his hand to touch her cheek, smile growing darker when she flinched away. “I know I would.”

“God Kageyama,” the third wheedled with a smirk, “stop playing around and think with your head.”

“Oh I’m pretty sure that’s exactly what he’s thinking with.” The green haired one snickered, sadistic chuckles shared by the other two. Erigor just stood by Lucy’s couch, passive look on his face. Natsu’s already narrowed vision started to flicker red at the look of horror on Lucy’s face. How dare they make Lucy wear that expression.

“I’m not scared of you.” Lucy snarled, spitting at Kageyama’s face.

As proud of her as Natsu was, even he knew that probably wasn’t a smart choice.

“Bitch.”

Kageyama lunged at Lucy, his coven mate quickly lifting the knife from Lucy’s pale skin so as not to cut the black haired boy’s hand as it wrapped itself around her throat. Lucy was quick to kick out Kageyama’s knee as she threw her elbow back into the man behind her, the pointed edge digging into the place where his nose should be and making him release her fully as he tried to stop the broken feature from bleeding. Natsu watched in vicious glee as Lucy pushed Kageyama back through a series of quick punches to the gut before kneeing him in the rib and kicking his jaw with the front of her foot. Kageyama’s body was sent flying to the ground, side catching on the low shelf behind Lucy’s couch.

“Fuck that’s so hot.” Natsu breathed, grinning widely at Lucy’s rolled eyes a light flush. A movement caught the corner of his eye, Erigor lifting his staff in Lucy’s directing and mouth beginning to form a spell sequence. “Fuck that shit.” Natsu snarled, leaping at the leader and sending a flaming fist into his face. Erigor stumbled back, quickly replaced by the third man sending ropes at Natsu’s arms and legs. The ones trying to bind his wrists quickly caught flame but the ones aimed at his legs were successful, yanking his footing out from under him and sending him crashing into the coffee table.

Wood splintered around him and Lucy’s sharp cry of his name echoed through his head, back of his skull sore from where it had connected with the furniture. With a snarl Natsu focused flames on the rope at his feet. It took more effort than the flames at his wrists had been, unused to channeling the magic to his lower limbs as Natsu was. Natsu looked away from the smouldering remains of the rope
to see the wall witch reaching for Lucy once more, this time from the hallway and kitchen division. He was too far away to reach them in time, so instead Natsu formed a tunnel with fists connected to his mouth, prayed to whatever gods he could think of that he didn’t spontaneously combust, and blew a fireball at the witch behind a distracted Lucy.

“Natsu what the fuck!” Lucy screamed, ducking away from the incoming fireball with a leaping roll, standing from a crouched position with a furious glare. “What am I going to tell the landlady about the giant scorch mark on my wall?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I was too busy savin’ your life and breathin’ fire like a fuckin’ badass dragon to stop and think ‘bout the landlady.” Natsu shot back. He looked at the rope witch, who was standing in front of Natsu, shaking in his spot. He grinned darkly at the obviously terrified man. “Roar.” Natsu said in an exaggeratedly calm voice.

The man stumbled back, a look of terror warping his scarred face. He tripped on the green haired man, curled on the floor as he clutched his burnt face. Natsu’s victory was short lived however. A heavy blast of wind slammed him into the bookshelf beside the TV, Natsu crumpling with a groan and trying to shield his skull from the incoming avalanche of hardcover novels. Why couldn’t Lucy like the cheap paperbacks? They hurt much less when bouncing off the back of his head and spine.

“I don’t know what kind of magic you use that doesn’t need a spell but if you insist in breathing fire, then I’ll just have to stop you from breathing, period.” Erigor observed coldly. Natsu lifted a flaming fist only to have it be snuffed out. He was lifted back up and slammed into the bookcase again, bright lights flashing in his vision as he tried to look around him. A third strike against the almost emptied piece of furniture sent him crashing through it, splinters slicing his skin and his body making a large hole in the plaster behind it. The wind knocked out of him, Natsu struggled for breath as his body was once more allowed to crumple to the floor.

He started to panic when he couldn’t regain his breath, lungs burning as the seconds without air ticked by. Natsu tried to breathe in but nothing happened, rasping and choking noises all he could make as he tried to call out to tell Lucy to run. Any fire he tried to conjure on his hands was wiped away quickly, Natsu too desperate for air to fully mouth the incantation he needed for the flames. It felt like minutes passed as his vision slowly blackened, unconsciousness dragging its claws over his mind as he hazily watched Lucy scream in his direction with tears in her eyes.

He was finally able to draw in a wracking breath, saltwater accompanying the life-saving oxygen flooding his veins. He sputtered and hacked out the random liquid, his clothes and hair soaked through. His cuts stung from the salt, but he ignored them as he balked at the sight before him.

Aquarius floated in the middle of the room, seven feet tall and orbs of water rotating in a lazy circle in the hand not holding the water urn. Water was several inches deep around Natsu, but long tendrils held each of the lackeys by the throat, currents moving within the translucent bindings.

“You know, there are entire legends about not pissing off mermaids. Whole volumes you puny humans have dedicated to it in fact. So now, why don’t one of you tell me exactly why it was a good idea to make my witch summon me? Because I know she knows better than to do it for no good reason. Her boyfriend dying, well, that’s a reason even I can understand the need to call for my help.” She looked at Lucy pointedly after studying each of the men in her grasp. Lucy was panting, hair swirling in the air around her and tips fading into a soft golden light. Hell, her entire body seemed to be glowing.

Her face did not make the ethereal vision, pinched and dripping sweat with concentration and exhaustion. Her legs shook, but her hands stayed steady and spread out in front of her body. The light seemed to originate from there, multiple rays pulsing from her palms and never fading out.
“I’ll have to make a contract with you know that you’ve proven yourself to be strong enough to call me.” Aquarius sighed flatly. She looked back at Erigor with an irritated huff. His tendril of water covered his mouth, leaving him unable to form a spell. Not that Natsu thought he was strong enough to challenge the sprite. The mermaid was silent as she slammed his head into the wall, effectively knocking him out. The other three followed suit easily, Aquarius letting their bodies fall to the floor unceremoniously. She looked at Lucy, brow softening as she took in her witch’s haggard appearance.

“Don’t call me until Capricorn’s explained everything to you.”

With her flippant farewell Aquarius disappeared into a golden ring of runes and a high chime. Lucy collapsed to her knees, breathing stuttered as she fought passing out. Natsu scrambled through the disappearing shallow water, supporting her when he knelt beside her. He felt a few ribs shift awkwardly, and his ankle felt a disconcerting level of numb, but he ignored them as he wrapped his arms around her limp upper body and cradled her into his side.

“Oh, fuck, fuckin’ shit, Luce, Luce are you okay?” He asked hurriedly, panic building in his throat.

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that?” Lucy rasped, fists weakly grasping at his torn shirt. “I was watching you suffocate Natsu and I couldn’t do anything! I was just as useless as when I was kidnapped and, and I just, I couldn’t lose you! I wasn’t going to leave you!” She sobbed into his shoulder, Natsu stroking her back.

“I never told you to leave Luce. I mean, I tried’ta, but I was kinda, you know, not able to talk.”

Natsu tried to lighten the mood, but a surprisingly strong punch to his shoulder made his forced grin fall with a wince.

“I heard you tell me to leave!” Lucy mumbled adamantly, fingers digging bruises into his biceps. Her voice caught with a loud ‘hic’ and then she was openly crying into him. Confusion made Natsu unable to answer, he knew he had been unable to talk to her at that time, so how had she heard him? Either way, that was a question for a later time, and so was the vague as fuck comment Aquarius had made about contracts and Capricorn.

Natsu glared at the bodies of the men in the room, eyes torn away when Happy appeared in the room with a glittering pop, flying into a wall hard before zooming to Natsu and Lucy. His feathered wings had half disintegrated ropes trailing from them, and his paws were still bound. Fury hit Natsu as the shock wore off, and it took every ounce of self-control left in him to not go and kick the rope witch’s head as he shredded the ropes with one hand and talons of flames he created.

“I-I-I’m s-s-so sorry, they, they broke in and then be-before I could do anything I-I was being attacked and they tied me and threw me in the ba-bathroom.” Happy wailed, stuttering over his words and crawling between their bodies so he was buried in Lucy’s cleavage and pressed against Natsu’s chest. Lucy stopped her own quiet crying, holding and stroking Happy’s fur and throwing away the remaining shred of rope with disgust.

This was all Natsu’s fault.

They wouldn’t have been hurt if he had moved earlier, if the psychos worshipping his brother hadn’t found him. Lucy was hurt and crying, Happy was a wreck. And it was all his fault.

He looked around Lucy’s ruined apartment, shame sinking his gut and making his blood run cold. The only good thing was that at least the remainder of the dark coven would be brought in. Which meant Natsu was about to do something that he was almost certain would mean the end of his life. He dug a hand into his pocket, thankful to see his phone was undamaged, thanks to the enchanted
case he had bought off a guy at the WTT last fall.

“Hey Erza, ya need to come to Lucy’s apartment. You’re gonna want me to show ya, rather than try and explain it to you. Yeah, I’ll see ya in fifteen.”
Natsu had shifted Lucy to the couch, still tucked solidly under his arm. Happy had taken it upon himself to tie up the men in the kitchen, each gagged with a rag imbued with anti-magic potions. They weren’t particularly good, but Happy had whipped them up himself and they were probably better than Natsu would have been able to make.

He had also left a nasty scratch along the side of the wind witch’s face.

Now the three were huddled on the couch, Lucy refusing to let Natsu out of her grip and Happy unable to stop shaking without the embrace of both Lucy and Natsu.

They didn’t even flinch when Lucy’s door was kicked in.

“Natsu Dragneel you tell me what’s happening right now or- why are there men in Lucy’s kitchen and why is there blood on the wall?”

Natsu looked over Lucy’s head at Erza, seeing the expected fury and concern there. Fuck, he was going to die when he told her why.

“It’s my fault.” Natsu said in a flat, defeated voice. Lucy jolted in his arms, Natsu passively letting them fall off of her.

“Don’t you dare say that.” Lucy hissed, Natsu feeling her glare on his skin. He scrubbed at the side of his face, dried blood flaking off from his chin. Of course Lucy didn’t blame him, the girl was loyal to a fault, and for some reason she thought Natsu was worthy of that devotion. “It is not your fault.”

“Someone tell me what happened.” Erza’s demanding voice cut through, and Natsu pinched the bridge of his nose as he took a deep inhale.

“A couple of dark witches tracked me down. Lucy and I got back here and then they attacked us. Luce saved my ass.” He looked at the top of Lucy’s head with a dry smile. “She ‘xhausted herself summonin’ her mermaid, so don’t be too pushy with her.”

Erza walked around, ignoring the tied up men and crouching in front of Lucy. Her wide brown eyes shot to Erza, confusion surfacing past the dull tiredness. “Why are you talking as if Erza knows about-” Lucy started to question, cut off by Erza’s firm but gentle hand turning her chin left then right, examining her face and neck. Next Erza gathered her hands, thumbs brushing over her bruising knuckles.

“You did good, very minimal damage to your hands without any protection.” Erza complimented. She looked at Natsu, directing her comment at him again. “And you seemed to have done well as the only trained witch against four, including the coven Master. I’ll have to take them into the Council station here, and you’ll have to give a report as well of course.” Erza sighed, straightening at Natsu’s silent nod. He was thankful she wasn’t chewing him out, even if he knew her praise was unwarranted.

“Like I said, Luce had to summon her mermaid spirit, she did a lot of the work too. I’d be dead if she wasn’t with me.”

Lucy’s hand was over Natsu’s mouth as soon as he finished speaking. “And we are officially done speaking about you living or dying, do you understand me?” Lucy’s glare was fierce, Natsu nodding under her unyielding stare before she turned and looked at Erza. “How much do you know about
Now Natsu shrunk under Erza’s sharp look. “You didn’t tell her?” She asked harshly, Natsu shifting so Lucy’s body was acting as a shield between him and Erza’s wrath. Her hand fell away from him during the shift.

“You said not to!” He defended weakly, quickly followed by a ‘sorry ma’am’ as he hid further behind Lucy. Natsu wondered if he had better odds against suffocation-man than Erza’s death glare.

“Yes but I would have assumed you’d ignore me as you usually do.” Erza said dryly, turning her attention back to Lucy. Her brow furrowed and her gaze returned to Natsu sharply. “You said she summoned a mermaid?”

“A sprite.” Lucy interrupted, shying back when both witches focused on her. “Uh, I feel like Aquarius would kill me if I didn’t correct you on that?”

“You never said she was a celestial witch.” Erza accused, absentmindedly inspecting Lucy’s neck again.

“Well I didn’t know at the time! That stupid fish followed her home in a flower or somethin’, and next thing I knew they were basically flockin’ to her from everywhere. Luce said one had been hidin’ in her clock this entire time, I think.” Natsu sulked, chin resting on Lucy’s shoulder.

“You were listening to me.” Lucy said softly.

“I always listen to ya, Weirdo.” Natsu snorted, “I just don’t always, y’know, listen.”

Lucy’s laugh was more of a sigh, but it made Natsu smile all the same.

A groan came from the kitchen, Lucy stiffening against Natsu’s side at the low noise. Before Natsu could even focus energy on a spell to knock them out again Erza had stood and marched to the kitchen. A dull ‘thud’ noise rang solidly, Natsu raising an eyebrow as he watched Erza kick the green haired man’s head over the back of the couch. Neither spoke as she returned to the couch and sat on the other side of Lucy.

“So how much do you know about magic?” Erza asked, gently turning Lucy to face her more.

“Uh, Natsu explained about the symbology and structure of spells, and I’ve been getting lessons with Capricorn and my other sprites…” Lucy trailed off, unsure but too tired to be guarded with Erza right now.

“And has he talked to you about what you are?” Erza said after nodding to herself.

“Oh! Uh, yeah, we’re Bonded and Soulmates, and I can only use magic when connected to him. And uh, I guess my magic is more prone to light and sprites?”

Lucy said it like she was asking for Erza’s approval, not that Natsu could blame her. Erza had that air about her.

Erza gaped at them for several seconds, gaze flicking between Natsu and Lucy. “I’ve only heard of Bonded in legends…” Erza said, obviously talking to herself. She stood up and paced in front of them, continuing to mumble under her breath. “Master needs to know of this right now. To have such powerful witches without a coven will only attract more danger.” She announced suddenly, whirling on the pair so quickly it made Natsu jump.
“What the fuck!” Gray said, eyes wild as he rushed to Lucy. Cana was quick behind him, leaning on the doorway and panting, shirt stained with what looked like the majority of a beer.

“I told you they were fine you little shit!” She exclaimed angrily. She then pointed a finger at Natsu, glaring at him with murderous intent. “And you made me spill my beer over myself with the force of that vision! Gods know I don’t fucking need to see Lucy glowing and shit while you’re dying on the floor!”

“How many times do I hafta tell ya not to have visions of me, ya drunk?” Natsu shot back, the memory of his last nerve beyond frayed at this point.

“It’s not like I have much of a choice you dickhead.” Cana said. “Sometimes they just,” she made a circular motion in the air beside her head with one hand, “-appear.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Gray demanded, shooting a terrified glare between Cana and Natsu. Lucy was cradled against his chest, Gray tucking her head under his chin after making sure she was unharmed. Lucy was complacent in his coddling, half checked out of the conversation. Natsu was worried she might actually pass out.

“Gray I think it’s best you don’t ask things you don’t want the answer to.” Erza said flatly. Or maybe she was trying to be soothing. She was never very good at comforting people.

“I’ll ask any question I damn well please.” Gray snarled. “Lucy has bruises on her neck, flame ass here looks like he smashed through a couple walls, the wall supports that dumb ass theory, and-”

“-there are men tied up in her kitchen.”

“Gray I’m fine.” Lucy sighed, pushing off from his chest but intertwining their hands.

“Like fuck you are! Dear gods were those guys from the same place as the ones before…” Gray trailed off. It occurred to Natsu that Gray wasn’t blaming him for once, the time that it was actually Natsu’s fault. He couldn’t help but feel sympathy sit heavy in his gut as panic bubbled under Gray’s eyes.

“No, they weren’t.” Lucy said softly. The room fell quiet as everyone caught their breaths and allowed the recent events to settle in.

Gray stiffened in his spot, slowly turning away from Natsu to look at Cana. “Explain.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Cana replied flippantly, waving her hand in a shooing motion. Gray hissed her name, the alcoholic’s shoulders deflating. She looked at Erza, a silent conversation happening in seconds between the two. Both sets of eyes flickered to Natsu, his teeth grinding as he fought from screaming for everyone to just leave him, Lucy, and Happy alone for the rest of the evening. You decide, Natsu thought at Erza, too tired to care what Ice-brain did or didn’t know.

“Fuck fine,” Cana breathed out, cut off quickly by Erza.

“No.”

“God I’m sick of lying about it Erza.”

“Would someone just fucking tell m-”
“It’s irresponsible, you know Master’s orders as well as I do—”

“Well the old bastard—”

“Do not be so disrespectful—”

“Cana what the fuck—”

“Master?”

“He’s known about magic for as long as we’ve known him! Aren’t you tired?”

“Cana—”

“Doesn’t he deserve to know?”

“What are you two talking about—”

“Cana you know we can’t—”

“Tell me!”

*Found you.*

Natsu’s eyes snapped open, the chaotic yelling around him threatening to overwhelm his pounding head, harsh voices overlapping one another silenced by the soft taunt. Natsu knew it, had heard it in his dreams for years. Even now he could hear echoing laughter, soft and low but Natsu knew the insanity that hid under it. The crack in the voice and stiffness like something that was good at mimicking actual human laughter, but was still off.

*Come home, Natsu.*

Natsu stood up abruptly, nails digging into his palms to try and stop their shaking. His brother wanted him to come home? Fine. Natsu would meet him, and then beat his ass. Maybe that would stop all the batshit crazies from coming after him. It would protect Lucy.

Or he’d die trying.

But then what would Zeref need with Lucy if Natsu was gone?

“Natsu?”

He looked down at Lucy, her quiet voice breaking the tense air that had blanketed the room when Natsu had stood up.

“It’s my fault, but I’m gonna fix it, ‘kay Luce?” Natsu tried to smile as he spoke but he could see Lucy wasn’t buying it.

“Natsu, what are you planning on doing?” Happy asked, looking up from where he had settled on Lucy’s lap.

“Did that cat just speak?” Gray interrupted, voice higher than usual. Natsu thought he looked like he was about to snap.

“I only look like a cat. I’m Natsu’s familiar.” Happy stated like it were obvious, tail twitching as he moved from Lucy’s lap to Gray’s. “I don’t know why Natsu doesn’t like you. I think you smell nice.
Well, not as nice as Lucy, but no one smells like her. All light and airy and accepting and weird. You smell like snow and clarity and a little bit of sad. Natsu smells a little sad too. Most people do."

Natsu sighed heavily. Gray’s head was too thick with packed stupid to understand that Happy was talking about his abilities to sense people’s souls, and Happy too dense to know that Gray wouldn’t know that.

“What?”

There it was.

“Happy.” Erza warned, the small cat shaking under her glower.

“But Erzaaa,” Happy whined, “it’s not like he doesn’t know magic exists now. And I hate not being able to talk.”

Lucy reached out and brought him to her chest, nuzzling the soft fur between his ears. “I know Happy, but we don’t want to overload Gray right now. I remember how I felt when the shock wore off about magic being real.”

Natsu grunted, remembering a distinctly different scenario than what Lucy was talking about. There had been less of a freak-out and more of a make-out. It’d be one of the memories he replayed to keep out the darkness as he searched for his bastard brother.

He forced a grin on his face, feeling his split lip reopen under the strain. “We’re just gonna take care of some unfinished business is all, Buddy.”

Happy eyed Lucy worriedly, uncertainty clear in his large eyes. “Aye.”

“The fuck you get to just walk away from this, Strawberry Dick. Sit your ass down. We’re going to talk about how everyone I know is a fucking dark arts practitioner.”

Defiant spite swelled in Natsu’s gut at Gray’s command, an insult burning on the tip of his tongue. Or maybe it was actual fire. Natsu still wasn’t sure how he had managed to spit a fireball earlier, if he was honest and actually thought about it, and he didn’t think Lucy would enjoy having a well-done best friend. Not that Natsu wasn’t her best friend. He was definitely way more of her best friend than Gray was, but Natsu knew the two were close. Well, obviously they were close, they were sitting right next to one another, but that wasn’t what Natsu meant right now. If he were explaining this out loud, that is. But he wasn’t. He was just staring at Gray’s stupid face. And then blackness. And then Gray’s face was back. Natsu figured that probably wasn’t a good sign.

“Sure.”

He sat down heavily. His head hurt.

“How long have you known?” Natsu lifted his head at Gray’s voice, watching as he and Lucy talked to one another.

“A couple weeks, I think.” She admitted quietly.

“And you can use magic? Like, real actual spells and shit?”

Lucy smiled slightly, her hand slipping into Natsu’s and squeezing gently. “I’m learning, but right now I can only rally tap into it when I’m around Natsu. But he and my sprites are teaching me.”
Gray’s glare deepened as he eyed Natsu. “So he corrupted you.”

Natsu bared his teeth at the venom in Gray’s voice. “No!” Lucy interjected, body shifting to shield Natsu from Gray. “No, it was always inside me. Natsu and I… heighten each other’s powers. After we formed a strong enough emotional bond, the magic inside me finally broke free from it’s bubble.”

Happy made a small noise, cleaning his paw in thought. “That’s a really good way of putting it Lucy. I would have just said you were Soulmates.”

“You two are Soulmates?” Cana barked out a laugh, bracing herself on her knees as she cackled. Erza looked at her with an unimpressed expression.

“And Bonded.” Lucy sighed.

“We still haven’t fully dealt with the talking cat, but I’m already sure this is a fever dream, so what the hell. What the fuck do you mean ‘soulmates’? And ‘bonded’?” Gray’s tone was flat, and Natsu could relate. Even he was still having a hard time processing what he and Lucy actually meant to one another.

“I’m a familiar, we went over this.” Happy stated plainly before continuing. “And being Bonded is much rarer than just plain Soulmates. Everyone has at least a couple soulmates, but not everyone has a Bonded. Simply put, they complete one another in ways even the gods don’t fully understand.”

“Gods?”

“Happy, I think you should maybe stop talking before you break Gray.” Lucy said gently, petting his head in soothing strokes.

“He’s not very smart is he?” Happy sighed sadly, sprouting his wings and flying into the kitchen. Natsu watched as Happy used his tail to open the fridge, slamming the door into the head of one of the tied up men before he settled on top of the fridge with a full fish.

Natsu snickered into his scarf at Gray’s dumb expression.

“So yeah. Natsu and I, what we have… it’s special.” Lucy said shyly, looking up at Natsu through her lashes and giving him a small smile. “Even if there was no magic, it’d be special to me anyway.”

Natsu knocked his forehead gently against hers at Lucy’s soft words, but her love only made the knot tighten in his gut. He loved her. Truly, deeply, harder than he thought he could ever love someone. And that’s why he had to protect her from Zeref.

“You two are going to make me barf.” Gray complained flatly. He looked at Lucy, face becoming a mask of no emotion. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Lucy pulled from Natsu completely, holding both of Gray’s hands with her own. “I wanted to,” her voice wavered, thick with emotion. “I really did Gray. But, you were always so against magic. And, and I was worried that you’d be angry.”

“You thought I’d abandon you?” Gray asked loudly, hurt breaking through his frozen exterior. His eyes dropped further at her silence, Natsu shifting back to give them room when Gray pulled her into a rough hug. “Lucy. I’d never… you’re my family. Sure, I might’ve tried to kick Flamer’s ass, but I couldn’t lose you. I sure as hell wouldn’t walk away.”

“Like-urg.” Natsu started to argue Gray’s claim that he could even try and kick Natsu’s ass before biting his tongue sharply at Erza’s warning look. He’d had more than enough near death experiences
today, thank you.

“I swear, I haven’t known very long myself.” Lucy’s voice was muffled by Gray’s -bare- shoulder, but Natsu could still hear her smile.

“I believe you.” Gray said lowly. “These two, on the other hand, have a bunch of fucking explaining to do.”

“Must you swear so much? It’s very ungentleman like.” Erza sniffed. Gray glared at her dodge, Natsu snickering into his scarf again.

“I think he’s allowed to swear right now.” Lucy said, giving Erza a baleful look and making the redhead duck her head in sheepish concession. With a sigh she shuffled away from Gray, moving Natsu’s hands so she could curl on his lap and rest her chin on her knees, head tucked into his shoulder. “You guys are going to have to make this quick or discuss it somewhere else, I’m not sure how much longer I can stay awake.”

Gray nodded before his eyes sharpened on Erza and Cana. Natsu was thankful nobody was paying attention to him right now, because he wasn’t sure how much longer he’d be able to not pass out either. And then of course he had to pack…

But right now he had Lucy in his arms, safe and warm in her apartment.

“Long have you been like… this?” Natsu focused back on the conversation halfway through Gray’s question. He could already tell he wasn’t in the mood for this, but he also knew Erza would flay him alive if he tried to leave without her permission.

“Relax, buddy,” Cana sighed, waving her hand dismissively. “We ain’t gonna hex you or anything. With how much you’ve been raving about voodoo and black magic you think you would have picked up on, like, something after all these years.” Gray ducked his head, jaw tense under Cana’s snickers.

“Oi, quit bein’ a bitch ‘bout this.”

All heads snapped to Natsu at his gruff bark, which he shrugged off easily. “It’s a lot to process if you ain’t been raised in it. ‘Sides, he’s not wrong to be freaked out ‘bout the creepy shit. Or don’t you remember that time you ‘n Bacchus got too drunk, snuck into the forbidden section of the coven hall, and your old man had to save your dumb asses?”

“Uh, thanks.” Gray mumbled, Natsu nodding in response before resting his head on Lucy’s shoulder.

“What’d they do?” Lucy whispered in his ear, Natsu grinning as he looked at her slyly.

“Tell ya ‘bout it later.” He promised, Lucy’s small smile and conspiratorial twinkle in her eyes sending a rush of warmth through his nerves.

“They didn’t summon a demon, did they?” Gray interjected, shocking Natsu into remembering they weren’t alone.

“No, that was all Natsu.” Cana said, eyes glinting at the opportunity to throw Natsu under the bus.

“For the last time, I was kid, I miss-said like one word, and Igneel dealt with it. Nothin’ woulda happened if Gildarts hadn’t brought you over anyway!”
“You summoned a demon.” Gray asked loudly. Natsu rolled his eyes, sneering at the black haired man on his- Lucy’s couch.

“It was a minor demon. It didn’t even do that much damage, just like, possessed the toaster for a couple hours.” Natsu explained sourly. “Bastard kept settin’ off the fire alarm.”

“I was not aware of this.” Erza said. Her low voice sent fear through Natsu’s spine and he curled closer around Lucy.

“’Cus you were twelve and not our boss.” Cana said blandly. “Now what do you wanna know, Stripper?”

“Uh,” Gray paused. He obviously hadn’t thought this far ahead, and Natsu couldn’t tell if he felt more agitation, pity, or glee watching him flounder.

He settled on pity, knowing that it would make everyone leave quicker if he didn’t start a fight with Gray. That could happen tomorrow.

“I specialize in fire magic. Manipulate heat and flame and shit with my hands and body. I use it to make art, but I can also kick some ass if I need to.”

Erza nodded encouragingly, picking up from Natsu. “I use space magic and enhanced memory. It allows me to master several fighting styles and weaponry in shorter amounts of time than is normal for non-magic users. I can summon armours and weapons from pockets of space between our dimension and others.”

Erza flourished her hand to the side, thumb moving to write an invisible sealing circle in the air with quick movements. The outline of a large weapon appeared in the air just in front of her hand, golden sparkles racing away to reveal hardened steel. Three feet of handle lead to a spiked ball on top, the mace the size of Natsu’s head. Aged leather went two-thirds of the way up the shaft, Erza wrapping both hands around it as it finally fully materialized.

“This,” she said as she gave a small flick of her wrist, inverting the mace and allowing it to swing gently in one hand as the other rested on her hip, the weight obviously familiar in her relaxed grip. “Is one of the easier weapons to summon I have, as there are no magical runes increasing its powers.”

Gray gawked at her, and Natsu let his eyes inspect the weapon before him. His cousin could make better weapons, more evenly weighted and suited to battle, but he wasn’t about to insult Erza or complement his cousin.

“How did you do that?” Gray’s voice cracked, Natsu snickering until Lucy pinched him sharply.

“She drew summoning runes and then she covered them with a sealing circle so the pocket wouldn’t tear our dimensional fabric.” Cana explained easily, looking bored as she leaned on the wall Natsu had spat fire at before.

“I always wondered how ya managed to do that without any words or actual marks.” Natsu interjected.

“I do have marks.” Erza stated, sighing when Natsu’s brows rose in question. Natsu felt anxiety knit his stomach as Erza closed her eyes without speaking, arms spread in either side of her with palms facing up. Her mace dematerialized into gold dust, but Natsu paid no attention to her weapon returning to wherever it came from. Instead he watched as tattoos appeared across her skin, bright red marks wrapping upwards from her wrists to her shoulders in spirals before disappearing under her
white sleeveless blouse.

Natsu couldn’t see it, but he knew more marks were appearing under her jeans and boots. Blurred red light bled through her shirt, following her collarbone and swirling patterns on her ribs, stomach, and back.

Power radiated from each mark, her loose hair gently floating with the force of it. Everyone was quiet at the awesomeness of it and Natsu was certain that he could hear the runes humming with his heightened hearing.

Her marks vanished instantaneously. Cana was the first to break the silence, clearing her throat loudly with a roll of her eyes. “If you’re done showing off, I’d like to move on now.”

Natsu forced off the stillness that had been put over him like a spell, reluctant to look away from Erza. He had known she was strong, but to have that many marks covering her body, Natsu couldn’t fathom what she was capable of. It took extreme concentration to summon the magic from a rune and control its power, and Natsu would know.

“So what kind of magic do you do?” Gray asked, eyeing Cana warily. The brunette snorted, opening a beer she had gotten from the fridge—Natsu didn’t even remember her leaving the wall—and taking a long swig before answering.

“I can see the future.”

Natsu snorted.

“Be serious.” Lucy chastised. Natsu shared a small smirk with Cana. He hadn’t gotten around to telling Lucy that Cana was a witch, or what magic she used.

“I am.” Cana said. She pulled a pack of cards from… somewhere. Natsu didn’t see any pockets on her, but he supposed if she could find a beer anywhere a deck of cards would be a breeze. With a flick of her thumb she sent the top card into the air, arcing high above her head. The rest of the deck followed the lead card, each one glowing faintly as magic activated in it.

Natsu was able to pick out each unique mark hidden in the decoration of the card back as they flashed by, coming to rest in a neat pile in her other hand. Simple enough, but Natsu could see that Cana was having fun fucking with Gray.

“I’m a card witch, which includes the ability to read the future.” Cana half explained. She tucked the deck back from where she got it, waiting for Gray to ask his questions.

“Do you have any tattoos?”

Natsu looked at Lucy, who was staring intently at Cana. He hadn’t expected her to ask any questions, thinking she’d be too exhausted from her earlier magic use to even really understand what was happening. He smiled softly as he thought about how strong she was. “Nah, all I need is my spells. Not like these two.” She gestured to Natsu and Erza.

“Tattoos give a more direct line between the magic inside and the use. It’s easy to lose control of that much magic, which would result in… unfortunate consequences for the witch.”

“Boom.” Natsu added on to Erza’s statement, making a pantomime of an explosion with his hands.

“Yes,” Erza continued dryly. “As Natsu so eloquently put it, the magic overwhelms the witch and they go ‘boom’.”
Lucy gave him a worried look, Natsu trying to smooth over her fears with a confident smirk. He was a strong witch, had been using his tattoos for years. But it touched his heart that she cared for him enough to worry.

A loud clap drew his attention away from Lucy. “Alright, I think that’s enough magic speak for Mr. Voodoo right now.” Cana walked over and placed a hand on Gray’s shoulder. “I’m sure he’s brimming with more questions, but they can wait until we deal with the dickheads in the kitchen. Erza.”

Erza nodded, walking into the kitchen. Natsu watched, bored, as she tied them up so each faced out, their heads still heavy with unconsciousness. At least he wouldn’t have to deal with their stench anymore. “The Council will be pleased that you managed to catch these four dark witches. By yourself.” She said the last word pointedly, tightening the rope around the four witches midsections forcefully as she did so. Natsu nodded. While the Council was there to stop dark witches, it didn’t mean the organization was good. They didn’t need to know about Lucy. Not yet at least.

Gods knew how many telemarketers for covens across the country would find her number.

Natsu hated the junk mail the most. He could never burn it or throw it out without having to remove an anti-lost spell.

Gray and Lucy shared a long hug goodbye, Natsu trying to not to listen in as they made promises to meet for coffee and go over everything.

Before he knew it, Natsu and Lucy were alone in her apartment again, the destruction around them - and the fact that Lucy’s door wouldn’t close- a reminder of their visitors. A reminder for Natsu how easy they had gotten off, considering who the men had been searching for.

“Let’s sleep in Natsu’s room, tonight.” Happy said softly. His high voice was soothing, and Natsu ran a hand through his fur when he felt the cat perch on his shoulder.

“Aye.” he agreed. He gently took Lucy’s hand, rubbing his thumb in small circles over her soft skin. She looked exhausted, now that everything was still around them. The three were quiet as they slowly made their way from Lucy’s apartment, through Natsu’s less disheveled one, and finally into his room. He tucked Lucy under his covers, gently hushing her small mumble of protest.

“I’ll be right back, just gonna get us something to drink. Magic can take it outta ya.” he explained. Lucy seemed to accept it, curling in on her side, Happy snuggled between her arm and chest.

Natsu did bring back a couple Powerades, after he added another two protection circles to his door. He’d have to redraw them tomorrow with the correct ingredients, but he figured his intent would be enough for tonight as he licked at his thumb.

The taste of electrified copper reaffirmed his security in his spell.
Natsu started and looked up from the spell book he’d been reading when a mug was placed in front of his nose. The creamy scent of chocolate rose from it, a hint of coffee letting him know Lucy had made him his new favourite concoction. Even if she complained about putting the chili flakes in it after snorting one by accident.

“Don’t work yourself so hard Natsu. I’m sure a stronger protection spell will come to you while my apartment is being fixed. Break-ins are covered under Renters Insurance, even if she doesn’t know where the burn marks came from.”

Natsu curled in on himself, guilt tight under his ribs. Her hands massaged his shoulders, gentle and kind in their touch. Not that Natsu deserved it. While Lucy thought she had caught him looking for stronger protection spells for Lucy’s apartment, he had actually been looking through old tracking spells.

Blood magic, if he was being specific. Igneel had one book on it, but Natsu had never needed much guidance. One or two drops were all he needed, and he did it more through instinct and what he supposed was repressed memory. Memories that he now needed to rely on if he wanted to find his dead-man of a brother.

He rubbed at his face, closing the book. He leaned into the undeserved touches Lucy graced him with, drinking her in while he could.

“Thanks Luce. At least now we have an actual reason to be livin’ together.” He gave her a tired grin as he looked up at her, bun squishing into her underboob. Both had assumed that she would be joining him for the few weeks that her apartment was fixed, a waterline apparently having been hit behind the bookshelves, which they used to explain away the soaked floors. Gray had thrown a fit when Lucy had moved her more valuable things into Natsu’s room, starting a fight when Natsu had explained that it wasn’t like it was the first time they shared a bed.

Lucy had not been impressed with him. Natsu had thought the fight with Ice Dick had helped release some left over adrenaline. He had felt better, anyway.

“Come to bed.” She whispered into his hair, kissing him softly where her lips pressed against him.

“It’s not that late, is it?” Natsu asked, closing his eyes. Lucy snorted, pulling back to take his hair out from the messy bun he had thrown it into hours earlier. Her nails raked along his scalp, soothing him even as her obvious love for him tore at his guilt. Guilt at having to leave or the danger he put her in by staying, Natsu didn’t have the mental energy to dissect.

“Natsu, it’s one am,” Lucy said dryly.

“Sorry,” Natsu mumbled. He twisted in his chair, winding his arms around her stomach as he nuzzled her bare skin. She had taken to sleeping in a sports bra and a pair of his boxers after a shower, and Natsu would willingly cut off his left pinky to keep her in the outfit. With a groan he stood, keeping his hold on her middle as he did so. Lucy squeaked, swatting at his shoulder as she wrapped her legs around his waist, settling into his hold as he walked from the desk to the bed. He dropped Lucy in the mattress, shooing away some ceramic dragons that had nested in his and Lucy’s pillows. They had been more active lately, drawn to Lucy and perching on her shoulders.

Lucy said he had neglected them. Natsu silently thought it was his magic manifesting his love of
Lucy through his previous creations. Lucy cooed as a particular red dragon circled her head before flying away with its siblings, nipping at Natsu’s ear fondly as it flew past.

“You guys are horrible.” Came a high complaint, Happy glaring at the pair where he had settled underneath the blanket. The only thing worse than waking a tired Happy was having no fish for a hungry one, and Natsu gave him the appropriate head rubs in compensation for disturbing the bed. With a purr Happy moved from his spot, rubbing himself along Lucy’s arm and body as he moved to the foot of the bed. He had learned that if he tried to sleep between them it often created a Happy sandwich as Natsu and Lucy moved to hold each other in their sleep.

Natsu and Lucy settled into bed, Natsu shucking his sweats and tank top, scarf placed gently on the nightstand.

He paused. “What about my drink?” Lucy rolled her eyes again, lifting the blankets for him to join her.

“Heat it in the morning,” she suggested as she laid her head on his chest.

“But you made it for me.” Natsu said, wrapping one arm around Lucy in a tight hold. He felt Lucy smile against his skin at his contradictory motion, and he grinned against her forehead in return.

“And you went through each of the books that were destroyed and tried to restore them.”

“Not like it worked.” Natsu grumbled, pouting as he rested his chin on Lucy’s head.

“But I appreciate the effort,” Lucy hummed, settling further against him and slipping her leg between his, like a clingy octopus. Natsu didn’t think that analogy would make Lucy smile as hard as it was making him, but he considered voicing it a few seconds longer than he probably should have anyway.

Natsu rubbed his hand along her arm, feeling the soft skin under his touch. Drinking in the warmth he felt in his bones when he was with Lucy. It was something like how magic felt when he used it, but safer. Soothing like an embrace where his magic felt like fire jumping in his blood. Both warm, but different on intensities. What he felt with Lucy was so much more than his own magic alone.

He loved her.

“Lucy?” Natsu asked, voice low in case she was asleep. She made a sound in her throat, allowing him to continue. “Are you happy? Knowin’ ‘bout magic, and me?”

He knew it was a silly question given all of, well, everything he knew about Lucy, but he needed to know. That even if she wasn’t safe, that she was happy in his arms. In his life. He needed that.

Lucy shifted in his arms, pulling back so she could frown down at him. Her brows were pinched, lips twisted downwards in concern as she studied him.

“Why would you even ask me that?” Lucy whispered, trailing her fingertips along the side of his face. Natsu shrugged, laying passive under her. “Of course I’m happy Natsu. Not only have you given me a new way to connect to my mother, you’ve also shown me a world I could only dream of. But even if magic wasn’t real, and you were just the neighbour with the blue cat and art studio, I’d still be with you. I’d still love you.”

Natsu took in a deep breath as he closed his eyes, the intake of air rattling in his lungs as he tried to press down his emotions. He didn’t need to make a sauna in his room at two am. Even after all these months he wasn’t able to control his magics flux when his emotions spiked. Especially when they
had to do with Lucy. He groaned when he felt her thumbs wipe at the tears gathering on his lashes, shying away from her touch. The last thing he wanted to do was cry in front of her. Again.

“Don’t be embarrassed about crying Natsu.” Lucy lectured softly, holding his head in her hands as he tried to turn away. Her soft words made him feel worse. Here she was, comforting him, all because he was too weak to do what he had to do. He was weak, when she needed him to be strong. And he was so goddamn weak he couldn’t even tell her how much danger he was putting her in. Gods, it was pathetic. Natsu gently pulled her hands from where they cupped his jaw, closing them so he could press his lips to her knuckles. The bruises were almost gone from her skin, but patches of mottled yellows still stained her pale hands. Natsu’s own injuries had been helped through his increased healing tattoos, but that only fed his guilt, that he should be fine and leave Lucy hurt.

“It’s my fault,” Natsu said, voice hoarse and low as he looked at Lucy.

“Natsu, no, it-” Lucy started, but Natsu cut her off forcefully.

“Yes. Yes it is Luce. They were goin’ after ya ‘cus you knew me. Because they’re obsessed with Zeref. You could’ve died Lucy, and its all my fuckin’ fault.” Natsu held her gaze. He needed to go run for a couple miles, punch a wall, something. He needed to feel his body do something, instead of sitting here useless. Lucy’s frown grew deeper, and anger scrunched her nose as she tightened her grip on Natsu’s hands.

“Was it your fault when Phantom Lord kidnapped me when I was a teenager?” Lucy asked. Natsu sighed, and Lucy continued on without waiting for him to answer. “Was it your fault when a guy got angry that a girl beat him and threw a dirty kick, breaking two of my ribs?” Natsu startled at that, a snarl pulling back his lips at the thought of someone hurting Lucy like that. She’d never told him that before, but if Erza had been there then Natsu didn’t worry that the asshole had received a just punishment. Maybe a broken hand or femur. “No. Just like it’s not your fault about what happened to Igneel. You are not to blame for existing Natsu. It’s not your fault what others do, and it’s not your responsibility to protect me.” Lucy kissed him then, hard and angry and sad, deeply and fully. Natsu kissed her back, appreciating how hard she was fighting to heal him with the simple gesture.

“But I want it to be.” Natsu mouthed against her lips, releasing her hands to run his fingers through her golden hair. He liked the way the starlight filtering through the window curtain caught in it, casting her in an ethereal glow that he thought matched her soul. Fuck magic, Lucy was an angel. His angel.

“Then if protecting me is your responsibility, protecting you is mine. Deal?” Lucy whispered back, peppering his lips with faint kisses.

“Aye.” Natsu hummed. He loved her, and he’d fight to the death for her. For her future. And given who was threatening it, Natsu didn’t feel like that statement was that far of a reach.

“Let’s get some rest,” Lucy said, voice low under the hush of night. As if Happy had any chance of falling asleep during their conversation. She settled into his side again, curling into him like he was made for her. Natsu released a shaky breath. He pushed aside his thoughts of spells to find Zeref and what he would actually do once he found him, hoping for at least a few hours of rest. At least he knew they were safe in their dreams, together.

“Aww, is little Natsu upset again?”

The cold voice sang the words, cruel and mocking as usual. Natsu curled further into himself, not bothering to open his eyes. All he would see is blackness, and at least if he closed his eyes it would
be his own dark. A loud bang came from above, a fist slamming on the top of the box Natsu was in.

“Guess ya shouldn’t’ve disobeyed our master, huh you little fucker? Ya know how long it took me to find that many cats?” Another loud bang jolted Natsu’s box, a kick this time. Natsu shook his head, whimpering as he tried to block out the voice. He had done the right thing. The way those kitties had looked at him… he didn’t know what his big brother had wanted them for, but he couldn’t help it. He had done the right thing. His face hurt where big brother had hit him, lip split and eye sore, but at least the kittens were okay. He had done the right thing.

“If we’re lucky Master will just use you instead.” The voice whispered loudly, pretending like he was sharing a secret with Natsu, and so close that Natsu feared he was in the box too. He whimpered again, trying to stop himself from crying. Crying was weak, and the others would hurt him more if he was weak. It was bad of Natsu.

“Jackal, it’s been five years. You could at least be used to him by now.” Another voice said. Natsu froze. This was worse than Jackal. Seliah could make him do things. Big brother never allowed her, but Natsu had made him really mad this time.

“Fuck off. I don’t understand why we can’t just kill the little brat and be done with it. He’s useless.” Jackal snarled, kicking Natsu’s box again, hard enough to make his head hit the back of it. Natsu bit his lip, reopening the cut as he stifled any noise. Noise was weakness. Weakness was bad. Natsu couldn’t be bad any more.

“Master has plans. Are you doubting him?” Seliah asked, and Natsu listened as Jackal scoffed.

“Course not you bitch. All I’m saying is that his blood is way better than any street cat I could get my hands on.”

Natsu blocked out the rest of their words. Big brother didn’t want him dead. He was okay. Big brother loved him. He told Natsu that every time Natsu was bad. ‘I don’t want to do this, but you have to learn’ he’d say as he closed the lid. Natsu had learned to stop crying. It only made him stay in there longer.

Suddenly light was pouring over his face, Natsu throwing himself backwards as he waited for Jackal’s claw to reach in and grab his hair. Instead it was big brother, smile kind and familiar red eyes looking down at him.

“You’re alone time is over, Natsu.” He said softly, stepping back to allow Natsu room to climb out of the trunk. Rings of runes circled the outside, all far too complex for Natsu to understand. All he knew is that they kept him in.

He hated the chest.

Natsu stood awkwardly behind his brother’s legs, fearful of Jackal. He sounded angry, and the only time that it was worse than an angry Jackal was a bored Jackal. He took his time hurting Natsu then. Jackal rolled his eyes at Natsu’s fear, cackling as he licked one of his claws.

“We found a replacement source.” He said gleefully. Natsu didn’t want to know. Not any more. Not after looking at big brother’s blood soaked hands.

“The ritual is done Natsu. Hopefully next time you won’t act out and miss it. You need to learn these things for the final casting.” Big brother lectured, and Natsu nodded. He didn’t want to upset big brother again. Not when he was so strong. Big brother was always strongest after a ritual. Natsu had never seen one, and he knew he didn’t want to, even if big brother did.
“Good boy.” He said. With a sigh he walked away, leaving Natsu beside his chest and Jackal blocking the entrance. All Natsu wanted was to go to his room. His head hurt.

“Big brother?” Natsu called, taking a step after his heavy cloak. But big brother just kept walking. Maybe he hadn’t heard Natsu. Natsu tried to speak louder, but Jackal was standing right in front of him now. He grabbed his hair, dragging Natsu along despite his protests. He kicked and screamed as he saw the door to the practice room come closer. He didn’t want to fight right now. He was tired. He couldn’t beg though, that only made Jackal hurt him more. Instead he clawed at the talons in his hair, drawing blood where they touched his scalp.

He was thrown suddenly, weightless as he sailed through the air. Like he was flying, if Natsu didn’t worry about the ground. He skidded across the cement, elbow hurting where he landed on it. “Big brother, I’m sorry!” Natsu screamed, hoping that he could be heard this time. Jackal stalked forward, like a leopard Natsu had seen once when he had snuck on the television in big brother’s room. Natsu thought that Jackal was much scarier. And much stronger too. He didn’t think a leopard could kick him so hard in the stomach.

“I’m sorry,” he sobbed, spitting out blood. He hated the taste of copper. Copper was bad. Blood was bad. Natsu was bad. “I’m sorry.”

“Oh, trust me ya little shit, you ain’t anywhere near sorry yet. But you will be.”

Natsu woke up with a gasp, body aching with the memories. He let his gaze lose focus on the ceiling, hand coming up to rub his ribs. That beating had left him with several broken ribs, a dislocated shoulder, and a broken ankle. He had been healed a day or two later, but the bruises had stayed all over his body for weeks. Zeref only ever allowed him to be healed enough to not need a hospital.

He scrubbed at his face with one hand, pausing when he felt dampness on his skin. He had been crying again.

Natsu snarled to himself under his breath. It was embarrassing how soft he had become lately. It had been years since he cried, and now it seemed like it was happening once a week.

Maybe the dream was a sign that Natsu should take a break from looking at blood magic. It was bringing up all sorts of memories that Natsu had managed to forget. It also cemented his desire to protect Lucy from that world. He’d never let Zeref get his hands on Lucy, use her for whatever sick spell he wanted to do.

He watched Lucy sleep, her mouth open slightly as she snorted softly. She was adorable, messy hair and drool on her face. Natsu loved her, and the weird expressions she made as she dreamed. He hoped she was having better dreams than he had.

“Natsu?”

Natsu sighed, turning his gaze from where he was watching Lucy to look at Happy. “Hey buddy.” At Natsu’s voice Happy crawled along his legs, curling into a ball on his chest beside Lucy’s hand.

“This isn’t good for you,” he said. His whiskers twitched, worry making his eyes dart over Natsu’s face. “You don’t sleep. You’ve barely touched your art or statues. Natsu, you’re only eating three times a day!”

“People are only posed to eat three meals a day, Happy.” Natsu tried to joke, half smile falling as Happy’s eyes narrowed on him.
“You know what I mean,” the cat hissed, Natsu surprised by the power in his voice. He looked over Natsu before sighing, his high voice sad as he released the breath. “Are you sure it’s the best idea, Natsu?” The cat asked quietly. “Zeref is powerful, and even if you find him, how do you know that’s not what he wants?”

“I don’t know Happy. I just know I can’t keep living in his shadow if I want to be with Lucy. I won’t risk her.” Natsu said. He wouldn’t allow himself to second guess his decision. It was for the best. What else could Natsu do?

“You’re my best friend Natsu.” Happy said so softly Natsu almost missed it. The cat’s ears were flattened to his head, blue fur more uncanny in the starlight. Natsu reached out a hand, gently rubbing his familiar between his ears. “I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“I won’t buddy,” Natsu assured.

“Leaving her will hurt you.” Happy said, wide eyes staring at him intently. The statement was said simply, but with such conviction it froze Natsu. Eons of experience and intelligence stared at him from Happy’s gaze, reminding Natsu that Happy was more than just his familiar or best friend.

“I don’t know what else to do.” Natsu admitted, letting his head fall back to the pillow. He felt Happy walk along his chest, curling against the side of his head as he settled down once more.

“I don’t either.” The small cat said back. Natsu chuckled dryly, it seemed that they were back where they had started. Natsu would stay with Lucy while he found a spell to track Zeref, and then he’d go to him. Alone. It didn’t matter how much stronger being with Lucy made his magic, he refused to allow Zeref to come within a city of her. Natsu counted off minutes in his head, Lucy’s quiet sleep sounds not soothing the anxious thrum under his skin.

“Hey, Happy?” Natsu called. The cat snuggled into him more, nose tickling the top of Natsu’s ear where the cool skin brushed his. “You’re my best friend too.”

Purrs vibrated along Natsu’s head, and he smiled at Happy’s happy sounds. Happy wasn’t Happy if he wasn’t, well, happy. They’d figure it out. And Lucy would be waiting for them when they did. Probably with a Lucy Kick and tears and an hour long lecture, but she’d understand.

Natsu looked down at the top of Lucy’s head again, lips pinching as he studied her peacefulness in slumber. She’d understand. She had to.

Natsu woke up slowly, the heavy feeling of being watched spiking his instincts. He looked up at Lucy, her lips thinned and gaze pointed as she looked over Natsu’s face.

“You were crying.”

Natsu smiled softly under her soft accusation, reaching up and running a hand through her hair. “Natsu you’re supposed to wake me up. We’ve been over this.” Lucy looked down at him, a mix of exasperation and sadness breaking Natsu’s heart. Natsu was starting to get sick of the pit of guilt churning between his ribs.

“It was just a bad dream,” Natsu soothed, reaching for her and pulling her down to him. She obviously wasn’t convinced, but allowed Natsu to guide her back to his chest. Natsu pressed his lips to her forehead, breathing in her warm vanilla scent as he held her close. She was all the family he needed. Well, her and Happy.

She pushed a sharp finger into his ribs, Natsu squeaking and trying to twist his body away from her
attack. “Next bad dream you wake me up and we’ll watch an episode of that nature documentary you like.” Lucy mumbled. Natsu sighed in agreement, petting her head. Why’d he have to fall in love with someone so stubborn?

“Sure Luce,” Natsu agreed. His small grin slipped from his face when Lucy pulled back suddenly, glaring down at him. She pinched his cheek and pulled on it, Natsu yelping in pain as he pouted up at her. “Why’re ya sho mean?” Natsu slurred, yanking on Lucy’s loose hair in retaliation.

“Because you’re impossible.” Lucy said sourly, shifting so she straddled Natsu’s hips and pinned him. She finally released his cheek, crossing her arms as Natsu glared up at her, raising onto his elbow and rubbing his red and sore cheek as he did so. He pushed himself up fully, resting his hands on her hips to steady himself. Natsu knocked her forehead with his, both staring the other down. A grin split his face when he realized neither would cave, and that Lucy was really his perfect Soulmate. After all, it took someone equally as stubborn to make him do anything he didn’t want. He kissed her when he saw the question grow in her chocolate gaze.

Lucy frowned into the kiss, returning it equally despite her irritation with him. Natsu raised his eyebrows in surprise at the grip she held his hair with, her anger giving her passion and making her take control in a way Natsu hadn’t seen before. He felt heat start to pool in his gut as a small part of his brain wondered what angry sex with Lucy would be like, his mind wandering to dirtier places when Lucy sucked and pulled sharply at his piercings with her teeth. Natsu would bet it’d be pretty fucking amazing.

He kept his grip light on her hips, gentle as he caressed her bare skin above his boxers. “You make me so angry sometimes,” Lucy mouthed against his neck, shifting lower as she laid claim to the skin on his shoulder. “Taking the world on your shoulders.

“We’re a team, Natsu.” Lucy said, eyes blazing as she pulled back and looked down at him. “You aren’t alone anymore.”

Natsu kissed her instead of responding, hands knotting in the loose hair on either side of her head. Lucy ‘hmphed’ into the kiss but kissed him back, accepting that sometimes Natsu couldn’t find the words he needed. She accepted him. Natsu broke the kiss with a heavy sigh, brushing her cheek with his nose as he held her warm gaze. If the world was perfect, Natsu could stay here, like this, with Lucy forever. Safe and untouched from any actual harm. Going on adventures.

But it wasn’t. He’d be damned if he and Lucy didn’t get to explore and make wild memories together though, and that was one of the things he reminded himself of now.

“Unless you want Erza breakin’ down this door too, we should probably get up.” Natsu groaned, holding Lucy tightly against him and tucking his head into her neck. Lucy finally giggled at his contradictory behaviour, turning them over so she could hug Natsu’s head and chest to her body, as if she could shield him from the world. Knowing Lucy, she was probably trying to do just that.

“As if she could break down your protection seals,” Lucy teased, and Natsu preened under her subtle praise.

“No but she’d find a way to break down the wall beside it then flaten my ass for lockin’ her out.” Natsu grumbled.

A loud bang signalled that Erza had indeed come to their apartment, though she showed restraint in knocking. Natsu rolled over, moaning loudly into his pillow and half crushing Lucy in the process. He ignored her swats, yelping loudly and tumbling from the bed when Lucy tickled his ribs. He huffed out an irritated breath, shifting a loose clump of bangs and from his eyes to the side of his
face, a smile pulling his lips at Lucy’s light giggles.

“Speak of the devil.”

“You’re dead if she hears you say that.” Lucy sang, standing and stretching in between his bent legs. Natsu rolled his eyes before he grinned up at her, running his hands up her calves and the back of her thighs. He loved how soft she was, and the way she shivered and swayed at his touch. “Natsu, as much as I’d love to see where you take this,” Lucy said, “you will not only be killed for ignoring Erza but ‘defiling’ me.” Lucy used quotation marks around Ezra’s favourite word, obviously annoyed by Erza’s overprotective streak. Natsu got it though, everyone seemed to adopt Lucy as a little sister in their friend group. He wondered how she would get along with his family.

“It’d be a fun way to go,” Natsu joked.

“I’m sure it would,” Lucy said dryly, stepping out of his hold and to his closet. Something possessive in his mind basked in the fact that Lucy had a space in his closet now. He rested on the ground, watching as Lucy flipped through the shirts she had hanging up, humming a light tune as she did so. He blinked slowly when she suddenly stripped her bra off, tossing the sportswear in the general direction of the hamper she had placed in his room. Lucy didn’t care, slipping into a long sleeved crop top, a short jean vest thrown over the light green fabric. Lucy would use a fancy term for it, baby pea green or seafoam, but Natsu thought both of those names were stupid. Obviously he could tell the difference between shades, he was an artist after all, but he hated how pretentious all those dumb names were.

He stood with a loud groan, letting Lucy know how much he didn’t want to do this, stretching his back as he followed Lucy gathering more clothes in her arms before walking out the door to the bathroom down the hall. A smile pulled his lips when he heard Lucy and Happy talking, the blue cat having wandered off to get his own breakfast before Lucy or Natsu woke up he guessed.

He grabbed a random shirt from his closet and a pair of clean looking jeans from the floor, dressing with much less consideration that Lucy had given her own outfit. If she didn’t like it she’d change him herself anyway.

“Brush your teeth and wash your face while I let Erza in,” Lucy called from the hallway. Natsu rolled his eyes as he slipped on his jeans, grabbing his scarf from the nightstand and a pair of socks from the open dresser drawer as he walked shirtless to the bathroom, like Lucy said. After he brushed his teeth -lime green plastic toothbrush beside Lucy’s light pink one- he splashed water on his face, hot water running from the tap as he knelt his head into the basin. With a sigh he looked at the mirror, turning off the running water as he reached for a towel to dry his face. He dressed, hand resting in his scarf as he looked over his reflection. What would Igneel think of his plan? Think of his life? Natsu grinned faintly when he ran a hand through his hair, knowing what his father would say about how long it had gotten. He needed a haircut, would probably do it after Erza talked to them about whatever she wanted.

He hoped Igneel would be proud of him.

Gods, did Natsu miss him. A sudden wave of longing hit him, wishing that he could introduce Lucy to his father, yell and wrestle with him when he said something to embarrass Natsu in front of her, show Lucy what a real father’s love felt like.

He set his jaw, forcing those thoughts aside. Igneel had always told him to look forward, and he would do just that. It was useless to think of might have been, and now he had his and Lucy’s futures to think.
Natsu made his way to the kitchen, grinning when Happy flew to him with an excited chirp. Lucy and Erza sat on his couch, cups of coffee in their hands, and Natsu’s cup from last night sitting on the table in front of them.

“I figured you could heat it up yourself, considering you don’t have a microwave.” Lucy said in greeting, raising a slim eyebrow at Natsu as she sipped her cup. Natsu smirked at her, plucking the cup from the old and stained wood, settling on the arm of the couch beside Lucy as he held it between his hands. With a blink Natsu had the cup of coffee steaming again, stirring it with his finger as he grinned smugly at Lucy. She elbowed him when he sucked the hot and sweet liquid from his digit, obviously displeased at his action. Natsu shrugged, it was quicker than using a spoon that he’d forget somewhere anyway. He was pretty sure there were about four in the couch from the years, not that Lucy needed to know that.

Happy purred as he jumped from Natsu’s head to Lucy’s lap, curling into a tight ball on her. Natsu let his eyes linger on her legs, a bare strip of skin calling to him from her thigh high grey socks and black high waisted shorts. Erza cleared her throat and Natsu looked at her, feigning innocence.

“So I’ve heard back from my coven master.” Erza said, looking back at Lucy.

“How’s Gramps doin’?” Natsu asked. He had a soft spot for the old man, would even go so far as to call him family.

“Master, is fine.” Erza emphasized. “He insists that you two are to come to the coven immediately. This attack was the last straw, and he wants to get Lucy somewhere safe so she can train more with you. We don’t know who else could be after your power.”

Natsu set his cup down, loud bang making Lucy jump beside him. “What do you mean ‘last straw’?” Natsu asked, standing as he did so. He felt magic lick his fingers, fists tight as they clenched and unclenched beside him. “You sayin’ I can’t protect Lucy? I’ll disintegrate anyone who even touches a hair on her head.”

“I’m sure you would try, but you saw what happened a few days ago. Do you really believe that you could do a better job than Fairy Tail?” Erza asked, tone cold as she stood to match Natsu.

“Yes.” Natsu spat, leaning into her face. His body itched for a fight, and Erza wasn’t one that backed down from his challenge.

“Then you are a fool.” She said, chin lifted and eyes narrowed. Natsu could hear the threat lying under her voice, and his magic acted in accordance, loud and pulsing and like an inferno in his blood at Lucy’s proximity.

“Lucy’s job is here!” Natsu defended hotly, stepping closer to Erza. “She’s learnin’ all that shit ‘bout magic from her sprites and me. She’s strong. We can do it, together. No one ain’t tellin’ us where to go and what to do!”

“Natsu! Think for a second of your life about the consequences!” Erza yelled, stepping into Natsu’s space as well. He felt her power swirl, invisible in the air, clashing with his. It sang to him, fire inside waiting to be called and unleashed.

“I’ve seen the consequences of covens.” Natsu snarled, quiet as he held Erza’s deadly gaze. Igneel’s family hadn’t really been a coven, something Natsu had appreciated. Covens made you blind, following orders without thought or concern for others. Sure, there were better covens than others, but Natsu knew. They were all the same. He refused to allow Lucy to fall into their trap, not until she was strong enough to defend herself properly.
He saw Erza’s eyes flare in warning, but Happy’s small voice interrupted her.

“Natsu…”

Natsu looked at where Happy had unfurled on Lucy’s lap, ears flat to his head and tail wrapped tightly around his haunch. He shook his head slightly, and Natsu let his hands hang loose beside him.

“Do ya really agree with her, buddy?” Natsu asked, trying to hide his hurt, but his voice sounded small even to him.

“Natsu,” Happy repeated, gently pushing off from Lucy and landing on Natsu’s shoulder, rubbing his head on Natsu’s chin and cheek. “I want to protect her just as much as you. And I know how you feel about covens, but we both know Fairy Tail is different.

“Besides, it would make things easier…”

Natsu hung his head. He knew Happy was right, especially the part he left unsaid. It would be safer to leave Lucy with Fairy Tail while Natsu was out hunting Zeref. He lifted a hand to tug on his scarf, soft fabric a familiar comfort under his fingertips. “You’re both my best friends.” Happy’s voice was starting to get watery, his fur soft where he was still butting Natsu’s cheek.

“Do you promise she’ll be safe?” Natsu asked, finally looking up at Erza.

“I swear on Fairy Tail’s honour.”

Natsu released his breath, nodding at Erza’s serious expression.

“Well what if Lucy doesn’t like this idea! What if, if Lucy decides she doesn’t want to go to this Fairy Tail!” Lucy said, looking up at both Erza and Natsu with an offended frown. “Neither of you get to say what I decide. And one thing is certain, that right now Natsu and I have to be together in order for me to have access to my powers, so where he goes I go.” Lucy looked down at her coffee, hands causing the porcelain cup to shake with barely restrained outrage.

“Now tell me what the hell Fairy Tail is.”
Natsu groaned loudly, falling back onto his couch and leaning his head on the top of the backrest. He pinched the bridge of his nose, closing his eyes. “Well go on and tell her ‘bout your stupid coven.”

He grumbled.

“It’s a family,” Erza snapped. Natsu kept his eyes closed as he tried to self heal his migraine away. He heard the table groan as Erza sat on it. If she broke his fucking table he would make her pay for a new one. Even if she would insist on doing it anyway, something irritating about honor probably. Or maybe just because she was one of his closest friends.

Gods, Natsu just wanted to go the fuck back to sleep.

“Fairy Tail is my coven. It’s where witches and other magical beings gather to find work and a community, a place we call home and can be ourselves. There are many covens throughout Fiore, and the world.” Erza explained, voice full of authority but gentle.

“Okay. So how do people know which coven is for them?” Lucy asked.

“People who want the same things, or have similar values. Mermaid Heel offers a safe place for women, and emphasizes strength of the soul. Blue Pegasus specializes in charms and vanity. Fairy Tail prides itself on it’s respect and approach to integrate magic in small ways into the regular world. Natsu, for example, would fit in perfectly.” Natsu groaned loudly at Erza’s pointed statement, falling to the side so he laid his head on Lucy’s lap.

“For the last time I ain’t joining any coven!”

“Why don’t you like covens, Natsu?” Lucy asked softly, placing her mug on the table beside Erza and carding her fingers through his hair. “They sound nice.”

“’Cus Erza’s leavin’ out the bit where they’re fuckin’ cults.”

“They are not-”

“Don’t pull that shit, Erza. Not after what just happened in Lucy’s apartment.” Natsu snapped, opening his eyes and holding her gaze. Erza looked away first, knuckles white where she clasped her hands in her lap. “They demand blind loyalty, brainwash you into whatever doctrine they want. They recruit young. I’ve seen it. Not all of them are bad, I know, but enough are.”

Natsu closed his eyes as he thought back to some of the members of Zeref’s coven. No, he had seen enough to know that covens were bad. And Igneel didn’t use covens, so Natsu knew his point was validated. Igneel was never wrong.

“We call those dark covens.” Erza said faintly.

“Yeah, and a dark coven’s what kidnapped Lucy when she was sixteen.” Natsu snapped back.

“Fairy Tail’s not like them Natsu. You know that.” Natsu sighed and closed his eyes at her stern voice, though there was a hint of understanding hidden faintly underneath. Erza could think whatever she wanted, deny the obvious truth to herself. Lucy had already said she wasn’t going anywhere without Natsu, so that was that. Even though Natsu had relented to Erza and Happy, there was no way Lucy would want anything to do with the type of organization that had kidnapped her.
They weren’t going to Fairy Tail.

“I think we should go to Fairy Tail.”

Natsu’s eyes flew open as he jerked upwards. He couldn’t believe it. He had to have misheard.
“What?” He said, cringing at the sharpness and volume of his question when Lucy flinched. “Luce?”
Natsu asked again, voice softer as he tried to force a small smile, unsure as he looked her over.

“I’ve known Erza for years, Natsu. I trust her.” Lucy said just as softly. She took one of his hands
between both her own, grip tightening when he instinctively jerked back. He couldn’t believe what
he was hearing. They were supposed to be a team.

“Cana is also a member of Fairy Tail, and her father.” Erza added, looking away at Natsu’s warning
glare.

“Natsu. They’re my family. They’ve been there for me at my worst moments. I trust them. Don’t you
trust me?” Lucy asked. Her eyes held hope that was tinged desperate enough to break Natsu’s heart.
“Besides, I’ll have you to protect me. My big, bad, scary dragon.” Natsu couldn’t help the wry grin
he felt pull at the corner of his mouth. He sounded just as afraid as he felt, and Lucy was right. He
could protect her, from most covens anyway.

“I’ll always protect ya, Weirdo.” Natsu said, knocking his forehead into hers gently, fingers tangling
in her hair as he cupped the back of her head.

“I’ll protect you too, Lucy.” Happy said, crawling from his perch on the arm of the couch and
slinking between Natsu and Lucy’s laps. His eyes were serious, bright and sincere.

“I know you will Happy.” She cooed, rubbing one ear fondly between her thumb and finger. Happy
purred at the motion, rubbing his head more into her hand.

“We’ll go,” Natsu said, turning to face Erza. “But if anyone even tries and hands us a pamphlet I am
draggin’ Lucy away and spittin’ fire at anyone that tries to follow.”

Erza smiled good naturedly at his threat, standing with a nod as she brushed out her skirt. “That is
fair. Now! We will be heading out tomorrow at noon.”

“What?” Lucy asked, voice cracking. “Erza, I can’t just leave like that! What will I tell Jason?
Who’ll cover my articles?” Lucy looked between Erza and Natsu, as if he had the answers. Which
honestly was a little sad, if Lucy thought Natsu had any idea what Erza was going on about,
well, ever.

“I will handle it,” Erza brushed off, Lucy to gawking at her hopelessly. “But I expect you to pack
light, there won’t be much room in my car with the three of us.”

“Hey!” Happy chimed in, hurt making his eyes water and muzzle twitch.

“My apologies,” Erza soothed with a kind smile, “the four of us.”

“Car?” Natsu choked. Gods he was going to puke. Erza’s driving made Lucy look like a turtle, and
he already felt near death in any vehicle with her.

“Is there a problem?” Erza asked, eyes flashing as she stared down Natsu. He gulped hard, shrinking
into the couch at her deathly look of challenge. He’d spent all his courage taking her on before, and
he wasn’t sure he’d be able to survive the second round.
“Aye sir,” he said instinctively, glaring at Happy’s quiet sniggers. Erza didn’t seem to mind, expression relaxing into a pleased smile as quickly as murder had flashed across her face.

“Good,” she nodded, leaving with only a short farewell and without waiting for a reply. Natsu and Lucy both continued to stare at the closed door in shock.

“Lucy I’m going to die if we let her drive.” Natsu wailed, throwing himself into her lap. “Don’t make me goooo.”

Happy landed on his head, batting at his loose hairs that had curled up from lack of brushing. “You wouldn’t last two days before she tracked you down.” Happy said matter of factly. “She’s crazy.”

“Be nice,” Lucy chastised, but no heat to her words.

“He’s not wrong,” Natsu agreed sulkily, whining loudly when Lucy flicked his ear. With a groan Natsu pushed off of Lucy, standing as Happy resettled on his head.

“You need a haircut,” Happy said helpfully. Natsu rolled his eyes at his familiar’s short attention span, but grinned at Lucy’s light giggle.

Natsu looked around the living room, letting his mind drift as he took stock of what needed to be done before Erza dragged his ass into the Death-mobile that was her van. He’d have to put some elixir in his plants so they wouldn’t die for however long he was gone, and then of course some toys up in the spare room for the dragon figurines. They got antsy if he wasn’t around for their magic to feed from for too long. Natsu supposed he could put them into hibernation, but he hated that. Who was he to decide that for them? So the living things were dealt with, and he’d have to contact his customers and let them know their orders would be put in hiatus. He’s probably make up some sickness, that usually got them off his back until he could settle down again. Natsu frowned as he eyed the half finished ash painting. He could probably finish that tonight, if he blasted the music and set himself to it. He’d really been in a groove with animal anatomy lately, and the pack of wolves he’d sketched begged to be finished, like the painted background was. Lucy had been the one to suggest wolve wisps on a desert background, and Natsu had loved the challenge of creating the texture of the multi toned sand and sky at dusk.

“Hey, Natsu?” Lucy called. Natsu looked at her over his shoulder from where he had started to put away his dried plant powders and other ingredients from his work table. “Can you tell me some more stuff about witches?”

“Like what?” Natsu hummed, walking to his cabinets balancing several magically infused canisters of paint, a few pouches of herbs, and the bones he had been half reading fortunes with for shits and giggles. He was no Cana, but he wasn’t half bad at premonitions, and he and Happy liked to play around with bones he wasn’t using for his more intense spells. He dumped the dried leaves, petals, and stem pouches onto the free space between his potted plants for spells that required fresh ingredients, the dragons swooping in to take them to their proper places. At least his little ceramic figurines were in a good mood, usually they wouldn’t deign to help him.

“I don’t even know what to ask about,” Lucy joked, but Natsu caught the low anxiety underneath and how she worried at her lower lip. “Umm, you mentioned something about pamphlets?”

Natsu snorted, nudging Happy to go see Lucy as he continued to attempt to clean up the wreck that was his living room. Even with Lucy there, it was a small chaos. Oh, there was the mug Natsu had been looking for! He sniffed it, pulling away with a curled lip. Definitely not paint water, and definitely not drinkable. “Pamphlets,” he said as he sat the mug of ominous liquid in the center of the bench beside an open book, “are one of the many ways nosy ass witches will try and convince ya
to join their coven.

“Some of them try and corner ya and tell ya all about how amazin’ they are, and others will bring it up casually. I get spam mail from them all the time, even though I keep fuckin’ movin’. I don’t even know how they find me.”

“Erza?” Happy suggested, looking at Natsu upside down from where he laid on his back, batting at a piece of string Lucy held for him. Probably from one of the half destroyed pillows he kept on the couch.

“Nah,” Natsu shook his head. His eyes narrowed when he thought through it a bit more. “Probably those sirens down at Ichyia’s.” He grunted, Happy nodding thoughtfully in agreement.

“Sirens?” Lucy asked, cocking her head.

“Yeah, pesky bastards. They use their voices to sway humans and control their emotions, which means they can usually convince people to do whatever they want. The ones I know are harmless really, but gods are they annoying. Ya met them before actually.” Natsu scratched the side of his head as he thought about Ichyia’s shop, the front for the coven Blue Pegasus’s Hageon outpost. He’d been meaning to make a supply run for a while, and he figured if he left a list with Ichyia his coven master should be able to order in his specialty requests.

“There are things other than humans?” Lucy asked, incredulous.

“Obviously,” Happy chimed, purring as he rubbed his head into her chest in request for pets. “I’m not human, your sprites aren’t human, demons aren’t human. Lotsa things aren’t human!”

“You have a point,” Lucy mumbled, reluctantly giving Happy ear scratches. “So what do witches do when they aren’t in covens?” she asked, shifting to sit cross legged on the couch, watching Natsu putter.

“They don’t.” Natsu replied dryly, flipping distractedly through a book for a certain spell. What would it be under, magical repression or cloaking?

“What do you mean?” Lucy pressed, ignoring Natsu’s pleased chirp as he found the set of runes and incantations he wanted. He didn’t know how strong a spell would be that he silent cast with Lucy around after a few weeks, so he planned on doing it the old fashioned way. Plus Lucy still fawned over watching him do magic.

“Witches never not go in covens. Hell, at the very least they have small groups like my old man did. I’mma outlier, but so is my dickhead cousin, but he ain’t got all his screws tightened in that stupid head’a’is anyway.” Natsu snorted as he thought of Gajeel. Maybe he’d convince Erza to stop by Crocus on their way to Fairy Tail. He hadn’t seen him in forever, and no one threw a punch like his cousin. Except maybe Gray, but Natsu would much rather wrestle with the metal head than Ice Dick.

“Why don’t you like covens?” Lucy asked quietly. Natsu sighed, looking up from the ancient book he was hunched over. Lucy looked unsure if she should be asking him at all, and Natsu reached up and ran his hand along the side of his scarf, pillowy fabric well known under his fingertips. Natsu hated that Lucy felt like she couldn’t ask him anything, even if it was the truth.

“Because I grew up in one under Zeref. I know first hand how easily people get sucked into their mindset and throw away any humanity they had, all for their master’s orders.” Natsu said finally, tense air between him and Lucy building to suffocating levels before he broke. His shoulders dropped afterwards and he shifted on his feet under Lucy’s stricken expression. “Zeref was so far
into the dark arts and forbidden magic that he makes those guys that broke into your place look like a bunch of wanna-be high school students playing with a book they found in a attic. And yeah, not all covens are like Zeref’s cult, but the principles apply. You verses someone else, with rules and codes and more dumb rhetoric that don’t mean shit. Plus, fuck, if havin’ a flyer shoved in your face at every convention don’t wanna make ya never join a coven then I don’t know what will.”

“Flyers and conventions?” Lucy asked, slight disbelieving smile curling her lips. “That sounds so… normal.”

Natsu snorted as he shared a look with Happy. “Witches are people, Weirdo. We do all the same shit. But I guess it’s less of a convention than a giant pop up market. The biggest one if the Wiccan Traveling Tradeshow, and it pops up in different cities every six months for two weeks or so. Recruiters and people from covens set up booths to sell potions or specialty charms or ingredients. There’s also some performance booths. It’s pretty cool actually, I think you’d like it.”

Lucy’s eyes widened and began to sparkle with each word Natsu said, and he couldn’t help the grin that broke out as he watched her excitement grow. His heart swelled at how eager she was to join his world. She was so weird it was no wonder she’d fit in so perfectly.

“So what does Fairy Tail do?” Lucy questioned, absentmindedly resuming her petting of Happy, finger nails gently dragging from between his ears and along his spine, drawing low purrs from the cat.

“Fairy Tail takes up a whole row!” Happy chimed, splayed out in her lap and under her touches. Natsu wasn’t ashamed to say he was jealous. Maybe he could bug Lucy for head scratches after dinner. “Erza does sword dances, and then Cana and Loke do simple tricks with their own magic! Plus Fairy Tail sells the best ingredients for Natsu’s smoke art and they’re the only ones Natsu trusts to find old spell books. A few other covens have big displays too, but they’re not as good as Fairy Tail.”

“Loke’s in Fairy Tail?” Lucy asked. Natsu cringed at her high pitch, and at the realization he’d forgotten to mention that before. “Is there anyone I know that isn’t magical?” She balked at Natsu, but all he could do was shrug.

“Gray’s pretty fuckin’ average.” Natsu suggested. He snickered at her eye roll, dodging the coaster she had brought from her place that she threw at his head. “But seriously. People who have an affinity for magic kinda end up clumping together. And Lucy, you’re some kind of magical.” Natsu winked at her, cackling as she blushed while whipping a pillow at his face. He caught it easily, sticking out his tongue at her.

“I swear you are never allowed to get drunk with Loke again.” Lucy grumbled

“Ya never blush that hard when he flirts with you,” Natsu pointed out, heart thumping as Lucy blushed deeper.

“That’s because Loke flirts with everyone and I don’t want to see him naked all the time.” Lucy countered, bright grin flashing across her face as Natsu’s heart lurched into his throat, making him choke. Damn his stupid heart for making him act like a dumbass teenager. They’d had sex already! Lots of it! So why did his mind blank and blood roar when she talked like that?

“Well all ya have to do is ask,” Natsu purred once he got his tongue back under control. He left the half cleaned mess on his work table, stalking towards Lucy and her cheshire smile. Happy made a sound of disgust as he slunk away, leaving Lucy to press her hands into the cushion between her legs, giving Natsu a wonderful view down her shirt. Which he knew she was doing on purpose by
the clever curl of her lips and bat of her heavy eyelashes. He leaned over her, hand gripping the couch back beside her head and other twirling a loose strand of golden hair between his finger and his thumb.

“Is that all?” Lucy asked innocently, head tilting upwards.

“Yeah.”

“I swear to all the stars in the sky if you two are about to fuck I will drown this entire building.”

Lucy yelled loudly, hand that was tangling gently in his scarf creating a fist at the sudden voice, yanking Natsu towards the couch forcefully. Natsu for his part swore extensively, words muffled by the facefull of aged fabric he was currently breathing in.

“Aquarius, what are you doing here?” Lucy asked, shoving Natsu off of her. He settled into the couch, arms crossed as he glared at the floating mermaid. Aquarius returned it equally, and it took all of Natsu’s wild power not to flick a flame at her. Maybe Happy would like grilled sprite more than raw tuna.

“Well since that bossy little witch has decided to hurry up your training, that means that I get stuck having to deal with you.” Aquarius huffed, flicking her hair over her shoulder as she swam closer to Lucy through the air. Natsu’s glare hardened at Aquarius’ words. He didn’t get how she could be such a bitch to Lucy, especially considering the way the blonde treated the sprite with nothing but respect.

“I’m sorry if it’s an inconvenience?” Lucy said, more confused than apologetic.

“It’s fine.” Aquarius snapped, and Natsu rolled his eyes. As if a powerful sprite like Aquarius would do anything she didn’t want to do. “So you finally decided to take your training seriously. And combined with the adequate power you displayed yesterday, that means I have to teach you about contracts and travelling tethers.”

“Oh, Lucy was more than ‘adequate’,,” Natsu defended. He sputtered when Aquarius shot a blast of water at his face, but otherwise ignored him.

Stupid fish woman.

“So what are contracts?” Lucy asked, also ignoring Natsu.

“Contracts mean that a sprite can only be tethered to one witch. It unlocks more power for the witch, but also means that they are tied more closely to life force of the sprite. It takes incredible strength of soul for a person to handle the connection to a being of power, such as a sprite like me.” Aquarius explained, voice condescending and bored, but otherwise neutral. An improvement really. “The more powerful a sprite the more demanding the contract, but it must be equally agreed upon so that neither party is taken advantage of. Your mother, for example, had several contracts with sprites, myself included.”

Lucy worried her lower lip, fingers playing with the hem of her shorts. “How do I form a contract?” She asked.

“Gods, do I have to do everything?” Aquarius complained. With an agitated flick of her tail the key tethers for Capricorn and Cancer appeared in the air in front of Lucy’s face, who instantly reached out to cradle them. “Call them and ask them yourself.”

“Capricorn, Cancer, would you please come out?” Lucy asked, smile brightening at the chiming
sounds and rotating rune circles that came from both keys. Now that Natsu was seeing it again, he noticed the zodiac symbology for each sigh that coincided with the sprites name, repeated between ancient runes Natsu didn’t recognize, and moving in clockwise and counterclockwise rings around one another. The light was soft and golden, wavering slightly so that Natsu had to watch a symbol for several seconds before he could see all of it. With a bright flare the magic light seemed to solidify before imploding in on itself. In their places now floated two six inch tall sprites, Cancer and Capricorn.

“Lucy baby!” Cancer greeted, snapping his scissors like that of a crab’s claw as he spoke. Or maybe his hands were really claws. The sprite kept moving so fast Natsu couldn’t really tell, and he lost interest in favor of watching Capricorn sniff at Lucy’s cup of coffee. The image of the goat headed man plunging into the cup by accident was funny enough that Natsu almost considered flicking a spark of energy to cause it happen. But even Natsu wasn’t dense enough to piss off a sprite as powerful as Capricorn. On purpose, at least.

“Hello Cancer, Capricorn. How are you?” Lucy asked, bright smile drawing a fond look to cross over the goat man’s face.

“We are well, Lucy.” He said with a shallow bow, one arm crossed behind his backs and the other placing his hand over his heart. These sprites were weird even by Natsu’s standards. No wonder they liked Lucy so much. “We hear you are looking to make contracts?”

“I am!” Lucy agreed eagerly. “I would like to make contracts with all the sprites I know actually, but I don’t even know where to start. Is there an oath I have to take, or a ritual?” Lucy’s nose scrunched in worry as she rambled, easy chuckles from both sprites in her hands and an irritated huff from Aquarius making Lucy blush and peter off.

“Nah, baby, it ain’t that hard! All you have to do is agree on a set of limits and calling times with us.” Cancer said, snapping his scissors-claws for emphasis.

“For instance, I am available for whenever you call,” Capricorn continued, “but I request that you state the nature for my appearance when you call me. Whether for training, battle, or simply to talk.”

Natsu held back a snicker at Lucy’s confused blink as she stared at Capricorn. “Did we just form a contract?” Lucy asked in a loud whisper. Natsu finally broke, laughing loudly with his head thrown back. She was just too cute sometimes. Natsu almost broke into another fit at her harsh glare, falling easily when she -literally- kicked him off the couch.

“You weirdo, as if it would be that easy! You need to say ‘I Lucy form a celestial contract with the sprite Capricorn’ or some formal shit like that.” Natsu explained, crossing his legs under the table.

“Natsu is right,” Capricorn said, Natsu easily returning the small smile the sprite gave him.

“Okay,” Lucy said, not sounding convinced. She took a deep breath and settled into her spot on the couch more, expression becoming relaxed as she concentrated. “I, Lucy Heartfilia, form a contract with the sprite Capricorn.”

“I accept.” Capricorn said. “My tether is the key you hold, and I am bound to no other until I am released.”

Natsu jerked back as Capricorn was enshrouded in the same golden light that he had appeared from, vague outline of shimmering light expanding until it was a six and a half foot tall mass, sparkles falling away and dissolving into the air before touching the ground in heavy rings until all that was left was the now full sized sprite.
“What the shit?” Natsu asked at the same time as Lucy’s gasp. Capricorn’s lips twitched, and he bowed again.

“I have to say it is refreshing to be my full size on this plane again,” Capricorn hummed.

“Come on, baby! My turn now!” Cancer interjected, wagging his hips in what Natsu thought was supposed to resemble a salsa, and snapping his scissor-claws in time to the imaginary beat. “My conditions are that I get to play with that gorgeous hair once a month and I’m available anytime except Sundays!”

“I, Lucy Heartfilia,” Lucy said, confidence palpable as she smiled at Cancer, “form a contract with the sprite Cancer.”

“I accept, baby! My tether is the key you hold, and I am bound to no other until I am released.” A similar encasement of light formed around Cancer until he too was standing in Natsu’s living room, this time only around six feet, not including his weird hair. Natsu was able to see now that if he concentrated on Cancer’s hands he was holding scissors, but if he let his eyes relax and used the enhanced eyesight his tattoos gave him permanently then Cancer’s hands were indeed claws. He hated spritely manipulation, it always gave him a headache to try and figure out which was real and which was the illusion.

“Now let me at that hair baby! I’m imagining platinum highlights and bringing the length down to mid lower back-” Cancer started eagerly, the sprite actually pouting when Capricorn stopped him from taking another step towards Lucy by a hand on his chest.

“I apologize for Cancer’s, enthusiasm, Lucy. He is just excited to finally be contracted to you, as we all will be.”

“But her hair’s so pretty Cappy!” Cancer complained. “It’s just begging for my magic touch, ain’t that right baby?”

Lucy giggled, but Natsu felt something in his chest clench at the strained curl her voice carried. He looked closer at her, worry spiking at the pinch in the corner of her lips and the dullness that started to creep into her eyes. “Oi, you alright?” he asked, resting a hand on her knee as he peered up at her.

“What? Oh, yeah, I’m fine-” Lucy startled, blinking several times as she answered him and tried to smile more convincingly.

“You are not fine, you brat.” Aquarius snapped, darting into Lucy’s face. “Surely even someone as dense as you can feel the drain having two contracts and a tether open is putting on you. If you want to be able to make contracts with all of your ‘friends’ before tomorrow you have to be smart about it. That means closing their tethers before you pass out.” Lucy blinked at Aquarius’ lecture, nodding mutely.

“Thank you Aquarius.” She said before looking at the two full sized sprites in front of her. “Thank you for forming a contract with me, and you may… return… I guess?” Lucy looked between the sprites in confusion.

“Just think of our tether closing for now as you hold the key, and it will obey your wish.” Capricorn explained kindly. His smile grew on his weird furry face when Lucy nodded, closing her eyes with another deep breath. Natsu watched her hands, partially entranced by the strength in her slim fingers as they gripped the golden keys tightly, and partially curious as to what would happen. With another chime and a much more solid and bright summoning circle Cancer and Capricorn dissolved into a burst of light.
Lucy’s shoulders drooped slightly, taking a heavy breath as she finally released the tension she had been holding keeping the tethers open.

“You’ll be less likely to kill yourself if you open them through their gates now with the tethers as concentration point.” Aquarius drawled, inspecting her nails. “That requires concentration and a set incantation, which I’m not sure you have enough brains to memorize, but I know Capricorn would love to try anyway. I’ll tell you the incantation after you make contracts with all the other sprites in your possession. If you manage to keep me here and all the others, then I’ll form a contract with you myself.”

Lucy brightened at that, clutching the keys in her hand to her chest in joy. Natsu didn’t get it, why would Lucy want to be contracted to Aquarius? She was the worst. “Okay!” Lucy agreed, melted chocolate eyes glinting in determination despite her fatigue.

Natsu watched with bored interest as Lucy made contracts with several sprites, including the one from her makeup or jewelry holder, a perverted cow that kept eyeing Lucy’s chest and drawing a warning growl from Natsu as he damn near drooled over her, and an old man sitting in front of a giant silver cross. Natsu’s interest was piqued by the fact that Lucy chose keys as the portable tether for each new sprite, the sprite themselves conjuring the item from the air and gifting it to Lucy with a pleased smile. At this point Natsu was laying on the couch beside Lucy, feet in the air and head hanging off the edge of the cushion as he tried to guess what each one would look like by their name.

He thought his ideas were much better than what anyone actually looked like, but it was a way to pass the time aside from making faces at Aquarius. An action that had caused Happy snicker loudly when Natsu got a face full of ocean water from the irritated sprite.

“Canis minor, would you please come out?” Lucy asked, exhaustion clear in her voice and the way her hands were beginning to shake as she held her several key tethers. Natsu flailed in his spot and fell to the floor with a heavy crash as Lucy squealed and launched herself at the sprite that had appeared in the air. “Doggie!” Lucy shrieked happily, rubbing her cheek lovingly on the head of the shaking sprite.

“Pun pun!” It said, returning the nuzzles. Or maybe it was just shaking harder.

“Oi, that’s the figure I made ya!” Natsu said, pointing at the sprite incredulously.

“Plue, I remember you! You were always there for me to hug when mom was sick.” Lucy sighed, ignoring Natsu. “If I had known the sprite Old Man Crux told me was connected to the trace on my mother’s desk was you I would have summoned you sooner.” The weird shaking white snowman - which was actually supposed to be a dog- ‘pun’ed again, pushing it’s weird pointy orange nose into Lucy’s cheek. No wonder Lucy was so weird if she had grown up around Aquarius and Plue. Natsu made his way back onto the couch as Lucy made her contract with Plue, squeezing the larger sprite tightly to her chest before he disappeared back to the celestial plane.

Aquarius sighed loudly, swimming through the air to float in front of Lucy again. “I can’t believe you actually were able to summon a dozen sprites in a row.” She grumbled, slight pride obvious in the lack of insults she spat at Lucy. “My conditions are that you can only summon me once every two days, I leave whenever I damn well please and you cannot force close my gate, and i have free reign to drown your boyfriend if he says or does anything stupid.”

“Oi!”

“Agreed.” Lucy smiled giddily.
“Oi!” Natsu repeated, sulking at Lucy’s pat on his thigh.

“She won’t actually drown you, Natsu.” Lucy assured. “I think.”

Natsu gulped at the wicked grin Aquarius shot him, twitching back at the mermaid’s jerk of her urn. Happy landing on his head and kneading his scalp with gentle purrs the only thing keeping Natsu from dumping a black fire potion on her.

“And before you ask for one of those blasted keys as my tether, I think you should know how Layla and I were bonded.” Aquarius said curtly, Lucy snapping her mouth shut with a soft clack of her teeth hitting. “Your mother viewed me so highly that in order to make sure my tether would not be in danger she used her body as the vessel. She had my symbol placed on her ankle, and there it stayed until she released me before she passed away. My final condition is that you show me the same respect as your mother did.”

Before Natsu could blink Lucy had said ‘okay’. He sputtered, Happy also voicing protests before both were silenced by a motion of Aquarius’ urn and her deadly glare.

“I request that you combine your symbol with my mother’s key on the back of my neck.” Lucy continued, holding the sprite’s serious gaze. Aquarius nodded, a gentle smile curling her lips for half a second before the mermaid forced it down.

“I agree to these terms.”

“I, Lucy Heartfilia, form a contract with the sprite Aquarius.” Lucy said, firm and even and with no trace of the strain her magic use was putting on her.

“I accept. My tether is the symbol on your skin, and I am bound to no other until I am released.”

Aquarius now floated in the room, the same size as she had been when Lucy had summoned her during their fight. She flicked her hair over her shoulder, looking over Lucy mildly impressed. “That was a solidly formed contract, Lucy. No waver at all in your magical concentration.” she praised, Lucy positively glowing under Aquarius’ niceness. “There’s no need to look at me like that,” she huffed, soft blush obvious as she looked away sharply. “Do you want to know the summoning incantation or not, you brat?”

“Yes please, Aquarius.” Lucy nodded, not fooled by the mermaid’s return to previous rudeness.

“Repeat after me; ‘I open the gate of the mermaid, Aquarius’.”

“I open the gate of the mermaid, Aquarius.” Lucy said. Natsu didn’t notice anything happen, but Lucy looked less exhausted as she sank back into the couch.

“And now that this is over, I am heading back to the celestial plane, to see my useful boyfriend. Try not to get killed without me being there to watch, got it brat? I’d hate for my tether to be broken without my being there.” Natsu rolled his eyes at the puff of sparkles and high chime Aquarius left behind as she returned to wherever she came from.

“I hate her.” Natsu said flatly.

“But you love me, so you deal with her.” Lucy hummed, falling into Natsu’s side.

“I dunno, she’s pretty horrible.” Natsu teased, kissing the top of Lucy’s head.

“But if you break up with me then you won’t get anymore head.” Lucy countered, stretching and
snuggling deeper into him.

“Looks like I’m stuck with the demon fish then, huh?” Natsu said, Lucy giggling tiredly as she nodded.

“Knew that’d keep you.”

“Aw, you know me so well.”

“If you can’t appeal to the heart go for the dick.” Lucy and Natsu broke into snorts and soft laughs as Natsu laid them both out along the couch, Lucy resting on his chest and between his legs as he played with her hair.

“Who taught ya that one?” he asked.

“Who do you think?” Lucy laughed.

“Cana.” They both said together, breaking into another quite fit of laughter. Silence filled the room, warm and thick like the honey that scented Lucy’s hair. Happy sat curled in contentment on Lucy’s back, purring happily at being near.

Natsu drew her hair to the side, running fingers through it loosely as he basked in her aura and the softness of silk between his fingers. He drew along the design of the tattoo on her neck, tracing the well known image expertly, the addition of Aquarius’ symbol in the center of the hand piece of the key.

“How come you got all their tethers to be keys?” Natsu asked, continuing to run his fingertip along her skin.

“It felt right.” Lucy shrugged, sighing heavily into Natsu’s scarf. “Wake me up when you know what you want for dinner,” she mumbled, soft snores following her words quickly. Natsu chuckled silently as he ran his hand along the side of her face.

“I love you so much, Weirdo,” he hummed, head thumping as he let it fall against the arm of the couch. He would do anything to protect her future.

Even if he really didn’t fucking want to.
There was almost an eighty percent chance that Natsu was trying to kill her.

“What. Did. You. Do. To. Your. Hair?” Lucy asked, gripping the doorframe of the bathroom tightly. So tightly, she wouldn’t be surprised to see her fingerprints moulded into it in fact.

“Uh, cut it?” Natsu said, tone making it more of a question. “You alright Luce, or do ya still need some rest after summoning all those sprites yesterday?” He walked towards her, putting his hand on her forehead as he eyed her critically. Eyes that had fringe just barely touching his eyelashes from his cut bangs, the right side of his head shaved to a buzz cut while the rest remained two or three inches long, all swept to the left in spikes and stylized chaos. Not that Natsu actually put effort into it. No, he always just happened to look like he’d been pulled from a fucking magazine spread of Lucy’s fantasies.

“You bastard.” Lucy hissed, pushing him deeper into his already small bathroom. “We leave in less than an hour, trapped in a van with Erza for gods know how long, and you decide now is the time for this!”

“For what, you weirdo?” Natsu asked, eyes narrowed at her outburst but still mostly lost.

“You hair!” She wailed, fisting at his tight black tank top. “You look like some rockstar with piercings and tattoos already, and now you cut your hair like this!”

Lucy ran her hands through the shaved portion of his hair in emphasis, fingers curling around the short pink hairs, their soft texture making Lucy bite her lip and run her hand through them a second time. “How could you do this to me?” She pouted.

Natsu gaped at her, flush hearing his cheeks as she continued to pet him. Gods, and it made his piercings even more noticeable…

“Luce?” Natsu choked out, trapped between the wall and Lucy’s body as she pressed kisses to his neck above his scarf.

“I didn’t even know you could cut your own hair,” Lucy mumbled, dropping her hands and sneaking her fingertips under the hem of his shirt. It had been days since her and Natsu had done anything more than kiss, and the need for physical exertion burned in her muscles. Lucy would gladly take riding Natsu over sparring with Kagura or studying with Capricorn, and if she were honest she didn’t know when her next chance might pop up.

Erza had the nose of a bloodhound when it came to indecency.

“Uh, your crab sprite did it for me. Insisted on a new ‘do’ before heading out to Fairy Tail.” Natsu rasped, nuzzling her ear and ghosting his lips over the thin skin there. His hands snaked along her back, lifting up her shirt the way she lifted his, eager to touch bare skin.

He whined loudly when Lucy pulled back sharply. “How did Cancer contact you?”

“Uhhhh,” Natsu said, eyes fogged and hair ruffled from Lucy’s touch. He leaned in to kiss her again, pouting when Lucy pulled back again. “Lushi~”

“Natsu, how did you contact my sprite?” Lucy pressed.
“I dunno,” Natsu sighed, “he just kinda popped outta the air and said he would cut me if he couldn’t ‘fix’ my hair. Have you seen his claws Luce? Those things are fuckin’ sharp!”

“They can do that?” Lucy asked.

“What else would claws be good for, Weirdo? Opening pickle jars?” Natsu replied incredulously, whining again when Lucy pinched his arm.

“Not that you jerk! I mean appearing whenever they want.”

“Well, it’s harder for ‘em, but not impossible for a sprite as strong as the crab dude.” Natsu shrugged, scratching the freshly shaved side of his head. “‘Sides, he seemed real antsy about getting to cut someone’s hair. I think he has an addiction.”

Lucy rolled her eyes, but couldn’t help a small grin at Natsu’s suspicious whisper. She nudged his chest with her shoulder, turning with a sigh to exit the bathroom.

“Where do ya think you’re goin’?” Natsu asked, Lucy pausing as heat from his hands settled on her hips. She tilted her head back with a hum, eyelids fluttering closed at the feel of Natsu’s lips along her jaw.

“To make sure your medicine was in the bag.” Lucy teased. She giggled when Natsu nipped at her ear in retaliation, fingers interlacing as her hands settled over Natsu’s on her body. She felt his heartbeat along her back when he guided her to rest against his body.

“Don’t you know it’d be rude to jump me like that, but not finish the job?” Natsu tutted, pulling on the lobe of her ear gently, Lucy feeling his wide grin against her skin.

“It would, would it?” She hummed, pressing her ass against Natsu’s hips.

“Yeah,” Natsu breathed.

Lucy turned, smiling up at him brightly as she pressed her chest against his, arms winding behind his neck and fingers gently tugging the baby hairs at the base of his skull. “Well I can’t be rude.”

With a bright grin that forced his eyes closed Natsu scooped up Lucy, her giggles high and loud as she settled her legs on either side of his hips and allowed Natsu to carry her to his bedroom.

“You two better make it quick or I’ll sell you out to Erza.” Happy grumbled, flying from the bed quickly. “And don’t be gross!”

Lucy rolled her eyes as Happy slammed the door shut with his tail around the knob. They had already apologized extensively for that time he fell asleep in the closet and woke up to… intimate noises.

Lucy had spent nearly half her paycheck on fish. She actually wasn’t sure if Natsu was fully forgiven.

“Then don’t listen!” Natsu called after the blue cat.

“Natsu,” Lucy whined, squeezing her thighs around him to draw his attention back to her. “He’s right about time. So are you going to waste it bickering with your cat or by fucking me?”

Lucy grinned up at Natsu when he dropped her on the bed, hands behind her back and chest forward. She wiggled them teasingly when she caught Natsu’s gaze flicking down to her cleavage
exposed by the low cut tank top. “You’re such a tease,” Natsu smirked down at her.

“You love it,” Lucy said. She bit her lip and giggled when Natsu pushed her down to the mattress, his grip firm on her shoulder where he pinned her.

“I do.”

Lucy sighed into the kiss Natsu pressed to her lips, his one hand under her shirt and squeezing her breast in greedy touches. She panted when Natsu pulled back, settling between her spread legs as he pushed her shirt to her collarbone. She watched Natsu lick his lips as he stared at her breasts spilling between his fingers, as he pinched and coaxed her nipples to tight buds that he could tease and make Lucy twitch under him with, the burning and possessive fire he focused on her. All of it made Lucy’s blood sing and her core knot in desire. How could he make her so wet just by fondling her breasts?

“Natsu,” Lucy whined, reaching up and tangling her fingers in his freshly cut hair. He chuckled at her needy tugging, pressing his thumbs into her nipples and making her arch into his touch.

“Lucy,” Natsu said in the same tone. He chuckled again at her pout, a look that dissolved when she moaned as Natsu rolled her right nipple between rough fingers and pinching her tightly. Lucy pulled him to the bed beside her, quickly sitting up and stripping her shirt off her and dropping it to the mattress beside them. Natsu sat up as well, grin wide and eyes sparkling with unrestrained joy at Lucy’s taking charge. His hands ran up and down her sides, eager to touch her already well-mapped skin. “You’re gorgeous.”

Lucy flushed at his compliment, grinning stupidly back at him. “Shut up,” she mumbled kissing his lips, or at least trying to. It was less of a kiss and more of pressing two smiling mouths together, teeth clacking and causing both to giggle more. Lucy soon solved that problem by turning her attention to the piercings on his ear, counting them as her tongue flicked over them. Three piercings hung from the lobe of his left ear, matched by the silver studs on his right. Lucy lifted her focus higher, taking the one bar between her teeth and tugging at it gently.

Natsu moaned low at it, her confidence surging at the heady noise and the way Natsu’s hands gripped her ass. Lucy rose onto her knees, leaning over Natsu and unwinding his scarf from his neck as she trailed her lips along his cheekbone. She needed him. Needed to feel him around her and inside her, all of her sense overwhelmed by Natsu. She didn’t know what the future held, but she knew what she held her in arms right now: Love.

Heat flared around them, making Lucy’s remaining clothes stick to her skin, though Natsu’s own burning touch was not unwelcome despite the temperature rising around Natsu.

“Why’d ya hafta put on pants today?” Natsu grumbled, kneading the firm muscle -thanks to rigorous training and an impressive amount of daily squats, if Lucy did say so- of her ass. His lips were rough and hot against her skin, pleasant shivers racing along Lucy’s spine despite his complaining tone.

“Because we are going in a car for an extended period of time, and I’d rather be comfortable. Besides, these are the pants that made you check out my ass after breaking into my apartment.” Lucy hummed, cupping his face in her hands and grinning down at him, noses brushing.

“Technically Happy broke in first,” Natsu said, light tone making Lucy roll her eyes.

“Did Happy check me out too?”

“Nah,” Natsu drawled, pulling back from her slightly. His eyes ran over her breasts and bare stomach, slow as they traveled her curves and drank in the sight of her. “I totally checked you out.
Still do, and can ya blame me?”

Lucy mewled when Natsu cupped her breast again, thumb rolling over her tight nipple in playful touches and unhurried exploration. Lucy knew he loved to try and get new responses from her, and she loved seeing what he would do to get them.

“No, I’m pretty hot,” Lucy purred, tugging up his tank top and removing it after Natsu lifted his arms in tandem to her pulling. “But so are you.”

They fell back to the bed together, soft giggles and low chuckles escaping from light and easy kisses, Lucy’s hands tangled once more in Natsu’s hair and his arms heavy as they settled around her back. Natsu rolled them over, pushing them to the centre of the bed and allowing Lucy to roll her hips up against the thigh Natsu had placed tight against her center.

“Natsu, please,” Lucy whimpered, desperate to feel him inside her.

“I love it when you beg like that,” Natsu growled against her neck, thigh pushing against her eager hips.

“If you don’t stop teasing me then you’ll be the one begging,” Lucy threatened. She nipped at his lower lip when he smirked down at her. “Now are you going to make me keep humping your leg or are we going to take off our pants?” Lucy asked, reaching down and tugging at one of his belt loops. As much as she loved the way his thighs looked in jeans, she would much prefer to have him be rid of them right now.

Natsu rubbed his thigh against her heat again, harsh and pointed in response to her words and pulling a breathy sigh from Lucy at the pressure and friction sending jolts of pleasure from her core and spiraling outwards to her limbs. Her hips canted against him, body craving more of the sensations Natsu made her feel.

“Whaddya say?” Natsu asked in a lilting voice, eyes dancing with unabashed joy at Lucy squirming beneath him.

“Fuck you,” Lucy gasped, hand gripping his bare shoulders tightly, hips rocking against Natsu’s thigh, his heavy and warm weight continuing to press and rub against her in deep strokes.

“Oh you will,” he growled, voice husky as Natsu dipped his lips to her ear. “But you have to say the right word first.”

“Please.”

“That’s what I’m talking about,” Natsu kissed her ear softly, rough hands tearing her pants down to her knees, and both pairs of hands worked to wiggle Lucy out of them the rest of the way. “Though I wonder where you could’ve gotten such a foul mouth from?” He teased. Lucy stuck her tongue out at him, shifting to her knees and waiting in the centre of his bed only in her sport thong. Hey, she had already explained her desire for comfort over appeal, not that it mattered to Natsu. He licked his lips as his eyes trailed the newly exposed skin of her thighs, the bruises finally faded from the fight and Erza’s lessons. He had been looking at her more intensely lately, like he was trying to memorize every detail of a spell chant before performing it, desperate not to have just wasted six hours on a painting only for it to be destroyed by the blowback of a spell. Why he was looking at Lucy so intently, though, is what made concern burrow itself besides the lust simmering in her gut.

“Why do you keep looking at me like that?” Lucy asked suddenly, head tilted to the side. Natsu’s gaze shot to her face, small smile quirking her lips at her boyfriend’s loud gulp. When all the
response that she got from him was a short shrug, Lucy sighed loudly. “I’m still here Natsu. I’m okay. We’re okay.”

Natsu took her hand and allowed her to pull him forward, walking on his knees until he stopped just in front of her. Their foreheads knocked when Natsu leaned against hers, lips pinched and eyes tinged with apology. “Sorry for ruinin’ the moment,” he sighed.

Lucy furrowed her brow, intertwining her fingers with Natsu’s on either side of their body. “Shush, you didn’t ruin anything. I love you, and you love me. I mean, I am definitely in the mood to be fucked more than making love, but you’ve never disappointed me before.”

Natsu snorted at her sly grin, all tension from before gone as he released one of Lucy’s hands, fingers trailing teasingly up her spine until he gripped the back of her neck. “Feisty thing, aren’t ya?” He asked, lips ghosting over Lucy’s. “Good thing I plan on fucking you so hard every time we hit a bump on the road you’ll be reminded of my dick buried deep in you.”

Lucy whimpered again, biting her lip to stifle the noise. Her underwear was slick against her heat at the piercing look Natsu held her with, eyes dark with desire and intoxicating danger making Lucy’s nerves stand on edge. “Oh?” She managed to breathe, air catching in her throat when Natsu squeezed his hold on the back of her neck in answer.

“Yeah.”

Lucy was under him again, Natsu leading their bodies to lay out as he kissed her roughly. She tried to suck on his tongue but was bit for her troubles, Natsu demanding as he tasted her mother and swallowed her keens. Lucy twitched away from his mouth, body arching as Natsu buried two fingers to his knuckles inside her, his mouth not wasting a second as he latched to her pulse point and sucked with enough force to draw a bruise from her pale skin. “Please, Natsu,” Lucy gasped, his low grunt at her fingers tangling in his hair as she clung to him tightly reverberating through her collarbone to her groin. “Please.”

“Fucking hell Lucy, shit, you’re gonna make me cum in my pants if you keep begging me in that voice,” Natsu snarled, thumb pushed into her clit as he thrust his hand into her over and over, fingers curling on the well-known spot that made Lucy’s leg twitch embarrassingly and all pride escape her for the moment.

“Wanna cum with you Natsu, please, gods, just fuck me!” Lucy moaned, nails dragging down his back as she fought for purchase on his skin, pulling him closer to her body and stealing his answer with a needy kiss. He kept his hand on the back of her neck as he kissed her, pulling his fingers from her with a wet noise before he tried to undo his pants by himself, ginning against her lips when Lucy’s hands joined his eagerly and helped his push his jeans down to free his cock. She pouted when she wasn’t allowed to grip him herself, Natsu already guiding his tip to tease her entrance and clit. They exhaled together when Natsu pressed his head into her, easy due to how wet Lucy was from his touches. Lucy opened her eyes to see Natsu already looking at her, and she cooed as she touched their noses together, Natsu pushing into her slowly, inch by thick inch swallowed by her heat and her inner muscles fluttering at the crashes of pleasure stealing her words.

“Look at me, Luce.” Natsu said, Lucy nodding as she kept her gaze locked with his. Her mouth fell open as Natsu began to rock into her, his cock stretching her wonderfully around him and his own noises lewd as he lost himself in the feeling of her gripping his length tightly. Lucy clawed at his arm that had snaked under her leg and held her spread under him, Natsu’s grunts making her bite her lip along with the tight hold on her neck he held, grounding them both to each other as their hips rolled against one another’s in tandem.
His pace picked up, thrusting into her deep and hard, filling her and forcing low cry after cry from her lips. Lucy hooked one leg on his hips, other immovable from Natsu’s grip, sensations of his hand on her skin heightening her closeness to him. Their breaths mixed in the barely there space between their faces, and Lucy thought to herself how beautiful he was, as she always did in these situations. Sweat beaded on his temples and trailed down his coppery skin, both the overspill of his magic heating the room to sauna levels and the exertion of his body moving above hers bringing a red flush to his cheeks. His lips were kiss swollen, bottom looking absolutely biteable as Natsu panted above her, and the way his jaw flexed as he buried himself inside her made Lucy swoon. His eyes were her favourite part though. Emerald colour held her captive, love and desire and possessive need swimming in his rich colouring, Lucy knowing it was a reflection of how she gazed at him too. They were meant for each other, and meant to be claimed by one another. Lucy knew it, as sure as she knew they would be best friends even if the sex couldn’t be mind-blowingly good at times.

This was definitely one of those times though.

Natsu kept pounding against the spot inside that made her hips roll without permission, noises Lucy couldn’t describe escaping her lips at the feeling of her nerves over firing under the onslaught of pleasure. He was brutal as he thrust into her, truly and fully fucking Lucy like he had promised to do, and Lucy loved it. Praise of his cock and his body and Natsu fell from her in incoherent thoughts. Natsu responded to the sentiment with low growls and curses of his own, thrusts quick and harsh as he ground his cock into her, carving himself into her body and laying claim to her through touch and movement alone.

“Ye-ohhh, yes, Natsu! Natsu, just like that, please, fuck, please, Natsu just oh gods, your cock-haah so good, your cock’s so fucking good Natsu, please, please, pleasepleasepleasepleaseplease-” Lucy screamed, eyes watering even as she held her gaze on him and she knew she was cumming. Her body seized violently under him, back alternating between trying to arch and pull him deeper inside her or curl into him and just hold on for the ride of her orgasm crashing over her. She wouldn’t have doubted it if her nails broke skin as she clawed at his back, so far gone as pleasure surged over her and made her toes curl. Lucy gasped under him, body dropping like dead weight as she was released from the hold of white hot pleasure, Natsu finally groaning her name against her neck as he buried himself inside her core twice with shaking hips, cock twitching and pulsing as he came inside her. Lucy ran her hands through his sweat sticky hair as she felt him coat her insides, lewd and filthy feeling making her body sing in pleasure, combining with the post orgasmic high that made her lazy and disconnected from reality beneath him.

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They both laid there like that for several moments, Natsu catching his breath as Lucy watched both their magic expand from their bodies, rising from their skin like it was awakening, gentle and quiet as it started and becoming brighter as it rose until it was several inches off of them, Lucy’s golden light shifting like a moving spotlight through a barrier, innumerable patches of intensity dancing over her and fading before reappearing somewhere else. Natsu’s flickered like the fire he conjured, eager to play and explore and be so much more than what it was forced into. She loved watching them intertwine, bright and flaring where they touched, like a visual harmony constantly building off one another. If there was anything to make Lucy believe in soulmates, it would be this.

“We need to shower or Erza will lock a chastity belt on you and skin me alive.” Natsu huffed. He remained entangled around her, which made Lucy smile, his thumb running gently along the side of her neck in loving tenderness.

“She’s not that bad you know. She knows we have sex, and that we’re both adults.” Lucy said gently, weaving her fingers in his magic, feeling the phantom heat against her skin as it kissed her
and enshrouded her skin greedily. Natsu snorted but said nothing, nuzzling into the hollow under her ear.

“Hey, Luce?” Natsu asked, voice soft in the stillness that had settled over them.

“Yeah?” she hummed, hands resuming their touches in his hair.

“I can’t feel my arm.”

“You’re the one that put it there!” Lucy shot back, shifting so Natsu could take his arm out from under her.

“It tingles~” Natsu whined, breath hot against her already sweat coated skin.

“Oh stop complaining, you baby,” Lucy huffed, glaring up at the ceiling. She was the one being crushed by his stupid chiseled body, so why was he complaining anyway! “But I do need to drink that potion you made,” she said, poking his head to get him to move. Natsu rolled off of her and pushed himself from the bed with a loud groan, padding out of the room without looking back at Lucy. She struggled to push herself onto her elbows, legs closing as she felt mess coat her inner thighs and mound, slick and cooling and sticky against her skin. Natsu wasn’t wrong about needing to shower. And she needed to wash her underwear before going too, now. Great.

Lucy watched as Natsu came back in, holding a small vial with swirled glittery red liquid in it. Her mind flashed to when Natsu had made the batch, essence of both needed to finish it. While Natsu had used a drop of his own blood -something that Lucy chose to not think about when taking it, because gross- he had insisted on using something else for Lucy’s contribution. She still flushed thinking about Natsu dipping his glistening fingers into the position, gaze salacious as he watched Lucy catch her breath from her orgasm.

“Here ya go!” Natsu said easily, grin bright as he held out the vial. One hundred percent effective and cheaper than birth control pills, and Natsu swore by it. Or at least, the website he had gotten it from swore by it.

Lucy swallowed it back like a shot, liquid sickly sweet and a little bitter on the back of her tongue but otherwise not unpleasant.

“Why did you have to get it from the living room?” Lucy asked, placing the now empty vial in his open palm. They were supposed to be tucked alongside the lube and other things in Natsu’s dresser drawer. “Did you pack them?”

Natsu shrugged at Lucy’s incredulous tone, scratching the side of his head. “I figured it’s better to be safe rather than sorry?” he asked, blush creeping back onto his face. Lucy snorted and rolled her eyes, unable to stop her smile. He was so silly sometimes. Lucy held her hand out to him, and Natsu easily helped her to her feet.

“Since I’ve taken one for today,” Lucy purred, leaning her chest against Natsu’s, “why don’t we save time and shower together?”

“Aye sir,” Natsu grinned down at her, scooping her into his arms as he kissed her. “You’re still standing, after all.”

Lucy gulped under his hungry gaze, squirming in his hold as he walked back into the bathroom. It was a good thing their bags were already packed.
“I’m going to need therapy.”

Lucy rolled her eyes at the cat’s high grumble. Her wet hair was pulled aside in a braid, Happy perched on her bare shoulder. “How about two cans of tuna?” She offered instead, rounding the corner of one of the platforms. Only two more levels and then they’d officially be on the road trip. It was safe to say Lucy was less than excited, more so if she had a spiteful Happy to deal with.

“Fine,” he sighed, tail curling around Lucy’s neck in a sign of affection. The pair made their way down the next flight in silence, Lucy needing to stay close to the hand tail for the times her legs gave out under her, small backpack with snacks and emergency supplies all she could carry herself. “You would be able to move faster if you and Natsu weren’t so gross,” Happy noted, cleaning a paw.

“I do not need lectures from the peanut gallery,” Lucy grumbled, wincing as a jarring step made aches flash through her thighs and between them. Natsu had most certainly lived up to his promise of making her remember with every step, although hindsight was 20/20 and that had been a stupid promise to make.

“You’re lucky you’re my favourite.” Happy said, nudging her cheek with his head.

“Aww, I’m your favourite?” Lucy cooed. All bad feelings towards the blue cat were gone replaced by the usual fondness she had for cute things.

“My very favourite. But don’t tell Natsu, or he’ll get jealous.”

Lucy giggled along with his conspiratorial whisper, nodding sincerely when he was done.

“Promise.” Lucy said, holding up her pinky finger. Happy curling his tail around it, and they shook, sharing bright grins with one another.

“And don’t forget my tuna!”

“When have I ever forgotten your fish?” Lucy scoffed, happiness blooming in her chest at Happy’s purr as he nuzzled her more.

Sunlight poured over Lucy as she walked through the doors of the apartment building, Happy jumping down from Lucy’s shoulder to run to Natsu’s ankles. Where he stood, arguing with Gray. Loke and Cana stood to the side, Erza holding the bridge of her nose as she listened to them take bets about who’d die first and how between Natsu and Gray.

“Um,” Lucy called, slowing her approach to the larger than expected group. “Why are you all here?”

“You think I’m letting Strawberry here whisk you away to a fucking witch’s coven? Yeah right!” Gray spat, head angled awkwardly where Natsu was pushing on his jaw.

“Ya already called me that you overgrown ice cube,” Natsu howled victoriously, “and if ya think I’m dealing with you and Erza’s driving then you’re stupider than ya look.”

“Natsu! Let go of Gray’s face. And Gray, let go of Natsu’s hair. We are going on this trip to Fairy Tail and that is final, and the only person that this is non-optional for is Lucy, so I suggest you don’t come or get used to it.”

Both boys separated at Erza’s warning, backs straight and arms pressed tight to their sides.

“Aye sir!”
“Yes Erza!”

“Why can’t we just fly?” Loke groaned. He leaned against Erza’s minivan, obviously disgruntled by the thought of traveling in a car with so many people.

“Because I am driving and that’s final!” Erza snapped.

“She can’t take flyin’, we all know this. The great Erza, scared of heights and planes.” Cana drawled, grinning as she made her way over to Lucy.

“If humans were meant to fly we’d have wings. Not even magic allows us to, and you expect me to get in that contraption? No, thank you.”

“Good thing you only have to believe in science, not magic,” Gray said dryly, sharing a snicker with Natsu before either remembered who they were laughing with, making faces at one another before Natsu broke off and walked to Lucy.

“It took you a while to get down here, didn’t it?” Cana asked, leering at Lucy with a knowing smirk. “And your hair’s not blow-dried! Why, I wonder what could have caused you to run late? Could it be Natsu’s hair cut distracted you?”

“Oh my gods Cana, stop,” Lucy rolled her eyes, bumping her shoulder into her friend’s. “Don’t tell me he doesn’t look hot.”

“While he is attractive, I have the mental image of a ten-year-old Natsu getting his head stuck in cat mask for an hour before getting his dad to help him out. So no, he doesn’t quite get my blood pumping like I’m sure he does you.” Cana snorted at the memory, taking a long sip of her flask as Natsu came to a stop beside Lucy.

“Why’s Loke poutin’ off in the corner like that?” Natsu questioned, slinging an arm over Lucy’s shoulders easily.

“Maybe it’s ‘cus you two smell like sex?” Cana said off-handedly, grinning at Lucy’s bright blush.

“Oi, we showered!” Natsu defended, a sound between a yelp and a grunt following as Lucy dug her elbows into his ribs. Really, did he know nothing about not feeding the fire that was Cana? “Lushi, what was that for?” he whined, pouting down at her with narrowed eyes.

“Have you heard of plausible deniability?” Lucy hissed, rolling her eyes when his pout deepened.

“Oh, hun, its far too late for that,” Cana said sweetly, pushing her finger into a tender spot on Lucy’s neck. “Considering purple ain’t your natural colour.”

The hickeys.

Lucy was going to kill Natsu in the car the moment his medicine kicked in. Or maybe she’d withhold it for the first couple miles. Either way, she’d need to borrow his scarf. Lucy glared up at Natsu, who at least had the decency to finally look apologetic at their situation. “Whoops?” he offered helpfully, whining and calling after Lucy when she rolled her eyes and pushed out from under his arm.

“I’m going to see if Loke has any makeup I can steal,” she grumbled. Her sour mood lifted as she walked to her friend, Lucy’s steps slowing when she noticed Loke’s tense shoulders, his thumbnail caught between his teeth as he worried at it. He only ruined his manicure when he was freaked out about something, like a girl’s boyfriend finding out where he worked. Loke jolted when Lucy called his name, her hand lifted in greeting dropping slightly. “You okay?”
He recovered quickly, flashing Lucy a bright grin, obviously fake. “I’m perfect, my sunshine!” Lucy waited for the arm around her shoulders or following flirtation, frowning when nothing came. Something was truly off if he wasn’t trying to woo her, playful banter between the two of them and both knew he never actually meant it.

“Are you sure?” she pressed leaning into his space, trying to peer through his tinted glasses.

“I always forget how well you know me,” Loke sighed, real smile pulling gently at the corner of his mouth. “It’s nothing. I just haven’t been home in a couple years, is all.” Lucy bit her lip at his strange tone, unsure what to do. She took one of his hands between her own, trying to give him her most comforting smile.

“I’m sure they’ll be happy to see you, Loke. Hey, why don’t I call out Cancer and he can give you a haircut like he did for Natsu! You always feel better after a good pampering, and I know Cancer would love to work with hair that’s treated as nicely as yours! You’ll love him, really, I know he can be a bit much with the ‘baby’s and the salsa dancing, but he’s sweet and funny and knows just what to do to lift your spirits! Oh, you’d love Lyra too, her voice is so pretty and soft—” Lucy rambled on, smiling as she turned her attention to the best she had thrown around her waist to hold her new pack of keys, silver and gold tethers sparkling in the sun. She hadn’t felt right shoving them into her purse along with her wallet and tampons and lip gloss.

“No!” Loke jerked his hand from hers, Lucy stopping mid-sentence at his outburst. “No, thank you, my glowing angel. I paid a fine amount of cash for this do, and I don’t want you using up any contract time for little old me.” Loke grinned at her again, not as full as before but also not completely fake.

“Okay…” Lucy said softly, crossing her arms when she found she had nowhere else to put them. “If you’re sure.”

“I am,” he assured. Lucy squeaked when he swooped in for a light kiss on the cheek. “I really do appreciate the thought though, Lucy.”

Lucy watched him walk away in a concerned daze, unsure what to do with his sudden sincerity.

“Hey Lucy!” Natsu called, jogging over to her eagerly. “I talked Erza into the best idea! You and I are gonna ride my bike!”

“What.”

Natsu beamed despite her flat tone, shoving her helmet into her hands as he continued on proudly. “There’s too many of us to fit in her van with all our shit, and this also stops me from wantin’ to throw myself out the window at a hundred and twenty kilometers an hour!”

“Natsu I don’t know…” Lucy said, biting her lip and holding her helmet at stomach height.

“Would you rather be stuck in a car with me, Gray, Erza, and a bored Cana?”

“Oh gods you’re right.” Lucy whispered, horrors flashing in her mind’s eye. Someone would die. Who, she wasn’t sure, but someone would die.

Natsu crowed in victory, dancing around Lucy. She laughed at his silly victory lap, shoving his shoulder. They walked side by side to his motorcycle, Lucy sticking her tongue out at Gray’s scoff of disgust and Natsu sticking up his middle finger to Cana’s cat calls.

“Gray, your pants!” Lucy reminded as she threw her leg over the seat behind Natsu, laughing along
with his low snickers as Gray scrambled for his clothes. Lucy patted Natsu’s shoulder before she wrapped her arms around his middle, leather jacket hot against her skin from the sun, raising her voice over the roar of the engine coming to life. “Now, take me to Fairy Tail!”
"Are we there yet?"

"Cana we have been driving for four hours you damn well know we are not there yet."

"Oooo Erza’s getting snippy, maybe we should send her out on Natsu’s motorcycle."

"Do you want them to die?"

"Now Lucy, she may have an idea there."

"Gray shut up and tell me are we turning off on the one-five-four or the one-four-five?"

"Well judging by how Natsu just took the turn I’d say it was the one-four-five."

"Aww, Loke’s waving at us."

"Cana that’s his middle finger."

Lucy groaned, lifting Happy and burying her face in his back. She had been stuck in the van with her soon to be ex-friends ever since Happy had begged for either her or Natsu to save him from the constant yelling and eyes-removed from the road -which was a frankly terrifyingly high number of times in Lucy’s opinion- at their last rest stop an hour ago.

Lucy was a little surprised at how eager Loke had been to go with Natsu, but he had been talking about how a motorcycle would make him even smoother with the ladies. And the leather with the men.

"Can someone else please drive?" Happy begged. "I’m starting to understand how Natsu feels when he’s motion sick."

"Do you think you can do better?" Erza hissed, knuckles white on the steering wheel as she pulled an overzealous u-turn in the middle of the highway, much to Lucy’s terror.

"Yes," Happy shot back just as quickly, hair starting to raise on the back of his neck.

"You know who drives better than both of you?" Cana asked, lifting her flask as she waited for all the attention to turn to her. "Me!"

"Cana you’re day drinking you are not going behind the wheel." Gray sighed.

"I’d be better than Erza," Cana grumbled.

"Lucy!" Happy begged, "Please, please make her stop trying to kill us."

"Fine," Lucy sighed, rubbing her temple. "I’ll drive next."

"Shotgun!"

"Happy you can’t call shotgun you’re a cat."

"I’m a familiar, how many times do I have to tell you guys this?" Happy whined. He pouted, climbing onto Lucy’s shoulder and tucking into a ball. His ears laid flat against his skull.
“You can sit on my lap,” Lucy offered, scratching under his chin.

“You’re the best Lucy.”

Lucy rested her head on the cheap, plastic booth table. She was shoved in between Gray and Erza, Cana, Natsu, and Loke all crammed in the opposite side. Natsu seemed to be the only one not ready to kill someone.

“Cana would you stop drinking for one minute? The sound of your flask opening is going to drive me crazy,” Loke said in a low voice, head hanging in his hands.

“Well sucks to be you ‘cus the only way I’m getting back in the car with Miss What’s-a-turn-signal is if I’m blind drunk and no longer fear the sweet embrace of death.”

“You know I should have known you were a fucking witch before considering how much you love to talk about the future and death.” Gray said dryly, pushing his gross eggs around his plate half-heartedly. Lucy’s nose wrinkled just looking at how fluorescent they were.

“Natsu did you just put ten sugars in your coffee?” Loke asked in what Lucy would call abject horror. Loke definitely had finer tastes in all things, coffee especially. Which was why he was sipping water with dejected acceptance despite Lucy knowing for a fact he was in need of a caffeine hit.

“It’s the only way this shit tastes good,” Natsu shrugged, holding Loke’s wide eyes as he dumped an eleventh packet of sugar in his coffee and began to stir it with the weird stir stick Lucy still wasn’t fully convinced wasn’t a poorly constructed straw.

She thought she heard Loke whimper before putting his head onto the table similar to how Lucy had hers before.

“Is that a drug deal going on in the corner?” Gray asked casually, shirt hanging around his shoulders like a scarf and using an ice cube to draw on the table. Lucy focused on the two teens, both sketchy looking with oversized hoodies and one with a face tattoo, black ink standing bright against his oily and pale skin. The tattooed one pressed something into the other kid’s hands, nodding as he stood and walked out the restaurant in what Lucy thought was supposed to be with ‘swag’.

“Yep,” she said, popping the ‘p’ and putting her head back down.

“Wild,” Erza drawled flatly.

“Lushi, how come I have to be in the car?”

“Because you can’t drive your bike for ten and a half hours straight no matter how many stamina tattoos you have.”

“But Lushi I’m dying.”

“So shut up and die already.”

“Oi, you shut up!”

“So original.”

“Gray please keep your eyes on the road.”
“Erza’s gonna crash my bike.”
“I can’t believe Loke would rather stay on that death trap.”
“I can if it meant not being stuck in here with you three!”
“Hey!”
“Happy I didn’t include you because I love you.”
“So you don’t love me? So mean Lushi.”
“If you throw up on me I will throw you out of this vehicle.”
“Well maybe if you’d stop drinkin’ I wouldn’t have to deal with your stench and Popsicle’s shitty drivin’.”
“Natsu you call everyone’s driving shitty.”
“Because it is- ugh.”
“Happy did you just knock Natsu out?”
“I. Need. Peace.”

The cabin of the car fell silent, Gray being the one to final break it. “So who wants to listen to the radio?”
“If you put on country I’m rioting.”
“Goddamit Cana.”

“Loke, are you alright?”

Lucy watched as Loke jerked beside her, head pressed tight against the glass of his window and turned away from her.

“We’ve been on the road for twelve hours, princess, what do you think?”

“You don’t have to be snippy.” Lucy huffed, pouting as she looked at the book in her hands. Happy had curled into her suitcase an hour or two ago, leaving Lucy alone with Loke, Erza, and Gray. Gray and Erza were having their own discussion in the front leaving Lucy alone with a suspiciously quiet Loke, and the unease she could feel radiating off him was getting on her last nerve.

“Sorry,” Loke smiled at her. He still kept his body firmly closed off from her though, and Lucy couldn’t help the pang of pain that flashed through her.

“What are you thinking about?” She asked, trying to keep the mood light. Also because she had no desire to be drawn into whatever conversation Gray and Erza were having and she had already found out she couldn’t sleep in the car.

Loke grinned at her, dry and empty and so unlike him it sent a chill along Lucy’s spine. “I’m thinking of home and life and death.”

Lucy blanched, shocked at his morbid thoughts. Loke always lived in the moment, loud and
unapologetic. “Like what?” she pressed, gentle as she placed her hand on his arm. Loke sighed low and long, eyes closing as Lucy watched his expression in the window. She took her hand away, shuffling over. She should probably just put in her headphones until it was her turn to ride on with Natsu again.

“I used to be a member of the Blue Pegasus Guild.” He said, softly so Lucy could barely hear him. His hand shot out, stopping her from pulling away further. “It was fun for a while, but Natsu is right to be wary of guilds. Not everyone I worked f-with was the kindest. It takes all types to make the world go, after all.

“But there are some people I left there that I didn’t want to. I haven’t spoken to them in…” Loke paused, snorting as he shook his head to himself, “Gods, has it really been years already?”

“Why did you leave?”

“There was an incident. It was my fault, and I have to live with that.” Loke shrugged, pulling back into himself. “But do you want to know the worst part?”

Lucy nodded, resting her hand on his forearms again, giving him a gentle squeeze to let him know she was there for him.

“The worst part was I had to leave behind all ten of my girlfriends.”

“You’re such a dick,” Lucy half moaned half laughed, shoving his shoulder roughly as she settled back into her seat.

“I’m serious!” Loke pressed, grin wide and eyebrows wiggling under his glasses. “Louise could put her feet over her head and-”

“Loke,” Lucy wailed, covering her ears with her hands, “now is not the time to regale me with your sex-capades! We were having a moment!”

“We could still have a moment,” Loke purred, over exaggerated in every way to let Lucy know he was only joking.

“You’re such a perv,” Lucy giggled, wiggling into her seat more and dragging a blanket from the back. “Wake up me when we get to Oak Town.”

“As you wish, princess,” Loke said, grin slipping from his lips as he looked back out the window.

“I spy with my pretty eye-”

“That’s not the phrase.”

“Well now it fucking is. Anyway, I spy with my pretty eye something green.”

“Is it, oh I dunno, a tree?”

“Alright frost nips, your turn if you can come up with something better.”

“I spy with my little-”

“AHEM.”

Gray exhaled sharply through his nose before speaking again. Lucy banged her head on the seat,
Happy curled in her lap and practically vibrating with either fear at Erza’s wandering too close to the separation lines or rage. Lucy felt empathy because she too was torn between those emotions.

“I spy with my pretty eye, something blue.”

“Is it the sky?”

“No.”

“Is it Lucy’s hair band?”

“Nope.”

“Is it the cat?”

“Correct!”

“What do I win,” Cana slurred. Lucy looked at them over her shoulder, scowling at the red flush over both Gray and Cana’s faces.

“Uh, nothing?” Gray offered. He scratched his chest absently, ankle resting on his knee. Lucy was thankful he was wearing his boxers rather than his briefs. Or nothing. She shuddered at the thought and turned back around to watch the road, sun sitting low on the trees but long past dawn as the sky had lost the oranges and purples and was firmly blue.

“Boo,” Cana pouted. “If Loke was here he’d give me something.”

“Yeah, his dick,” Gray snorted.

“He does give very good dick,” Cana agreed, taking a sip from her flask. Was that thing bottomless?

“Will you two shut up?” Happy snapped, leaping onto Lucy’s shoulder. She could tell by how his tail twitched he was pissed.

“Aw, don’t worry Happy, I’m sure you’ll get a pretty little pussy for yourself one of these days—” Cana’s snigger was cut off by a powerful wave of pressure jolting through the car.

“I am more than a cat,” Happy said, voice soft but deadly calm. Lucy ran her hands along his spine in calming strokes.

“Tell me what’s wrong, Hap—”

“I would request you don’t throw tantrums while I am trying to drive.” Erza said through her teeth.

“Trying and failing,” Happy snapped. ”And they’re being too loud Lushi, they’re hurting my ears and I want to fly but I can’t because she won’t let me and I hate small spaces that I’m forced to be in Lushiii.” Happy nuzzled between her breasts as he talked, whiskers trembling and eyes wide and watering as he looked at Lucy. His pleading look hardened instantly when Erza spoke again.

“Do not think I won’t punish a cat.”

“I’m a familiar and you know I have more power in my wingtip than you do in your whole body,” Happy hissed.

“Oooo snap Happy ain’t so happy anymore!”
“Excuse you?”

“I am not one to be underestimated.”

“Alright, time to switch out! I call motorcycle with the flame idiot and his cat that could kill us all.”

Lucy understood how Natsu felt when he was finally freed from a vehicle now.

“Lucy please stop hugging the ground it’s weird.”

“Do I always look that dumb?”

“Yes.”

“Oi, I never asked for your opinion!”

“You literally just asked a group question!”

Lucy turned her head to look at her friends, Natsu glaring at Gray with crossed arms, Gray looking offended and confused as he returned Natsu’s sour look. Erza was dead on her feet, mumbling something about strawberries and Loke and Cana were playing thumb war for dibs on the first bottle of wine. Lucy herself sprawled face down on the first patch of grass she had found outside the motel. Probably not the most sanitized place, but she would have a burning hot shower before bed anyway. Gods knew she needed it after sixteen hours trapped in an SUV or holding onto Natsu for dear life. She felt a light weight settle on her back, Happy purring as he curled into a ball along her spine.

“See! Happy likes me on the ground.” Lucy said smugly, grinning at Natsu’s eye roll.

“Happy likes sittin’ on ya period, Weirdo.” Natsu said, walking over. Happy grumbled when Natsu shooed him away, slinking along the grass as Erza had made it very clear he was forbidden from flying in public. Lucy took Natsu’s hand, grunting as he hauled her up. “Now let’s go see what kinda restaurant they have attached here!”

“It’s a pancake house genius. It’s not gonna be that good.” Cana sighed, hands shoved in her pockets after losing to Loke. “Probably don’t even have booze.”

“It’s a motel, you alcoholic, of course they’re going to serve alcohol here.” Gray sighed, dropping his shirt onto the asphalt parking lot. “I wanna make sure we aren’t going to get a disease from the bed sheets.”

“Would all of you shut up and follow me to the front desk?” Erza snapped. She blinked, flushing slightly as she dragged her hand over her face. “I apologize for snapping, I just seem to be a little more tired than I was expecting.”

“That’s ‘cus you insisted on drivin’ for eight hours.” Natsu said, narrowing his eyes at her in concern. “You don’t look too good either.”

“Thank you for the observation, Natsu,” Erza said dryly. Natsu shrugged, throwing his arm around Lucy’s shoulders as he hugged his travel bag over his shoulder. The pack followed after Erza, each gathering their bags and trudging along, bickering amongst themselves as they walked. Lucy gave the receptionist an apologetic smile when she saw the poor boy’s eyes widen in fear as he took in the increasingly bawdy group entering his lobby at ten in the morning.

“Hello, how many rooms do you have available?” Erza asked, trying to give a smile but appearing
threatening if the way the dark haired boy paled was any indication.

“We, uh, have three rooms available, but only two are double beds—”

“Perfect!” Natsu called, pulling Lucy into his side. “Luce and I call the single, key please.”

“It is improper for two unwed—” Erza started, and Lucy snapped. She swiped the key from the terrified concierge’s hand, glaring at Erza as she spoke.

“First of all, we all know you and Gray had a thing a couple years ago so stop it with the holier-than-thou act, and secondly anything Natsu and I would do in that hotel room is not something that we wouldn’t have done before. Now I am tired and gross and cranky so if you all don’t mind, me, my boyfriend, and our cat are going to go to our single room. See you in a couple hours.”

Lucy turned on her heel in a huff, dragging Natsu behind her as the rest of their friends gaped at her retreating back. She heard the pad of Happy following, as well as his soft sniggers. She knew she’d pay for it later but honestly Lucy couldn’t really give a damn at the moment. She loved her friends but she loved her sanity more.

“Erza’s gonna kill ya,” Natsu whispered, his slanted eyes almost round as he stared at her. Lucy shrugged, rubbing her temple as she looked away from Natsu’s almost horrified expression and tried to find their room. She really hoped they went the right direction. 332, 333, 334… There it was! 335.

“Erza can suck it.” Lucy mumbled, pushing her key card into the reader.

“Are you okay?” Happy asked, flying around their small room. He settled on Lucy’s head, kneading her scalp worriedly. “You’re acting even weirder than usual. Are you sick? Is your weirdness disease contagious?”

Lucy grumbled under Happy’s barrage of questions. She reached above her, plucking Happy from her hair and holding him to her chest in a hug. With an exaggerated groan she flopped onto the bed, staring up at the popcorn and yellowish ceiling while still holding Happy under his armpits.

“I’m fine Happy. Just tired. And I think my back’s permanently disfigured from hunching for so long. Goodbye, modelling career and three page spread in Weekly.” Lucy said, giving Happy a tiny squeeze as she felt her spine shift and crack back into a semblance of the proper place. “At least I have an excuse not to call my father for his birthday this year.”

“What?” Natsu asked sharply, sitting next to her on the bed. Lucy cringed, remembering that he might be offended that Lucy wasn’t jumping at the chance to connect with her father, something Natsu would do anything to get.

“Every year we talk a few times, my birthday, his birthday. I kind of treat him like a great uncle who’s put me in his will, you know?” Lucy shrugged, trying to play it off. “I’ll call him when we get back to Hargeon.”

“But… why?” Natsu asked, voice harder than usual as he looked at her. “That bastard put you in the hands of some really bad people. How can ya forgive him?”

Lucy opened her eyes and looked at Natsu in shock. It had never occurred to her that Natsu would still be upset about what she had told him. She sat up, holding Happy in her lap and playing with his ears when he began to purr. “It took a couple years, but we’re better now. I think what took the longest for me to forgive was the danger he put my friends in. He’s still my family,” Lucy shrugged. She didn’t really know how else to explain it. Natsu didn’t seem to be buying it though, eyes skeptical as they flicked over her face.
“Family is who you choose it to be,” Natsu said finally, something heavy and serious in his gaze holding all of Lucy’s attention. She reached for his hand, intertwining their fingers and giving him a soft squeeze. Holding his gaze she brought his hand to her lips, pressing a kiss to each of his fingers. She would be all the family Natsu needed until he was ready to join Fairy Tail. Lucy liked to think she knew Natsu fairly well by this point, and she knew that Natsu was not a solitary soul. A coven would be just what he needed, and Lucy trusted Cana and Erza and Loke not to join a cult by accident. Well, she trusted Cana not to join a cult by accident.

“If you two are gonna do gross things again I’ll tell Erza,” Happy warned, nails threatening to dig into Lucy’s thigh. Natsu blushed and grumbled under his breath, grip tightening around her hand. Lucy shook her head with a dry smile.

“Even if I wanted to, I’m too exhausted to get in the mood right now. We need to be rested for when Erza comes barging in to drag us around town to find her contact.” Lucy said.

“You do know there is no contact and Erza caught wind of a sale happening down at this magic shop, right?” Natsu asked. He laid on the bed, pulling Lucy with him through their connected hands and Happy curling up into a ball between their legs.

Lucy chuckled under her breath, wedging her head under Natsu’s chin as she spoke. “I kinda figured. Maybe I’ll find some more sprites here!” Lucy yawned after speaking, the last of her energy used up with her hopeful thought.

“Whatsoever you say, Weirdo,” Natsu grinned, running his hand along her hair in soothing pets. Her retort was lost in an indignant mumble as Happy’s low purrs, Natsu’s heartbeat, and the fact she had an adequate pillow lured Lucy to sleep. She’d make sure to draw on his face if she woke up first for that comment, though.

“This is how they draw you into the dark arts. Bright colours and stuffed animals.” Gray said darkly, eyes wary as he looked at the line of imbued teddy bears.

“Oh yeah,” Natsu said dryly, turning his attention away from the incense twigs he held in his hands, “witches recruit through the evil practice of chasing away nightmares and making your girlfriend smile.”

“Does that mean I’m going to get one?” Lucy asked. She blinked up at Natsu innocently, fluttering her lashes as he wound her arms around one of his. “Pleaseee.”

Natsu grinned and rolled his eyes at her drawn out word, Lucy’s heart fluttering at the easy expression. Both had woken in better spirits after their nap, even if Happy bemoaned being left behind.

Lucy couldn’t help but feel bad for leaving him trapped in the motel room. A packet of dried fish caught her eye and she wandered over to it, leaving the boys to bicker over demons and the occult. It was a miracle Gray had even agreed to step foot in the shop, tucked in the sketchiest part of town by their motel and with dark black and silver writing on the sign. Spellings. At least it was better than the Blue Pegasus coven’s front name.

Oh! The fish would be perfect, Happy loved tuna more than he did his wings. That silly cat.

“Sorry,” Lucy squeaked, placing a hand on the shoulder of the girl she had bumped into. The pale girl was silent, blue hair framing her heart-shaped face. Her eyes widened before falling flat, the deep blue like a storm as she turned on her heel and walked away from Lucy without a word. It was more
of a scurry, Lucy decided as she watched the girl’s retreating back, blue skirt swishing as she rounded a corner.

Lucy had to give it to Gray, witches were a strange bunch.

She found Cana looking through the tarot cards, expression bored as she scanned through the packs in the cupboard. “These are real ya know,” she said offhandedly. “They only work for witches though. Everyone else is a hack that gives us the bullshit name Gray’s so terrified about.”

Lucy snorted at Cana’s smirk, bumping her elbow. Lucy browsed the bottles in the bin beside the one Cana was still flipping through, charms for beauty and luck mixed in with potions that caused break-outs or bad breath. She shook one in front of Cana’s face, grinning when the brunette’s interest was piqued.

“You’ll fit right in with Fairy Tail with that mind’a yours. No wonder you and Natsu are best friends.” Lucy smiled at Cana bashfully, shrugging as she went back to looking through the smaller items on display.

“Don’t let Gray hear you call Natsu that,” Lucy joked. Her smile slipped slightly when she saw the girl from before eyeing her between the displays. “Has she been looking at me this entire time?” Lucy asked Cana warily. The last time a stranger had taken interest in her it hadn’t exactly ended well.

“Who?” Cana asked as she raised her head. Her mood switched instantly, carefree to serious like Erza. Lucy could see how they’d grown up together.

“The girl with the blue hair,” Lucy whispered, nodding slightly with her head in the direction the girl had been before. Lucy looked out the side of her eye, watching the girl jump and scurry away again. Lucy didn’t know why, but she didn’t feel any bad vibes coming off the stranger.

“I dunno but she’s pretty cute,” Cana hummed appreciatively, eyes still harder than usual as she blatantly watched the girl retreat. Lucy wanted to bury her face in her hands. Was she the only person she knew who understood the need to be subtle?

Lucy was stopped from complaining at Cana to not be so obvious when she saw Erza walk past with an armful of clothes. Erza had been known to max out her credit card in only three places; the weaponry in the East Quarter in Hargeon, the cafe that had once let Erza pre-order cake for two years, and the Heart Kreuz boutique.

Lucy saw the familiar cross symbol on the tag of one of the dresses.

Not good.

“I’ll take it all please.”

So not good.

“Erza wait!” Lucy called, hurrying over to the frazzled looking cashier trying to dig through the pile of clothes to find their tags. “Do you really need this breastplate? And is that a pink leather sword sheath?” She asked.

“It is. The lovely Emily here found it for me at my insistence.” Erza smiled at Lucy easily, and Lucy eyed the late teen worriedly. No wonder the poor girl looked like she was about to start shaking. “And one never knows when she will need a little black dress or a pair of armoured boots to crush her enemies with.”
Lucy paled at how Erza said that as if it were a normal thing to say.

“Where will you even put it?” Lucy asked, relief flooding through her as the thought came to her. She looked over her shoulder quizzically when she heard Cana and Natsu snort, turning back to freeze under the sly smile Erza was giving her.

“How about I show you?” she asked, taking back her credit card from Emily. Lucy’s shoulders fell in defeat. She blinked at Erza when the red-haired woman lifted her arm, thumb swiping through the air too quick for Lucy to track. Instead of the shimmering outline of a weapon like Lucy expected, a two foot hole opened up four feet above the ground in the middle of the store. Lucy was on the other side of… whatever it was, and could see purples and yellows and blues swirling in the blackness like galaxies, wisps of colours shifting in and out of view, almost as if it were alive. Lucy gaped when she noticed Erza tossing her clothes into her side of the hole as if it were just another daily chore.

“What are you doing?” Lucy squeaked, unsure of how close she could get for fear of being sucked in somehow.

“Placing my new clothes with the rest of my closet and armour.” Erza said simply. Lucy paled when she saw Erza examine a long single-sided blade that’s hilt only seemed to be composed of a single white cloth wrapped around it. She was pretty sure it was a katana of some sort, though the specific type was beyond her. Maybe Lucy should have taken Erza up on that advanced blades class like she offered.

“Pretty sure Erza could fill my apartment with all her clothes,” Natsu commented, arm finding it’s natural place on Lucy’s shoulders as he came to stand beside her.

“That would be an exaggeration,” Erza sniffed, cheeks slightly red as she tossed in her last item, a short and pretty red skirt.

“Would it?” Natsu asked skeptically. “Would it really?” Erza said nothing and turned away, the portal closing in on itself soundlessly.

“I don’t even want to know what I just saw,” Gray said flatly as he walked up to the other side of Lucy, black tank top shoved into the back pocket of his cargo pants, leather belt and silver chain to be seen and judged by all. Lucy lifted an eyebrow when she saw him twirling a woven bracelet between his fingers. Silver, black, and white colours were braided through it, a small azure stone suspended in the middle.

Lucy caught another flash of blue out of the corner of her eye, but when she turned it to look over her shoulder all she saw was the display full of crystals in little individual baggies.

“Onto the next shop!” Erza said loudly, walking from the store with her head held high. Lucy looked at Natsu wearily.

“We should follow her, shouldn’t we.”

“Yep,” Natsu said, popping the ‘p’. They both stood still, listening to the the chime of the door quiet.

“She’s crazy.” Lucy sighed sadly, following after Erza after making sure Gray and Cana were coming along as well. Loke had run off a half hour earlier, eyes bright as he discussed the possibility for ‘new connections’.
“Yep.”

Looking around the store Lucy could understand why it had looked abandoned out front. Now this was exactly what Gray had probably pictured when he imagined a witch bookshop.

Everything was dimly lit and covered in dust, bookshelves twice as tall as Lucy stacked with a mixture of pristine and ratty tomes, all equally ominous looking.

Lucy felt like she was standing in the middle of a giant cliche.

“Natsu I just saw a mouse.” Lucy whined, clinging to his arm.

Natsu shrugged, finger running along the ancient and dust covered oak shelf. Lucy pouted, pulling away from him reluctantly as she decided to explore herself if he was going to be so preoccupied. Lucy knew first hand how single focused he could be, a trait that was frankly frighteningly consistent across the board. With a loud and pointed sigh she left him to his devices, turning a corner of a bookshelf and walking through the tighter aisle.

Lucy paused when a book caught her attention. It’s leather was thinner than she was used to, tanned black but worn with age. Her eyes narrowed on the spine, Lucy reaching for it as she recognized some of the symbols pressed into the leather in flaking silver as the same as on Natsu’s back. Lucy flinched back when her fingertip brushed the tome, a deep uneasy feeling twisting around her gut like a viper. Setting her jaw Lucy gripped the book firmly and pulled it from it’s placed nestled in the row of equally unique looking books.

Lucy furrowed her eyebrows as she looked at the front cover, discomfort crawling slowly along her spine as she tried to focus on whether her skin was vibrating where she touched the leather or not. The sheer fact she couldn’t tell would usually be enough for her to disregard the tome completely, but Lucy figured she had already gone this far to sate her curiosity. A voice whispered in the back of her head; *Curiosity killed the cat.*

“And satisfaction brought it back,” she mumbled under her breath, running her fingers along the ancient and illegible runes placed in the centre of the cover.

*But was the cat ever the same?*

*Shut up,* Lucy thought forcefully, taking a deep breath and opening to a random page.

Lucy scanned it in a mixture of confusion and enraptured curiosity, words Latin-esque but *different* in a way Lucy couldn’t place. Symbols and circles reminiscent to the style and order of Natsu’s back tattoo were scattered throughout the pages like charts in a textbook. She turned a page, body falling still as if someone had encased her in ice, her blood itself feeling like it had stopped in her veins. Her pulse pounded in her ears as she looked over the full-page image a second and third time.

It was a detailed drawing of five cloaked figures surrounding a magic circle drawn on the ground, two faceless bodies in the centre in a heap on the earth. A third body of an infant was drawn in front of them, arms reaching to the sky.

The five figures held daggers covered in what Lucy could only assume was blood by the darker colouring, but the medieval horror ritual wasn’t what made Lucy’s body clam up. At the bottom of the page was a single word, written in all capitals, as easy to read as Lucy’s own name.

*ZEREF*
A seed of disgust grew in Lucy’s stomach the longer she stared at the page, all of Natsu’s panic attacks and things he had whispered about his brother in their private talks rushing back to her. What kind of despicable human beings would name and raise their son like a cult leader or demon? Natsu had never talked about his parents, and Lucy couldn’t even begin to imagine how horrible they would have to be to raise a person like Zeref.

“That quite a selection you have made there ma’am,” a voice said behind her. Lucy jumped, snapping the book closed as she looked over her shoulder. The man was tall and thin, looming over Lucy with his dry and brittle hair framing his face, thin lips pulled into a sly grin and revealing a few missing teeth. Lucy gulped, shuffling backwards as best she could in the tight quarters.

“An interesting fact about collections like this one is that they were compiled over time, as are most ritualistic ones.” His voice was high for a man, raspy and with a slight whistle from his missing teeth Lucy would guess. His eyes sparkled as he leaned in, obviously eager to share something -like a child when they have a secret to tell. “The most important and honoured ones, such as this, were bound by the leftovers of their sacrifices. Only a grace saved for the most sacred texts.”

Lucy tasted bile in the back of her throat when she thought of the picture, human bodies limp in the centre of a magic circle. It fell from her hands, body numb as she pressed herself against the bookshelf. The man caught it easily, pale and watery eyes glinting as he smirked at her. Her vision wavered in front of her, and the acidic taste grew in her mouth.

That had been bound in human skin. Leather made of people.

“Natsu,” Lucy called, voice shaking and barely more than a whisper. She looked around, paranoia setting in about how many other magic books would be as full as darkness as the one she had held. Lucy didn’t want to be here anymore.

“Oi,” a deep voice said, Lucy relaxing as she recognized it. She peeked around the shopkeeper’s shoulder, seeing Gray making his way towards her, not even sparing a wary glance at the shelves on either side of him as he marched forwards. Lucy felt relief wash over her more firmly when Natsu also popped his head around the corner, concerned gaze hardening as he found Lucy and also made his way towards her. Gray and Natsu came to stand side by side -as much as they could- Natsu with his arms crossed over his chest and Gray’s behind his head.

“You okay, Luce?” Natsu asked, eyeing the shopkeeper. Gray stood silent, lips pulled in a distasteful frown. Lucy started to speak but was stopped by the tall man.

“Salamander.” He said, as if he were meeting an old acquaintance again. Natsu narrowed his eyes, body stiffening.

“Do I know ya, old man?” He asked flatly, Lucy slipped past the shopkeeper, standing between Natsu and Gray. Lucy smiled slightly when she felt Natsu rest a hand on her hip, Gray shifting so he had a foot between Lucy and the man still holding the human-leather bound tome.

“I am simply familiar with your family’s work.” He hummed. Natsu bristled, lips pulling into a sneer as his grip on Lucy tightened. The man placed the book back in its slot, bowing his head and walking away before Natsu could speak.

“Those psychos ain’t my family,” Natsu ground through his teeth. Lucy leaned into him, resting a hand on his chest and bunching her fingers in his potion-stained tank top. He was lucky all the colours had managed to make it look like it was tied-dyed or Lucy would have burned it long ago.

“I know, Natsu,” Lucy saved softly. He deflated at her touch, gaze suddenly tired as he gave her a
small grin.

“This place is creepy as fuck,” Gray said sourly, narrowing his eyes at the most middle row of shelving across from them.

“I agree with Gray,” Lucy said softly. She shuddered, wiping her hands on her shorts as much as she could. “Why did you want to come in here? Also, Gray, why are you in here? This is like, your nightmare fuel.”

Natsu shrugged again. “Been workin’ on a spell and hoped a shop like this would have what I needed. Old shit is hard to find on the internet and if it is, it’s usually been translated, and done shit poor at that. Gotta admit for as creepy as it is, this place is legit.”

“I didn’t want this hot head leading you into a cult by accident and getting you sacrificed.” Gray said flatly. Lucy whipped her head to lecture Gray when she felt Natsu tense, plans to tell him off for joking about stuff like that and being a dick stopping on her tongue when she saw his serious and pinched expression. He was telling the truth.

Lucy watched as Gray shrugged, stretching in the middle of the aisle before letting his arms fall to his side. “We should probably find the others and head back to the motel,” Natsu grunted, pulling Lucy with him as turned to leave. Gray followed silently, and when Lucy looked back at him she saw a faraway expression in his glazed eyes, as if he were watching a memory. Lucy worried her lip, deciding she’d ask him tomorrow when she knew there was no way for him to escape, save jumping out of the van at a hundred kilometres an hour.

The three had to blink as their sight readjusted to the setting sun hitting them directly in the face outside, Lucy pouting while Gray and Natsu swore under their breath. Lucy started to walk to the more populated shopping area where Loke, Cana, and Erza were sure to be, rifling through her tote slung over her shoulder for sunglasses or her cell phone to text Cana to get her exact location. Lucy squeaked when she bumped into something, bouncing back and apologizing before meeting the stranger’s gaze.

“Hello,” the girl said softly, blue hair curled at the ends and dark blue eyes holding a heavy sad now that Lucy could see them up close. It was the girl she had been seeing flitting around for a few hours now. “Juvia would like to introduce herself formally to Miss. Lucy, and apologize.”

“Uhh,” Lucy said, unsure of what to do. Was the girl Juvia, but if she was, why was she referring to herself in the third person? And how did she know her name?

“Juvia and Miss. Lucy have met before,” Juvia continued, hands clasped in front of her, knuckles turning white and shaking slightly. Lucy cocked her head slightly, she was pretty sure she would have remembered someone as eccentric as Juvia appeared to be.

“Juvia was part of Phantom Lord.”

End Notes

So this is the first chaptered fic I made, and I'm slowly going to updating here lol, I already have 20 chapters on ff.net and tumblr, so it should be quick updates until I catch up!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!