Affogato

by moonside

Summary

Working at Stella's isn't such a bad arrangement. Of course, then Ignis makes Noct work the opening shift with the cute new blonde guy - who isn't such a stranger, after all - and Noct's life is about to drastically change. He doesn't really understand why everyone keeps assuming they're dating, though. He and Prompto are just friends, right?

Notes

hello, this is a story i've been working on for a while now. i've been pretty radio-silent this month, despite my best intentions, and it's a lot of crazy life stuff happening! i got a job, and i kinda fell out of love with writing for a while. this is a silly side project i started because i just wanted mindless fun, and then it turned into a beautiful collaborative effort by myself and @UnsteadyGenius!

She is writing the Gladnis perspective of this series, and I'll be tackling Promptis. No worries if that's not your thing - separate fics, just in the same universe. They can be read and enjoyed separately, and will make perfect sense as stand alones, of course, but they will reference each other~ We also are going to coordinate updates! <3
It’s a terrible day, because Noctis Caelum is awake before noon. Hell, he’s awake before *sunrise*.

It’s bullshit. Ignis *knows* to stop giving him these stupid shifts, but apparently nobody else had been available to open. “I know you’re competent Noctis,” he’d said, when Noct had complained about the horrific ‘4:30 AM’ marked on his schedule, “it’s because I trust you.” As if Noct is supposed to give a fuck that Ignis trusts him.

Noctis doesn’t fall for Ignis and his stupid flattery because his alarm is blaring at four in the goddamn morning. Normally, Noctis at least *tries* to make himself look half-presentable. Today? He’s a zombie, stumbling out of his apartment in the damn dark. It’s cold, and his car is freezing, and he’s still living in the dream world when he fumbles with the lock to the coffee shop door.

Noctis, as a whole, really likes his job at Stella’s, the coffee shop owned by his cousin Ignis. He *usually* gets the late shift, mid-afternoon to close, and it’s a good time. The tips are decent, the evenings are quiet, and most importantly, he gets to *sleep*. But damnit, their regular morning person was fired a couple of weeks ago, and Luna can’t do it every day, and now Noct’s life is a living hell.

*And* he has to train someone today. At least Ignis had been quick to hire someone, and damnit, they better be willing to work the morning shifts or someone is going to die. Noctis may very well burn the place to the ground, because a sleep deprived Noctis Caelum is *not* a happy person.

The weather needs to fuck off too, and Noct mumbles that vaguely under his breath to nobody in particular. Speaking of breath, his is puffing in the crisp, early winter air. It’d been warm just a few damn *days* ago, and Insomnia, apparently, can’t quite decide what season it is, because suddenly there’s frost and the scent of snow in the air. He should’ve dressed warmer, Noctis thinks miserably, bouncing back and forth on his heels as he gets the door opened and slips inside.

At least it’s warm inside Stella’s, once Noct’s got the lights on and his stuff tossed in the back room. They’re short-staffed and he’s opening alone but the new hire’s supposed to be in at five and *thank fucking god* it’s a weekend and it won’t pick up until later, because Noctis would probably murder someone if he was supposed to take orders, and train the new person, *and* make drinks all on his own for the first hour of his shift, because Gladio’s little sister doesn’t show up until six.
“I hate everything,” Noctis says aloud to nobody in particular. He’s half-asleep, slumped over the register, and he probably should actually finish opening the till, but instead he’s dozing off and wishing he was back in bed. Literally the only good thing about this shift is that he’ll be done at noon and then he can sleep his afternoon away. It will be a good afternoon. If he survives, that is. Which, currently, is doubtful.

Noct’s phone chimes, and that makes him jump to attention again. It’s Ignis, naturally, checking to make sure he actually showed up.

“Asshole,” Noct grumbles, typing back a scathing message that would be insulting if it wasn’t so full of sleepy typos that even autocorrect can’t salvage. Whatever. Ignis will know he’s awake, at least.

At ten to five, there’s a knock on the door. Oh god. It’s only ten to five, he’s been here exactly twenty minutes, and already Noctis is debating smashing his face in and putting himself out of his misery. The store isn’t even open yet. If it’s a customer, he swears he’s gonna kill someone. Noct glares, and in the dim, early morning, pre-dawn glow beginning to spread, he can see a blonde guy about his age waving through the glass.

Noct’s about to grumble aloud about stupid customers showing up before they even open, but then he remembers the new guy is supposed to show up. Great. He’s early, and he’s grinning widely, and Noctis absolutely cannot deal with a cheerful morning person, not today. He’s going to die.

Noctis debates making him wait, but whatever, he’s already going to be hell to work with. He might as well at least try.

“You’re early,” he mumbles, as he crosses the storefront and unlocks the front door, making a point to lock it behind him as soon as the other kid slips inside, because fuck early customers.

“It’s my first day, dude. At least pretend you’re happy I’m making a good first impression?” the new kid responds, grinning at him. And, well, at least that wakes Noctis up, as he gets a decent enough look at his new coworker.

The lighting in the coffee shop is low still, with that quiet, comfortable ambience of a hipster, hole-in-the-wall joint. Noct’s eyes are half-closed too, blurry around the edges with sleep. But that face, he swears he recognizes it somewhere. And, that bit aside… well. New guy is cute.
“Sorry,” Noctis says, offering up his best smile, even though it’s lopsided and sleepy. He tries to blink some of the sleep away, and extends a hand. “I uh, I really don’t do mornings. I’m probably the worst person to be training you. Name’s Noctis.”

New Guy blinks at the name, and takes Noct’s hand, shaking it. He’s got blonde hair, and somehow, it’s styled, despite it being ridiculously early. It’s a bit longer in the front, spiked and falling in nice, soft waves over his forehead. His eyes are the brightest blue Noct’s ever seen, and his cheeks are covered in a smattering of freckles. More than the obvious voice that’s screaming that this guy is really fucking cute, though, is a strange familiarity.

“Do I know you from somewhere?” New Guy says, as he lets go of Noct’s hand. Their eyes meet, and there’s something strange that passes between them. “Oh! I’m Prompto, by the way…”

Prompto. The damn name sounds familiar, too.

“It sure feels like we’ve met before,” Noctis says, tipping his head to the side, and squinting. “You from around here?”

Prompto nods brightly, and he offers Noctis a brilliant smile, one that’s way too cheerful for how early it is. “We lived here when I was a kid, but we moved when I was in elementary school.”

It’s funny, how a simple phrase can make things click. Really, Noctis wants to blame it on the fact that he’s exhausted, because it takes a second of silence, of the two of them looking at each other, and then they’re both suddenly grinning, talking at the same time.

“Noct!” Prompto says, as Noctis is echoing, “Prom!”

“Shit, dude, that’s you, huh?” Prompto laughs, and then, Noctis realizes quite suddenly, he’s looking at his goddamn best childhood friend from elementary school.

They’d lost touch of each other years ago. A full fucking decade ago, and it’s insane that it’s been that long. They’d met in kindergarten. Prompto had been totally different back then, and Noctis supposes he can’t really be blamed for not recognizing him. He’d been a chubby kid, with thick-rimmed glasses and flat blonde hair. His skin had been paler, and the freckles had been barely visible. It’s nothing like the guy standing in front of him, slim and lightly toned, the freckles vibrant on his tanned skin.
“You moved away in fifth grade,” Noctis says, with a quiet little smile, and suddenly, before he can say anything else, Prompto’s moving in, awkwardly throwing an arm around Noct’s shoulder and tugging him in for a hug. Noct hates being touched, and he hates human contact like this, but it feels good, it feels right, and he leans into the embrace, his chin resting on his old friend’s shoulder.

“Yeah, dad got a new job,” Prompto admits. “I dunno. It all happened really quick, and you were sick I guess, and just… I dunno. Dad thought it would be really stressful for you, with everything that was happening… I think he was hoping I’d make some new friends once we moved.”

“Did you?” Noctis says. He doesn’t mention the part where he never really recovered from losing his best friend, that he kinda existed, sick on and off through middle school. He was a loner in high school, too, though in the cute-and-admired-from-afar kind of way. It’s mostly just because his dad’s rich, but whatever.

“Not really,” Prompto admits, with a laugh, “but I had a few friends on the track team, I guess. You?”

Noctis shrugs. “Just Gladio and Ignis. I wish he’d told me he’d hired you, there’s no way he didn’t recognize you.”

Or, well, maybe that’s not accurate. Prompto really does look different. He looks good. Noct’s stomach is doing flips, and maybe it’s just the excitement of seeing his old, best childhood friend again, or maybe it’s something else.

“Well, I’m here in the flesh now,” Prompto shoots, cheerfully enough, and he leans in to playfully knock at Noct’s shoulder. “So, I worked in a coffee shop in high school, so hopefully I’ll pick up fast.”

Even through the excitement, Noct’s still exhausted. It’s impossible to shake just how goddamn tired he is, after all, because it’s still five in the morning. And it’s also apparently one of those mornings where they’re going to end up opening up late, because Noct still has a million things to do and instead he’s standing here, shooting the shit with the cute blonde guy blasting in from the past.

“That’s the best news I’ve heard all day,” Noctis says with an exhausted smile. “I hate morning shifts. I’m… kinda useless, honestly, Prom.” He hesitates, just for a moment, “… I can call you Prom, right?”
“Duh, Noct,” Prompto replies, far too brightly and awake for such an early morning shift. “C’mon. We get free drinks, right? How ‘bout I practice making a latte for you, that’ll wake you up!”

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For his first shift, Prompto does a pretty damn good job. He picks up on things fast. The prior experience helps, sure, but he’s friendly – the girls love him – and efficient, and Noctis is grateful for that, because he’s slow and sleepy in the mornings.

“I’m a hands-on learner,” he says to Noctis, grinning, because it’s the holiday season and every single girl imaginable wants a peppermint mocha. It’d only taken a few tries for Prompto to master it, and Noct’s a little impressed. He’d been awful when he’d started this job, if he’s being honest, and it’s only his eagerness to impress his dad that had kept him pressing forward.

Prompto had learned pretty damn fast, too, that Noctis likes his drinks unbearably sweet.

“How the hell do you even drink that?” Prompto eyes Noctis skeptically as he sips at his latte, made with several extra pumps of mocha and caramel. Noct simply shrugs. He doesn’t even like coffee, if he’s being honest with himself, but the caffeine is pretty much a necessity so damn early in the morning, and if he covers it with enough sugar, it just tastes like candy anyway.

Noctis simply shrugs. “I like sweet stuff.”

“I’m gonna remember that. Six pumps of caramel, five of mocha?” Prompto makes a disgusted face, but it pleases Noctis, in some way he can’t quite understand or rationalize, that he’s making an effort to remember.

“You have a good eye,” Noct replies, lazily, taking another drink, leaning against the counter. It’s been a slow, steady morning, and they’ve got a well-needed lull in customers. “Extra whip, too.”

Prompto rolls his eyes. “Of course. You’re a total white girl, you know that?”

Noctis laughs. “No way. They’re the ones getting half-sweet, almond milk, light-whip crap. Or the frappes. Just you wait. Awful to make.”
Prompto shakes his head, but he’s smiling, a bright smile that lights up his entire face. “Says the guy drinking diabetes in a cup. Don’t think you have any right to judge, Noct.”

Noctis can’t help but smile back, though, and there’s a fluttering warmth in his chest. A customer approaches the front, though, and there’s no room to say anything else, because he’s stepping back, letting Prompto take the reins. He really is a fast learner, though, and doesn’t need much of Noct’s help.

Iris is bustling around, making drinks, and she pauses, a huge smile on her face as she gets up in Noct’s personal space, her lips far too close to his face. “Noctis Caelum, smiling during a morning shift? Damn, you’ve got it bad, huh?”

Noctis absolutely doesn’t know what Iris is talking about, but as soon as he opens his mouth to protest, she simply giggles and bounces off, full of energy. He does not have anything. Iris has always been weird and bubbly and saying things that don’t make sense, though, so he dismisses it.

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Somehow, Noctis survives his morning shift.

It’s probably thanks to Prompto Argentum, in all honesty, that he’s not in an absolutely terrible mood.

It just so happens, too, that the new guy’s shift ends at the same time as Noct’s.

“Survived your first day,” Noct says, with a lazy smile, as he tugs his apron off and balls it up, tucking it into his bag unceremoniously. Prompto, on the other hand, is taking his off and neatly folding it. Noct doesn’t quite get it, since there’s a giant stain on the front and Prompto’s gonna have to wash it anyway, but whatever.

It’s probably more a problem that he’s quietly, unconsciously watching the other’s behavior, but that’s whatever.

“Yeah,” Prompto says, gratefully, grinning at Noctis. “You’re a good trainer, you know. Thanks.”
Noctis doesn’t quite think that bit is accurate. He’s nice enough, yeah, but he’s impatient and his temper first thing in the morning isn’t quite the best. “I’m the one who fucked up three orders this morning,” he points out, shaking his head.

“You said it yourself, though. Not a morning person, huh?” Prompto teases, and damnit, every time he smiles, Noctis finds himself smiling back. He’s not sure what it is. Maybe it’s just Prompto’s sunny demeanor, or maybe he’s just a magnetic kind of person. Or, hell, maybe it’s the fact that they’d been friends as kids, because even all these years later, talking like this seems easy. It feels like no time’s passed at all, if Noct’s being honest with himself, even though it’s been an entire decade.


Prompto nods, and then, just for a moment, there’s a strange flicker of emotion in his eyes. “So, we’re gonna be working opposite shifts, then?” he says, and he words sound casual, too casual, and Noctis swears for a moment that he hears a bit of hesitance there.

Noctis really, truly, doesn’t understand the strange surge of emotion he’s feeling right now.

“Mostly, yeah,” he says, slinging his bag over his shoulder. “… hey. I’m really fucking tired, worst company ever, but you wanna hang out after work sometime?”

Just like that, the strange flicker of emotion Noctis had seen is gone, because Prompto’s grinning again, nudging their shoulders together as they make their way out of the coffee shop. Iris waves them off with a knowing smile, and she’s nudging into Luna and whispering something in her ear conspiratorially. Of course she is – Iris is a menace.

“You drive?” Noctis asks, as they head out into the parking lot.

“Nah,” Prompto admits, flushing. “I mean, I *can* drive. I don’t have a car yet, though. I’d normally walk, but it was my first shift and it was early so I took an Uber…”

Noctis grins, his car keys in hand, flicking the button to flash the headlights and unlock the doors. His own car is a damn nice one, and it’s completely courtesy of his dad. “I’ll drive you home. And don’t give me that look you’re totally about to give me, I’m tired, but I like driving.”
Prompto sighs. “This isn’t gonna be a regular thing, Noct. I’m fine on my own.”

It’s totally gonna be a regular thing, but Noctis doesn’t argue it. Instead, he quietly enjoys how Prompto’s eyes go all wide at the fact that a kid working in a coffee shop has a really nice car. And, at the same time, he’s grateful that Prompto doesn’t ask. It’s not so much that he hides who his dad is – and Prompto has gotta remember some of the details, even ten years later – but that it isn’t all immediately about his apparent wealth.

That’s a nice change.

Noctis likes Prompto. It only takes five minutes to drive him home, but it still feels like seconds, with the way Prompto hums along to the song that’s playing over Bluetooth, rambling on about whatever comes to mind. Noct doesn’t have to put much effort into the conversation; it all comes seamlessly, and for once, something in his life feels like it’s simply falling into place.

“When do you work next?” Noct asks, as he pulls over to the side of the street and shifts the car into park, as Prompto directs him to a building that’s apparently his.

“Tomorrow. Open shift.” Prompto replies, twisting in the seat, and their eyes meet. There’s something in the air, there’s an electricity, something, and it makes Noctis shiver, makes his whole body surge. “You?”

“I come in at noon,” Noctis replies. “Guess we’ll have a couple hours of overlap?”

“There till two,” Prompto agrees, with a grin, because the shop opens a little later on Sundays. “See you then?”

“Yeah—” Noctis starts to say, and then he’s shifting, reaching for his phone. “Hey. Wanna give me your number? We can text and shit.”

Prompto’s cheeks flush bright red, and he’s offering one of those bright, bursting grins again, one that sends spikes of warmth through Noct’s chest, one that’s making him feel things he doesn’t understand, but hell, it feels wonderful and confusing all at the same time.

“Yeah,” Prompto says, a little breathless, “dude, let’s do that. I don’t know anyone here.”
“You know me,” Noctis replies, “guess you’ve always kinda known me, huh?”

“Guess so,” Prompto agrees.

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For the first time in his life, Noctis isn’t too upset when Ignis calls him that night and asks him to switch shifts the following morning.

“I know it’s two morning shifts in a row,” Ignis starts off saying, “but Iris’s cat is sick, she’s very upset, Gladio’s taking it to the vet, you know how soft he is for his sister—”

Noctis rolls his eyes, because Iris is positively diabolical.

“It’s fine,” he says, quickly, interrupting Ignis, and probably giving him the shock of his life, that he isn’t putting up a fight about this. “I’ll open, Specs. Whatever. Exhaustion is my constant state of existence, anyway.”

“Who is this?” Ignis responds, politely, after an expected, shocked pause. “Surely, I’ve called the wrong number, because there is no way Noctis Caelum would agree to an early shift without a fight. I was prepared to bribe you.”

Noctis laughs and shakes his head. “You can totally still bribe me. I’m open to that.”

He doesn’t bother to mention that he’s been texting all goddamn day with Prompto Argentum. They’re apparently both into the same thing, and they’ve both been binge-watching the same shitty show on Netflix. Noct was a couple of episodes ahead, so he ends up napping while Prompto catches up, and they’ve been live-texting each other reactions for a good chunk of the evening. Of course, the sun’s set, and it’s dark in the apartment, and Noctis is pretty damn close to passing out, but he’s still staring at his phone screen, smiling like a ridiculous dork every time the text notification goes off.

“I—have a breakfast sandwich, then,” Ignis says, lamely, and it’s obvious that he’s got no idea what’s happening. After all, Noctis hates working this particular shift. “On the house.”
“Cool,” Noctis says, with a grin, “thanks, Iggy. By the way. New kid. You should’ve warned me it was Prompto Argentum!”

There’s another short silence, and Ignis replies, quite politely, “should that name mean something to me?” and he says it in the vaguest way that has Noct’s stomach doing another flip. Ignis, of course, always knows everything.

“Ignis,” Noctis says, groaning, “I swear. Don’t play dumb with me. I used to hang out with him all the time when I was little, remember?”

There’s another pause, and then Ignis says, carefully, “ah, of course. You two were attached at the hip for a few years, weren’t you? There’s that photo in your father’s office of the two of you with those ridiculous flower crowns you made each other…”

“That photo is embarrassing,” Noctis grumbles, but he’s smiling, and it’s totally apparent in the way his voice goes all soft. He’s fidgeting, and he doesn’t even know why. “You should’ve told me.”

“I didn’t quite make the connection,” Ignis’s voice is light, but he’s absolutely precise, continuing on, “so, training him went well? Iris said he’s a natural, that the customers loved him. He’d told me he worked in a coffee shop in Gralea, so I figured it would be a good fit.”

“Yeah,” Noctis replies, and maybe it’s a bit too eagerly, “opening with him was easy. He’s nice. Kinda… feels like we’re instantly friends again, y’know, after all these years?”

“Iris may have mentioned that you two got along quite well,” Ignis says, and then, Noctis can practically hear the realization dawning upon him. “You open with him again tomorrow, that’s right.”

Noctis shrugs, and he tries his best to sound noncommittal. “Yep, Ignis. Making me open up two days in a row with the new guy. You’re the worst.”

He’s not too upset about it, though.
Noct absolutely doesn’t realize it yet, but he’s totally fallen, and **hard**.

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading!! this fic is... oh, gosh, about half written already? <3 it's really something i'm having a ton of fun with, so hopefully people enjoy it too! i'm on twitter @thatdest, tumblr @desttree! thank you again! go ready @UnsteadyGenius's fic, because we bounced ideas off each other and they complement each other SO DAMN NICELY, I AM SO PROUD OF THIS AU.

(also, if anyone stalks my ao3, yes i did have a persona fic by the same name but i deleted it lmfao bc i felt like affagato was the perfect name for this fic and let's be honest im never gonna finish any p5 fic lol)
Playful Conversation

Chapter Summary

Prompto survives his second day of work (somehow), and Noctis starts to develop... feelings? Something. He's not sure.

Chapter Notes

we were gonna do weekly updates but this story is ridiculous and fun to write. If you haven't been following UnsteadyGenius's side of the series -- see that 'series' button up there?! Click next, and it will bring you to her Gladnis fic!! we reference each other constantly and I promise you, her fic is better than mine. :p

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day two of Prompto’s shift is going smoothly enough. Sundays are usually slow until later in the day, anyway, when the Saturday night hangover crew stumbles in for ridiculously sugary lattes and junky breakfast sandwiches. And, of course, for Ignis’s pastries, which have quickly become famous here in Insomnia. Noctis is eyeing the dwindling pastry case, debating stealing one. He deserves it, right? Working another morning shift. It’s still a slow morning, though. There’s a few regulars, some poor unfortunate souls who are on their way to retail hell, and a couple of gossiping college girls seated in plush chairs by the door, but otherwise, the shop is pretty quiet.

Noctis has learned that Prompto likes ridiculously complicated drinks.

“This is going to taste like shit,” he warns, as he whips up a gingerbread latte, half-sweet, made with almond milk, and no whip, but extra cinnamon topping.

Prompto accepts the drink, and there’s a moment that’s both awful and wonderful as their fingers brush when Noct passes the steaming cup over. For a split second, Noct wants to keep touching, but then he’s drawing back, and okay, maybe he’s a little worried that Prompto won’t like the drink. He shouldn’t be. But he is.

“It’s perfect,” Prompto beams, though. They really shouldn’t be outright leaning against the side of the counter, drinking lattes on the job, but there’s nobody paying them a lick of attention. It’s nine in the morning, three hours into Day Two of the Shift from Hell, and Prompto Argentum is literally Noct’s saving grace, because as much as he’d been willing to agree to this shift when Ignis had asked, he’s about two-thirds asleep at this point.
Basically, Noct’s regretting his life choices.

Noctis offers up a sleepy smile, despite that, and he sips at his drink. It’s ridiculously sweet, enough that his tongue hurts, and Prompto definitely slipped some extra shots of espresso in there. Thank fucking god for that, because he needs it.

“Why’d you move back to Insomnia, anyway?” Noctis asks, lazily, leaning against the counter a little more, until his hip is outright nudged up over the edge, perching in a manner that Ignis will absolutely lecture him over. Totally unprofessional. Noct doesn’t give a shit.

Prompto, the new model employee that he is, is at least pretending to be cleaning off the pastry case. Noctis admires his work ethic, at the very least. He might be admiring other aspects of Prompto, too, but he’s not about to admit that.

“I got into college here,” Prompto says, brightly enough, “full scholarship. I wasn’t gonna take it, though. Didn’t wanna leave dad, and no schools in Grabea offered my program.” He laughs a bit self-consciously, as if Noct’s gonna judge him for that, but Noctis gets it, and says nothing. Prompto continues on, “Anyway, it was kind of a last-minute thing, so I missed the cutoff to start this year. My dad thought I should move anyway, though, have some time to just get settled and maybe make a few friends…”

Prompto trails off, and he’s flushing a little, purposely averting his eyes, suddenly hyper-fixated on a nonexistent spot on the glass case that he’s rubbing his cloth stubbornly over. Again, Noct gets it. He shouldn’t get it, maybe, but instinctively, he does. His only friends, really, outside of a basic coworker relationship, are Gladio and Ignis. Ignis is his cousin, so that doesn’t count, and Gladio might as well be, since their dads are best friends.

“What about you?” Prompto says, immediately, changing the subject.

Noct shrugs. His story’s not that different, really. “I got into college. Dad’s supportive, but… I dunno. I’ll probably follow in his footsteps, but I just wanted a bit of time to prove myself, to figure things out. Dad gave Ignis the money to start the shop, so I guess I’m still reliant on him, but… it felt important. To do something for myself, y’know?”

Prompto nods, and they exchange a look. How has Prompto only worked her for two days now? Noctis doesn’t understand it. Then again, the kid he’d been friends with for those few formative years has always been in the back of his mind, because after Prompto had moved? They might have been little, but that’s really the first – and maybe the only – genuine friendship Noct’s ever
had in his damn life. The first thing that’s entirely his, and he’d missed it, maybe more than he ever wanted to admit.

“I get it,” Prompto says. “You should start college with me next year. Who knows, maybe we’ll figure something out together.”

“Maybe,” Noctis agrees. He has to admit, it seems like a damn good idea. The future has been a terrifying thing, something he’s been hesitant to chase, because really, Noctis has no idea what he wants to do, apart from working mindless shifts at a coffee shop and playing video games, but the idea of having a friend? Having someone to face the world with? Someone who’s going through the same thing?

It’s a good thing.

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Of course, things are going too smoothly for a Sunday shift. It picks up a little from a bit of a noon rush, but it’s still slower than usual. The tips are better than usual, though, and it’s probably because of the cute, freckled, new face that is Prompto. He flirts happily with pretty much everyone, and he’s picked up on brewing up lattes way faster than Noctis ever did. Soon, there’s less than an hour left of both of their shifts. Noct’s other favourite coworker, Luna, is here to close, and Ignis is in the back office, doing the week-end paperwork. Ignis, it seems, is always doing paperwork. Noctis wishes he’d let him help out, but that’s just how Ignis is, always shouldering the weight of the world.

The door chimes, and Noctis looks up. His stomach drops, and Luna immediately groans. She’s on her first break, and she offers up an apologetic look as she scurries out of the front area and back to the break room, coffee in hand, a muttered, “good luck, guys.”

Prompto blinks. He doesn’t know yet. He will soon. “What’s got her so spooked?”

“This one’s all you,” Noctis replies, and he feels a little guilty, but hey, every coffee shop has its Problematic Regular, and Prompto might as well learn to deal with it sooner rather than later. It’s an initiation, of sorts, a rite of passage that they all had to face. It just kinda sucks that it’s Prompto’s second day on the job, and so far, a pretty damn good one.

Good day or not, it’s all about to go to shit, because the customer who just entered Stella’s is ambling his way up to the register, taking his slow, sweet time doing it, a misleading, lazy smile
already spread wide across his face.

Noct used to wonder if the guy was drunk, the first few times he’d showed up in the coffee shop. He’s got that ridiculous, exaggerated swagger to his step. Eventually, though, Noctis had just realized that the guy’s just an asshole, a self-righteous one with an inflated ego. Still, it’s always a little bit like something out of a horror movie as he wanders to the register, the horrible background music of Taylor Swift only adding to the sense of foreboding. Who even added Taylor Swift to the coffee shop playlist? It sure as hell wasn’t Noctis. It was probably Iris. It’s always Iris.

“Hi, how are you today?” Prompto says brightly, to the new customer, still mostly unsuspecting. Luna has him slightly spooked, though, and he’s fidgeting a little, kicking at the bottom of the counter with a toe, one hand toying with a strand of hair, tucking it behind a pierced ear, fiddling with one of his piercings and tugging against the cartilage. Even though Noctis knows Prompto’s totally judging the guy for wearing that gross, ugly coat and the awful fedora, he’s polite as always. Noctis might be shrinking away, and maybe he should feel bad and step in, but fuck, he does not wanna deal with this.

Prompto is better with people, anyway. He’ll be fine. Right? Right.

“Latte. Large. Extra hot, no foam,” the problematic customer says, no preamble, though he leans forward, eyes narrowed, as he stares Prompto down, eyes focusing on the name tag on the front of Prompto’s apron. “You’re a new face. Pronto, is it? Pronto, my dear lad, I must warn you, I have a foam allergy.”

Prompto winces at the obvious mispronunciation of his name, and Noctis can tell he’s biting his tongue.

Noctis himself barely contains the derisive sound that so desperately wants to come out. He almost – almost – points out that he’s pretty sure it’s impossible to be allergic to foam, but last time he’d done that, Weird Creepy Guy had asked him to remake the damn drink five times and in the end, he’d had to ask Luna to step in because he was about two seconds from throwing it in the guy’s face.

“Oh,” Prompto says, taken aback, but he recovers quickly enough. Apparently, he’s decided not to argue, which is probably the best course of action. Prompto’s a better judge of character than Noctis, maybe. Or, hell, maybe it’s just obvious what a gross slimeball this guy is. “Y-yeah, sure, that’s fine. Large latte, extra hot, no foam, that’ll be—”

“Four twenty-five, I know,” the man replies, and Noctis can barely contain himself at the
expression on Prompto’s face when the guy proceeds to pay in small coins. He does this every fucking time. “And, a little extra for your troubles,” he adds, tossing a few pennies into the tip jar.

Noctis had been pissed the first time he’d been tipped pennies. Now? They like to joke about the cursed pennies and argue over who has to get them included in their tips.

Nobody wants Ardyn’s cursed pennies.

“Name for the order?” Prompto asks, picking up his pen and poising it against the side of the paper cup. He’s taking this all in stride, surprisingly well; clearly, Prompto’s customer service skills are far better than Noctis’s, because Noctis is absolutely pretending to be very busy doing other things.

“Ardyn,” the man replies, with that inflated sense of self-importance, yet again, “and I should only have to tell you that once. Everyone here knows my name. This pathetic little shop is lucky to have my patronage. Why, Pronto, if it weren’t for me, I don’t know how it would stay afloat. You’d best remember that.”

Noctis snorts under his breath, and disguises it as a coughing fit. Stella’s is busy as hell, and Ardyn is never worth the trouble it takes. They’ve wasted so much food remaking his stupid drink, it’s absurd. He glances at Prompto though, and he’s very pleased to see that the name is spelled “Yargen” in Prompto’s bubbly, looping script. The passive-aggressiveness of a scorned barista, even one as sunshine and rainbows as Prompto Argentum, knows no bounds.

And, hey, Prompto only has to remake the drink three times to satisfy Ardyn’s ridiculous stands.

“Aceptarable,” he says, finally, and Noctis can totally see Prompto’s fingers twitching as he chews on his lips and stares him down. “Not the best, mind you, but it will do.” He pauses, though, inspecting the cup.

“I do say, though. You’ve misspelled my name, Pronto. Perhaps I misjudged you, and you’re simply slow. I suppose I’ll overlook it this time – I’m running late for a very important meeting.”

Noctis doubts that, unless ‘meeting’ is Ardyn-speak for gulping down a bottle of mouthwash and a street corner with a sign. Prompto’s tongue ring is clacking against his teeth, and Noctis is briefly worried that a fight is going to break out. Luna, apparently, has the same idea – she has a weird sixth sense for trouble, and is always there to defuse the situation. She’s poking her head out of the break room, and she and Noctis exchange a look.
Prompto, however, simply smiles, and says, “oh, good luck with your meeting then!” His voice is overly cheerful, to the point of being fake, and he’s back to tugging at a piercing, but hell, he’s doing better than Noctis would be.

“Why thank you,” Ardyn croons, and he reaches into his pocket, tugging out a stained, half-crumpled business card with a torn edge. “Ardyn Izunia, of Izunia Industries. For future reference, so you don’t mistake my name again.”

Prompto seems rendered speechless, as he stares down at the gross looking business card. He very pointedly places it down on the counter – not wanting to touch it – and nods. “Right. Uh. Have a good day.”

“A fantastic day,” Noctis speaks up, quickly, and very pointedly, “Thanks for coming into Stella’s.”

Ardyn sips at his latte, seems as satisfied as he possibly can be, and smiles a sinister smile. “Until next time, boys.”

Noctis waits until the man leaves, the drunken swagger still in his step, before he bursts out laughing, the moment the door swings shut behind him, “holy fuck, Prom, you should’ve seen your face!”

“You could have warned me!” Prompto groans, sticking his tongue out at Noct, the piercing clacking against his teeth, “god, why does every coffee shop have one of those assholes?!”

Luna, who had been hiding out in the break room, pokes her head out from the back. “That’s better than he usually is, Prompto. Normally, he asks for three ice cubes in his drink. And he still orders it extra hot!”

Prompto sighs. “Well, at least this shift can’t get any worse, right?”

“Don’t say that. Murphy’s law,” Luna says sagely, but she’s wandering over, curiosity getting the better of her, to poke at the grubby little business card Prompto had put down on the counter. She seems hesitant to pick it up, and instead leans over the counter, blonde curls falling over her face as she squints to read the card. “Ardyn Izunia, Executive CEO and Supreme Overlord, Izunia Industries. Holy shit, is this guy for real?”
Prompto nudges her aside, leaning over to re-examine the card, now that the shock has worn off. “He’s pure evil, Noct. Shit. He’s worse than I thought – he used Comic Sans on his business card!”

Noctis groans. “Fuck, dude. He’s the worst. He comes in all the time, and he’s always a nightmare.” Noct’s shoulder is pressing into Prompto’s, though, their faces close as he gets a look at the nightmare little business card, too. “Izunia Industries. Never heard of ‘em. Wonder what they do?”

“He must have money,” Luna sighs, “or he really is that deranged.”

“Maybe he just wanders around a parking lot, pushing like, a stroller of dolls or something…” Prompto says, thoughtfully, and Noctis bursts out laughing at the mental image. Noctis is usually withdrawn, quiet, but Prompto is hilarious, and he can’t quite help it. The other boy just brings him out of his shell so naturally.

Luna momentarily eyes Noctis, but then she’s laughing too, reaching for her phone and pulling it out. “You know, Google can answer that.” They all shift focus, hovering over Luna’s little phone screen as she thumbs ‘Izunia Enterprises’ into the search browser. A site comes up, but it’s a generic looking one, with no real description of what the company does. It looks like a professional site, though. Huh.

“Whatever. They’re probably douchebags,” Prompto says, as the door opens and a customer comes in.

“Probably investment bankers,” Noctis replies. “My dad says they’re all dicks.”

“Your dad’s right,” Luna agrees, mildly, “my brother’s a financial analyst. All the same thing.”

Noctis hides a laugh, but he turns his attention back to the job. It’s almost time to go, anyway. He also pretends not to notice when Luna sneaks into the back with her iced coffee, and comes back with something that smells vaguely of alcohol. She’s a good employee, with a good head on her shoulders, and hell, they probably all need a nice, stiff drink after the Ardyn experience.

“Izunia,” Luna says, as Prompto whips up a customer’s drink – an easy caramel macchiato, no modifications, a good customer, thank god – “that’s a weird last name, isn’t it?”
“Wonder if he made it up,” Noctis shrugs. He’s taking another order, because naturally, now they’re getting slammed with a sudden rush of people. “Hello, fellow youths! My name is Yargen Zootopia, and I would like a ridiculously complicated drink that I’ll ask you to remake five times!”

Prompto busts out laughing, and he almost drops the latte he’s making. Luna hides a giggle of her own, and thus, a new tradition is born.

“Oh, we are so putting that on his cup every time he comes in. We have to,” Prompto says, and they all agree on that, unanimously.

Luckily, the shift doesn’t get any worse, and after that particular rush, it slows down again. Noctis and Prompto are both pleased about that, because it’s time to leave. And, as much as Noct wants to go home, he’s not about to abandon poor Luna to a slammed shop. Stella’s is quiet though, and he and Prompto both are in the clear to leave. Good thing, too. Noctis is on his fourth latte of the day, and he’s absolutely high on sugar and caffeine. He’ll crash eventually, and it’ll be awful, but at the moment? He’s feeling good.

And okay, maybe he’s feeling a little brave, too, because he’s eyeing Prompto as they walk out of the coffee shop together. That free breakfast sandwich Ignis had delivered on feels ages ago, at this point, and Noct’s stomach grumbles with the thought. “Hey,” he says, as they make their way across the little parking lot to his car, “you wanna go grab lunch?”

Prompto doesn’t hesitate, and instead offers up a resounding, “yeah, Noct, that sounds awesome.”

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They end up at a pizza joint near Noct’s apartment. There’s a bit of a passionate debate between the two of them, because Prompto’s one of those fucking freaks of nature who enjoys pineapple on pizza. They come to a bit of an impasse agreeing on what to order, and inevitably end up splitting the toppings half-and-half.

Noctis grumbles, picking away a pepper that somehow managed to stray onto his side of the pizza, poking at it disdainfully.

“We should’ve showered first. We smell gross, like coffee,” Prompto points out, shaking his head. He looks a lot better than Noctis does, at least. His makeup’s a little smudged, after a long shift, and his hair’s mussed, but honestly? Noctis thinks it makes Prompto look even better.
“This is my life,” Noct replies, his fingers smeared with grease as he takes a bite of his own pizza, all meat, no veggies – minus the sneaky pepper - just the way he likes it. “It’s not a bad job, though. You picked up fast, you’ll do well. Iggy likes you.”

Prompto nods, slowly. “Ignis... I remember him, when we were kids. He was always way smarter than us.”

“He still is,” Noctis replies, laughing. “... hey. I’m sorry we lost touch, when we were kids. I... should’ve tried to find you. I dunno. I was really sad when you left. Figured you didn’t wanna see me anymore.”

Maybe it’s an accident, how Prompto’s foot nudges into Noct’s under the table, or maybe it’s a sign of something deeper. Noctis isn’t sure. He wants Prompto to keep looking at him like that though, gaze intense, eyes bright and vivid blue, just like a sunny sky. Fuck, Prompto, suddenly, is everything. How has it only been a couple of days since they were reunited?

It feels like they’re best friends, already.

“Noct, shut up. We were kids. Important thing is... all these years later, and we’re here, right? Must be, I dunno, fate or something. Don’t fight it.”

Fate. Noctis isn’t sure he believes in fate, but whatever. Prompto’s right. It sure feels crazy, serendipitous, that they’ve met again, one step forward into adulthood, but still lingering in that strange place where they’re uncertain and nervous about the future. Maybe Noctis needs this sort of friendship right now.

And maybe it’s not chance at all, because he’s pretty damn sure Ignis knew exactly who Prompto was when he hired him. That’s another thought, one that Noct shelves away to revisit later, when he has a chance to grill his goddamn cousin. Everyone in Noct’s life is a devious bastard.

“Yeah,” Noctis replies, realizing he’s fallen silent. And this time, it’s the toe of Noct’s shoe that’s kicking into Prompto’s shin, and they’re sharing a tentative, secret smile. “Whatever it is, I’m glad.” Noct’s never been good at talking about feelings, stupid emotions and shit like that, and he’s flushing a little, eyes ducking back down to focus on his pizza. Prompto seems to get it, though.
They seem, somehow, to simply just get each other.

“So, Ignis recommended this book series to me,” Prompto says, with a bright grin, changing the topic. Noct’s grateful for that, looking up, and even though he can’t quite meet Prompto’s eyes, he’s lingering on the way a hand is idly tugging at that one particular piercing, of the several that line his ear, or the way Prompto fidgets ever-so-slightly, like he can never stay still. It’s endearing, just like the pattern of freckles, or the way the toe of Prompo’s worn sneakers nudges at the floor as he talks. Noctis wants to learn everything, to take it all in.

“Bet it’s that book series about the prince that saves the world, huh? Power of friendship?” Noctis replies, rolling his eyes, “dude, Iggy’s obsessed. He doesn’t wanna admit it, but he’s a total nerd.”

Prompto’s sunny smile widens. “He always was nerdy,” he points out, reaching over to take a swig of Noct’s soda – Prompto had opted for water, and he’s apparently now regretting that. Noctis playfully swats at Prompto’s hand, but he doesn’t actually stop him. He probably doesn’t need the caffeine anyway. “Remember that time he tried to cook for us and gave us food pois—” Prompto stops, abruptly, a sudden, horrified look. “Oh god, no.”

Noctis blinks. Did he say something wrong? “You okay?”

“Fuck,” Prompto half-groans, half-moans, lifting a hand to his face, his shoulders hunching. “I totally told Ignis a story about how I was poisoned as a kid at the job interview. I didn’t even make the connection that it was him! Fuck, do you think he remembers me?! Maybe he didn’t—I look pretty different now…”

“He totally does,” Noctis replies, with a grin, but he’s leaning over, knocking their shoulders together. “Dude. Don’t worry about it. He hired you. That’s saying a lot. Stella’s is Iggy’s baby. He’s overprotective. You’re good.”

Noctis, after all, knows Ignis pretty damn well. He’s got a sneaking suspicion that Ignis did this for him. Ignis is always ranting that Noctis needs to have some friends, that he shouldn’t be so quiet and withdrawn. That’s bullshit, given how much of a lifeless workaholic Ignis can be, but that’s a whole other issue.

“I’m an idiot,” Prompto sighs. “How did I not recognize him?! God, Noctis, I’m oblivious.”

Noct’s amused, but he doesn’t wanna admit that. “The book series,” he says, “you gonna read it? It’s actually half decent…”
“Yeah, I think so,” Prompto replies, brightly, and then he’s off again, all sunshine and rainbows and far too much energy, rambling on about fantasy worlds and comics he likes, and Noct’s happy to tumble into conversation right alongside him. It’s easy, way too easy, even though Noctis sucks at conversation, because he and Prompto are so similar. It really doesn’t feel like it’s been ten years at all, with how fast they’re reconnecting. After they finish their pizza, he’ll drop Prompto off at his place, and then Noct’s gonna go home, take a long shower, and then pass out for a well-deserved nap. But when he wakes up? He’s totally going to be texting his new friend.

They really are already on their way to becoming fast friends again. Hell, soon enough, they’ll be inseparable.

Chapter End Notes

I am on tumblr @destatree; twitter @thatdest. come scream at me. all feedback is loved and appreciated so much. sorry if there are typos--running on 36 hours without sleep, 4 coffees, and 3 sodas right now. i can barely function. vacation and disney world woooo. (also, yargen zootopia has been my nickname for ardyn ever since i started writing this fic and i’m not sorry.)
Prompto visits Noctis at work, and a freak snowstorm brings them closer together.

The days turn into weeks, and one thing becomes certain: wherever Noctis is, Prompto isn’t far away, and vice-versa.

Of course, Noct’s love of mornings doesn’t get any better. He goes back to working primarily close shifts, and their schedules, under regular circumstances, wouldn’t let them see each other very much. There’s sometimes some overlap of a few hours, but for the most part, they’re on totally opposite schedules.

It’s giving Noctis a very interesting dilemma, because honestly? He’s really debating if it’s worth agreeing to work morning shifts so that he can hang around with Prompto some more. He mentions it, off-handedly, to Ignis, who simply stares, incredulous.

“You’re my closer, Noctis,” Ignis says, quite bluntly, “I’m not hiring someone because you want to work with Prompto. Your customer service skills in the morning are terrible, anyway.”

He has a point. And so Noctis keeps saying he’s going to wake up earlier and haul his ass to the coffee shop to hang around, but then he sleeps through his alarm, and he’s dragging himself out of bed thirty minutes before his shift starts, grumbling and groaning.

After a couple of weeks, Prompto starts hanging out at the coffee shop in the evenings.

The first day he shows up, it’s a ridiculously slow night. Noct’s the only one working, and it’s snowing out, just heavy enough that Noctis is starting to worry about being able to drive home in a couple of hours. There’s only a couple people in the shop, some local college kids, and they’re both nursing drinks, tucked away in opposite corners, doing school work.

The door chimes, and Noctis wonders who the hell is coming in with this kind of weather, and then he sees familiar blonde hair and freckles and a bright smile.
“Prom?”

“Hey, buddy!”

Prompto grins and waves. He’s wearing his glasses, and he has to take them off and wipe them on the corner of his sweater as they fog up when he walks inside. There’s rapidly melting snowflakes clinging to his hair, and he’s shivering a little, his sweater bundled up tight around him.

“What’re you doing here? You just worked like nine hours, dude,” Noctis points out, with a shake of his head. Prompto had the dreaded five-to-two shift, and they’d only run into each other for a ridiculous busy late lunch hour rush before he’d left.

Prompto grins wider, though, and bumps his hip against the front counter as he polishes his glasses frantically. Then, satisfied, he carefully plops them back on his face, adjusting them. He doesn’t usually wear the glasses during his shift, opting for contacts. It’s only the second time Noct’s even seen Prompto with them on, and he really, really likes them.

Noctis doesn’t say that.

“Felt like you could use some company,” Prompto offers. “You sounded bored in your texts.”

Right. Of course, Noctis isn’t really supposed to be texting on the job. He’s also not quite a model employee. And, it’s been slow as hell. He’s already gone through the cleaning checklist and done as much as he can prior to close. The snow’s coming down thicker, and even though it’s definitely got the right atmosphere for a hot drink, in theory, the reality is that nobody’s gonna be heading out in that weather, college town or not.

“I’m not that bored,” Noctis counters.

Prompto, in response, whips his phone out of his pocket, tugging a glove off with his teeth so he can swipe through the screen. “What about the part where you lament, ‘kill me prom, im bored, this is what dying feels like?’ Sounded pretty dire dude.”

Prompto has a point.
Noct rolls his eyes. “If I wasn’t on the clock, I’d punch you,” he says, lightly, but he’s already reaching for an empty cup. “Usual, huh?”

“You’re gonna let me pay for that, Noctis,” Prompto replies, but of course, Noctis isn’t gonna accept anything, Ignis be damned. Prompto slips a bill in the tip jar (one that Noct’s absolutely going to put right back into Prompto’s share of the day’s tips) and then Noct’s whipping up some disgusting, not-sweet-enough, fake-milk concoction that Prompto will love.

Prompto grins and accepts the drink, despite his complaints.

“You’re gonna let me pay for that, Noctis,” Prompto replies, but of course, Noctis isn’t gonna accept anything, Ignis be damned. Prompto slips a bill in the tip jar (one that Noct’s absolutely going to put right back into Prompto’s share of the day’s tips) and then Noct’s whipping up some disgusting, not-sweet-enough, fake-milk concoction that Prompto will love.

Prompto grins and accepts the drink, despite his complaints.

“Up to your standards?” Noctis says, lazily, leaning across the bar with his elbows on the countertop.

“I asked for extra hot, no foam,” Prompto replies, in a haughty voice, and if Noctis had something to throw at him, he absolutely would.

“Shut up, you idiot.”

Prompto ends up snagging the table closest to the counter, though. Noctis pretends to be working, at least until the couple of remaining customers finally wander out to brave the storm before it gets any worse. It’s turning into a proper storm now, too, and Noctis has half a mind to text Ignis about closing up early. Of course, as soon as it’s just the two of them alone in the store, anyway, it doesn’t matter.

Prompto’s got a book open in front of him, but he’s barely reading it. Noct’s given up all pretense of work now that it’s just them, and he’s perched on the edge of the counter.

“Didn’t know you read,” Noct says, glancing up from his phone. He’s just browsing a gaming forum, where people are arguing, as they usually do, about various game mechanics for a new game being too difficult.

Prompto laughs. “Obviously I can read, Noct.”

“No not what I meant,” Noctis rolls his eyes. He’s kicking at the edge of the counter, and if Ignis could see him, he’d probably be annoyed. It’s not like he can say much anyway, though. Most of
the closing activities are done, and the store’s empty, except for the two of them, and Prompto totally doesn’t count as a customer.

“I know what you meant. I’m just being an ass,” Prompto replies, laughing, but he looks up from his book.

“That the book series Ignis was telling you to read?” Noctis asks. He’s totally an asshole, because they did have this conversation, ages ago, and Prompto had seemed interested in the book then, too.

Instead, Prompto flushes a little, and puts his book down, sighing. “So. This is gonna sound totally cheesy, but I really like romance novels. Don’t give me that look, Noctis, I swear—”

“No, that’s not a look,” Noctis says, but his grin is wry. “‘Luna’s really into reading about people’s relationship troubles on the internet. You two should totally compare and contrast.”

“Oh shit, she does? I totally read that stuff, too,” Prompto admits, and somehow, that doesn’t surprise Noctis in the slightest. “We’re totally gonna have to talk about it.”

“Great. I’ve created a monster,” Noct’s sigh is an exaggerated one, though, and he’s absolutely still smiling. He smiles a lot, whenever Prompto’s around. “Here’s a post for you: my new best friend is a total weirdo. He shows up at my work to harass me and read weird romance novels.”

Prompto laughs, though, and shuts his book, though his words, they rock Noct to the core. “So, I’m your best friend now?”

For a moment, Noctis almost freaks out. He almost does. Noctis doesn’t let people get close to him. It’s just been him, for a long time, and he doesn’t even let Gladio and Ignis get that close, and they’re family. But Prompto’s watching him, and Noctis likes having his attention, and somehow, it grounds him, it pulls him back from the edge.

“If you wanna be,” Noct says, shrugging, “you don’t gotta make it weird, Prom. We kinda text constantly, though. And you are here, keeping me company in a snowstorm.”
Prompto looks like he’s trying to settle on what to say, and then he simply grins. “I’m not very good at this friend thing, Noct, but… best friend, it sounds pretty good, huh?”

It does sound good. Noctis flushes a little, because they’re both weird, making this into a Thing, when it’s not really much of anything. But neither of them are good at friendship, apparently, that much is obvious, given how flustered a dumb conversation is making them.

“Talking about it is making it totally weird,” Noct admits.

Prompto drains the rest of his drink, and laughs self-consciously. “Dude. Totally. We are the worst. Can we pretend this whole conversation went totally different?”

“Yeah,” Noctis agrees, and then his phone chimes in his pocket. It’s Ignis, because who the hell else would be calling, and he’s finally telling Noctis to close up early and get home safe and sound.

Even though Prompto’s not on the clock, he helps Noctis with locking the door and closing up the shop. “That’s what best friends do,” Prompto says, brightly, even as his cheeks flush, and Noctis doesn’t bother to correct him, or to point out that he totally owes him a favour now. The work goes quicker with two, and it doesn’t take them long at all to get out of the coffee shop for the night. The snow’s already coming down heavily, though, and the parking lot is covered in a thick layer. Noct’s car is coated in snow, too, and he groans as they make their way slow and steady through the parking lot, the snow getting in Noct’s shoes and clinging to his pants.

“I don’t think I can drive in this,” Noctis sighs. “I totally haven’t gotten my winter tires yet.”

“Seriously, Noctis? It’s snowed a few times already!” Prompto points out, as if that’s going to do them any good.

“They’re all-seasons, it normally doesn’t snow this much…” Noctis eyes his car skeptically. The parking lot hasn’t been plowed out, and the streets themselves look slick and messy. There aren’t many cars on the roads, and the ones that have come through have packed the snow down enough that it’s gonna be rough getting anywhere.

“Well,” Prompto says, brightly enough, “you know my place is walking distance. Spend the night, and you can come get your car in the morning?”
Noctis doesn’t know why his heart is suddenly doing flips in his chest, thumping wildly against his ribcage. His throat feels dry, too, and maybe it’s just because it’s cold out and it’s been a long day.

“Or, y’know, I can help you clean your car off,” Prompto adds, quickly, when Noctis doesn’t reply.

Noct realizes, instantly, that he’s gone silent, and if his cheeks weren’t flushing red already, they definitely are now. He’ll blame it on the cold and the snow, and Prompto won’t mention it, and he’s grateful for that.

“No,” Noct says, quickly, “cool. Let’s do that. If you don’t mind the fact that I’ll pass out within an hour. I sleep a lot.”

“I kinda figured that out, Noct,” Prompto replies with a laugh. “You fall asleep mid-text all the time.”

Maybe they know each other pretty well by now, Noctis thinks, and he lets Prompto lead the way, even though by now, he’s driven enough times to Prompto’s apartment to know the directions by heart anyway. The walk goes by quickly enough, because Noct had made them hot lattes on the way out, and they warm their fingers as they walk. It’s realistically pretty slow, with the two of them wading through snowdrifts. There’s snow in Noct’s shoes, and he’s shivering a little, because he’d only thrown on a light sweater on his way out of the door earlier. Despite all that, the banter is nice and light, and the snow looks pretty, at least. Other things look pretty too, but Noct’s not very focused on that.

“I gotta warn you,” Prompto says, when they climb the steps to his apartment building, “it’s a bit of a mess. And I… don’t have a ton of stuff. My dad’s helping me cover rent, but it was too expensive to move most of my stuff… I’m kinda living the ghetto, second-hand-store-furnishing look.”

“It’s fine,” Noctis laughs, “I was using a milk carton for a coffee table until my dad realized it and made Ignis take me out real furniture shopping.” Noct’s stubborn to a fault about money, even though his dad is more than happy to help out, so he gets it, he really does.

Prompto lives on the top floor of a four-story building. It’s a small apartment, with a tiny kitchen, a living room that’s sparsely furnished with a couch, a fluffy papasan chair, a television stand and a TV with a couple of consoles hooked up. It’s comfortable at least, with a fluffy blanket messily bunched over the back of the couch, and a couple of pillows.
Prompto leads the way, making an elaborate show of giving Noctis the grand tour of his tiny apartment. “Bedroom’s a mess, sorry,” he admits, with a laugh. Prompto’s bedroom, at least, is better furnished, and subsequently also pretty cramped. There’s a double bed, hastily made, clothes strewn across the bottom of it, a computer desk with a decent looking computer hooked up, a folding chair with some more clothes strewn over it, and a couple of plastic storage cabinets. The dresser has a pretty nice looking camera on it, with some specialized equipment that Noctis sorta recognizes from some of his dad’s marketing promotions and the photoshoots he’d been forced to do on occasion.

“You’ve got a nice camera,” Noctis says, lightly. He knows Prompto loves taking pictures. He’s always snapping dumb selfies of them. He’d made Noct download that stupid photo chat program too, and he’s always sending pictures with stupid filters that make him have flower crowns and look like animals. It’s dumb. Prompto talks about real photography, too, and he’s got a smaller, lighter camera tucked away in his bag that he’s taken out when they’ve gotten pizza or are shooting the shit after work, but this one? It’s nice. It’s got one of the big, fancy lenses and everything.

“Yeah, it’s my pride and joy,” Prompto replies, brightening up at the mention of it. “I uh, I could show you some of the pictures I’ve taken, sometime, if you want…”

“Yeah,” Noct finds himself agreeing, instantly. “I’d like that.” Hell, Prompto could show him his fucking pet rock collection if he wanted to, and Noct would find it interesting, by sheer fact that it’s Prompto.

“Later,” Prompto says, grinning wildly at the thought, “oh. Bathroom’s an en-suite, you look freezing, Noct, your pants are all wet, here…”

Prompto’s rummaging through his room, going through a drawer, and suddenly he’s pressing a pair of sweatpants and an old t-shirt into Noct’s arms. Noctis is aware, immediately, that it smells like Prompto, and he has no idea what the fuck is even happening at this point, and there’s a weird moment where he simply stares dumbly.

“You can go change whenever… I mean, I figure you’ll be more comfortable...” Prompto explains. “Oh. You can shower too, if you want. I know that’s what I’d wanna do, after a shift. Hang on, I’ll grab you a towel—”

Right. Right.
“Thanks,” Noct says, quickly, ducking past Prompto into the bathroom as soon as Prompto comes up with a clean towel for him. Prompto keeps his bathroom decently clean at least – which is more than Noctis can say for himself. Ignis is totally the one to come by and clean it for him, usually, embarrassingly enough. There’s hair products and makeup scattered all over the place, but the shower’s clean. Noct feels a little guilty about using some of Prompto’s fancy looking shampoo, but the water feels good, and most importantly, it washes away the scent of roasting coffee that’s clinging to his skin and his hair.

Hell, there’s a long moment, too, when Noct’s leaning against the shower wall, where he realizes he’s happy here, and that’s the strangest thing.

Noctis is a pretty closed-off person. He’s distant, emotionally unavailable, and he physically puts space between himself and others. The only people he lets get even remotely close are his dad, Gladio, and Ignis. He and Prompto had been best friends as kids, yeah, but—things were simpler back then. Things weren’t complicated.

There’d been a strange bit of hesitance in coming over here, too, because Noctis likes his own space. He likes going home after work, crawling into his own bed, putting on his own clothes. Being at Prompto’s, though? It’s like an extension of himself, and hell, he isn’t alone here. It shouldn’t click into place so easily, but here he is. And hell, Noct could simply lean here, letting the water wash over his face, running in hot streams over his skin, but the water starts to cool – he likes his showers excessively hot – and suddenly Noct’s scrambling to get the water turned off.

He does a half-assed job of getting dried off, running the towel through his hair as he gets dressed. Noct’s pleased that Prompto’s clothes fit him pretty well – they’re about the same height, and similar build – and it feels warm and comfortable.

Prompto, too, has apparently been busy while Noctis showered, because the apartment smells good, as Noct shuffles back through the living room and into the kitchen.

“Hey. Thought you could probably use some real food,” Prompto says cheerfully, looking over his shoulder as Noctis leans in the doorway. He’s changed out of his clothes, too, and he’s wearing flannel pajama pants and a tank top that shows off the freckles on his shoulders quite nicely (another thing Noctis isn’t focusing on, but he does notice.) More important is the mouthwatering scent of bacon popping and sizzling in a pan on the stove, as Prompto pushes some scrambled eggs around another frying pan.

“Fuck, that smells, good,” Noctis says, grinning. “I suck at cooking, too, imagine that.”

“How the hell do you survive alone?” Prompto replies, tipping his head.
“Ignis, mostly,” Noctis replies, “and lots of microwave dinners.”

“So you’ve got diabetes and sodium poisoning,” Prompto sighs. “Well, you’re in luck, Noct. I make some really good eggs. They’ve got cheese and hot sauce. Downside is that I don’t have a kitchen table, so we’re gonna have to feast like kings on the couch.”

Noctis grins. “That’s fine, dude. Kinda flattering that you’re cooking for me.”

“Don’t get used to it, buddy. Your turn to cook next time,” Prompto teases. “And instant food is cheating.”

“You’ve got a death wish, then,” Noctis replies, with a laugh, lifting a hand and running it through his still-damp hair. “That or I’ll burn the place down.”

“I’ll teach you how to make something, then,” Prompto concedes. “We’ll cook it together. Totally nerdy, right?”

Noctis laughs and shakes his head. “You’re impossible, Prom.” It’s something, that’s for sure, but he’s not really sure exactly what it is. And Noctis isn’t sure, for that matter, why it’s making him feel all weird and funny and warm in his chest again. “You have drinks?”

“Soda’s in the fridge,” Prompto replies. “I don’t have booze, though, if that’s what you mean.”

“We work tomorrow,” Noctis sighs, “it’s already hell waking up in the morning, you think I wanna be hungover, too?” Of course, the idea of a couple of beer with his best friend doesn’t sound terrible, but for the moment, Noct occupies himself with scrounging through the fridge. He grabs a couple of sodas, one for himself, one for Prompto, and hovers awkwardly for a minute in the kitchen. “… you need help?”

“Naw, I got it,” Prompto replies, brightly enough. “You can start a movie or something, if you want. I trust your tastes, we like most of the same stuff.”

Noctis feels a little guilty for taking advantage of Prompto’s hospitality this way, but realistically, what can he actually do? He could offer to toast the bread or something, because he does know
how to use a toaster, but there’s also that time he forgot that he cranked it up to the full 5-minute duration making poptarts and they’d charred into black, gooey messes. Ignis had ended up just buying him a new toaster. It’s still a fresh enough memory that Noct simply nods and retreats to the living room. Prompto, at least, owns a little wobbly coffee table, likely from a giant box furniture store, and Noct sets the drinks down, reaching for the remote to get a movie set up.

Prompto comes over, a few minutes later, once Noct’s indecisively gone through Prompto’s queue several times, finally settling on a super hero action series that they’ve both mentioned, in passing, about wanting to see, despite awful reviews.

“Figure we might as well watch something terrible. I’m totally gonna fall asleep before the first episode’s over, anyway.” Noct grins, accepting a plate of delicious food from his friend. Their fingers brush, and Noct smiles, because the food looks amazing, and Prompto’s totally his fucking hero right now.

“That tired, huh?” Prompto grins, and their shoulders bump together as they get cozy on the couch, blankets drawn over their laps as they start to eat their late dinner. “What time did you get up again?”

“Shut up,” Noctis replies, “Prom. We can’t all be you. I dunno how you function on five hours of sleep, but you’re totally not even normal. How the hell are you real?!”

Prompto flushes brightly, but he rolls his eyes and shoves a forkful of eggs in his mouth. “Well, Noct, when a man and a woman love each other very much—”

“Prom,” Noctis groans, and he presses the ‘play’ button on the remote. They fall into silence as the show starts, and within five minutes, they’re making fun of the absolutely terrible special effects and cheesy dialogue, and everything else is forgotten. And Noctis, even though he’s a notoriously picky eater, cleans his plate for once, eating every last little scrap of crispy bacon.

And hell, Noctis even makes it through the first episode. It’s somewhere between a ridiculous, overdramatic fight scene and the end credits, about halfway through the second episode, when Noct’s eyes start to get heavy, when he realizes, in a distant, sleepy sort of way, that he’s leaning up against his best friend. Prompto’s warm though, and his bare, freckled shoulder makes a really nice pillow. And if Prompto cares that Noct’s drooling all over his arm, all warm breaths of air and lips pressing into his skin with words that go unspoken, he doesn’t voice it at all.

The next thing Noctis realizes, Prompto’s shaking him awake, and it’s morning.
“Hey. Sleepyface. Noct,” Prompto says, nudging his shoulder. Noctis groans and rolls over, reaching for a pillow and cramming it over his head. There’s an awful, disorienting moment when Noctis realizes he’s not in his bed. Hell, he’s not in a bed at all. He’s curled up on Prompto’s little couch, and it’s comfortable enough, but his back is not made to be sleeping like this. Noct’s neck aches, and he almost rolls off the damn couch in his attempt to get away from the hands that are firmly shaking him.

Noctis tries to open his mouth to speak, but it’s a bunch of gibberish, nonsense syllables, the only recognizable word being a bleary, “time?”

“It’s eight in the morning,” Prompto replies. “It’s still snowing, dude. Ignis didn’t open up this morning. He and Gladio are gonna drop your car off at my place when the plow comes and clears out the parking lot later. My apartment comes with a parking spot, and they’ve already cleared out my lot, so they can leave it here.”

Noctis lifts up just enough to nod sleepily, and then he’s cramming his face back down into the pillow. “… so why’d you wake me up?” He doesn’t understand. If neither of them are going to work, sleep seems like a good idea.

“Noct, it’s freezing,” Prompto grumbles, gathering the blankets up around himself as he slowly sits up on the couch.

“Yeah,” Prompto admits, flushing. “Sorry, Noct. The heat is really spotty sometimes… it picked a shitty time to be acting up. C’mon. My bed is a lot warmer than the couch, promise.”

Noctis nods, and he lets Prompto help haul him up off the couch. He’s practically nonfunctioning being woken up like this, and especially with the way the cold’s working through him, but he stumbles down the hallway, collapsing into Prompto’s bed. It’s much warmer, and much cozier, and even though it’s not an expensive, fancy bed, the mattress is nice and soft. More importantly, and this is a far off, vague, sleepy kind of thought, the bed smells like his best friend. It’s nice, and
comforting, and Noct simply breathes in deep, surrounded by Prompto. He falls asleep again, and when he wakes up, it’s to Ignis and Gladio dropping the car off. Eventually, the shop opens late, the snow stopping and the roads getting cleared, and Noct heads back home. There’s a strange reluctance to the whole affair, though.

And, from then on? Movie nights over at Prompto’s place after a long shift at work become commonplace.

Chapter End Notes

sorry if there are typos ughhhhhhhhh i just ran a full marathon (my first one ever! 26 miles/42km ) and i'm dying, everything hurts, lol. <3 as always, comments/kudos are so appreciated. UnsteadyGenius and I are having so much fun writing this together, and we are SO HAPPY everyone is enjoying it as much as we are!! <3
Words Held Back

Chapter Summary

As a rule, Noctis just... doesn't invite people over to his place. But hey, Prompto's presence in Noct's life is just changing everything.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Noctis gets the feeling that Iris is up to something, after a while.

Of course, Iris usually is up to something. This time, though, all of her attention seems to be fixated on him.

“That’s not your sweater,” she says, pointedly, one day, when Noctis wanders into the shop before the start of his shift. He’s actually fifteen minutes early for once, and that’s because he’d fallen asleep at Prompto’s apartment again. His best friend’s given him a key, and his alarm had gone off at the normal time, even though Prompto’s only a few minutes away.

Prompto’s not working for once. He’s neck-deep in doing some marketing thing for Ignis though. Apparently Prompto’s masochistic enough to offer to help with the social media aspect of the coffee shop, and Ignis has been horrendously overworked lately, so he was willing to accept whatever help he could get.

Back story aside, Noct hadn’t been able to find his sweater, so Prompto had simply tossed one of his in Noct’s direction. It’s warm, and comfortable, and it smells like Prompto’s laundry detergent, and it’s nice. Noctis likes it.

“It’s Prom’s sweater,” Noctis says, lightly, as he scoots behind the counter to get himself a quick pick-me-up latte going before he has to clock in. “Couldn’t find mine. It probably fell under the bed or something.”

Iris gives him a look, and Noctis might be oblivious, but it’s still a scandalous enough look that it makes his cheeks flush. “What, Iris? He’s my best friend! We were up till like two in the morning playing video games.”
“Uh-huh,” Iris replies, in a voice that implies she is not convinced. “This is like, the third time this week you’ve been over there, Noct. You’re wearing his clothes.”

Noctis shrugs. He doesn’t quite get the big deal. Okay, so maybe he sleeps in Prompto’s bed now when he stays over, on the occasions that he doesn’t simply pass out on the couch. That’s just because the couch is horribly uncomfortable, though. It has nothing to do with anything else, with how nice and warm he is to be surrounded by the other boy. It’s just a comfort thing. And he and Prompto really are best friends. They’re like opposite halves of a puzzle, and they fit together in a way that makes Noctis feel oddly content, at peace with his place in life, even though it’s realistically a very confusing spot in his life.

He’s apparently got some dopey expression written over his face, though, because Iris giggles gleefully and claps her hands together. “Oh, Noctis, you are so adorable. You don’t even see it, do you?”

“Noctis grumbles, his eyes narrowed as he steams the milk for his latte, adding a couple extra shots of espresso and way too much mocha syrup to balance out the extra bitterness. He tops it off with a giant swirl of whipped cream, and sighs happily as he gets a mouthful of sugar with the first sip.

Iris simply shakes her head. “I give you guys a month,” she says, after a moment, and bounces away, over to the register to take an order. Noctis simply blinks, sipping at his drink.

“I don’t get it,” he says to Luna, since she’s the poor soul stuck working with Iris today.

“Oh, Noctis,” Luna simply says, smiling, “eventually you’ll get it.”

Noctis is pretty sure everyone is in on an inside joke except for him. He doesn’t like it, but what can he do? Then again, he probably doesn’t want to know the details, anyway. So, instead of dwelling, he simply heads into the back break room and tugs Prompto’s sweater over his head. His apron’s freshly washed, too, courtesy of Prompto, and it smells like his detergent now, too. After his shift, the scent of coffee will overpower it, but for now, it’s nice.

Of course, Iris is still giggling in Noct’s direction every time she sees him, until Luna gives her a quiet, but firm, talking to. Noct still doesn’t get it, honestly, but he’s here until close with Iris. Eventually, he simply ignores her, and starts texting with Prompto instead.

‘pizza after work?’ Noct texts, during a lull in customers.
‘sounds good,’ Prompto agrees, following it up with a string of ridiculous emojis.

‘cool, pick u up at 930,’ Noctis replies. It’s at the point where they have a usual place, and it’s open until midnight, so it gives them plenty of time.

Iris is absolutely reading over Noct’s shoulder, too, and if looks could kill, Noct’s pretty sure he’d be in a million pieces, burning to bits on the floor. “Got a hot date with Prompto, huh, Noct?”

“It’s pizza, Iris,” Noctis sighs, “and we’re friends. And stop reading my damn phone!”

“Stop texting at work,” Iris shoots back, and Noctis doesn’t really have a counter to that particular argument, though he glares in her direction until she backs off, and he’s a bit stealthier for the rest of his shift as they make tentative plans, ones that mostly just involve pizza and shitty movies, and maybe hanging out at Noct’s place afterward.

They still haven’t been to Noct’s place, honestly, but well, they’re best friends, right? So, why the hell not? Noctis is ignoring a lot of things that are happening here, and the fact that he’s really weird about having people at his apartment is one of those things. Whatever.

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Pizza happens, and then, inevitably, comes the afterwards part. Noctis had been, to some extent, dreading the part where they try to figure out what they’re doing after, and he ends up driving Prompto home. They’re best friends, and he’s genuinely enjoying himself the more time he spends with Prompto, but Noctis is… well, he’s Noctis.

The weirdness never comes though. They’ve managed to finally establish themselves as ‘regulars’ at the pizza place, and the server already knows their order when they settle down. It makes Noctis smile, because everything, really, has fallen totally into place. It’s all familiar banter and warmth inside, and outside, the snow’s still coating the ground. It’s a cold night, but it’s a good one.

Prompto’s bitching about the heat in his apartment being shit again. That’s been a problem, more and more, as the weather drops down further. They finish off half the pizza, and get the rest boxed up. That means breakfast for the morning, and Noct’s absolutely looking forward to stumbling out of bed in the morning and cramming some cold pizza into his face. They both work an opening
shift tomorrow, for once, and he’s almost looking forward to it. Almost.

The waking up part is still gonna really suck, though.

It’s natural enough, though, when Prompto starts bitching about the heat, for Noctis to casually make a suggestion.

“We’re right by my place. You can come stay the night, if you want. My apartment is always really warm,” he says, offering Prompto a smile that’s almost shy. They’re just getting up out of the booth, Noctis tugging his sweater on and picking up the leftover pizza. Prompto blinks, and his fingers tremble for a moment, as he fumbles with the buttons on his coat.

“You sure, Noct? We gotta get up really early. I don’t wanna keep you up,” Prompto replies, in that same careful, casual voice. Maybe it’s just Noct’s imagination, but he swears, his best friend sounds both anxious and excited, and maybe there’s a hint of nerves in there, too. Whatever it is, Noct’s stomach is back to doing those weird flips.

“Never said I’d be good company,” Noctis replies, nudging his elbow into Prompto’s side. “I’ll probably fall asleep. But it’s warm and I’ve got the new Assassin’s Creed… and we work open tomorrow anyway, so we can just go right to work.”

Prompto’s grin solidifies into something more confident and sure. “Okay, okay. You won me over with Assassin’s Creed. I haven’t played it yet!”

“What?! Prom, you’re missing out,” Noctis replies, feigning scandal in his voice. “C’mon. Might even try to stay up so we can experience it together.”

There’s still a bit of nerves through it all. It’s cold outside, and Noct’s car is cold, so there’s a couple of fumbling moments where they’re all bundled up and shivering as they wait for the heat to kick in. The heated seats in Noct’s car are a fucking godsend, though.

Noct’s apartment building has underground parking, too. Even though he’s determined to make his own way here, and he’s doing a damn decent job of it, maybe his dad still helps out with rent. It’s a bit of a sore point, but his father had pointed out that Noctis is working hard, and he’s proud, and all that other awkward dad stuff that makes Noctis blush and groan. It’s not the fanciest building in the world, but it still has a parking garage and a communal indoor pool and a front doorman.
Noctis hates it. He’s eyeing Prompto warily as he leads him inside, but Prompto seems to take it all in stride.

“I’m on the top floor,” Noctis says, as they wait for the elevator, “it’s kind of a pain in the ass.”

“At least it’s warm inside,” Prompto replies, with a smile.

Noct’s actual apartment is a bit sparsely furnished, and that’s intentional. He’d left behind most of his stuff when he’d moved out of his dad’s condo. He’s got his television and stand, his big fancy bed – because that’s one thing Noct wouldn’t settle on – and a couple of bookshelves stuffed full of nerdy stuff. Then, of course, his dad had come by one day, realized Noctis didn’t even have a couch, and now he’s got a couple of couches, a coffee table, a dining room table – rarely used, because who the hell is Noctis gonna invite over for dinner? – and whatever other stuff his dad just happens to ‘leave’ when he visits.

It’s a nice apartment, all things considered. Nicer than Prompto’s, but Noctis likes Prompto’s place a lot better.

“Damn, Noct, fancy,” Prompto grins, when Noct gives him the quick tour of the place.

“It’s messy,” Noctis replies, and that much is true. He hasn’t taken the kitchen trash out yet. There’s a few empty takeout cartons stacked on the counter. His fridge is a bit gross, and he’s quick to shove the pizza in there. Prompto rolls his eyes, and that doesn’t really seem to surprise him at all.

Noct’s bedroom window has a nice view, though, and Prompto’s distracted by city lights and stars as he quickly shoves a bunch of clothes off the bed and tidies up as best as he can. There’s a hamper overflowing with laundry that Ignis will probably end up doing for him, and Noct’s currently silently grateful that he actually tackled cleaning his bathroom a few days ago because at least that’s not a nasty mess.

Trying to be a grown up is hard.

“I like it,” Prompto says, as he sinks down on the edge of Noct’s giant bed, and he sighs a very happy sound when he sinks into the mattress. “Noct, your bed is amazing.”
“Yeah,” Noct agrees, with a grin, perching down on the other edge and reaching for the television remote and the gaming controller on the bedside table. “You know I like sleeping. This thing weighs a million pounds, it was hell to move. I’m living here forever.”

Prompto laughs, and lets himself fall backwards, sprawling heavily across the mattress, staring up at the ceiling. “For all your teasing about falling asleep before me, I might pass out first.”

“Yeah?” Noct’s heart does that thing again, and it doesn’t surprise him anymore, but the burst of warmth still catches him off guard. It’s just a little harder to breathe, and the room feels stuffy, too hot for his lungs to properly work. “You’re stealing my bed, huh?”

“We can share,” Prompto replies, without missing a beat. “It’s a huge bed, dude.”

Noctis makes very quick work of turning on the Playstation and he pretends to be very interested in debating between games, or turning on a streaming app. They’ve become best friends, and fast ones at that. Noctis has totally fallen asleep in Prompto’s bed before, too, and it’s always been absolutely accidental. It means nothing that his best friend’s joking about sleeping in his bed. It makes sense. It’ll just happen.

It still feels so fucking right though, and Noctis can’t quite place why he’s smiling like a total fucking idiot, as much as he’s trying to mask his expression.

“You better not kick me,” Noctis threatens, after another heartbeat or three of silence. “Those opening shifts are fucking awful enough without you interrupting my sleep.”

“Noct, dude,” Prompto replies, rolling his eyes, “you sleep through everything. The fire alarm in my building went off that one night and you didn’t even wake up!”

That had actually happened, and Prompto had told everyone at work about it. Iris had giggled up a storm about, ‘oh so Noct’s sleeping at your place, huh?’ and Ignis had rolled his eyes. Noctis doesn’t get it. It’s not like they’re dating, or anything like that, but whatever. Point is, Prompto’s totally right.

“Shut up,” he says, good-naturedly, and tosses the controller in Prompto’s direction. “You’re the guest. You pick.”
Prompto lifts himself up, and Noctis absolutely does not notice the way his shirt rides up his stomach as he shifts. Not at all. He smiles a big, goofy smile, and scoots up so he’s seated back against the headboard, a pillow propped up behind him.

“I’m lazy, Noct. You wanna just watch something?”

“Sure,” Noctis agrees, and he shifts to arrange the blankets around them, until they’re nestled in a nice, warm cocoon of quilts and blankets and too many pillows. Prompto picks up on the latest tv series they’re binge-watching, and they’re halfway through the episode before Noct’s eyes start to droop. He should get up. He should take a shower, because he smells like coffee. Prompto smells like coffee, too, Noct realizes, because his head’s lulling to the side, his cheek pressing up against his best friend’s shoulder before he even knows he’s doing it. It’s a good smell, too, and Prompto’s skin is soft and warm against the side of his face.

Yeah, Noctis should definitely get up. But they’ve got work in the morning, and he’s just gonna smell like coffee all over again. Prompto isn’t making any attempt to move either. Instead, he’s shifting, and resting his head on top of Noct’s. His hair tickles a little, and Noctis makes a content, sleepy sound. This is nice. He likes having Prompto here, in his apartment, where it’s not quite so lonely. That’s all Noctis really thinks, though, because then he’s falling asleep.

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“Nope,” Noctis says, a week or so later. “I am not dealing with this shit.”

Prompto is a good best friend. He’s, arguably, the best best friend that Noctis could ever hope for. Noct’s reminded in a million little ways. And right now? He’s reminded because Prompto grumbles and groans, but absolutely lets go of the hold he has on Noct’s apron, giving Noctis the opportunity to zoom away and hide in the back room.

It’s been a particularly shitty day. Ignis is in a mood, and Noct’s not even sure why. He and Prompto are working opposite shifts again. They have been all week, and they have a two hour overlap, but Prompto leaves in thirty minutes, and then it’s just Noctis and shitty-mood Ignis. Oh, and Iris, but she’s coming in late, and she’ll probably be her usual, menacing self, making jokes that Noct doesn’t quite understand.

So, naturally, Problematic Customer chooses that minute to come in. And yeah, Prompto must really like him, because he’s letting Noctis duck away, so that he doesn’t have to deal with the asshole himself.
“Good afternoon,” Prompto greets, politely enough, as Noctis peers from behind the doorway.

“Hello, Pronto, my good lad. It appears you’ve forgotten to greet me personally, again!” Ardyn, the obnoxious usual, is… well, his usual self. Everyone knows his name. They’re all just too spiteful to let him know that they remember it. It’s way too fun to blunder through the conversation and get his name wrong, anyway.

“Sorry,” Prompto replies, with usual sunny smile, though it’s a bit forced, and he’s shuffling his feet a little, kicking the toe of his shoe against the bottom of the counter. “Extra hot latte, no foam, right?”

“Ah,” Ardyn replies, and even when he smiles, it’s repugnant. “So you do remember me! That’s excellent. Ah, but I’m afraid I have a different order today. See, I just so happen to be in charge of a rather large, important company… I needn’t bother you with the name… and I’m personally delivering my staff coffee. Very kind of me, isn’t it?”

Even though Noct’s not got the best view from his hiding place – and he feels absolutely no shame in hiding and letting his best friend deal with this shit – he can absolutely tell Prompto’s got an incredulous, ‘I don’t give a fuck, why are you telling me this’ expression, as he tips his head to the side and chews on his lower lip. Absolutely nobody cares about this dude with his inflated ego and overindulgent sense of self.

“Right,” Prompto sighs, “so. What’s the order?”

Creepy Regular Ardyn was apparently waiting for this moment, because his smile widens, and he lifts a hand to his face, tapping a gloved thumb over his cheek. “An excellent question. It’s a rather simple order. I’d like twenty three caramel frappes, please. Medium. Half with nonfat milk. Three with no whipped cream. Two with extra caramel drizzle. Oh. And I would also like one extra hot latte, no foam, with three ice cubes.”

Prompto expertly stifles an anguished sound. Noct’s a little impressed, because he’s totally ducking back behind the doorway, covering his face with his hand, muffling quiet laughter at just how horrified Prompto is. Of course, the laughter is immediately dying on his lips when he realizes that he’s going to have to help make twenty three frappes.

Ardyn is a nightmare customer.

He tips exactly twenty three cents, too, because he’s a fucking asshole.
It takes Noctis and Prompto half an hour to make twenty three frappes ("Yargen" written on each and every cup, out of spite), and Ignis has to step in and help. Ardyn looks like he’s very desperately trying to find a reason to request that they remake the drinks, but the death glare Ignis is very pointedly gracing him with makes him sigh out a simple, “I suppose this is acceptable,” and then he has the fucking nerve to ask Prompto and Noctis to help carry the frappes out to his car, a junky old run-down thing that Noctis is surprised even runs.

“Oh,” Ardyn says, as they’re loading up the drinks, “I just remembered. I actually only need three frappes, not twenty three… how silly! I suppose I’ll just have to dump these in the trash.”

It’s a miracle that they don’t get fired that day for cursing out a customer. When they come back in, Ignis is drinking an extra-large cup of the strongest blend they have, a hand on his temple, rubbing the stress headache away.

“I should just ban him,” Ignis sighs, “I don’t think it’s worth the stress.”

Noctis and Prompto immediately make themselves drinks as well. Ardyn had, most insincerely, offered them some of the frappes they’d made. Out of principle they’d refused, though. They’re cursed drinks, after all. Everything Ardyn fucking touches is cursed. So, Noctis whips up their favourite drinks, while Prompto clocks out and goes to clean up in the back room.

“Well, at least we suffered through that together, huh Noct?” Prompto teases, his spirits lifted somewhat by the end of his shift, when he wanders back out, changed out of his apron and into fresh clothing.

Noctis grumbles and hands the drink over to Prompto. They’ve got some new holiday drink that Prompto likes in a very specific way (almond milk, no whip, exactly 2 pumps of syrup, and an extra shot of espresso) and Noctis, of course, had immediately learned to perfect it.

“This is perfect, Noct, you’re the best,” Prompto sighs dreamily. He sips at his latte and settles down at the table closest to the bar, tugging his tablet out of his backpack.

Noctis blinks. Ignis has retreated to the back room, and there’s a couple of girls hovering around and waiting for their drinks – chai tea lattes – and it’s a drink Noct can make in his sleep. He’s paying more attention to his best friend than anything else as he steams the milk.
“Your shift’s over, Prom. I’m working for like the next six hours, you know,” Noctis points out.

“I know,” Prompto says, with a grin, “but I was just gonna go home and read Reddit on my tablet, anyway, so I figured might as well stick around and bug my favourite person.”

Noctis has to wonder, vaguely, when his body’s gonna stop doing that weird, fluttering thing it does every time Prompto says these kinds of things. He almost spills the damn steamed milk everywhere, cursing under his breath, and he forces his attention back to actually doing his job. When the girls have their lattes in hand and depart the store, though, Noct doesn’t even bother to pretend he’s doing work.

Instead, Noct’s leaning against the counter, draping his arms over the top and resting on his elbows, watching Prompto. “You’re totally using me for the free drinks, aren’t you?” he teases, with a lazy grin.

Prompto rolls his eyes, though he takes another sip of his drink, and Noctis doesn’t miss the way his expression shifts, subtly, as he savours the taste. Noctis might not be the world’s best barista, not by a goddamn long shot, but he knows just how to make something to Prompto’s tastes. For some reason, it seems like a very valuable skill to have.

“You know, you’re the one who keeps accidentally making my favourite drink,” Prompto shoots back. “I’d say you’re trying to impress me, Noct. Or maybe just bribing me so that you have company during your shift.”

Noctis laughs, though. He’s still got some of his own drink – if it can be called that- and there’s a disgusting amount of sugar and caffeine in it, equal bits espresso and mocha syrup, with a giant mountain of whipped cream on top. It’s roughly the texture of molasses, and he’s got a spoon stuck in it. Prompto thinks it’s the most disgusting abomination of a drink in existence. Noct thinks it’s delicious.

“I’ve got excellent company,” Noctis points out. “Ignis is here. And Iris closes with me later.”

Prompto snorts his response. “Fuck. Good luck, dude.”

“Hey, if you’re really gonna hang out, good luck to you too,” Noctis grins.

Prompto sighs, pretending to pack his stuff up and stand up from the table. “Good point. See ya,
“Asshole!” Noctis replies, a little louder than he should, given that a regular (a nice lady who owns a consignment store down the street) has just walked in. She simply smiles and shakes her head though, as Noctis sighs and lifts off the counter. He’s not as good at remembering faces and names and orders, not in the way that Prompto is.

“I swear, you two really are attached at the hip,” the lady says, nodding in Prompto’s direction. Prompto’s smile, in response, is just a little too warm. It makes Noct’s cheeks flush as he ducks his head down and starts preparing her drink.

“What can I say? I love my job. They can’t get rid of me,” Prompto replies. Noct’s fingers slip, yet again, and he almost spills the damn coffee.

Noct’s shift ends up going by rather quickly, as it always does when Prompto is around. Iris shows up, and she looks absolutely gleeful that Prompto’s hanging around.

“Imagine that. Can’t stay away from your boyfriend, huh, Prom?” she teases, going in for an awkward hug as Prompto rolls his eyes and shifts around in the chair to playfully shove at her shoulder.

“Shut up, Iris. Here for the drinks,” Prompto grins. “Besides, Noct’s totally taking me out for dinner after, right, Noctis?”

Noctis snorts and rolls his eyes. He’s honestly just waiting for Iris to clock in so he can take his goddamn fifteen, and naturally she’s going to take forever, because she’s back on that never-ending kick of assuming that they’re dating. They aren’t, obviously. They’re best friends, and no matter how many times Noctis points that out to Iris, it doesn’t deter her. If anything, it just makes her that more goddamn determined to prove them wrong.

“We can grab dinner on the way home. You wanna stay the night again?” Noct replies, ignoring Iris and the look she’s giving them. She has no idea how friendships work, clearly, and she’s going to pretend that they’re dating no matter what they do.

“Hey, we have tomorrow off, don’t we?” Prompto replies, realization dawning on him, and he’s suddenly grinning again. “Shit. I didn’t bring a change of clothes, though—”
“It’s fine,” Noct interrupts, “you left some of your clothes at my place a few days ago. I’ll do laundry. Problem solved. You wanna?”

“Yeah,” Prompto agrees, and there’s just the faintest hint of a flush spreading over his freckled cheeks. He looks pleased though. And Noctis? He feels so goddamn pleased with this outcome, even though Iris is squealing a little, bouncing on her heels as she scoots away to toss her stuff in the back.

It’s a pretty typical night, too. Noctis might keep accidentally sneaking Prompto drinks, and even though Iris rolls her eyes and comments on it, she won’t rat him out to Ignis. Noct’s pretty sure Ignis knows, anyway, and simply lets them get away with it. At some point, too, Noct sneaks into the back and he changes the playlist to Prompto’s favourite one, too, some indie rock band that he’s never heard of, and Iris just mutters a, "you guys are so gay" under her breath, but whatever. Let her be annoyed.

Prompto's smiling, and that's all that matters. It doesn't bother Noctis when a group of girls all order customized frappes, or when a guy complains that the coffee isn't freshly brewed - it's twenty minutes before close, what the hell does he expect? - because he's got a night of video games and television with his best friend to look forward to. And they have a shared day off, which is rare.

And because it's Prompto, he helps Noctis and Iris close up. Ignis has already taken off for the night. The guy's a workaholic, but his moods have been weird lately, and that's a little concerning. Iris is a sweetheart, despite her devilish attempts to convince Noctis and Prompto that there's something more between them than there actually is, but the girl does love to gossip.

"Iggy seemed depressed today," Iris says, as she's cleaning the espresso machine. They never bother to do that until the store is closed up for the day, but they've managed to chase out all the customers and lock the doors a few minutes early. That's a nice change of pace. It's snowing, and it's coming down slow and lazy, and Noct's really hoping that they get out before his car gets snowed in again. At least he finally got his winter tires put on. He still hates driving in this kind of weather, though.

Noctis shrugs. "Iggy works too much. He always has. He just needs a vacation, but good luck convincing him to actually take one."

Prompto isn't even supposed to be working, but he's mopping up the floor anyway, and Noctis thinks he loves his best friend a little more for doing it. They're totally gonna be out early today. It's a blessing.
"He seems kinda lonely, honestly," Prompto says, leaning up against the handle of the mop, looking pensively at the other two. Noct's counting the cash in the register and getting ready to deposit it in the safe for the night. He looks up at Prompto, and his best friend looks _good_ in the dim lighting, even though he's been sitting here in old clothes all damn day. It makes Noctis smile that dumb smile again, and then damnit, he's lost track of his counting and he has to start over again, but it doesn’t matter.

Maybe, finally, the strange fluttering in his belly is calming into a steady, present warmth, and that’s maybe more problematic, but Noctis isn’t smart enough to give that any real thought.

“I always assumed he and my brother would hook up, anyway,” Iris says, distracting Noctis yet again, as she wipes down the countertops. “Gladdy’s got some new boyfriend, though.”

“That why he hasn’t been around much?” Noctis blinks. He’s not much of one for gossip, or drama, but lately, he’s noticed that their little friend group has been strained. Gladio and Ignis were always close in the sense that they’re older than Noctis, and both more mature. When they’d been younger, it’d always been the two of them looking out for Noct. He’d felt a bit of an outsider, but things have kinda changed. Now, Noct’s got Prompto, and Gladio and Ignis seem… distant, both from him, and from each other.

Noct frowns, and mulls that over.

“Yeah,” Iris says, straightening, curling her hair around a finger as she examines her work. “I think he and Ignis dated for a bit. Gladdy won’t tell me. You can _totally_ see that they’ve got the hots for each other, though.”

“Nox, Prompto swoops in behind her and steals the rag from Iris’s hand to attack a streak of sticky, dried syrup that she’d missed. “I think you’re right, Iris. That look that Ignis gives Gladio, every time he’s in here…? Dude’s got it bad.”

“Takes one to know one,” Iris replies, going back in to steal the rag again, playfully swatting at Prompto’s face with it. “When are _you_ two gonna realize it, huh?”

“Iris,” Noctis says, warning, “we’re best friends. Can you stop shipping us already?!”

Later, back at Noct’s apartment, greasy fast food burger wrappers and cartons of half-eaten, cold fresh fries piled up on the bedside table, Noct’s in his usual, favourite place, curled up next to his best friend. His head’s pillowed in the crook of Prompto’s arm, eyes half-shut as he watches his
best friend play a dungeon in this cool new RPG he’d picked up. Normally they’d argue over who gets to play, since it’s a single-player game, but Noctis is exhausted, and he hadn’t really put up much of a struggle over the whole affair.

He’s somewhere between reality and the dream world when Noctis thinks, vaguely, that maybe this is more than just something that best friends do. It’s a strange thought, belated, and not entirely formed, but even as it drifts across his consciousness, Noct’s curling himself closer to Prompto. His best friend’s mashing away at the controller, cursing under his breath at the game he’s playing. Noctis isn’t watching, though. Through half-closed eyes, he’s watching the steady rise and fall of Prompto’s chest. His hand’s shifting, and he’s draping an arm over Prompto’s chest, fingers curling into the fabric of the shirt he’s wearing. Prompto’s got one of Noct’s shirts on, and it’s well-worn and soft.

“Prom?” Noct mumbles, and he doesn’t really know what he’s saying here, or what he even wants to say. All he knows is that, in that moment, he’s happy. He’s stupidly happy. Even if they work a shitty job, slaving their asses off for idiots who don’t appreciate a good cup of coffee even if Noctis physically threw it into their faces, he’s reconnected with his goddamn best friend.

“What’s up, Noct?” Prompto replies, but Noctis only half hears it. He doesn’t get out a response, anyway, though, because he opens his mouth to answer, but nothing comes out, and Noctis falls asleep.

Chapter End Notes

screaming i just love this fic so much still. <3
as always, go ready @UnsteadyGenius's part, too! we love and appreciate comments/kudos so goddamn much! thank you for reading our dumb au!! :D
Chapter Summary

Apparently the entire coffee shop is betting on when Noctis and Prompto will hook up. It's totally Iris's fault.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“How’s the job going?” Noct’s dad asks over dinner.

Noctis is grateful that his dad, at least, seems to treat him more like an adult, now that he’s gotten a fulltime job and moved out of the house. Yeah, he’s still reliant on his dad’s money to afford his apartment, and he’s absolutely going to let his dad pay for his college, when he inevitably decides on what he wants to fucking do in the first place. But his dad’s stopped sneaking vegetables into his food, and had happily enough ordered him fried chicken and fries for dinner.

“It’s… work,” Noctis replies, nibbling on the crispy edge of his chicken. “Ignis is stressed. He works too much. Tell him to take a vacation, dad. He’s driving us insane.”

Noct’s father laughs. “You and I both know that he won’t listen to me.”

Noctis knows that. He also knows that Ignis is doing a hell of a lot, running a business. He’s only two years older than him, but sometimes, it seems like Ignis has an entire fucking lifetime of experience and maturity over him. Noct, for sure, couldn’t do it. Of course, Noctis doesn’t give himself credit, because he’s somehow half-competent. At least, he hasn’t burned the store down, and that’s something.

“Funny coincidence,” Noctis says, and he doesn’t know what inspires him to say it, but well, a lot of things in his life have been different lately. Different is good, right? Change can be good. “Dad. You remember that kid I was friends with in elementary school? Prompto?”

His father tips his head to the side, and chews thoughtfully on his food. “Of course. The blonde boy with glasses. I have that framed photo in my office. Right?”

“Yeah,” Noctis flushes a little. That photo is embarrassing. He’d spent a good deal of his teenage
years lamenting that his dad had a photo of him with a ridiculous flower crown on his head that his childhood best friend had made for him. It’d hurt a little, too, the memory of having someone and then losing them. It’s all complicated. “That’s the friend. So… turns out he lives here now. Ignis hired him a while back.”

Noct’s father laughs at that. “Ignis has always prioritized your happiness, Noctis. I take it you and Prompto are as inseparable as you were before he moved? I always felt guilty, you know, that you two lost contact… I should’ve spoken to Prompto’s father, worked something out…”

Maybe, Noctis agrees, silently but he doesn’t voice it. There’s no point. He’d just been a kid, and he and his dad have had their ups and downs. They’re close, now, and Noct’s grateful for that. “We’ve been hanging out a lot. He… he’s kinda my best friend. Even though we didn’t see each other for so long, it’s like no time passed at all. Weird, huh?”

“I’m happy for you,” Regis replies, very sincerely, and he smiles. “Noctis. All I’ve ever wanted is for you to be happy. And hell, son, if happiness is brewing up coffee for ungrateful regulars with Prompto, I support it.”

Noctis laughs and shakes his head. “Fuck, dad. I’m so gonna be ready to go back to college, don’t you worry. There’s this one regular, named Ardyn, and he’s a total nightmare…”

“Don’t say fuck, Noctis,” his father interrupts idly, but he’s smiling, and he merely listens while Noctis rambles on about his new friendship, about all the stupid things he and Prompto are doing together. He talks about their pizza dates and the fact that Prompto’s started staying at his place, because the heat is so spotty, and how annoying it is when Ignis gives them opposite shifts…

“So,” Regis says, when Noct’s done rambling, “I take it you’re telling me all about my future son-in-law, hm? You two certainly seem to be close.”

Noctis drops his fork, and it clatters against the edge of his plate with a loud, jarring sound. “Dad,” he grumbles, “come on. Not you too. Prompto’s my friend!”

Noct’s father laughs. “Of course, Noctis. We’ll do this at your pace.” Noct doesn’t bother to argue this point with his father. His dad is a total troll when he wants to be. Of course, Regis Caelum also knows his son well, perhaps even better than Ignis does, but Noct’s in denial about that part, too. He’s really starting to wonder though, just why the hell literally everyone in his life is getting the goddamn wrong idea about him and Prompto.
It’s a mystery.

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Noctis stares at Luna, horrified, as she tries to explain.

So, long story short, they’re having an employee holiday party. It probably won’t be so bad, because Ignis is a fucking fantastic cook, and he knows how to throw a party. There’s an ugly sweater theme, and it’d been Prompto’s idea for them to have matching sweaters. Noctis isn’t entirely sold on the idea, but his best friend gets that look in his eye, and Noct’s never about to deny Prompto anything when he’s got that expression written all over his face.

So, Prompto had excitedly brought in a couple of matching sweaters earlier. It’s Prompto’s day off, but that never stops him from dropping by during Noct’s shift to keep him company for a while. Eventually, Ignis had shooed him out. Ignis has been in a fucking horrible mood lately, and it’s a combination of overworking himself, and the holidays, or so he’s saying. Noct and Prompto have both noticed, though, that ever since Iris pointed out Gladio being distant and not dropping by anymore… well. It’s suspicious, and they can’t help but wonder if the two are connected.

Noctis isn’t gonna dare mention that, though.

“So. Noctis,” Luna says, when Prompto drops off the package and heads out, after leaning over the counter to give Noctis a quick hug. “You guys are a matching couple now, huh?”

“No couple,” Noctis corrects, idly, despite the fact that yeah, he and Prompto have devolved into being those friends, with matching sweaters. Prompto’s threatening to do his hair and makeup, too. Noctis had made the unfortunate mistake of peeking at the sweater, too, and it’s absolutely hideous. Of course, ugly holiday sweaters are supposed to be hideous. This one has chocobos on it though, and that doesn’t surprise Noctis, because Prompto loves chocobos.

Weirdo.

“Okay, okay,” Luna sighs, “but when you two do get together, can you do me a favour? My day is…” and she pauses for a moment, mulling it over, before she speaks again, “two days after the holiday party. So, don’t get drunk and confess anything, okay?”

Wait. Wait.
“Luna,” Noctis replies, eyes narrowing, giving her an expression of sheer horror. “Your day? What are you talking about?!”

So, that’s how Noctis finds out about the store-wide employee betting pool about when he and Prompto will finally start dating.

“I swear it wasn’t my idea,” Luna apologizes, in vain, as she brews some tea up for a couple of customers. “It was just a silly thing, but… c’mon, Noct, you have to admit, you two have a total bromance.”

Noctis likes Luna. She’s his favourite coworker, if he’s being honest. He’s very unimpressed with her right now, though. Everyone teasing him and Prompto about being a couple is starting to get old. They’re just best friends. Very close best friends, yes, but.

“We’re not dating,” Noctis sighs, shaking his head, as he hands over a couple of other drinks. They’re moderately busy. Not too busy to carry on a conversation, but enough that they’re constantly moving, and time is going by quickly enough. The tips are decent, too. “Iris started it, didn’t she?”

“Might have been her idea,” Luna agrees, mildly. “… Noctis. I know it’s your life, and your feelings, but… you two really do spend all your time flirting, you know.”

Noctis almost spills espresso over his fingers, and he hisses and draws back. It splashes over his apron, instead, and great, now he’s gonna have to do laundry. “Just friends, Luna. I’m gonna tell Ignis you guys are sexually harassing me. My personal life is nobody’s business.”

Luna shakes her head and offers an apologetic smile, but she looks amused, too. “… Ignis might be in on it, too. Noctis, we… we all just want to see you happy, you know. You’re a good guy. You shouldn’t be single.”

“I’m twenty,” Noctis sighs. “You’re acting like I’m forever alone, or something.”

Luna opens her mouth to respond, but Noctis simply shakes his head. “Just drop it. Prompto and I aren’t going to be kissing on anyone’s day. Tell Iris to knock it off. Maybe I should tell Gladio. Wait, nope, don’t tell me—Gladio’s in on this too, isn’t he?”
Luna’s wry smile is the only answer Noctis really needs to hear. He sighs and busies himself with work, because this shit is getting old. Can everyone stop assuming he’s dating Prompto? They’re just best friends. It’s totally normal. Nothing is wrong with being affectionate friends who fall asleep in the same bed, and cuddle, and wear matching Christmas sweaters, and are practically attached at the hip…

The list goes on. But whatever. Friends.

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Part of the fun thing about working in a coffee shop is seeing customers come and go. They have a fair few regulars, but occasionally, people they’ve been serving for a while will disappear, or new ones will start showing up. Sometimes it’s people moving, or switching jobs, or maybe they just find a coffee shop that’s better.

Noctis doesn’t really like people. He’s shit at making small talk and carrying on light, casual conversation. That’s part of why he enjoys working with Prompto so much – or, so he tells himself. They do work damn perfectly together, two halves that come together as a unified front. Prompto’s excellent at keeping up conversation, while Noctis mixes drinks. Prompto, naturally, manages to learn everyone’s names, too, and he knows all their regulars.

They’re working a closing shift together, too, and that’s nice. It’s just the two of them when the front door opens, and a couple walks in.

Noct glances up, and he does a bit of a double take. It’s two guys, hand in hand, walking close enough that their hips and shoulders nudge together. One’s dark haired and bearded. His companion’s a bit slimmer, blonde and blue-eyed, and fuck, it’s eerie how much it looks like the two of them.

“Prom—” Noctis starts to say, but Prompto’s head lifts, and he doesn’t have to say anymore, because his best friend looks a bit like a deer in the headlight. Clearly they’re both thinking the exact same thing here.

“Dude,” Prompto replies, but that’s all he can say, because the couple steps up to the register. “Uh. Hey. What can I get for you?”
Doppelganger Prompto – who seriously looks a lot like Prompto, just with paler freckles, more muscle, and some awful facial hair – grins back at Prompto. It’s weird. Noctis feels like this is some strange twist of fate, or something.

“Haven’t been here before. What do you recommend?” the guy asks, and Noctis groans quietly. He hates those kinds of people, the ones who assume he knows what they’d like, based on… well, based on a whole lot of nothing. Like he’s supposed to be able to guess someone’s tastes.

Apparently, doppelganger Noctis agrees with actual Noctis, because the dark-haired guy is groaning, lifting a hand to card through hair that falls long over his face. “Don’t bug the barista. Just order something,” he sighs.

Noctis quietly agrees.

Prompto never minds helping customers like this, though, cuz he’s grinning and quickly jumping in to explain the menu. The one redeeming part of this strange coincidence is that their older mirror selves apparently have opposite tastes, because the blonde guy orders a sugary sweet drink, and Noct’s older, distinguished self goes for a black americano.

They look happy together, though. Noctis watches, as he hands over the drinks, while the two settle in a far table up against the window. They’re playing footsie under the table, and when they lean in to share a quick kiss between sips of coffee and scattered bits of conversation, Noctis flushes and looks away. It feels weirdly intimate, like he’s interrupting something private.

“They’re cute,” Prompto’s voice says in his ear, as his best friend half drapes himself over Noct’s back. The contact is a bit startling, but Noctis settles in, and he smiles, leaning back against Prompto. It’s a quiet lull in a cold, winter night, and it’s nice. And… looking over at the two guys who look way too much like them, so obviously in love with each other? It’s got that warmth spreading through Noctis again.

“That’s totally gonna be us in ten years,” Noctis replies, and then he flushes a little. “… well. With less of the kissing, I guess,” he adds quickly.

Prompto laughs and draws back from Noctis a little, giving him a playful little nudge. “What, you don’t wanna kiss me, Noctis?!”

Noctis rolls his eyes. “I dunno. Ask Iris, and she might have a very different answer.”
Prompto grins, though, and he swats at Noct’s ass playfully with a rag he’s using to wipe down the countertop. Noct ducks expertly and for a little while, at least, the weird coincidence is forgotten. And, Noctis is pleased, too, because when Prompto had joked about kissing him? Well, for some reason, his stomach started doing that weird flipping thing again, and maybe it’s not such a bad idea. Maybe.

More likely, all of Iris and Luna and everyone else’s silly joking is getting to him. Prompto is his best friend.

In coming weeks, of course, “Older Promptis” – as Iris has very kindly taken to calling the new customers – become legitimate regulars at the shop. Prompto points out, multiple times, that their names aren’t Noctis and Prompto, at least, but damn, the similarity is striking.

“I would not wear one of those suits,” Noctis grumbles at Iris, because she is absolutely thrilled at this strange new coincidence. Of course, she is, because she’s a total fucking monster.

Older Noctis is apparently some sort of businessman, because he always has nicely tailored suits. He’s gotta be high up, too, because he’s got a beard and long hair, and he walks with the air of someone who’s used to getting their own way. He also shows up without his blonde boyfriend during lunch breaks sometimes. Noctis likes older Noctis, because his drink orders are simple, and he seems to hate talking just as much as Noctis does.

“You guys should get a mobile ordering system,” he says one day to Noctis, in a rare bit of conversation.

Noctis agrees, really, because it cuts out the whole ‘having to talk to the customers’ part of the transaction. But they’re a small coffee shop, and Ignis is already overworked, and he’s having a rough day.

“We’re not Starbucks,” Noctis replies, with a shrug. “Don’t think it’s feasible.”

“My boyfriend develops apps. You should put him in touch with your boss,” the guy responds, and he hands over a business card. Noctis glances it over, quickly, and hilariously enough, this guy’s pretty high up with his dad’s rival company. Go figure.

“I’ll pass it on to Iggy,” Noctis replies, shrugging.
The guy smiles patiently. “You know, you look a lot like I did when I was younger…”

Noct groans. “You think so? I don’t see it.”

Okay, so maybe Noctis is kind of a snarky asshole, but if he lets Iris hear wind of this conversation he will absolutely never live this down. He’s not willing to admit that older, gay version of himself sees the similarity, too. Absolutely not.

Older Noctis simply rolls his eyes. “That blonde guy you work with? Prompto? He… you know what? Never mind.” He drops it, thank fucking god, and simply hands Noctis a ten dollar bill. Noct starts to make change, but the guy waves him off. “Keep it.”

At least he tips well. That much is good. Noctis has to hope, at least, that maybe someday he’ll be successful enough to wave money around like that. It reminds him a lot like his dad. And he absolutely does not mention it to Iris, though later, he’ll tell Prompto. His best friend’s spending the night again, and he’s already at Noct’s apartment when he gets home, draped across the couch. Noct settles in, legs draped over Prompto’s lap, starting with “you know doppelganger me? He thinks it’s weird, too,” and he and his best friend have a good laugh over it as Noct recounts the whole series of events.

“So, older me is a programmer,” Prompto teases, reaching for the card that Noct had tucked, forgotten, into his apron. He’s examining it again, and Prompto’s deft fingers tug the little card out of his grasp. He turns it in his hand, and whistles under his breath. “Damn, Noct. Future you must be loaded. You know, it might not be so bad, hookin’ up, if this is what the future’s gonna give us. Success and happiness.”

Noctis laughs. “Prom, better be careful, or I’ll start thinking you might actually wanna date me.”

Prompto flushes a little, and just for a moment, he looks horribly awkward, before he regains his composure. “Noct, we’re best friends, c’mon, now you’re making it weird! Dealing with Iris is bad enough! How was she, by the way…?”

“Aawful. Thank fucking god she didn’t overhear that bit,” Noctis sighs. Small victories. “Ever since I found out they’re all betting on when we get together… Prom, it’s weird. Do you think we’re too... close, or whatever?”

Prompto shrugs. Realistically, they’re curled up together on the couch. Noct’s got his legs thrown in Prompto’s lap, and Prompto’s got a hand resting on his leg, the other hand still flipping the little
business card around. After this, they’ll probably fall asleep curled up together? But the warmth in Noct’s stomach at all of this, it’s because he’s never really had a friend like this before, right? It’s totally platonic. This is just what they do.

“Does it matter, Noct?” Prompto asks, quietly, chewing on his bottom lip. Noct’s not quite expecting that kind of response. He’d figured they’d laugh it off, the way they always do. But Prompto’s fidgeting a little, looking nervous. It makes Noct pause, tipping his head to the side.

He’s happy like this. He doesn’t feel so alone anymore. He’s got his best friend back, after ten fucking years, and it’s nice to be close to someone like this. Noctis doesn’t care if his stupid friends are convinced this is more than what it is. This is between the two of them, after all, right?

“Nah,” Noctis replies, with only that heartbeat of hesitance. “I… just wanna be us, Prom. This is us.”

Prompto looks relieved. He finally hands the card back to Noctis, and when their fingers brush together, for some reason, it draws an awkward smile to Noct’s lips. He tucks the card away, and reaches for the remote, instead, and they stay like this, watching television, until Noct falls asleep on the couch. When he stirs, a little later, he’s shifted enough that his head’s cradled against Prompto’s chest. It’s warm though, and surprisingly comfortable, for being a couch, so he simply falls back asleep.

He does give Ignis the business card, at least, but Noct’s sure nothing will come of that. Coffee shop encounters are weird. Why are regulars so weird? Why does everyone keep making the one good thing in his life so bizarre? Not that it matters, though, because he and Prompto have each other. They’re best friends, and it’s good.

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“Can I… tell you something?” Prompto asks, quietly, a little hesitantly.

Noctis nods. He doesn’t talk a lot. Honestly? Neither of them talk a whole lot. Well, they talk a lot about things like new comic books and video games. That’s all easy stuff, though. Underneath, they’re both a little quiet. It’s like layers, really. There’s some part of Noctis, deep down, that’s bursting to come out. Sometimes, when he’s with his best friend, it really does. Usually, though, he’s subdued.

Right now, though, they’re playing in the park near Noct’s house.
They live in the city, so there’s not a lot of places to play. Usually, they’re stuck making forts in Noct’s giant living room, or hiding in a closet and pretending that they’re on an adventure. Or, more likely, they settle down in front of the television and play whatever new game Noct’s managed to coerce his dad into buying.

Today though, it’s a summer day. They’re finally old enough, Noct’s dad has agreed, to wander outside on their own. The park is their new favourite hangout spot, because it’s a little haven amidst the urban sprawl. It’s not super large, but there’s a pond, and a little smattering of trees, and wildflowers that grow along the edge of the trees. Sometimes there’s birds and small animals wandering around. Prompto’s got a little point and shoot camera that Noct’s dad bought him for his birthday, and they like to take pictures and pretend that they’re big, important explorers, discovering new creatures and roughing it together in exotic locations.

Right now, they’re simply lounging by the water. It’s summer vacation, and Noct’s dad gave them money to pick up sandwiches at a little shop nearby. They’ve been out here all day, skipping rocks into the water and simply enjoying the sun. Noctis likes it out here. He’s got a new handheld gaming console, and they spent a while crowded together under the shade of a tree playing it, before their attention had drifted.

“You can always tell me anything,” Noctis replies, a little belatedly. He’s watching dragonflies dive and spin in the air over the water nearby.

They probably look really dumb. Prompto’s picked a few handfuls of wild flowers from the edge of the trees, and his fingers are weaving the stems together. He’s distracted while he works, and that’s probably the only reason he’s even talking like this in the first place. Noct’s quiet, but Prompto is properly shy. He’s been slowly coming out of his shell, but they’ve been best friends for years to get to this point.

Prompto flushes a little. His fingers slip, and he drops the flowers he’s weaving together into his lap. The stems are twisted together, and it comes loose. He groans and picks it up again, starting anew. Noct watches out of the corner of his eye, without pretending to notice. He doesn’t know what Prompto’s even doing. They’re just existing together, enjoying not being alone, and that’s enough.

“… it’s dumb,” Prompto shakes his head. His glasses slip down his nose, and he shifts awkwardly, pushing the frame back up the bridge of his nose with his arm, because his hands are busy.

“You’re my friend. Nothing you say is dumb,” Noctis replies, instantly. His own fingers are itching, and he’s fiddling with the edge of his t-shirt. “… well. Except that time you tried to say
you were better at the King’s Knight cardgame than me. *That* was dumb.”

Prompto laughs, though, and the weirdness, for the moment, is gone. “That’s cuz I *am* better than you, Noct. Get over it!”

“Lies, Prom. You *wish,*” Noctis laughs, though, and they look at each other, their cheeks flushed from too much sun and all the excitement. All things considered, Noct’s happy to have a friend.

Friends are… well, they’re hard. His dad is well off, but Noct isn’t like the other kids. He’s awkward and shy, and he doesn’t really *like* talking that much. The other kids have never excluded him, but Noct’s never really made a lot of effort to be *included,* not until he just… clicked with Prompto. They’re an unlikely pair. Noct’s thin, small for his age, scrawny, with big fat cheeks and wide eyes. Prompto’s bigger, with dull blonde hair and freckles and thick-rimmed glasses.

But they’d met, when Noct commented that he liked the book Prompto was reading, and he’d gotten a shy smile in return, and an invitation to sit and read it with him. Noct had quickly learned that the best kind of friend is one that he can sit in comfortable silence with, and the rest is history. They’ve been attached at the hip.

“It’s just… Noctis, I know it sounds dumb. But you’re the only friend I’ve ever had,” Prompto admits, pointedly looking down, shifting his weight around awkwardly as he tries to avoid Noct’s eyes. “I dunno. I feel… good about things. Better than I used to.”

Noct doesn’t think that the words are dumb. He doesn’t think it’s dumb at all, because he feels the same way. His dad keeps saying he looks happier, and Noctis doesn’t feel quite so sad all the time anymore.

“It was pretty boring, being alone all the time,” Noct agrees, a little shyly, as he gives his best friend – his *only* friend – a tentative smile. “… best friends forever, right, Prom?”

“Yeah,” Prompto agrees, brightly, and he sounds happier again, if a little surprised. “No matter what… even if we go to different schools, or stop seeing each other. You’ll always be my best friend.”

“Good thing we’ll always see each other,” Noctis agrees, with the full earnest optimism of a ten-year-old, because little does he know, less than a year later, the whole world will stop, and they’ll be apart for a long time, because Noct’s gonna get sick, and Prompto’s going to move, and the
world doesn’t care much for an elementary school friendship. Right now, though, that doesn’t matter. “Hey. Prom. What are you doing with those flowers?”

Prompto flushes a little, and he holds out a little crown, awkwardly weaved together, clumsy and breaking apart in his hands, but in Noct’s mind, it’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever done.

“It’s for you,” Prompto mumbles, “… it’s stupid, I know…”

Noctis simply reaches over, though, and delicately lifts the flowers out of Prompto’s hands. He arranges the crown on his head, and grins brightly, tipping his head to the side. “I like it. How do I look?”

Prompto’s tentative smile brightens instantly, and his hands are quick to make himself a matching one. To anyone else, they’re just a couple of dumb kids, but to the two of them? They’re kings of their own world, a certain place that exists only for them. And yeah, they’re gonna grow up, but that world will stay with them, in the back of their minds, encouraging them forward.

Noct’s dad, later, snaps a photo of them, still wearing their silly crowns as they head back to Noct’s place for dinner. The photo gets framed and put in his office, and it’s always a reminder, always a pang of missing something in the pit of Noct’s belly, when Prompto moves away, and when he’s alone again.

He’s never truly alone though, and ten years later, he realizes that Prompto’s not really gone. And, as damn cliche as it is, absence only makes the heart grow fonder.

Chapter End Notes

STILL OVER HERE SCREAMING
how meta can we get? somehow, it gets even more meta than this.
i dedicate this chapter to ffxv royal edition because older noct has me thirsty AF.
as always, go read UnsteadyGenius's chapter! And we appreciate and love all forms of feedback--comments make my heart the happiest~!
Wonderstruck

Chapter Summary

Noct’s feelings are getting out of control—it’s just the alcohol talking though, right? Right.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Can you tell your sister to knock it off, Gladio? Please?” Noct’s grumbling.

They’ve got that dumb work holiday party soon, and Noct’s kinda-sorta dreading it. Yeah, they have their matching sweaters, and he’s a little excited to actually match with his best friend. Ignis is closing the shop up early, too, and he’s paying them for showing up, apparently, so that’s sweet. Noct’s getting really sick of Iris though, and her non-stop chattering about the two of them being a couple. He’s getting sick of Ignis, too, because his bad moods are getting out of hand.

Gladio huffs and rolls his eyes as he places two glasses on the bar countertop. “You think I haven’t tried to shut my sister up?”

“Good point,” Prompto whines. He’s sitting at the stool next to Noct, elbows resting against the edge of the bar. “C’mon, Gladio, make me something sweet. I don’t work tomorrow.”

“Shove it, blondie,” Gladio teases, but he reaches for the rum. Noct watches, silent but amused, as Gladio dumps in way too much rum and curacao and tops the whole thing off with sugar and juice. He passes it over to Prompto, who grins brightly and sips at the drink.

“Gladio, I swear, if he pukes in my bathroom—” Noctis starts, and Gladio simply responds with a rum and coke pushed across the table.

“I’ve seen your place. Your bathroom probably needs to be cleaned anyway,” he retorts with a casual grin. “On the house. I haven’t seen you idiots in a while.”

“Gee, thanks,” Noctis sighs, but that doesn’t stop him from sipping at his drink. Hey, free alcohol is free alcohol. Having a bartender friend is nice, even if Gladio is a bit hard on Noct sometimes, pushing the ‘brotherly love’ thing to the extreme. They hadn’t seen much of each other for a good
part of Noct’s childhood, and Noctis really does feel a little guilty that he doesn’t make much time for Gladio these days. He used to stop at the coffee shop a lot, but… well, Noct gets the feeling that he and Ignis are at odds with a lot of things, lately. There’s a story there, but like hell Noctis is pushing it right now.

Gladio grins, as Prompto takes a long sip of his drink. “Better slow down, Prom. You puke in my bar and I’m kicking you out.”

The threat is spoken casually, with a bit of affection to it, but Noct knows damn well it’s a valid threat. Gladio towers over both of them. He’s pure muscle, even dressed in a comfortable, worn t-shirt and jeans, his hair thrown back into a messy bun and thick-rimmed glasses over his eyes. Even though he’s less hardcore about it than he used to be, Gladio spends more time at the gym than any of them combined, and he’d been really into surfing for a while.

“I’m not gonna puke in the bar,” Prompto replies, haughtily. “I can’t even taste the alcohol.”

“That’s the point,” Noct says smartly. “Gladio makes the best drinks, dude.”

“You have to work tomorrow, don’t you?” Prompto asks, eyeing Noctis as he downs more of his own drink. The soda doesn’t cover up the taste of rum, but Noct’s dad had an affinity for fancy alcohol and Noctis can handle it, despite his sweet tooth when it comes to coffee.

“Yep,” Noct grins. “I don’t want to. Might as well be hung over.” What he doesn’t add is that maybe Ignis will lay off on him if he’s sick. Okay, so maybe Ignis had just gone off on them for doing quizzes and messing around on their phones instead of working. Maybe that’s still on Noct’s mind.

“That’s the worst idea,” Prompto laughs, but he’s somehow downing the last of his first drink. Gladio doesn’t say anything, but he’s smirking as he whips up another drink for Prompto. They’ve had a couple of drinks together since Prompto started working at the shop, and Noct has a feeling that his best friend is a lightweight. This is gonna be one hell of a night.

A few drinks later, and it turns out Prompto is indeed a lightweight. He apparently can handle his alcohol better than Noct, though, who stopped after three and is still feeling the alcohol. Everything’s swimming, and he feels all lightheaded, grinning as Prompto slings an arm over his shoulder.

“Noct,” Prompto says, so very seriously.
“Prom,” Noctis replies, just as sincerely, nudging an elbow into his best friend’s side. “You’re drunk.”

“You’re both drunk, you idiots,” Gladio says lazily. The bar’s pretty busy, but they’re well-staffed, given it’s the holidays and the college kids are done classes for the semester. He’s bustling around, but Gladio’s a good friend, and he keeps coming back to the two of them. Of course, he’s swiftly replaced both of their empty glasses with fresh ones full of water, and Noct appreciatively sips at his. His throat feels a little scratchy, and even though he feels good, he’s definitely tipsier than he’d intended.

Noct wobbles in his bar stool, and Prompto giggles and presses his face into Noct’s shoulder. Okay, maybe he’s drunker than Noctis had initially thought.

“I’m not drunk,” Prompto tries to insist. His lips are warm against Noct’s skin, through the fabric of his shirt. Noctis is pretty sure it’s just the alcohol speaking, but it feels good. There’s an urge, a sudden, strange, desperate one, to get Prompto closer, to curl his arms around him and run his fingers through his hair, and—

“So,” Gladio says, interrupting the moment, snapping Noct out of his strange reverie. “What’s my sister doing now? You were bitchin’ about her earlier.”

“Huh?” Noct’s voice is bleary, and his thoughts are kinda far off. Prompto leans in a little closer, and Noct’s arm slips around his waist, tugging him in, until the blonde is practically draped over him.

Prompto sighs happily, and rests his chin on Noct’s shoulder. “Iris. He’s talking about Iris, Noct. Remember—wait, why were we mad about Iris?”

Noctis tries to think. He’s aware of several things right now. First, he’s pretty damn sure he’s drunk. Second, Gladio’s giving them a look, one that just screams some sort of smug superiority. Third, Prompto’s warm, and Noctis really wants to bury his face in his shoulder. Maybe they should go home. Suddenly, a movie seems like a good idea, curled up together in Noct’s bed, snuggling up warm and away from the cold.

Fourth—

“Dude,” Prompto echoes back, his voice dreamy and far off, “that sounds so good, Noctis.”

Of course, then Prompto gets distracted, as a girl across the bar loudly says something that is apparently the funniest thing ever – Noct doesn’t even pick up on what it is – and he’s bursting into laughter, giggling wildly and burying his face in Noct’s neck again, and this time, he’s so close, his lips are pressed into his skin, and it’s like kissing again, and.

“Iris is gonna be the death of me,” Noct grumbles, even though nobody’s really listening. Gladio’s already backed off to help a couple of customers, and Prompto’s descended into mad giggles. For now, the Behemoth Brewery is the center of the universe, and they’re happy together. Noct’s staring off into space, torn between dragging Prompto’s silly ass out of the bar and to a late-night Chinese restaurant down the street, or simply dozing off in his chair. It’s a tough choice.

“Hey,” Gladio’s voice cuts through the bullshit that is Noct’s bad drunken thoughts. He jumps in his chair, sitting upright – apparently, he’s been half-asleep on Prompto’s shoulder – and his eyes lock onto Gladio’s. The bar’s starting to lull down, and Noct realizes that it’s late, that somehow he and Prompto have been cuddling up at the bar for a while now. Prompto’s got an arm wrapped around his waist, and his fingers are splayed across Noct’s spine, and it feels good, heat spreading all through him.

“Last call,” Gladio points out, as if that’s the most obvious statement in the world. Noctis blinks a few times, and he has the presence of mind, at least, to tug his phone out of his pocket with clumsy fingers, and sure enough, it’s late. Fuck.

“‘m good,” Noctis mumbles, and then he spends several minutes talking Prompto down from having a final drink – ‘just one, Noct! To go!’ nevermind that carrying drinks outside in public is illegal – and it’s an argument that’s going nowhere, Noct too drunk to really say much of anything, Prompto too drunk to listen.

Gladio swoops in and saves the day. “Hey, lovebirds. If you guys head out now, you’ll beat the bar rush at the Chinese place,” he points out.

Noctis still wants Chinese.

“Noct,” Prompto says, very seriously, and he manages, just for a moment, to act like he isn’t totally wasted, before he’s suddenly descending back into giggles at the realization that he
sounded so fucking serious. “We should get pancakes instead. Chocolate ones. With whipped cream.”

“And coffee,” Gladio says, rolling his eyes, “fuck, Noct, you’re gonna be hungover at work.”

“Don’t remind me,” Noctis sighs, because now that he’s stopped drinking, now that the euphoric rush is starting to fade, his head’s already starting to throb and the world seems blurry in an unpleasant kind of way. “Iggy’s gonna murder me.”

If Noctis had been sober, or hell, if he hadn’t quite been so drunk, he might’ve noticed the slight flicker of emotion shifting Gladio’s expression, just for a moment. Gladio shrugs his shoulders, and he tips his head down, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose, and then when he looks at Noct again, it’s gone. Noct’s drunk, though, and the whole subtle nuance of the situation completely goes over his head.

Prompto misses it too, and because it’s Prompto, he manages to make things that much more awkward.

“Hey! Let’s take a selfie! I’m totally gonna send it to Iggy when he’s gotta deal with your stupid ass tomorrow, Noct!” Prompto grins, reaching for Noct’s phone. Gladio tries to protest, but Prompto’s leaning back over the bar, and Noct’s following, and their friend has no choice but to sigh, an exasperated smile on his face as Prompto snaps a photo.

It’s a bad picture, blurry because of the low lighting in the bar, and Prompto’s slightly shaky, drunk grip on the phone. Noct’s cheeks are flushed, and Prompto’s are flushed even more, his freckles standing out stark and his makeup smudged. They’re both grinning though. Gladio looks unimpressed, a wry smile on his face, but he’s making bunny ears over Noct’s head, and that descends Prompto into another mad fit of giggles.

“I love this,” Prompto sighs, dramatically, when Noctis finally slides his lazy ass out of the bar stool. “Noct. Buddy. I love you. Gladio – I love you too… this is a good night!”

“Yeah, yeah. Love you, Prom,” Noctis replies, and he writes off that new rush of warmth as just being drunk, again. That’s the easiest thing to do. There’s sincerity hanging in the words, they’re best friends, of course, but… fuck. The world is spinning and Noct’s stumbling a little.

“You two gonna be okay?” Gladio frowns, watching, as they try to get their bearings. He’s got a rag slung over his shoulder, the bar closing down in a few, final call having gone out, and soon
he’ll be closing up and heading home. The words are a quiet offer to take care of them, and Noct appreciates that, even though the last thing he wants, really, is Gladio Amicitia babysitting him.

“We’ll be fine,” Noct replies, with a huff. The Behemoth Brewery’s walking distance from his place, and they’d left Noct’s car at home. Besides, they can take an uber, and the pancake place is close by, and they’re probably gonna argue passionately about what they want to eat, anyway. Gladio seems skeptical, especially when neither of them can walk in a straight line across the bar, or when they take way too long to figure out how to open the door, completely oblivious of the ‘push’ written on it as they try to pull it open. He doesn’t protest though, and Noct’s a tiny bit appreciative of that. Gladio’s always been the tough love sort of big brother figure in Noct’s life. He’d spent a few years in military school, thanks to a bit of a rough patch when his and Iris’s mom had left, but he’s always been a very kind, solid shoulder for Noct to lean on. He’s appreciative of that.

“F-fuck,” Prompto hiccups, as they make their way outside into the winter air. It’s gotten cold again, and the wind’s howling rough and bitter around them. Noct shudders and wraps one arm around himself, the other arm hooked through his best friend’s as they walk. It’s a damn good thing the alcohol is still coursing through their veins, giving them that hot feeling of youthful immortality, warming their bones and their blood so the cold isn’t quite as biting.

“Fuck yourself,” Noct replies, and that seems like the wittiest response in the world, in that moment. Prompto descends into another fit of giggles, and Noct can’t help it, his best friend’s laughter is contagious, and now they’re both giggling, leaning helplessly into each other as they wobble their way down the sidewalk.

“I—Noct—” Prompto gasps out, bumping their shoulders together. The gesture sets Noct’s balance off and they pitch suddenly and heavily to the side, nearly smacking into a streetlamp pole before they manage to right themselves. That sets off another spiral of giggles and smiles and playful nudges, until Noct’s lungs hurt and Prompto’s cheeks are burning red, even in the dim light.


“Yeah,” Noctis rolls his eyes, but he plays along with his best friend’s dumb. “Gladio’s good for that. He’s… he’s a good friend, Prom. A really good friend.”

Prompto nods, solemnly, tightening his arm around Noct’s, lurching forward onward. “I’m glad you have him, Noct. I’m… glad I met you all. Again, I guess, since we met ages ago, officially.”

Prompto’s words inspire a swell of heat in Noct’s stomach, something that’s sudden and fast and
swirling up and all through him, crashing against his consciousness like a rough ocean wave.
Everything, sometimes, feels like it’s happened pretty fast. Noct’s life had been normal. Boring,
but normal. He graduated high school, got the job at Iggy’s coffee shop, moved out. Life had been
a cycle of work, video games, internet memes, sleep, repeat. Occasional hangouts with his friends,
and constant teasing from Iris and Luna about whatever.

Now, though? Prompto’s in his life, and the weight has shifted around. Suddenly, Noct’s life is
Prompto, Prom, more Prompto. More than that, Noct’s happy, though.

“Hellloooo? Noct, you havin’ a chat with the stars?”

Prompto’s voice cuts through, and Noctis jumps a little. He flushes, realizing his head’s tipped
slightly back, that he’s not quite paying attention to where he’s walking, relying on Prompto to
lead the way. Noct’s staring up at the stars, even though he’s not really seeing anything from his
glazed-eyes, his thoughts far off. It’s funny, how he can be so far away, when really, he’s thinking
about Prompto, his best friend, who’s right in front of him.

“Guess I am,” Noct replies, with a laugh, “Prom. You wanted those pancakes, right?” They’re
passing right in front of the twenty-four-hour diner near Noct’s place, the one that has disgustingly
sweet pancakes coated with mountains of whipped topping and sugary syrups, and even though
Noct’s stance had been firmly on Chinese food through the whole debate, the truth of the matter
is, he always knew pancakes would win, because it’s the first restaurant they’d run into.

“Sweet, yes, Noct, I’m starving!” Prompto babbles out, tugging his best friend in. They’re greeted
with the scent of eggs and bacon and pastry hanging heavy in the air. It’s warm inside, making
Noct’s skin tingle and his cheeks redden. Prompto’s cheeks are bright, cherry red, too, and Noct
tips his head to the side, watching drunkenly as Prompto shrugs his coat off and tucks it over his
shoulder.

Prompto’s freckles are a lot like the constellations in the stars, Noct thinks, suddenly, through the
haze of alcohol, and for some reason, that makes him smile. The night sky is beautiful, even
through the light pollution, but his best friend? Prompto? He’s infinitely more beautiful, and he’s
something tangible and real, and so much more than Noctis deserves.

“Comin’, Noct?” Prompto asks, draping himself over Noct’s shoulder as the hostess directs them
to an empty booth in the mostly-empty diner. Noctis nods, and abruptly pulls himself away, before
he leans in, before he does something dumb. Stupid drunk thoughts. They’re the worst.

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Of course, Prompto ends up at Noct’s apartment after they pick at crappy, greasy breakfast food at nearly two in the morning. He curls up at Noct’s side, in his bed, even though there’s more than enough room to spread out. And, of course, Noct wraps an arm around his best friend’s waist.

“Noct?” Prompto asks, quietly. They’re both half-asleep. The world is spinning a little bit, whenever Noctis closes his eyes, so he’s doing his best to keep them open. It’s dark in the apartment, and outside, the stars are shining bright in the winter sky. Noct can make out Prompto’s features, though, through the darkness, and the dim light that’s filtering in.

“Mmm?” Noctis mumbles back. He’s so fucked tomorrow. He has to get up for work soon and the alcohol is lingering. His mouth feels dry, and his stomach is bloated, and even though he’d had the presence of mind to preemptively pop some painkillers and get them both water, he feels gross.

“You ever wonder if maybe we’re the ones who can’t see what’s going on?” Prompto asks. Noctis thinks his best friend’s cheeks are flushing, but it’s hard to tell, in the darkness.

It’s totally just drunk talk. Noct’s stomach does a weird little flip, and he tips his head back, looking out the window again, because the thought of looking at Prompto? It’s… hard. It’s making Noctis feel things that are completely the alcohol’s fault. They drank too much, and in the morning, they’re gonna laugh about how dumb they were. They might not even remember much.

“Pretty sure we’re the ones who know what’s up, Prom,” Noctis replies, but the words sound hollow, coming from his lips. There’s a feeling building, and Noctis thinks, maybe, he wants to kiss his best friend. A heartbeat later, he’s regretting all those drinks. Prompto’s a clingy, affectionate drunk, and Noctis is quiet as always, but maybe he’s a little bit more receptive to touching. Maybe he’s aware of the way Prompto’s fingers are brushing over a sliver of exposed skin between his low-hanging pajama pants and the shirt that’s riding up, bunched around the curve of his waist. Maybe it’s driving Noctis insane, just a little.

Probably a good thing he’s too drunk for his body to have any sort of reaction, because otherwise, Noct would really be in trouble.

“Maybe,” Prompto agrees, quickly, and his laughter carries that same hollow sound that Noct’s voice did. “Yeah. You’re right. Sorry, Noct, I say stupid shit when I’m drunk…”

“We’re never drinking again,” Noctis agrees, somewhat solemnly. That’s a total lie, and they both know it, but right now, it seems like a damn good idea. It’s not worth it, not when Noct’s suddenly feeling so confused.
“Bullshit, Noct,” Prompto laughs though, and then he’s snuggling closer. His body is warm and comfortable, and Noct ignores that he has to be up in a few hours. He ignores that his fingers are tangling in the fabric of Prompto’s shirt, or that he can feel the warm puff of Prompto’s breath against his skin, and the drag of fingers over his exposed hip. It’s all too much.

“‘m going to sleep,” Noctis says, instead, belatedly, and that’s all he has to say, there. Prompto nods, then they fall into silence and doze off together. In the morning, Noct’s going to be hungover as hell. Ignis’s mood is going to be trash. But for now, none of that matters.

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In the morning, Noctis is hungover as hell. Work is about as terrible as he expected it to be. Prompto’s still sleeping soundly in his bed, and Noct has to tear his eyes away from the sight of his best friend curled up under the blankets, hair mussed and cheeks flushed from the drinking the night before. It’s probably the one time in the existence of their entire friendship that Noct’s been awake before Prompto.

He feels like shit, and he’s not a good cook, but Noctis totally leaves a breakfast bar and a fresh glass of water on the bedside table for his best friend, before he heads off to work.

Ignis’s mood is just as awful as expected. He points out, several times, that Noctis shouldn’t be drinking when he has to work. Noctis wonders, momentarily, how the hell Ignis even knows. Then, of course, he remembers that Prompto had been texting him. Then he remembers that Ignis just knows everything, anyway. He wants to point out that Luna’s regularly drinking on the job, but whatever, pissing off Ignis isn’t on Noct’s to-do list.

He gets through the shift, anyway, thanks to several ice waters. He even ditches the usual sugary drinks in favour of a stiff, black coffee that Ignis shoves into his hands. Whatever. It does help. At least Noctis has a shorter shift today, only five hours. Prompto had texted him, earlier, saying that he was alive (“barely”, in his own words) and going back to bed to sleep off the hangover, so Noct’s looking forward to getting back to his apartment and seeing his best friend.

Noct’s surprised, when his shift is over, to see Gladio’s car in the parking lot. Iris isn’t working, and he’s got that increasingly bad feeling that things are weird between Ignis and Gladio right now.

It turns out, of course, that Gladio’s here to see Noctis.
“Buy you lunch?” Gladio says, amiably, the car window rolled down, leaning out over the side. “I’ll drop you back off here so you can drive your car home.”

Noctis frowns. “Prom’s waiting on me,” he says. Of course, it’s not even noon yet, and Prompto had seemed in pretty rough shape. Noctis had expected, of the two of them, that Prompto would be the quickest to recover from a drinking session. But, then again, Prompto had been gone last night. Hell, he’d been drunk enough to suggest that maybe they were… actually something.

Noct’s stomach is still being weird and there’s warmth spreading, even without the assistance of alcohol. Shit.

“I’ll make it quick,” Gladio says, grinning. “Get somethin’ for Prom, too. My treat. He hung over?”

“Yeah, he’s fucked, dude,” Noctis laughs, though, and he climbs into the passenger’s side of the car. Gladio has a point. Some real food will be helpful, and it’s not like Noctis knows how to actually cook anything. He doubts Prompto will feel like crawling out of bed any time soon, either. “What’s good hangover food?”

“Somethin’ greasy,” Gladio grins, turning his attention to the road and pulling out of the parking lot. “Burgers sound good?”

“Yeah,” Noct agrees, idly watching out the window. Gladio’s got music turned on low in the car, and as Noctis half-listens, he realizes it’s one of Ignis’s favourite bands. Funny, Ignis used to play this particular song at Stella’s all the time, but he’d abruptly removed it from the playlist one day.

Gladio’s fingers drum at the steering wheel in time with the beat. Noct’s headache is coming back. He’s totally going to down more painkillers and crawl into bed with a trashy movie when he gets home. Hell, he should’ve told Gladio that today isn’t a good day for this, but if Noct’s being honest, he misses spending time with Gladio like this. He hasn’t seen him as much at Stella’s, and admittedly, Noct has been a bit preoccupied with Prompto. Maybe he’s been ignoring other parts of his life.

“Feelin’ okay?” Gladio asks, arching a brow, pulling his eyes away from the road for a moment to look at Noctis. Noct flushes, and nods quickly enough. Sometimes, he swears, his friends know that his mind’s a mess, and they totally catch him lost in confusing thoughts. If Gladio doesn’t believe him, though, he doesn’t push it. For that, Noctis is grateful.
They end up at a burger place. Noctis places a to-go order for Prompto, and he picks at his fries and sips at a disgustingly sweet milkshake that absolutely won’t help his hangover at all.

“Prompto spend the night, then?” Gladio asks, as they eat. The words are spoken casually enough, but Noctis doesn’t miss the way his eyes focus in. Gladio’s always been more tough-love than Ignis has. And, even though his friend had been encouraging him the night before, Noct’s half expecting the rant about bad influences, or acting like an ‘adult’ now that he’s got his own, place.

“Yeah,” Noctis tries to sound casual, as he crams a fry into his mouth. “We hang out a lot.”

“I’ve noticed,” Gladio replies. “You’re totally waiting for a lecture, huh?”

Noctis groans. Ignis always knows everything, because he’s Ignis, and he’s psychic or something. Gladio just knows how to read Noctis impressively well. “That obvious?”

“Yes. You’ve got that look, and you go all tense,” Gladio chuckles appreciatively, and pauses to take a sip of his drink, before continuing. “Nah, Noct. I like Prompto. He’s a good kid. And god knows you needed a friend.”

Noctis makes a quiet, appreciative sound. He’s grateful that Gladio isn’t pushing the way that everyone else does. He’s glad, too, that his best friend has gotten Gladio’s approval, too. Somehow, it’s really important that the people in his life get along with Prompto. He’s got to introduce him to his dad, too, soon – eventually – and even though Noct isn’t quite ready for that, it’s gonna happen.

“What about you?” Noctis says, quietly, changing the subject. “I haven’t seen much of you, not since you and Ignis stopped being roommates.” Noct has his suspicions there, and he doesn’t voice them, but he swears, just for a moment, there’s a strange expression on Gladio’s face. Then, Noct blinks, and maybe he just imagined it all, because Gladio looks as casual as he always did.

“You know you can always come by the bar to chat,” Gladio says, “Just been busy, Noct. Don’t hang out with pretty much anyone other than the guys at work.”

Noctis nods, slowly, and no, he’s not imagining the slightly strained way Gladio’s talking, or the way he’s reaching a hand back, fiddling with the messy bun his long hair’s pulled back into. This game goes both ways and Noctis knows Gladio pretty damn well. Something is up. He just
doesn’t quite know what.

“You can always come to the coffee shop, too,” Noct points out. “Don’t just sit in the parking lot waiting, like a weirdo. I’ll give you a free drink next time, Gladio, c’mon.”

Gladio laughs, but even that is strained, and Noctis, suddenly, is even more confused than he was before.

“Tell you what, Noct. When you stop bein’ so oblivious, maybe then I’ll come visit you at work. Deal?”

Noctis groans. “Fuck off, Gladio, not you too, do not get started the way your sister does…”

It’s a dirty move, because Gladio changes the subject, with a half-hearted apology, and Noctis doesn’t dare bring up the subject of the coffee shop, or Ignis, again. They finish eating, anyway, and when Noctis returns home with food for Prompto, his poor best friend has at least slept off enough of the alcohol to have a voracious appetite and a sunny attitude. And, just like that, Noctis pushes all the other stuff aside.

Eventually, though, he’s going to have to figure out what’s going on.

Chapter End Notes

i wrote this chapter like a month and a half ago and i forgot how dumb it was, haha. i love it.
sorry for being slow on getting to comments last chapter--it was a helluva week, lmao. but as always, they are appreciated and they make me scream.
go read @UnsteadyGenius's chapter, IT'S SO GOOD.
As always, on tumblr @destatree, twitter @thatdest. see you in a few days!!
Noctis and Prompto exist in their own little world, even when everyone's crashing and burning around them.

Inevitably, the holiday party happens. Noct’s still kinda-sorta dreading it, too. It’s just the way things are. Noct’s looking forward to it, to some extent, because Prompto, somehow, has gotten him on board with the whole ‘matching sweaters’ thing. They’ve got matching jeans, too. Well, sort of. Skinny jeans, similar dark wash, that they both happen to own.

“Stay still,” Prompto’s currently grumbling, as Noctis sits on a makeshift chair in front of the bathroom mirror. Prompto’s sticking his tongue out, hyper-focused and honed in on the task at hand. He’s got a black liquid eyeliner pencil in his hand, and his fingers are steady as he swipes a solid black line across Noct’s left eyelid. Noctis hates it. It feels like something’s trying to poke him in the eye, and he’s doing his best not to struggle, but he’s failing miserably.

“Trying,” Noctis groans, “Prom, do you really need to do this?”

Prompto huffs in response. His own makeup is immaculately done, as it always is. “Duh. Noct. I totally matched your foundation and everything. Just let me have this.”

Noctis wants to point out that Prompto doesn’t need to hide his freckles, that he likes him best when he’s all natural, just waking up in the morning, hair tousled and freckled skin vibrant, but that doesn’t quite seem appropriate. Instead, he sighs, fingers gripping at the edge of the chair, and does his best to stay still as Prompto finishes the whole dumb winged eyeliner look.

It feels like he’s wearing a pound of makeup. Moisturizer. Primer. Foundation. Concealer. Bronzer. Eyeliner. Eyeshadow. Brow liner. Brow gloss. Lip liner. Lip gloss. Sealing the whole deal with some spray. It’s a fucking lot. Goddamn, if this is the effort Prompto puts into his daily look – and that’s not even including the time spent on clothes and hair- Noctis has a new level of appreciation for Prompto.

And really, Noct doesn’t see much of a difference, when he finally inspects his reflection in the mirror. It totally doesn’t seem worth the time it’s taken.
“I did good,” Prompto says, though, his voice bright as he stares Noctis down. “Your skin is *perfect*, Noct, it isn’t even fair.”

Noctis simply shrugs. He doesn’t see it. “You done, already? I hope Iggy’s in a better mood tonight, he’s been a *nightmare* lately…”

Of course, there’s probably several factors contributing to Ignis’s less-than-ideal mood. For one, Noctis had showed up to work *horribly* hung over, and apparently Prompto had drunk texted that photo, along with several rambling, typo-ridden messages (‘I love u iggy I s2g’) ranging from midnight to about three in the morning, when they’d finally passed out. Noct’s headache had been a mess that day, and Ignis’s mood had been absolutely sour.

It’s only gotten worse, too. It’s been a few days, and maybe it’s the stress of the holidays, but Noct swears it’s a miracle nobody in the shop has been murdered by Ignis yet.

“What’s his deal, anyway?” Prompto frowns, as he carefully fluffs his hair, styling his bangs in a very particular way for the thousandth time. Noctis can’t see the difference, honestly. “Think he’s overworked?”

“He’s *absolutely* overworked,” Noctis agrees, turning and heading out of the bathroom to rummage through his bedroom for the ugly sweaters Prompto’s insisting they wear. His room’s a bit more of a mess than usual, and it looks like his closet puked all over the bed – thanks, Prompto – with a couple of bags of takeout trash next to the door and stuff scattered everywhere. Noct’s computer is on, a dumb MMO he likes idled out on the log in screen, looping music quietly. Luckily, the sweaters were tossed onto the bed, and Noctis tugs his t-shirt up over his head, groaning as he pulls the sweater on.

When Noct gets the sweater on, adjusting it and tugging it down over the flat plane of his belly, he swears, just for a second, that his dumb friend is staring at him. Their eyes meet through the reflective glass of the mirror, and Prompto flushes deeply and pointedly looks away, focusing back on making his hair cooperate again.

“I mean, he’s what? Two years older than us, right?” Prompto says, quietly, shifting back to the subject at hand. “…that’s kinda crazy, dude. He owns a *business*.”

“He’s always wanted a coffee shop,” Noct shrugs, rummaging through his bedroom now to find his phone and his wallet. The phone’s easy, plugged into the charger and resting on the bedside
table. Noct’s wallet is another story, and he’s already ruining his immaculately styled hair, running his fingers idly through it and mussing up the back as he tries to locate where the fuck he put his wallet.

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“Stella’s was Iggy’s life dream, when we were kids,” Noct continues on, picking up a pair of pants from the clothes hamper he’d dumped it in, emptying out the pockets. “Dad told him if he still wanted it when he finished his bachelor’s, he’d help… so naturally, he started taking college courses in high school… finished way early.”

Prompto wanders out of the bathroom, apparently finally satisfied with his own appearance, and he’s careful as he strips his shirt off and changes into his matching sweater. Noct’s too distracted by searching for his wallet to really notice – small blessings.

“It must be nice,” Prompto sighs, tugging at the edge of his sweater, smoothing it out. “I mean, knowing what he wants, and just… going for it. Doing it.”

“Dunno,” Noct shrugs. “Work isn’t everything, Prom. I love Iggy, he’s basically a brother, but… I don’t know if he has much of a life, outside the shop. He needs a hobby or something. I think you’re right, he’s just overworked.”

Prompto tips his head to the side. He’s got a stupid Christmas-themed set of earrings in, too. He’s wearing his contacts, and he’s even got a little necklace with red and green and white swirled candy beads tied around his neck. He’s so themed, it’s disgusting. Prompto is Christmas cheer personified, and it makes Noctis feel a little overwhelmed.

“Hopefully tonight does him some good, then,” Prompto says, lightly.

“Doubt it,” Noct replies, “he hates that the shop’s closed early tonight.”

Prompto doesn’t reply, but he’s bending at the waist, leaning down to grab a pair of pants that’s half shoved under the bed. It’s the pants Noct wore to work earlier, and he fishes out his best friend’s wallet, grinning as he offers it up to Noctis. “Lookin’ for something?”

“My hero, Prom,” Noctis smiles gratefully, pocketing his wallet. “’Mon. Let’s get this over with.”
The holiday party doesn’t start out all that terrible. Iris is staring them down the moment they enter, but she swoops in with a ridiculous Santa hat, and Prompto’s happy enough to accept one, arranging it jauntily on his head. He’s grinning and laughing, and it spreads more of that warmth through Noct’s belly, watching his best friend be so happy and carefree.

The shop is closed early, and Ignis ordered catering. The food looks amazing, and Noct’s immediately gravitating toward it, even though Prompto’s immediately making himself the life of the party. There’s a photo booth set up in the corner, with stupid holiday themed props, and the whole store front has been decorated. That part isn’t a surprise, since Ignis had managed to coerce Noctis into helping decorate. There’s a tree in the corner that Noctis had set up. It’s horribly lopsided, and looks like it’s about to fall over at any given second. Noctis had debated fixing it, for a split second, before he shrugged, said fuck it, it was too much effort, and left it.

It's definitely more slanted than it was before. The damn thing is gonna fall over before the end of the night. Oh well.

“Hey, Luna,” Noct says, wandering over to where Luna’s sitting. She’s surreptitious emptying a little silver flask into her travel mug of coffee. Noctis rolls his eyes, but Luna simply smiles sweetly in return and tucks the flask back into her coat pocket.

“Hi, Noct,” Luna replies, “you met my brother yet?”

Noctis blinks. Luna nods her head, and lifts a hand, waving as a man that Noct vaguely recognizes saunters over. He knows of Luna’s brother. Hell, he’s made his coffee a few times, and Prompto would probably know exactly what the guy takes, after making his order twice. Prompto’s freaky like that. They’ve never met, though. Noct didn’t even know there was a plus one at the party, but then again, it’s a small enough shop, and there’s a ton of food.

“Luna,” her brother sighs, running a hand through his hair, “this place is abysmal.”

“Noct, this is Ravus,” Luna replies, that sickly-sweet tone in her voice still, eyes sparkling with mischief. “Ravus, you know Noct, I talk about him all the time. Don’t be an asshole in front of my friend, brother.”

Noctis has to admit, he appreciates the sarcasm. There’s no denying that this guy’s related to Luna. Same light complexion, same faint, barely visible smattering of freckles, same eyes. His hair’s silvery blonde, lighter than Luna’s, but that same sharp, biting wit runs between them both.
“Charmed,” Ravus sighs, extending a gloved hand. Noctis stares him down for a moment, before he finally grips Ravus’s hand, shaking firmly.

“So, you bring enough booze for the rest of us, Luna?” Noct teases, leaning back against the counter as Ravus settles into a chair next to his sister.

“Alcohol? Luna, I told you to keep that at home,” Ravus replies, crossly.

Luna giggles, and kicks at the leg of the table with a booted toe. “You’re just salty, Ravus. I told you that you should’ve brought a flask of your own…” she’s smiling, though, propping her chin up with a hand, other hand reaching into another pocket inside her coat. Ravus arches a brow, and Noct watches, silently, as Luna passes another flask over to her brother. “You’re lucky I love you.”

“Cruel world,” Noctis sighs, “at least tell me Iggy’s in a better mood than he was?”


Luna has the right idea. Noctis worries, sometimes, about her. He’s definitely pretty sure she’s adding Kahlua to her drinks at the coffee shop on the regular, but then again, Luna’s probably the smartest, and sanest, of them all. Objectively speaking, she’s more capable than any of them. And underpaid. Luna really needs a better job.

“Maybe you should give some to him,” Noctis shakes his head and laughs.

“Nah, won’t help,” Luna replies brightly, leaning in and throwing an arm casually around her brother’s shoulder as she takes a sip of her spiked drink. For a moment, Ravus looks ruffled, but then his expression softens, and he nudges his cheek into the top of her head. Noct, for some reason, feels a strange, panging spike of jealousy. He can tell, without even saying anything at all, that Luna’s got a great brother. That, despite his bitter exterior, the sarcasm biting, the cold demeanor, Ravus would probably do anything for her.

Then again, Noct’s got friends that are the same, right?
“I think he just needs to get laid,” Luna says, mildly, and Noct’s eyes widen a little.

“Fuck, I do not want to think about Ignis having sex with anyone, Luna…” Noct groans.

Luckily, at that moment, Prompto reappears. He’s somehow acquired a ridiculous, bright strand of garland that he’s looped around his neck. He’s got an extra hat, too, and Noctis wants to question why he spent so damn long making his hair perfect if he’s just gonna shove the hat on and ruin it.

Instead, Noct’s grumbling and trying to push his best friend away, because Prompto outright curls an arm around his waist, grinning jauntily as he crams the hat on Noct’s head, instead. Noct sighs, and his shoulders droop, as he playfully tries to push Prompto away.

“Oh, come on, I don’t need a hat…!”

“Looks good,” Luna says, with a knowing smile. “Ravus, that’s Prompto. Prom, you probably recognize my brother, I think you’re the one who usually makes his coffee when he stops by…”

Prompto blinks, just for a moment, his chin resting on Noct’s shoulder as he eyes Luna’s brother. “Right! Vanilla latte with soy, light foam. Right?”

“That’s it,” Ravus nods, and gives Prompto a long, appraising look. “You’re competent. You’ve never fucked up my order,” and Noctis gets the feeling that those words are intended to be a compliment, though they outright drip sarcasm and condescension.

“Gonna take that as a compliment,” Prompto replies, with a grin. “Why you at Iggy’s party?”

“I didn’t wanna suffer alone,” Luna replies, before Ravus can offer up some great wisdom on the situation. “Besides, my brother’s a stuffy old asshole. I figured he needs to have some fun.”

“Fun,” Ravus echoes, deadpanning. Noctis has to admit, he’s on Ravus’s side here. This isn’t exactly his idea of fun. Everyone, at least, has a ridiculous holiday sweater on, even though Noctis and Prompto are the only ones matching. Iris is chatting it up with Crowe, another girl who opens a lot and Noct doesn’t interact with all that much. There’s a couple of part-timers who showed up, but they’re sticking together. High school kids. Noct’s pretty sure they’ll bail after they eat, and he doesn’t really blame ’em.
“So,” Ravus says, silkily, his attention turning back to Noctis. Noct feels his cheeks flush a little, before the words even follow. “You two are dating, then? I always assumed, given how affectionate you are. Rather inappropriately so, for the workplace, might I add.”

“We’re not dating,” Noctis says, quickly, maybe too quickly. Prompto’s got an arm around his waist, after all, but they’re just affectionate best friends. When the hell will people just learn that?!

“Best friends,” Prompto replies, grinning brightly, and maybe Prompto’s just accepted the truth of the matter, that people are dumb and they’ll keep assuming that, because he doesn’t seem quite as ruffled. “We’ve known each other since, like, kindergarten. Spent a while on opposite sides of the world, and fate brought us back together here… cool, huh?”

“An absolutely riveting love story,” Ravus replies, rolling his eyes.

“Told you they’re in denial,” Luna says, brightly, amusement shining in her eyes.

“Hey!” Prompto, at least, has the dignity to retort that, his arm drawing away from Noctis to shove playfully at Luna.

“Watch the drink!” Luna scolds, when Prompto nearly knocks her precious spiked coffee out of her hand. Prompto’s eyes narrow, and Noctis watches as his best friend stares down Luna, realization dawning upon him. Or, maybe he’s just close enough to get a whiff of her breath.

“Not fair, Luna. At least bring enough for the rest of us!” Prompto’s voice is accusatory, and he takes a step back, firmly grabbing Noct’s arm and dragging him. Noctis resists, just for a moment, but only out of show – he’s much happier letting Prompto pull him away. Let Luna’s dumb brother think what he wants. Everyone already thinks they’re a couple anyway, and it’s not like it’s doing them any harm, at this point. Hell, maybe it’s easier to just give people what they want, right?

“C’mon, Noct. Let’s go take some dumb photos. We need souvenirs of our fantastic matching outfits!” Prompto’s saying brightly, as he locks arms with Noctis. Noct laughs, and knocks their shoulders together, and he has to admit, the coordinated outfit thing, as much as he’d bitched about it, is actually kinda fun.

“Okay, whatever,” he agrees.
The girl running the photo booth ends up having a pretty nice camera, and Noct leans against the table, rolling his eyes as Prompto nerds out with her, rambling on excitedly. He’s good with people, way better than Noctis ever could be, and she’s happily letting him fiddle with settings and mess around with it.

There’s maybe a pang of jealousy in the pit of Noct’s stomach, when the girl stands a little too close, when she curls a strand of blonde hair around her finger, her hip nudging into Prompto’s while he messes with the camera, clutching it carefully in his hands. Prompto’s just naturally good at talking to people, and he’s probably not intentionally flirting, but…

Hell, why does it even matter if his best friend’s flirting with a girl? Noct should be supportive, right? If Prompto gets a girlfriend, yeah, it’ll cut into their time together, but he wants his friend to be happy.

“You okay, Noct?” Prompto says, as he returns to Noct’s side, eyeing the props thoughtfully. Noct’s got a stupid little “Happy Holidays!” sign and Prompto picks up a giant plush gingerbread man holding a candy cane. He loops an arm around Noct’s neck, and they lean in close, their cheeks pressed together. Prompto’s grin is always brighter than Noct’s, but Noctis is smiling too, a subdued, but happy little one.

The girl running the booth snaps a few photos in different poses, and slowly, Noct sees some sort of strange realization dawn over her. Goddamnit.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she says, in a vague sort of way, to Prompto. “I had no idea… here. C’mon. Let’s do a special picture.”

Noctis doesn’t get it.

The girl sets the timer on the camera and steps away, quickly. “It’s gonna count down on that screen over there, get ready…” and then she approaches the table of props, grabbing what Noct realizes, suddenly, is a bundle of mistletoe hanging from a string at the edge of a stick. The photobooth girl is smiling as she holds it up over their head. A strange rise of panic sets in, hot and heavy, in the pit of Noct’s stomach.

“Wait, I—” he tries to say. The screen is ticking down. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five…

Prompto leans in, and whispers hot in Noct’s ear. “Dude, just go with it…” he says, and there’s a
bit of amused exasperation there, but *maybe* something else, too, Noct’s not sure. He feels hot, his face is flushed.

“Prom, this is dumb—” Noctis tries to say, but his best friend’s suddenly leaning in, lips pressed firm against his red, flushed cheek.

Three, two, one…

There’s a flash, and then Prompto’s drawing back. Noct tips his head, and their eyes meet, and Prompto’s cheeks are red too, hiding the smattering of freckles, but he’s smiling a bit.

“See! Not so bad,” Prompto teases.

“No not so bad,” Noctis echoes back, and maybe there’s a bit of wonder to his expression as he hastily, almost on autopilot, puts down his stupid prop, his free hand lifting to rub the tingling spot on his cheek where Prompto had kissed him.

“That wasn’t a *real* kiss,” the photobooth girl says, but she’s smiling anyway. “It’s cute, though. You two are a really cute couple.”

“Uh. Thanks,” Noct says, his voice vague and far-off. It’s not worth arguing about. He’s a bit distant, his mind in a whole other place as Prompto tugs him to the side, to the set-up display to enter their email addresses in to get a copy of the photo. The girl running the booth prints off two sets for them, as well, a series of photos, ending with that final image of Prompto kissing Noctis on the cheek, both of them flushed, Noct looking a little startled. But, hell, Noctis realizes, staring down the image of the two of them, that he’s *smiling*. It’s a nervous, awkward smile, but he hadn’t even realized he was smiling.

“Y’know, Iris is *never* gonna let us live this down,” Prompto says, when they leave the little booth.

Noctis groans. “She is *never* seeing that. She already thinks we’re dating, Prom. It’s a serious problem.”

Prompto laughs, though, and they pocket the photos, putting them out of thought as they approach the food table, devouring their way through a bunch of snacks. Noct’s sweet tooth is totally getting the better of him, and there’s cookies that he’s pretty sure Ignis personally baked.
Prompto’s hanging off his arm, and Noct’s surprisingly okay with that, too.

Ignis, it seems, is finally around, too. Maybe he’s always been there, and Noctis and Prompto were too wrapped up in themselves to notice. It’s hard to say. Either way, he does look like he’s in a slightly better mood than before. Still ruffled, eyes a little red around the edges, behind the glasses, and his hair’s a bit messier than usual, but he’s got a little smile, at least, and he’s talking to Luna – who, thankfully, seems to still be rather sober.

The door opens with a faint chime, and Noctis, instinctively, looks to the front. He blinks a few times, and suddenly, Noct’s stomach is sinking, as he realizes that their party just absolutely, totally, got crashed by the last person they want to see. Didn’t they lock the door?! Noctis swears that they did, after the last employee arrived, but apparently not.

“Why, hello!” Ardyn’s familiar, nauseating voice booms. He sounds absolutely delighted. “I came by for a coffee, and it appears you’re in the midst of some festivities!”

Fuck.

“Oh god,” Prompto groans, “Noctis, make him leave!”

Noct is pretty sure he’s powerless to do any such thing. He’s scanning the room for Ignis, who is also looking up, and he absolutely looks irritated as all hell to see a party crasher, especially one that happens to be their obnoxious regular.

Luna is quickly downing her spiked drink, and her brother is eyeing Ardyn with outright disgust. Noctis agrees with Ravus, on that front. Ardyn, of course, is pointedly oblivious, and he’s carrying a bag with him.

“I brought holiday gifts!” he exclaims, with a smile of lavish grandeur. “Who wants to sit on Santa’s lap and see what’s in the bag?!”

Noctis glances at Ignis again, hoping that he’ll step in. Instead, Ignis is reaching for Luna’s drink, pulling the cup right out of her hand and taking a long sip of the coffee-vodka concoction. Again, Noct doesn’t blame him.

“Excuse me,” Noctis says, because he’s the first one to recover, taking a step forward. “We’re
Ardyn looks momentarily taken aback, but just for a moment, because the smile returns, and he’s reaching into his horrific bag. He pulls out what appears to be a used coffee cup, soggy and messy, and he offers it to Prompto. Prompto seems shell-shocked, giving Noctis an incredulous look, as if he doesn’t even know how to react—probably because he doesn’t.

“That’s quite enough,” Ignis says, finally making his approach. His eyes are flashing, narrowed behind his glasses, and maybe he’s just worked long enough that he’s at the breaking point, or maybe it’s a sudden rush of liquid courage from Luna’s vodka-infused coffee. Whatever it is, Noct’s grateful as hell.

Ardyn smiles politely, “ah, Igloo, is it? So nice to see you. Very... quaint party, you have here.”

He reaches into his bag and offers up what appears to be a plastic capsule with a little fake ring inside, the kind that little kids put coins into a machine for. It’d probably turn Ignis’s fingers green or something if he put it on. It also looks like it’s covered in some sort of grime.

Ignis flinches back and grimaces, and Noct’s almost surprised. Ignis is usually the pristine, picture perfect professional, at least in front of customers. Of course, Ardyn is absolutely not a normal customer.

“Please,” Ignis says, through clenched teeth, his jaw set, and Noct’s totally invested in the situation now. He’s vaguely concerned that a murder is about to go down at Stella’s, and he’s gotta admit—he wouldn’t be too upset if Ardyn Izunia was amongst the casualties.

“You need to leave. This is for employees only,” Ignis reiterates.

“Ahh, but,” Ardyn replies, smiling silkily, “I’m a regular. My business is vital to the survival of your grubby little shop—”

A couple of things happen. First, Ignis turns a vivid shade of splotchy, ugly crimson, and his eye starts to twitch. Noct’s suddenly worried that his cousin might be having a stroke. Second, and more importantly, Iris bounces over, apparently done with this shit.

“Yargen Zootopia,” she says firmly, hands on her hips, and the glare Iris Amicitia is capable of is truly astounding, the eighth wonder of the world itself. She’s full of spunk and fury and she’s only
sixteen, a tiny little thing, but she carries herself as if she’s the size and build of her older brother. “Nobody invited you!”

Ardyn looks taken aback. For a moment, Noct thinks maybe he’s going to protest. Instead, he seems to decide that arguing with a teenage girl isn’t worth it, and that’s probably the sole good decision he’s ever made, here in Stella’s.

“Fine. If you must,” Ardyn sighs heavily, shaking his head and taking a step back, arms raised in the air in a strange, mock peace gesture. “Igloo, I must say, you’re a blind fool. I thought you’d know better than to kick out a generous patron of your establishmen—”

“Igloo,” Ignis sighs. Iris shakes a fist, backing him up, and a few moments later, the door is shut and locked again, the group of them standing in the window, watching Ardyn swagger off with his disgusting gift of… well, who knows what else he had in that awful bag.

Prompto slings an arm casually around Noct’s waist when he’s gone. “Well. Crisis averted, huh? Noct, there’s gotta be some alcohol around. You have anything at your place? We should do shots after the party!”

“We should sleep after the party,” Noct replies, but Prompto’s already dragging him back to the snack table so they can binge on a few more of Ignis’s pastries. Noct’s mildly concerned about Ignis’s sanity, but he seems to have downed all of Luna’s drink – much to Luna’s chagrin – and whether or not that’s helped… honestly, Noctis has no idea. His eyes meet with Ignis’s, though, and the look Ignis gives him is startling, somewhere between wry amusement and annoyance.

“He still looks pissed, dude,” Prompto whispers in Noct’s lip. Noct sighs and shoves a bit of the cookie he’s eating into his best friend’s mouth, to shut him up.

Things go uneventfully for a little while longer. They were going to do a little gift exchange, but Noct and Prompto had gotten each other anyway in the totally random selection, and they’d opted to just do something on their own terms, instead of at the dumb holiday event. Iris made everyone little charms, though. For Noct, she hands over a little keychain with a fish on the end of it. Prompto gets a little earring with a sun on it, and Iris seems pleased. “Because you’re always so happy!” she tells Prompto, “not that I’m complaining! Glad someone can get through to grumpy Noctis over here!”

“Iris,” Noct sighs, a warning, as he fishes his keys out of his pocket and fastens the cute little
keychain onto them. It’s cute, at least.

Maybe it’s just because Noctis is not a party person. He’s itching to get out of here, and Prompto can tell that he’s restless. They’re whispering to each other – off in their own little corner of the party, ignoring the world – when there’s a knock on the door.

Noctis blinks. He and Prompto are in the corner tucked at the front of the store, on the other side of the pick up window, closest to the door. There’s a horrible sinking feeling, because if it’s Ardyn again… well, Noct’s gonna cry. It’s not Ardyn, though. Hell, it’s Gladio, of all people, and he’s with a guy. It’s a guy that Noctis thinks he’s seen before. He’s pretty sure the guy works at the same bar Gladio bartends at.

“Whoa, I didn’t know Gladio’s hooking up with the bouncer at his bar!” Prompto breathes out, as Noctis quickly steps forward to unlock the door and let them in.

“Prom!” Noctis hisses, nudging his best friend, as the pair enters. “Hey, Gladio. Didn’t think I’d see you here.”

“Gladdy!” Iris exclaims loudly, waving her arms in the air as she bounces over. Her cheeks are suddenly very flushed, and she’s eyeing her brother with wide eyes, her gaze shifting back and forth between Gladio and his companion. “Ooo, you brought someone! Who is this?!”

“Nyx Ulric,” the guy says, smiling politely enough, extending a hand to Iris, who looks very surprised.

“Shit, Noct, look,” Prompto’s saying in his ear, though, and Noctis turns his attention over to Ignis. He was perched on the edge of a table, talking to Luna, but suddenly, his expression seems… well. Noct’s not sure what his expression is. His eyes are wide and his cheeks are flushed and Noctis can’t decide if Ignis is pissed or upset or just damn tired, or hell, maybe he’s drunk. Drunk, actually, is a very good possibility.

“Time to go?” Noct says, suddenly, to his best friend, tearing his gaze away from Ignis before he notices the staring.

“Yep. Abso-fucking-lutely, Noct, c’mon!” Prompto says brightly, grabbing his hand and dragging him to the door. “So, uh, nice party everyone! See you guys next shift!”
The last thing Noctis sees, before they head out across the parking lot and into the night, is Ignis stealing a drink from Luna’s brother, downing it in a solid gulp.

“Dude, Gladio’s totally fucking that guy,” Prompto says, as they shiver their way to Noct’s car. He’s trying to keep his voice down to a whisper, but hell, Prompto’s loud even in the best of times, and right now he’s excited and surprised, and it’s so quiet out, that he’s horrendously blatant with his words. “Holy shit, Noct. Didn’t Iris always rant on that her brother and Iggy have a thing?”

“Had,” Noctis corrects, sighing. The little fish keychain dangles off his keys as he gets the car unlocked. They pile into the car, and the seats are cold. Noctis hisses as he fumbles to get the car started and the heat blasting. There’s another hiss – louder, grumpier – at the blast of cold air they get, at first, before the heat kicks in proper.

“Had?” Prompto tips his head to the side, his expression twisted somewhere between curiosity and confusion, and just damn plain cold. “What’s the story there?”

Noctis shrugs. He’s not sure, honestly. Ignis has always been a pretty closed-off person, emotionally unavailable, even though the two of them are relatively close. Something had happened, Noct’s pretty sure of that. Iris will swear to the death that her brother and Ignis had been together, but then again, Iris is also swearing to the death that Noctis is dating his best friend. He doesn’t entirely trust her.

“They were roommates for a while,” Noct says, slowly. “… then one day, Gladio moved out. Didn’t wanna talk about it. Said they disagreed on some fundamental thing, and he got his own place. Started working more at the bar. Iggy kinda… lost himself after that. He’s always been a workaholic, Prom, but after that…” Noct trails off, shrugging again, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel as the car heat blasts, slowly warming them up.

“Shit,” Prompto says, eyes wide as he marinates on that information. “Dude, Iris is so right. They were together, Noct. That… wow, that sucks. I wonder what happened?”

“They could’ve just been roommates. You know how Iris gets,” Noctis says, a bit lamely, but he’s inclined to agree with Prompto, there. Ignis and Gladio had been… close, for a while. He doesn’t know what happened, either, but Ignis has always had trouble balancing the simpler parts of his life with things like work and responsibility.

“No way. You saw how Ignis looked at Gladio and that guy he brought,” Prompto replies, swiftly. “He was pissed, Noct. And…” Prompto hesitates just for a second here, picking his words carefully, his lips quirked up into a slight frown. “I think he looked kinda sad, too.”
Noct chews at his lip, his fingers closing restlessly around the steering wheel. He doesn’t really know what to think, there. He agrees with Prompto. He hates how stressed out Ignis has been lately. Stella’s isn’t easy, yeah, but it’s been his dream for a long time. When Ignis had first learned to cook—when they’d been young, before Prompto had left, before Gladio had been shipped off by his dad to boarding school—he’d said, quite proudly, that he wanted to open his own shop someday and sell fancy drinks and pastries.

They’d all smiled about it, back then.

“Y’know, I think Iggy forgot all about opening this place until he started hanging around with Gladio again,” Noct says quietly. It’s tricky. Maybe he should talk to Gladio, and figure out what the hell really happened, here. He’s not sure. Messing with Ignis’s business is never a good idea.

“Shit,” Prompto replies, leaning across the center console, his head settling warmly on Noct’s shoulder. The effort of it can’t be comfortable, Prompto’s shoulders pulled to the side, his neck craned, but it feels nice, anyway. Noctis finds himself leaning in, his own head tipped, getting them awkwardly snuggled together. “Do we say anything? What do we do?”

Noct sighs. He doesn’t wanna pull away, but the car’s warm, and he really wants to get out of Stella’s before any real drama happens. He carefully lifts his head, puts the car into reverse, and backs out of the parking spot. It’s only when they’re on the road – relatively empty – and approaching the intersection he needs to turn at, before he speaks.

“Don’t think we can do anything,” Noct admits. “… your place, or mine?”

Prompto doesn’t speak for a heartbeat, but their turn is coming up. “Uh. Yours. That okay? Supposed to be cold tonight.”

“Duh,” Noctis replies, smiling a little, despite himself. His bed is so much lonelier, so empty and vast, when his best friend isn’t snuggling up with him.

Prompto babbles away the rest of the short drive home. Noct’s half there, half distracted with thoughts of Ignis and Gladio, of his two oldest friends being involved. He’d always wondered. He’d seen the hurt in both of their eyes, after Gladio had moved out. At the time, Noctis had questioned it. He hadn’t wanted to assume. It seems important not to assume here, either, given how much everyone else assumes his friendship with Prompto.
But, hell, Ignis is lonely. And maybe Gladio is too. It sucks, seeing his friends like this.

“You okay, Noct?” Prompto asks, after they get the car parked in his underground lot. They’re taking the elevator up to the top floor. At some point, Prompto’s fingers closed around Noct’s. It’s a bit of a surprise that it happens, but Noctis isn’t complaining. He simply blinks, goes quieter than usual for a moment, and then… tangles their fingers together, tentatively squeezing Prompto’s hand.

They’re best friends, right?

“I’m okay,” Noctis replies, after several moments of silence, and he gives Prompto’s hand another squeeze, rougher this time. He is okay. He has his best friend at his side. They’ll figure things out, together.

Chapter End Notes

gosh, we're slowly getting into the final stretch. <3 slowly!
UnsteadyGenius's chapter is so fucking good for this part! go read hers!!! ahhh!!
As always, on tumblr @destatree, twitter @thatdest.
don't worry... SOOOOON.
Caught up in a Moment

Chapter Summary

Noct's on the verge of revelation, but timing is not on his side.

Chapter Notes

Of course, Ignis isn’t making Noct’s life easier.

Noctis is off, the day after the holiday party. Prompto’s only got a short morning shift, and he’s back at Noct’s place before he even wakes up. That’s a nice little thing Prompto’s started doing, too. Noct’s fancy apartment has a passcode, and the guys who work the front door apparently know who Prompto is, now, anyway. It’s not like Noct ever needed to give Prompto a key. That’d be weird and formal. Instead, one day Noct had casually mentioned that his best friend might as well let himself in, when he comes by, and they went from there.

What? They’re best friends. Noctis sometimes gets the feeling that the super friendly guy who’s usually working the front desk is giving them the same look that Iris gives him. Prompto’s on good terms with the guy though – he really does know how to talk to pretty much anyone – and so Noctis simply sighs and goes on with his day.

Prompto warns Noctis, at least, that Ignis’s mood has somehow gotten even worse. He’s not wrong, either. When Noctis goes back to work, indeed, Ignis seems to be even saltier than before.

So, really, Noctis should expect this, when he shows up for his shift, almost a week after the party.

Okay, maybe some of it’s Noct’s fault. He and Prompto are working together, a close shift for once. Ignis has been there all day, and Luna whispers a hurried, ‘good luck’ on her way out of the door, seemingly far too eager to escape the coffee shop. She gives Noct a knowing look, one that’s screaming gossip, and Noctis immediately whips out his phone to text her. Prompto’s a step ahead, of course, and already thumbing out a frantic message.

“ Iggy’s in a trash mood, ” Prompto warns, when Luna texts back a few minutes later. “ Luna says to ‘ keep the PDA to a minimum, ’ whatever the hell that means.”
Noctis groans. He’s not in the mood to deal with Luna’s joking. He’s also not really in the mood to deal with one of Ignis’s hissy fits. It’s gonna be a long day, even working with his best friend. At least the music is good, upbeat and happy, and there’s a steady stream of customers to serve. Even though Noctis enjoys evenings when the shop is slow, and it’s just the two of them, time does go by faster when they’re busy with customers.

Naturally, though, Ignis picks the worst moment to come out from the back office.

They’re busy for a solid hour. There’s a bit of a dinner rush, people ordering sandwiches and the remaining pastries, and sugary drinks to keep them going for the rest of the day. Noctis and Prompto are good together. There’s all the obvious reasons, yeah, but more than that, they simply work well together. They’re always aware of each other, working in tandem and getting a surprising amount done.

Things finally slow down about an hour and a half in. Noctis is pleased for the little breather, as Prompto finishes up with a customer. It’s a regular, a cute college girl who totally flirts relentlessly with his best friend. It always makes Noct’s stomach do a weird, awful little somersault, seeing the way Prompto smiles at her, even though it’s totally just casual banter and Prompto being his usual, sunny self.

Noct distracts himself with whipping them up a couple of drinks. They’ve got some new, special macchiato made with almond milk, and Prompto absolutely adores it. Noct learned, very fast, just how to customize it for his best friend’s tastes.

“My hero,” Prompto sighs, all dreamy and wide-eyed, when Noctis hands the cup over. Today, Noctis opted for a monstrous concoction that’s half hot chocolate, half espresso, with a few extra pumps of white chocolate syrup, a heap of whipped cream, and a bunch of chocolate and caramel drizzle.

It’s the most disgusting drink ever. Noctis loves it.

“Oh, so I get to be the hero today?” Noct teases, leaning back against the counter. That’s something he really shouldn’t be doing, given Ignis’s awful moods lately, but he’s enamored with his best friend, as always. The rest of the world seems to fade away, when it’s just him and Prompto.

Prompto laughs, and takes a sip of his drink. “Yep. Today, the damsel in distress is played by yours truly, Prompto Argentum!”
Noctis can’t help but laugh, though. He leans forward a little, playfully swatting at Prompto’s shoulder with his free hand, the one that’s not grasping his delicious cup of sugar. “You’re impossible, Prom.”

“And you’re the one who wants to be best friends with impossible,” Prompto retorts. They’re both grinning widely, though, a sort of unrestrained, unbridled energy coursing between them. There’s a couple of regulars in the shop – the cute college girl, and an older, motherly-type lady – and they exchange knowing looks with each other, but Noctis and Prompto are in their own little world, far too distracted to notice. And hell, for that matter, too dense to understand what everyone else is seeing.

Noctis takes another sip of his hot chocolate, but he’s snorting into the drink, getting whipped cream everywhere. It only makes things worse, their giggles infectious, until it hits that point where neither of them know what’s so goddamn funny, or why they’re laughing, and that just compounds on itself. It ends up with Prompto’s face pressed into Noct’s shoulder, both of them shaking, their faces right and tears pricking at the corner of Noct’s eyes.

“You’re such an idiot,” Noctis says, affectionately, when the giggles die down enough that he can actually breathe. His sides ache, and his ribs hurt, and it’s the perfect kind of worn-out sensation that’s got a ridiculous smile written all over his face.

“Takes one to know one,” Prompto replies, smartly, and Noct has to appreciate that at least his best friend is one step above grade school ‘I know you are but what am I’ level. “Hey, Noct, you’ve got whipped cream…”

Prompto gestures vaguely at his nose. Noctis blinks, and reaches a hand up, fingers swiping over the tip of his nose. They come away white, covered in a little smear of whipped cream that he’d apparently gotten all over his face.

“Better?” Noctis asks.

Prompto grins brightly, for a moment. Their eyes meet, though, and suddenly, his best friend’s expression is faltering. Prompto’s got this strange, far-off look in his eyes, one that Noctis recognizes, out of some strange instinct, but doesn’t understand. Noct’s stomach is doing flips again, insistent ones that won’t let up, that make it suddenly hard to breathe. His chest feels tight, his heart’s thumping, and he’s pretty sure his cheeks are flushed.

Prompto’s cheeks are flushed, that’s for sure, and he’s licking his lips, leaning in, and Noctis realizes he’s leaning in, too.
“You’ve got some on your nose still, here…” Prompto’s voice is quiet. Damnit, are his fingers shaking, too, as he reaches out, gently wiping at the side of Noct’s nose, cleaning away a bit of lingering whipped cream.

Why does the touch set Noct’s whole body on fire? Why does he feel like he’s about to burst into outright flames and burn away into nothing? Why can’t he stop staring at Prompto, and why is his heart trying to pound its way out of his chest?

“I… Prom…” Noctis tries to say, but words are hard, and he doesn’t know what he wants to say. His cheeks have to be bright red. Everything else is fading away, and he can’t stop staring into Prompto’s eyes.

Prompto’s getting closer, and Noctis doesn’t know if he’s the one leaning in, or if Prompto is. Prompto’s hand is still on his face – Noct doesn’t think he’s ever pulled away, he’s not sure, nothing makes sense – and his fingers are tentatively cupped over Noct’s cheek, thumb stroking over hot skin in slow, steady little circles. It’s driving Noctis insane, he’s never felt like this before —

And, at that exact moment, Ignis pokes his head out from the back. “What the hell are you two doing?” he snaps, far more irritable than he has any right to be.

Noctis jumps back, something between shame and embarrassment and a deep, burning disappointment spreading across his cheeks. Prompto looks similarly chastised, his cheeks burning bright against the freckles.

"Nothing--" Noctis starts to say, as Prompto immediately jumps in with "Sorry, Iggy--!"

Yeah. Guilty as charged. Oops.

Ignis eyes them both warily for a long moment, his lips curled into something that can only be described as an outright disapproving scowl. Noct shifts his gaze from Prompto, to Ignis, then down to the floor. He doesn’t know how he feels right now. It's a mix of emotion. There's some strange new feeling twisting in his gut. It's like he'd been at the edge of a cliff, about to dive over, on the verge of some great revelation. Of course, it's ruined now, and instead there's a deep confusion, a strange shyness, and annoyance that Ignis caught them goofing off. Not that it's really goofing off, but that's totally what Noctis is gonna think of it as.
"You two are impossible," Ignis says, after a long moment of silence. "There's a customer right there."

He points - and somehow, Ignis manages to even point irritably - and indeed, there's a customer waiting at the counter.

Noctis groans. Prompto flushes, and bounces over to the register to take the order. He recovers quickly enough, with a distraction at hand, at least. Noct lifts his eyes, and catches Ignis's gaze, and just for a split second, he's thrown off. Because, now that the moment has passed, he sees something else in his oldest friend's eyes. Ignis looks... upset, maybe? No, more specifically, he looks sad, in a sort of far-off, nostalgic kind of way.

He's lonely, Noctis realizes, abruptly, and that just adds to his goddamn confusion.

"Get back to work," Ignis snaps, suddenly, the moment broken, and then he's spinning on his heels and stalking back to the office. Noctis watches, for a moment, but then he's interrupted, again, by Prompto pushing an empty to-go cup at him, the order written on the side.

"Nonfat vanilla latte," Prompto says, anyway, before Noct can read the order.

"Right," Noctis agrees. Their fingers brush, as Noctis takes the cup, and there's a little rush of warmth that rocks him to the core. Fuck. Somehow, it feels like something has changed. Prompto's fingers twitch, and he hovers, just for a moment, before quickly pulling away and turning to take the next order -- just a dark roast coffee, Noctis overhears, as he prepares the latte.

"Sorry about the wait," he says, sheepishly, to the patient customer, after the drink's prepared.

It's a girl, one that is at the coffee shop fairly often. She's not a regular, per se, but she's usually there with another girl. The typical 'friends who meet up and write and don't say much of anything to each other' type that frequent coffee shops and order obnoxious drinks.

"It's fine. You guys were having a moment, huh?"

Noctis groans at the tease. At least he's not getting another one of those 'so, you two are a cute couple' comments that some of their regulars are guilty of. Goddamnit, Noctis, half wishes people would just shut the hell up about that. It's annoying, but--and he'll never admit this, he'll take it to
the grave--it's kind of entertaining, at this point, that the whole world sees something that is so clearly not happening.

Well. Maybe the 'clearly' bit isn't true anymore, but...

Noctis shrugs, and he goes back to work, and luckily, they're kept busy enough that they both forget about what happened. At least, Prompto seems to forget. Noctis is a bit fidgety, and his mind keeps racing back to those moments, but looking back on them, it just seems even more muddled and confusing. Nothing makes sense, and so, quite firmly, he tells himself to just let it go.

Easier said than done, but they're best friends, and that will never change.

The rest of their shift goes by rather uneventfully, until the very end. It's always that final hour where everything goes to shit at Stella's, Noctis has come to learn. Usually, it's an annoying customer. More often than not, that annoying customer is Stella's one and only Yargen Zootopia.

Today, it appears Ignis is on a roll, though, in making things tense and awkward.

Noctis pokes his head into the back room, because of course, a girl's ordered a chai tea latte with the sugarfree syrup, and of course, they just went through the last bottle of said syrup. It's one of the more popular items - even though it tastes overly sweet, in that chemical-infused, nasty kind of way - and that's probably because of the volume of college-aged girls they get in the shop.

"Hey, Iggy," he starts to say, "where'd you put that new order of the sugarfree syrup?"

He'd expected to walk in on Ignis neck-deep in paperwork. There's a bunch of stuff due. Noct's actually not terrible at the administrative part of Stella's, if Ignis would actually let him help with it. It's year-end, and that means tax returns and inventory counts, closing the books and preparing financial statements, and Noctis thinks he could probably figure out some of it.

What he walks in on, though, is Ignis sitting at his desk. The screen's tilted just right that Noct -- totally unintentionally -- gets a glimpse of what he's looking at. He's absolutely on Facebook. Gladio's Facebook, going by the profile picture. It's not like Ignis to slack off at work, and that's what takes Noct by surprise, more than anything.

Ignis's expression flickers from something vaguely depressed and downtrodden, to surprised, to outright annoyance.
"Noctis, I've told you to knock," Ignis snaps, and there's an awkward, oddly frantic moment of his oldest friend fumbling with the cursor, then he's quickly minimizing the screen, like a teenage boy who's just got caught by his parents looking at porn.

"Uh," Noctis replies, deadpan, "the door was wide open, dude."

That was probably the wrong thing to say. Ignis huffs and glares, an icy-death stare. If looks could kill, Noctis would burst into flames on the spot, he's certain of it.

"What do you want?" Ignis says, then, a moment later, processes the whole scenario. "The sugarfree is in the Partial Nourishment box, I told you that, Noctis. If you weren't so damn distracted with Prompto every time I try to get you to do something in this place, gods help me, you'd actually know things!"

Noctis absolutely hadn't been expecting the outburst. His eyes widen a little, and there's a long pause, the silence ticking between them, as Ignis stares him down, as Noct's mind tries to wrap around the fact that really, Ignis is being a total fucking dick here.

"I just asked a question," Noctis says, quietly, and maybe a little dangerously. He and Ignis absolutely butted heads constantly when they were teenagers. Noct's always been brash, and they're both absolutely stubborn to a fault. And yeah, Noctis has a shy streak. He's withdrawn half the time, introverted, preferring to keep his emotions held close. When Ignis is involved, though, Noct's never really been afraid to speak his mind.

"Ignis," Noct starts, to say, "are you oka--?"

He's cut off, though, again, when his eyes flicker to the schedule on Ignis's desk. It's another incidental thing, his attention drawn by the red ink standing out starkly against the paper. It looks like the neatly printed times have been crossed out angrily. Ignis rarely changes the schedule, and it's only when necessary. He'd already changed it earlier this week, and that had been unusual enough.

"Did you change the schedule? What happened, is someone sick?"

Ignis’s eyes narrow. Noctis swears he can see a vein throbbing in his forehead. He's not really
sure if Ignis is going to scream or simply storm off, or maybe - and this is a stretch - he'll simply burst into frustrated tears. He's absolutely overworked and exhausted.

"I've made some changes," Ignis says, shortly.

Noct has a very bad feeling about all of this.

He doesn't have to wonder for long, though, because Ignis reaches for the schedule, and angrily thrusts it in Noct's face as he approaches, as he takes a step forward. Blinking, Noct looks down at the schedule, and suddenly, he understands.

"What the hell, Ignis? Why am I scheduled for mornings?"

The usual schedule has been totally crossed out. Noctis normally works evenings, and Prompto works mornings. Sometimes, they have occasional shifts together, and almost always, there's an hour or two overlap, at least.

Instead, Ignis has scribbled out the neat black printed numbers, replacing all of Noct's night shifts with openers. Prompto's been stuck in the evening shift, and there is - Noctis notices, mournfully - absolutely zero time where they're actually in the shop together. Their schedules always have a gap of an hour or two between them.

It's absolutely intentional. Ignis is *diabolical*.

"I told you, Noctis," Ignis says, his voice concise and clipped in a very rigid sort of way, one that leaves absolutely no room for debate, "if you two can't *work without distraction*, I'm going to separate you."

"That's not fair," Noct tries to say, his voice rising, "Ignis, we didn't *do* anyth--"

"*Noctis,*" Ignis interrupts, in a dangerous voice, no-nonsense, rising just a lilt, into something that Noct doesn't quite understand. His stomach drops, though, because Ignis is *pissed*. Noct doesn't know if he's ever seen his oldest friend this angry before, and he doesn't understand it, but it's making his own stomach twist up into an angry knot. "Drop it. And you'd *best* get your attitude together, before I tell your father what a lazy slacker you've been."
"Keep my dad out of this," Noct's spitting the words out before he can hold them back, the anger rising, harsh like bile in the back of his throat. Realistically, he shouldn't be this mad. Yeah, he hates the morning shift, but a week - and it really is just a week - of it won't kill him. He sees Prompto plenty outside of work. Yeah, totally opposite schedules will suck, but they'll be able to text, they'll have days off, they can hang out after work, it's not the end of the world--

So why does it feel like Noct's been punched in the gut over this? Why does the idea of not seeing Prompto for a week feel so damn awful?

He's mad at Ignis for interrupting them earlier, Noctis realizes, back on the verge of that revelation.

"Stop being an insufferable, lovesick idiot, then," Ignis's voice is rising, too, and suddenly, he's standing up, glaring Noctis down. Noct's glowering back, hands on his hips, and he takes a step forward, like he's going to... what? What the hell is he doing, here?

"You're an asshole, Ignis," Noctis says, abruptly, "no wonder you're fucking alone."

Ignis's eyes widen, and for a moment, Noctis really thinks he's going to get screamed at. Instead, Ignis sits back down, at his desk, and he sighs, pressing a hand over his face. Fuck. Noctis realizes, instantly, that he's taken this too far. He's hit on something, a sensitive point, and the damage has been done.

"Go home, Noctis. Your shift's over," Ignis's voice is harsh still, but it's rough around the edge with an emotion that Noct can't quite place.

"I didn't--" Noctis tries to say, but Ignis isn't budging."I've got like two hours left--"

"Go. Home."

Ignis repeats the words, and Noctis feels his stomach knot up again. He's pissed, and rightfully so, but maybe he shouldn't have said that to Ignis. He should apologize, but Noct's pride is at stake here, and it was a low-blow to split up his shift like that. It's a dick move.

"Fuck off, Ignis," Noctis grumbles, instead -- a truly mature move -- and he turns on his heels and storms out of the office, running a hand through his hair and kicking at the ground with the toe of his shoe as he ambles into the back room. Prompto's still out front, and for once, Noctis is glad. He
He tugs his apron off and wads it into a ball, shoving it in his bag. Collapsing down onto a chair, Noctis stares at the wall. The old schedule is pinned to the bulletin board back there. Ignis is going to have to text everyone, to tell them the schedule is all fucked up. It’s obvious what he’s doing here. There’s no way that it isn’t.

Noctis glares down the schedule. In a sudden fit of annoyance, he tugs it off the bulletin board, crumples it up, and tosses it into the trash.

“Noct?” Prompto says, when Noctis heads out of the back room and through the shop, bag slung over his shoulder, coat on. The coffee shop is getting busy, and Ignis is out, apparently covering for Noctis until his replacement comes in later.

“I’m going home. I’ll explain later,” Noctis grumbles, glaring pointedly in Ignis’s direction.

Prompto’s face scrunches up. He looks really cute when he has that pouty expression on his face, Noctis thinks absently. He gets it, though, nodding at Noctis, and then Ignis is barking out directions. Apparently even this short interaction is pissing him off.

Fuck, Noctis thinks, angry, someone needs to do something about Iggy’s shitty mood. He wonders, idly, if they can stage an intervention, make him go on vacation or something. Or, hell, if they can at least hook him up with someone. Maybe Ignis just needs to get laid. Whatever it is, he’s never seen his cousin that damn uptight, and that’s saying something, since Ignis’s default state of existence is stick-up-the-ass.

Prompto doesn’t dare text Noctis until his shift is over.

Noctis is waiting, because of course he is. He knows what time Prompto’s shift is over. He knows, just like clockwork, when to expect his best friend. He’ll deny it, but he’s totally got his phone next to him in bed, on his pillow, just waiting. Occasionally, he glances over at his computer desk, where he has his half of the dumb roll of pictures from the photobooth stuck in a cheap frame Prompto had brought over a few days ago.

When it buzzes, he’s already thumbing the lock screen open.

Soooo, uh, wtf was that noct? Iggy’s P I S S E D dude!!! (╯°□°）╯︵┻┻
Noctis laughs, because he can practically see Prompto, all wide-eyed and frantic, about to flip a table, as the emoji suggests. He keys out a quick, 'calm down prom lol 🙄 (“-.-”)’ and taps the screen as the message sends. Yeah, Ignis is pissed, and Noct’s still mad too. He ponders, for a moment, debating what to say, but Prompto’s typing again, and Noctis stops, and waits, watching the three dots flicker on the screen, before Prompto’s next message comes through.

*Can I come over?*

Noct can’t quite hold back the smile. He types back a quick response. *Yeah, where are u? want me to come get u?*

Prompto’s response is immediate.

*Already in an uber lol so good thing u don’t mind*

They know each other pretty fucking well, at this point, and it makes Noctis smile, that they’re at that point where they can drop in on each other pretty much unexpectedly. Anyone else? That would drive Noct insane. He’s introverted, and he likes being alone. But being with Prompto is just second nature, like breathing or eating, or sleeping. So, Noct’s slipping out of bed. He throws on a pair of joggers, at least, and a t-shirt, and runs his fingers through his hair to make sure it’s not a *complete* trainwreck.

Prompto shows up with food, too, bless his fucking heart. Noct had left Stella’s in a hurry, without eating, and he’d come home in a bit of a rage. Noct tends to *forget* about things like eating when his emotions are taking hold—that, at least, is a trait that he and Ignis share.

“Chipotle,” Prompto says brightly, holding the bag out. “Remember that cute girl that works there? She and I *totally* worked out a system, I give her lattes and she sneaks me food. It’s like, a secret fast food underground network or some shit.”

Noctis laughs and shakes his head. Only fucking Prompto would manage that.

“Surprised you tried that shit, with the mood Ignis is in,” he points out, but he’s eagerly accepting the bag from Prompto and getting it laid out on the coffee table. Prompto, by now, treats Noct’s place as a second home, and he’s already bouncing into the kitchen to grab some sodas from the
“His mood got better once you left,” Prompto admits, with a nervous sort of laugh. “Noct, what the fuck did you do? He’s never outright sent you home before.”

Noctis shrugs. He’s unwrapping his burrito from the foil, and when he takes a bite, he is very pleased that Prompto has indeed remembered he likes double meat, no beans, extra rice, no veggies, extra cheese and sour cream. It’s a perfectly junky, delicious burrito.

“Noct, what the fuck did you do?” Prompto grumbles, between bites of his food. “Did you see the new schedule?”

Prompto groans, as he flops down on the couch next to Noctis, leaning forward to set the cans of soda on the coffee table. “Dude. Yeah. He’s got me on all evenings. You’re opening. What the fuck did you do?”

“I told you,” Noctis grumbles, chomping down angrily on his burrito, as if he’s trying to take out all his frustration on his damn food. “He’s got no life. He’s mad that we’re friends, and I called him on it—” Noctis cuts himself off, a bit hesitant to keep talking, but whatever, it’s Prompto, he trusts him.

“Something’s up with him and Gladio. I walked in on him trolling his Facebook profile.”

Prompto’s eyes widen, as he tugs the top off his carton of salad. Noctis had tried to point out – once – that the salads are junkier than the burritos, with all the dressing and toppings they put on them, but Prompto hadn’t been hearing any of it.

“He’s stalking his social media? Dude, he’s got it bad,” Prompto points out, stabbing his fork into his food, taking a bite of salad. “Like… really bad, Noct. They were totally dating.”

Noctis isn’t the most perceptive person. It’s hard to deny that something happened, though, and he’s inclined to believe Prompto, there, especially with the subtle reactions he’d gotten out of Gladio, the few times he’s seen him. And, of course, with how messy the holiday party had gotten, the second Gladio had shown up with a date.

“So he’s just being pissy with us cuz of Gladio?” Noctis sighs. There’s no fixing things, if that’s the case, not unless they start messing around in things that aren’t their business.
“Guess so,” Prompto agrees. He sighs, and tips his head back against the couch, momentarily ignoring the carton of food in his lap. “Noct, this sucks. He didn’t even give us the same days off! Bet he would flip if we even tried to trade shifts so you don’t have to work mornings…”

Noctis doesn’t even want to think about it. Next week is going to be hell.

“You can always stop by and visit me in the mornings, you know,” he points out, even though that’s probably a terrible idea. Noct’s mind is already filling in the blanks, images of Ignis standing guard by the front door, just waiting for Prompto to show his face, ready to bite his head off and chase him out.

“I could,” Prompto groans, “but I dunno. I don’t really want to make it worse, Noct. I—this is stupid.”

Yeah. It’s stupid. It’s stupid and it sucks, and Noctis sulks a little, as he polishes off his burrito. He leans forward to crack open the can of soda, and downs a swig of the fizzy liquid.

“Whatever. I don’t want to think about it. You wanna watch a movie?”

Prompto nods, and maybe, Noctis thinks, there’s a quick flicker of that same unnamed emotion he keeps noticing, the one that has his stomach twisting up, his insides all confused. “Yeah. Sounds good,” he says, and he forgets about it, for now.

Chapter End Notes

I'm VERY excited for the next couple of chapters, for the record~ shit's about to get real, huehuehue, and MAAAAAAAAYBE that E-rating is finally gonna come into play soooooon.

this fic is officially finished, on my side, i finished writing it earlier this week! I'm just waiting on Unsteady's side so that we can make sure things line up as we update! <3 we've had so much fun and I love this fic so much!

as always, comments & kudos appreciated. SCREAM with me: twitter @thatdest; tumblr @destatree. Till next time!
Okay, so as much as Noctis had tried to tell himself that this week wouldn’t be bad, it’s really fucking awful.

Everyone’s in a shit mood. Iris and Luna’s schedules have been messed up, too, and Iris keeps giving Noctis dirty looks while they work an early morning shift together. She’s still on holiday break, and she’d been planning – as she’s told Noctis at least ten times today – on sleeping in while she can.

“It’s not my fault,” Noctis tries to insist, for what feels like the damn hundredth time. He’s on drink duty, because his mood is abysmal, and Iris is young and cute enough that customers are nicer to her. It’s a stupid double standard, but whatever. Noctis has spilled hot coffee on himself like four times so far, and the week is only half over. He’s terrified that Ignis is going to fuck up next week’s schedule, too.

“I too your fault,” Iris grumbles, as the next customer in line spends a fucking eternity holding everyone up while they debate over whether to get a scone or a muffin with their drink. “If you and Prompto could stop being handsy, I’d be in bed right now!”

“So would I!” Noctis snaps back, and then, moments later, his brain catches up with what she’s said, “and we are not handsy, Iris, knock it off!”

Iris glares again. “Are too. You’ve really made Iggy mad, Noct, you better apologize or we all suffer!”

The indecisive customer steps to the register, and no surprise, they’ve decided against getting any pastries at all. Figures. Noctis grumbles and grits his teeth and crams the lid on the latte he’s crafting a little too harshly. It’s a miracle that he hasn’t made a total mess of the countertop yet.
“Fine. I’ll apologize. Happy?” Noctis says, somewhat viciously. Iris smiles a victorious little smile, but it’s too tight-lipped to be fully appreciative. They’re all suffering here, really, but Noctis is pretty sure he has it worse than any of them. It feels, honestly, a bit like he’s lost his best friend.

It’s stupid, really. Prompto hasn’t gone anywhere. Ignis’s mood is draining, though. Just being around him is making Stella’s that much more exhausting. Noct’s walking on eggshells, and Ignis’s mood has gotten increasingly worse. It’s affecting everyone, seemingly. Iris and Luna are both pissy, and the other part-timers. Even the regulars seem to be snappier than usual, and the tips aren’t as good, either.

Noct’s been trying to see Prompto, but it just hasn’t happened, the past few days. They’re both exhausted. One night, Prompto came by after he got off work, but Noctis had fallen asleep almost immediately, and they’d only gotten to spend about half an hour together. He’d woken up with an arm curled around Prompto’s waist, and the urge to just call in had been so fucking strong, but he’d been working open with Luna, and Noct’s not about to ruin her week even more.

He misses his best friend something fierce. It’s like a hole’s been ripped out of Noct’s heart. It’s dramatic, and it’s stupid. This week will end, and they’ll fall back into their place, and maybe Ignis will stop being such an asshole.

Of course, Ignis has already lectured him – tersely, with no room for Noct to get a word in – about keeping his cell phone off the floor. So Noctis can’t even text, either, which is a fucking low blow. He’s half-convinced Ignis is going to fire him, though, and as much as Noct wants to tempt fate, he doesn’t want it to get back to his dad.

This stuff always gets back to his dad.

Noct’s on his lunch break, at least, and he’s texting Prompto incessantly. It’s the few moments where he feels normal again. Prompto’s ready for work, even though his shift doesn’t start until far later, and Noct’s on his fourth espresso. He’s in the middle of thumbing out a long, rambling message, when his phone rings.

Noctis blinks. It’s his best friend – who else would it be? – and he answers the call, lifting his phone to his ear.

“What’s up? Was just texting you.”

“You were taking too long,” Prompto’s voice responds on the other end, all sunshine. “I was
Noctis laughs, and he balances the phone between his shoulder and his cheek as he bites into the bagel he’d snuck from the front. Ignis has been snippy about them taking food, again, lately, and Noct’s not about to back down there.

“Miss me that much, huh?” he grins.

There’s only a beat of silence, and Noctis swears, he can hear Prompto smiling in return. “Duh. It’s been a long week.”

It has been a long week, Noctis can agree to that. “You have no idea.”

“Uh, yeah, Noct? Pretty sure I do have a damn good idea,” Prompto sounds cheerful enough, but for a moment, his voice lowers a little, goes just a bit somber. In the background, Noctis can hear the familiar, upbeat soundtrack of an RPG they’ve been playing, on and off, over the past few weeks. Neither of them had a lot of time for it, given how much they’re usually together, and there’s a strange little pang of sadness, that Prompto’s getting ahead of him, and that they’re not doing it together.

“How is it today?” Prompto asks, tearing Noct’s attention back to the conversation at hand.

“The usual,” Noctis sighs. He lowers his voice to a whisper, because he swears, Ignis is always lurking. “Iggy’s still pissy. He got mad because I wasn’t smiling at customers, earlier, Prom. Come the fuck on, he’s making me work at five in the morning…”

Noctis could rant, passionately, about the woes of the world, about how cruel and grossly unfair Ignis is being, but what’s the point? He sighs, chomping down on more of his bagel, and washes it down with a sip of his gross, sugary drink of the day. They’ve got some new butterscotch drink now, too - to compete with one of the big chains - and he’s loaded it up with several extra pumps of syrup and a drizzle of caramel on top. It’s not as good as a drink Prompto would be able to concoct for him, but whatever.

“Great,” Prompto sighs, “so I should beware when I show up for work, later, you’re saying?”

“Yep,” Noctis grumbles. He wants to say more. He’s debating asking Prompto to come over tonight, even though realistically, Noct’s eyes are already drooping, and he’s already so fucking
tonight, even though realistically, Noct’s eyes are already drooping, and he’s already so fucking
tired, he is probably going to be long asleep before his best friend’s done his shift for the day.
And, his shift’s almost over.

Still, Noctis doesn’t want to hang up the phone. “… I gotta go back to work, Prom,” he says,
reluctantly.

A pause.

“Right,” Prompto agrees, but he sounds just as reluctant. “Well. Cool. Let me know when the new
schedule is out? I… next week will hopefully be better, right?”

“Right,” Noctis sighs. He’s debating staying on the phone a little longer, but Ignis picks that exact
moment to walk past the break room on the way to his office. It’s just a short, silent exchange, as
he stands there, a hand on his hip, glaring at Noctis, but the message is clear: don’t be late.

Noctis gives Ignis the finger and rolls his eyes, and that absolutely doesn’t help. If looks could kill,
this is the tenth time today that Noctis would find himself six feet under. Ignis’s jaw is set so
harshly, it looks like it might just freeze that way forever.

“Gotta go, Prom,” Noctis says, quickly, and then, quietly. “… miss you, dude.”

“Miss you too,” Prompto sighs out, and then Noctis is hanging up the phone.

“Did you apologize?” Iris asks, in a scandalized voice, as Noctis returns to the storefront,
adjusting his apron strings, before Ignis can call him out on being sloppy, or messy, or whatever.

Noctis groans. “No. Kinda the opposite,” he admits, because okay, maybe flipping Ignis off had
been a bad idea. He gestures vaguely at Iris from behind the counter, and her eyes widen and she
outright groans.

“Noctis! You didn’t! You’re gonna get us all killed!”

At least, Noctis thinks, she’s off the whole ‘boyfriends’ thing that’s been a nonstop topic of great
interest to Iris, since Prompto was hired. Of course, thinking the thought has cursed him, because
she immediately follows up with, “Hey! Tomorrow’s my day! Noctis, you totally ruined
By the end of the week, Noctis is absolutely miserable.

It’s his day off, but even that is sullied by the fact that he hasn’t seen Prompto all fucking week. Last night, he’d showed up at Stella’s with his tablet, under pretense of ordering a drink, just to spend time with his best friend. Ignis has been working even more lately, but he’s never around on Friday nights, not this late.

It’s just Noct’s fucking luck that he shows up at Stella’s to be greeted with an icy stare from his cousin, as Ignis is taking orders at the front. Prompto’s preparing the drinks, and it’s not really busy enough for Ignis to be there, but of course. This week hates Noctis.

“Just stopping in for a drink?” Ignis asks, in a tone that suggests it is not a question.

“Yes,” Noctis had replied, and he’d finished his latte, sitting at a table as far from the bar as possible, exchanging hopeful glances with his best friend whenever Ignis wasn’t looking.

That was last night, and by now, Noctis is realizing, he’s kind of a hopeless mess without his best friend. Was it always like that? It couldn’t have been—Prompto’s only been working at the coffee shop for a few months. Noct had been able to function perfectly well before all this, hadn’t he?

He’s not really sure.

It’s noon, and Noctis is lying in bed. Luna had asked him to cover a shift, and he’d agreed, readily, even though it’s his day off, because Prompto’s working. She’d texted back, though, saying that Ignis had simply said he’d work the shift himself. Of course.

It’s absolutely not funny anymore.
Noctis sighs. He’s going to apologize. He’s just going to suck it up and apologize. It wounds his pride, yeah, but whatever, this isn’t worth it. He’s been moping all day. There are things Noctis could be doing. He’s got video games to play. Luna and Prompto totally got him addicted to that shitty, gossipy relationship forum they browse, but the idea of reading about other people’s relationship drama, when he’s got all this shit going on, is just exhausting.

Maybe he should post on that forum, actually.

Maybe it’s not such a bad idea.

He could ask how to apologize, right? Noctis isn’t good at this stuff. He and Ignis have never really argued before, not like this. And, well, Noct is desperate.

He rolls out of bed, and he takes a shower. Then, because he can, he orders some food for delivery, a pizza that he’ll be eating for the next three days.

Noctis misses his best friend. That’s at the forefront of his mind, through all of this. He shouldn’t be going to random strangers on the internet, but hell, he’s desperate, and he’s lonely. He’d been texting Luna, but she’s – supposedly – sick. Noctis suspects she’s either hung over, or just doesn’t want to deal with work, but he’s not going to bother her. He can’t text Prompto, because he’s working. He had debated talking it over with Gladio, but Noct gets the feeling that Gladio’s too involved in this situation to be any help at all.

So, internet strangers it is.

He ends up sitting at his desk, glancing at the photo from the holiday party. The two of them are smiling so damn brightly. Noct sighs, and turns his attention to his laptop, staring at the screen, as he types out the title:

I (20/m) have caused WW3 at work bc my boss (22/m) thinks I’m slacking off, please help.

It’s dumb. It’s a post that won’t get much attention. Most of the ones that blow up are about people cheating on their partners, or getting STIs, or ridiculously cute, over-the-top love stories about old friends being reunited due to unlikely circumstance, and realizing that they’re in love. Sometimes, there’s the occasional, ridiculously cute story about a guy falling in love with his male best friend or something, and realizing that love goes beyond sexuality, or whatever.
Whatever. Maybe *someone* will offer advice.

*Long story short, my boss is also my cousin. He hired my old best friend (also 20/m) a few months back. We haven’t seen each other since we were 10, but we’re pretty much immediately best friends all over again.*

Anyway, everyone at work is convinced that we’re in love. It’s really annoying. We’re not, he just likes to spend the night and we like all the same things, so we’re always together. My cousin, tho, is convinced that we’re slacking at work… he says we’re always flirting and getting handsy and that we behave rly inappropriately.

*I don’t see it. We’re just best friends, we do all the normal best friend stuff. Maybe we’re a bit affectionate, we hold hands and cuddle and stuff, but it’s totally normal, right?*

Noctis stops typing, and he frowns. It sounds stupid. This is a stupid idea. Why would he become one of those idiots, asking the internet for help? Luna would see it. Prompto would see it. Noctis sighs, and he turns his attention to the photo on his desk, instead. The bottom panel, where Prompto’s kissing him on the cheek. The warmth flares up in his chest, and it’s spreading, a slow-burn that’s building all through him. He realizes, abruptly, that he’s smiling.

He can’t stop staring at that damn photo.

Noctis has never felt so confused in his life. Or so pathetic, really. His eyes are locked on the little series of photos, and just looking at the two of them, so happy and casual, leaning close, eyes sparkling, it’s doing something to him.

*I miss him.*

*Life isn’t the same.*

There’s a moment, here.

It starts slow, a strange, burning feeling in the pit of Noct’s belly, replacing that usual heat. It’s a feeling, maybe, that’s been growing for a while, quiet and unimposing, forming into something that’s different than anything he’s ever experienced. Noct’s never really given thought to it, apart from passing moments.

Now, though, it’s different.
“I miss Prompto,” Noctis says aloud. It’s silly. He’s not talking to anyone in particular, but there’s something behind the words. That strange sensation he’s been getting, of being on the edge of a great discovery, about to jump into the unknown, is back, and it’s strong, and this time, Noctis isn’t backing down.

It’s all true. Life hasn’t been the same since he’s met his best friend. There’s something that’s shifted inside of him, an alteration that will never be undone. Noctis doesn’t want it to change. He wants Prompto. He wants… well.

“Shit,” Noctis says.

He wants to wrap his arms around his best friend. He wants to hold him safe, to keep him close, to… fuck, he wants to kiss him. Suddenly, Noctis is seeing the world differently. He’s seeing what everyone else has been teasing them about all along. He’s only got eyes for his best friend, he’s crazy about him. Prompto makes Noct’s heart pound in his chest, and his palms get sweaty, and how the hell didn’t he realize this before?

Noctis quickly exits out of the browser on his laptop without posting that stupid message.

He doesn’t need to. Suddenly, apologizing to Ignis is the least of Noctis’s worries. Because, what the hell is he going to do about this other problem? What is he going to do about the fact that he may very well actually be in fucking love with his best friend?

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Noctis texts Luna to ask for advice. He gives in and decides to bother her. Turns out, of course, that she’s on a date, and that’s why she called in at Stella’s. She’s not just on a date with anyone, though.

‘don’t tell Ignis, but it’s the guy Gladio was messing with… Nyx.’

That’s what Luna’s text reads. Noctis sighs. ‘the guy from stella’s? the bouncer? Fucking hell luna.’
This is the last thing he needs. He decides against bothering her, when she sends a selfie of herself and the guy she’s at dinner with, and sure enough, it’s totally the guy Gladio had brought along to the holiday party, the one that Noctis and Prompto had been so sure he was fucking. Nyx Ulric. He wonders what the story is, there. He’ll have to ask her. Or Iris, because Iris knows everything.

At least it takes his mind off things. Sort of.

Noctis tries to clean his apartment, he’s so messed up over this. He actually succeeds, kind of. He wipes the counters off. He carries the tower of cardboard takeout boxes to the dumpster outside and tosses them. He even half-empties his fridge into a garbage bag, deciding to simply sacrifice old, probably moldy Tupperware containers in favour of washing them out.

But it’s not working, because all Noctis can think about is Prompto.

Prompto had asked, when they were drunk, if Noctis thought maybe there really is something between them. That scene keeps replaying in his head. They’ve been increasingly more affectionate. When he closes his eyes, he can feel Prompto’s arm curled around his waist, heavy and warm and protective. He can feel the rise and fall of his best friend’s chest. Noct can fucking see the smattering of freckles dusting his cheeks, the way one stubborn strand of bangs falls over Prompto’s face, half-hiding the mischievous sparkle of his eyes…

Fuck. He has it bad.

Noctis feels a bit like an idiot. His cheeks are flushed, and it’s not because of the cleaning. He flops down on the couch, and he tips his head back. They’d almost kissed at the holiday party, hadn’t they? They’d almost kissed while they were drunk, too, and then when Ignis interrupted them at work that day. There’d been so many quiet moments slipping by without Noctis fully understanding what this strange knot in his belly was telling him...

Hell, even his dad had commented, hadn’t he?

Everyone’s seen it all along. And somehow, something that had been so fucking annoying, only hours before, is coming as a stark relief, because Noctis knows he isn’t insane. These feelings aren’t unreasonable. Everyone is supportive, even if it’s been in a weird, obsessive sort of way.

Of course, that leaves one giant, huge, seemingly insurmountable problem: how the hell does he confess this to Prompto? Maybe – and Noctis doesn’t know, but it’s certainly a possibility – he’s looking at this all wrong. Maybe his best friend is just fucking happy with being best friends, and
there’s no more to it than that. Noctis can’t decide. He might be about to get his damn heart ripped out.

Before Noctis can lose his nerve, he tugs his phone out again. He’s typing out a message to Prompto, ‘hey, come over after? I’ll pick u up.’ There’s only a moment’s hesitation, an awkward trembling of fingers, before Noctis sends the message. Then, he tosses his phone away, and turns on his Playstation, and is determined to not obsess over this moment. Prompto isn’t off until nine, and Noctis will fucking figure it out then.

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Of course, easier said than done.

Noctis shows up a little early, and he’s pretty sure his heart is about to hammer out of his chest, as he sits in the car and waits. He’s terrified to come in and help close up, even if he wants to. Ignis is there, and Noct doesn’t want to deal with that. He’s also horrendously afraid of seeing Prompto, of fucking up their entire friendship.

Noctis stares straight ahead, at the snow that’s starting to gently fall against the windshield of his car, fingers drumming at the wheel. He outright jumps when there’s a sudden, sharp rap against the passenger’s window, because what if Prompto hates me, what if I fuck everything up, I’m doing this all wrong—

“Hey! Unlock the door, it’s freezing!”

It’s Prompto, hopping back and forth from foot to foot, trying to keep warm. For a moment, Noctis wonders what the fuck he’s doing here? If he just drives off—Iggy would give Prompto a ride home, right?

No. That’s stupid. They’re best friends, before anything else. They can survive this, even if it goes horribly, right?

Noctis quickly unlocks the door, and Prompto hops in, sighing at the warmth. “Heated seats, Noct. I’m never gonna get over how much I love this car...” he grins, and then, Noctis realizes, Prompto’s holding out a drink. “Here! For you! Iggy’s mood was shit, but I totally snuck your favourite!”
Their fingers brush, and it’s like fucking electricity. Noctis trembles, visibly, and then he’s snatching the drink away. Fuck.

“… thanks,” he mumbles, taking a sip. It’s sugary sweet and perfect, warming his insides as it goes down. Just like Prompto.

“Oh! Schedule is out, too…” Prompto grumbles a little, “… same shit as before, Noctis…”

Fuck.

Noctis groans. “Seriously? A week of opens again?”

Prompto laughs bitterly, no humour there. “We have one overlap though! Three sweet, precious hours!”

“Fuck it. I’m gonna talk to Iggy,” Noctis says, all determination. He looks over his shoulder, though, and sees the lights in the coffee shop still on, Ignis sitting at a table and apparently going through a stack of paperwork. Interrupting a late-night paperwork session on his already overworked cousin seems like an awful idea. It seems awful, especially, when Noct’s thoughts are Prompto, when that’s all he can focus on. “… later, though. Not today.”

Noctis turns his attention back to the task at hand. Prompto’s stretching out in the passenger’s seat, running a hand through his hair. He looks gorgeous. There’s a streetlight on nearby, casting an orange-golden hue on the two of them, making Prompto’s hair glint like spun gold, catching in his eyes, and fuck, Noct’s breath is coming fast.

“… you okay, Noct? Or we just gonna sit here forever?” Prompto teases, but their eyes meet, and he goes silent. Something is happening here, some moment between them, one that Noctis doesn’t understand, one that might have passed as a strange lull in the conversation before, but suddenly holds so much sway, all the power in the world.

It can’t be Noct’s imagination, the way Prompto’s mouth parts, just a little, the way his tongue is darting out to wet his lips. Noctis is leaning forward, hand reaching down between them, idly, to put his drink in the cupholder. He can’t stop looking at Prompto. He can’t stop thinking, this is everything.
“Prom, I…” Noct tries to say, but his throat is a giant lump. He doesn’t know what to say. Are there words for this?

“Noct,” Prompto says in response, head tipping, “you keep lookin’ at me like that, and I’m…”

Fuck it. There’s been something building up in Noctis for a while now. It’s come in quiet moments, with Prompto pressed close, with their hips bumping, with arms slung over the other’s shoulder. There’s been those moments of laughter, where the whole world has faded to a blur beyond the gaze of his best friend. It’s cliché and it’s dumb, but Noctis feels, in a way, like he’s been looking for Prompto his whole life. And he has, really, because those ten years that they were apart, they didn’t feel right.

There’s a lot of things Noctis could say. They’re burning on his tongue, building in his throat, getting stuck there. He should say things. Or, maybe, he should say nothing at all, because that wonder is reflected in Prompto’s gaze. Hell, there’s only one thing to do.

Noctis goes for it.

He leans in, and Prompto must sense it, because he’s got a hand braced on the center console, his eyes widening just a little, and then—and then—

Noct’s pressing their lips together, before he can think better of it, before he lets himself get caught by that nagging little voice of doubt in the back of his mind. It’s warm, and Prompto’s lips are soft under his, and it’s a bad kiss, objectively, but none of that matters. Outside, the snow falls down, but the car is warm, and Noct’s hand is cupping Prompto’s cheek as their lips brush.

There’s no explosion of fireworks, and no moment of frantically drinking Prompto in. There is warmth in Noct’s belly though, and an intense desire to keep doing this. When they part, Prompto’s cheeks are flushed, and his eyes are fluttering open, and he looks like he has no idea what to say.

“Iris,” Noctis says, and he’s just as flushed, just as terrified, but that had felt so right. So, he pushes through, mustering up some sort of inner courage, “is never gonna let us live this down.”

Prompto laughs, and his hand’s shifting, groping for Noct’s. Their fingers tangle, and he gives a little squeeze. “… I’ve been hoping you’d do that for like, weeks, Noct.”
Those words, somehow, inspire a sudden surge of emotion. If they weren’t in Stella’s parking lot, Noctis might be tempted to drag Prompto into the backseat. But, hell, Ignis is still in there, and his apartment isn’t far, and fuck, Noctis wants to kiss Prompto again.

“My place?” Noctis says, forcing his attention back to the wheel.

“Yeah,” Prompto agrees, and Noct’s never driven back home as fast as he does right now.

Chapter End Notes

FUCKING FINALLY. F I N A L L Y. 9 chapters isn't that slow burn, right? next chapter is a fun one too. :3 eyeing that E-rating muahahaaa~ for the record, i've wanted to write noctis posting on r/relationships like the fucking moron he is ever since ludic. i couldn't resist, haha. i'm sorry. :) you know where to find me! UnsteadyGenius and I are so excited to start to wrap this fic up! only a few chapters to go! <3 scream at us pls!
Woke Up Just in Time

Chapter Summary

Everything, for once, seems crystal clear.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's funny, how fast things shift. It's like a floodgate has opened, and now that Noctis has admitted this is a thing, there's no going back. And, hell, he doesn't want to.

He's nervous, the whole drive home. Okay, maybe he's taking the turns a little sharp, and maybe he keeps glancing at Prompto. Their eyes keep meeting, and Prompto's smiling this shy little smile, even as he chatters away about nothing. Work, the crappy customers - Yargen had been in, because that's the kind of day it had been - and so on. Somehow, Noctis appreciates that, that things are still normal, even as his heart's racing out of his chest.

When they're out of the car, walking up the stairs to Noct's apartment, Prompto's fingers brush against Noct's. Their shoulders bump, and Noctis only pauses, just for a moment, before their hands are clasping, and more of that warmth is spreading. Noctis likes the warm feeling that's swelling up in his belly -- fuck, he thinks he could get used to that.

"There's pizza, if you want some," Noct says, when they're inside. He's kicking his shoes off, and Prompto's tugging his coat off, pulling his apron with it, wadding it into a ball to be tossed into the laundry. "You wanna watch a movie, or--?"

It's Noct's turn, apparently, to be taken by surprise, because quite suddenly, Prompto's got his arms around his neck. Noctis takes a half-step backwards, and then momentum pushes him the rest of the way, and he's suddenly backed against the front door, Prompto's lips on his.

This time, the kiss is hotter, wetter than the one they'd shared in the car. Prompto's taking the initiative, a hand tangling in the hair at the nape of Noct's neck, mouth hot and fast. Noctis can't quite process what's happening, but he sure as hell isn't complaining. An arm's curling around Prompto's waist, and Noctis realizes he really likes having it there, fingers stroking against the base of his best friend's spine. Prompto makes a quiet, pleased sound, and when Noctis parts his lips - purely on instinct - he's delving forward.

Noctis had forgotten that Prompto's got a tongue piercing. He's always known, been aware of it,
but it's just part of Prompto. Suddenly, though, he's been greeted with the curl of Prompto's
tongue, with the sensation of hard, unyielding plastic, and it's got him shuddering, his fingers
 tangling in Prompto's shirt. Noctis doesn't really know how to kiss. Prompto does, though - or at
least Noct thinks he does, he's too inexperienced to really know - and he's leading the way.

They’re both gasping for breath, a little flushed, when they part. Prompto smiles, though, and the
freckles on his cheeks stand out brilliantly in the dim lighting of Noct's apartment.

"Sorry. I... might go a little crazy, here. Been sleeping in your bed, thinking what if for a while
now," Prompto confesses, with a quiet laugh.

Somehow, that's the hottest thing Prompto's ever said, as Noctis pictures his best friend, awake,
aware of just how closely they're pressed together. It's funny, how that works. A day ago, Noctis
had no idea what all these feelings swirling around in his head meant. Now? His body's on fire,
and there's a painfully embarrassing reaction happening, the warmth in his belly settling lower,
that fluttery feeling returning in full, brutal force.

"You wanna go to bed, then?" Noctis asks, breathlessly, and he's glad his brain has short-
circuited, that it's stopped caring about things like reason and logic, because it's given him the
courage to just blurt things out, with no consideration. "Pretty sure we can figure out the what if
part."

Prompto takes in a sharp breath, and he leans forward, and fuck, their hips press together, flush
and hot. They’re both getting there, and Noctis feels less embarrassed about all of this, more
certain than anything.

"Yeah." Prompto agrees, just as breathless, "c’mon, Noct."

Prompto’s been in Noct’s bed countless times, since they became friends, but this is entirely
different. For one, Prompto keeps stealing heated kisses, as they make their way down the hall,
and across Noct’s bedroom. The floor’s littered with clothes and a couple of empty boxes from
holiday gifts he’d gotten from his coworkers in the past week. They navigate around the room, all
tangled limbs and roaming hands and fastened lips, and Noctis sinks down onto the bed when the
back of his legs hit the mattress.

Prompto hesitates, just for a moment, when Noctis scoots back across the bed, but there’s no room
for hesitation, and no fucking going back, and Noct’s hooking an arm around Prompto’s waist,
tugging him with him, until Prompto’s kneeling on the bed, shifting to straddle Noct’s lap.
The position is intimate, something new. Noct’s stomach is doing those flips again, and his pants are starting to feel tight. He’s jerked off, yeah, but he’s never done this, and let alone with his goddamn best friend. It’s new ground, territory that’s unfamiliar, but exciting.

“Noct, I—” Prompto laughs, breathlessly, pressing their foreheads together. They’re so close that Noctis can make out every freckle. He can see the subtle shift of colour in Prompto’s eyes, the bright blue darkening around his pupils, that slightly nervous glimmer there. It’s got Noct’s heart pounding in his chest, hammering to be freed. He’s got one hand pressed into the small of Prompto’s back, stroking there, slow and affectionate. Noct’s other hand is trembling, just a little, and he steadies himself bracing his hand against Prompto’s thigh.

It’s got Prompto shivering, and they’re both a bit terrified, Noctis realizes.

“Prom, I wanna do this,” Noctis might be nervous as hell, but he steadies his voice, and their lips brush together, they’re so close, when he talks. “Dunno what the hell I’m doing, but—”

“It’s okay,” Prompto’s the one to take initiative here, shifting closer, straddling Noct’s thighs properly, hips rocking forward, and the friction between them is hot, tangible, both of them gasping. “Noct, I got you. I’ve kinda watched, like, a lot of porn…”

Noctis wants to point out that porn and this aren’t exactly the same thing, but fuck, Prompto’s lips are on his again. It’s a messy kiss, sloppy and wet, lips parting against each other, and Noctis forgets everything. Prompto’s tongue is distracting as hell, and absolutely unfair, that stupid little tongue ring teasing against the roof of Noct’s mouth, teeth tugging at his lower lip as they part for breath, and then they’re both pressing in together again, frantic.

The whole world fades away, at some point. It’s impossible to be self-conscious, or afraid much longer, because Prompto’s hips keep moving. Noct’s hand shifts, slides up his inner thigh, and Prompto outright shudders. He gasps, the kiss breaking abruptly, face pressing into Noct’s shoulder, when Noct’s fingers brush over the obvious bulge in Prompto’s pants, palming the heat curiously, feeling the twitch and throb of his cock from beneath the confines of his jeans.

“Fuck,” Prompto groans, “Noct, touch me.”

Like Noctis needs any more encouragement, and from there, nothing else matters. It doesn’t matter that he’s never done this before, because it’s Prompto. There’s a bit of awkward shifting, frantic and desperate, Prompto lifting his hips, and Noct’s fingers trembling from eagerness as he tugs at Prompto’s pants. The button comes undone, and his fly almost – almost – gets stuck, just Noct’s luck, but then Prompto’s lifting, getting his pants and underwear shoved down. Noct’s grateful, for once, that he’s got sweatpants on, because it only takes a bit of lifting and shimmying to get his
There’s a moment where Noctis pauses. There’s a huge lump in his throat, as he takes in the damn sight of his best friend. Prompto’s t-shirt is pushed up over his tummy, and his thighs are bared to the world. He’s got a freckle on his hip, right over the jut of bone, and Noctis can’t help it, he’s sliding his thumb over the little mark. Prompto shivers, and his erection — full and heavy, curved up against his abdomen — twitches. It’s wet at the tip, and flushed red, and Noctis realizes, maybe for the first time, that he’s probably actually in love with his best friend.

Of course, Prompto’s the one to close that final bit of space between them, taking the leap, his hand snaking between them to curl around Noct’s cock — equally hard, flushed and swollen against his belly — and giving a slow, experimental jerk.

“Noct, fuck,” Prompto says, in a voice that’s dark with lust. Noct’s cock twitches, and everything turns to molten heat from there on.

It’s a blur. It’s Noct’s fingers tightening, his hand working strokes that aren’t quite smooth and steady. It’s jerky and erratic, but so is the pace Prompto’s set. Noct’s lips can’t stop — won’t stop — moving, kisses pressed into Prompto’s neck, rough and wet enough to leave an embarrassing mark right at the junction of neck and shoulder, right at the collar of his t-shirt. His fingers are slick with precome, and he can fucking feel Prompto throbbing under his fingertips. Prompto’s gasping, and his breath is labored. Noct’s is, too, and his hips are jerking up all on their own. He’s so hard, so eager, his balls drawn tight and his abdomen clenching.

It can’t be more than a couple of minutes, but time’s stopped having meaning. Everything’s stopped existing, except for the feeling of Prompto jerking him off. There’s a hand at the back of his neck, tangling in his hair and tugging, but Noctis barely registers that. He’s hyperaware of the knot twisting in his belly, and of how good Prompto feels, a trembling, writhing mess, perched in
his lap.

“Noct, ‘m—” Prompto gasps out, suddenly, and he’s tugging at Noct’s hair, pulling his head up, and getting their lips mashed together, rough and fast and insistent. Noctis doesn’t quite understand the meaning of the words, but then Prompto’s going rigid. His thighs are shaking violently, clenching around Noct’s, and his back’s snapping forward, and he’s practically moaning into Noct’s mouth. Noctis feels the hot spurt of come over his fingers, as Prompto rides out a desperate orgasm, and somehow, that’s what it takes to pull him over the edge, too.

Prompto’s strokes have gone all erratic, all pattern or rhythm lost with his release, but it doesn’t even matter, because getting his best friend off, feeling how he’s trembling and shaking, mess dripping over Noct’s fingers as he jerks him through his release, that’s so fucking hot that Noctis loses it on the spot. It’s a bit premature – for both of them, really – but he’s following Prompto over the edge, gasping against his best friend’s mouth, all wet, open-mouthed kisses, as he comes hard against his belly, against his shirt, over Prompto’s fingers.

Time’s stopped moving, and Noctis doesn’t even know how long they stay like that. At some point, Prompto pulls away, just enough to bury his face in Noct’s shoulder. Noct’s hand shifts away from his best friend’s softening cock to wipe his sticky fingers on his shirt. He thinks, vaguely, that Prompto’s making a disdainful noise in response, but his own fingers haven’t quite uncurled yet. They’re slow, stroking, exploring, over Noct’s softening cock, driving him mad with little brushes of fingers over the oversensitive head of his cock, swiping through the fluid still smeared there, sticky and cooling.

“Prom…” Noctis groans, finally reaching down, pushing Prompto’s hand away, and Prompto laughs in response, a breathless sort of sound that Noctis appreciates so fucking much. “’s too much. You gotta give me like… I dunno. An hour?”

The words are brave, carrying a double-meaning that absolutely can’t be mistaken for anything else. Prompto’s laughter softens, and he’s lifting both arms to curl around Noctis, squeezing a little. “That an invitation to do that again, Noctis?”

“Honestly, I might fall asleep,” Noctis confesses. The question stands between them though, unspoken, hovering in the air. It feels a bit like going zero-to-a-hundred in a very short period of time, but then again, they’ve been barreling into this for a while now, haven’t they? There’s been a hundred moments where the truth has been right in front of his face. And, Noct keeps coming back to it, to the moment he’d stared Prompto down, naked and bared before him, and thought, fuck, he loves him.

Noctis doesn’t think he’s gonna say that. Not yet. But—
“Y’know, I never call in sick at work,” Noctis admits, with a laugh, “… tomorrow’s your day off, isn’t it?”

Prompto lifts his head up, and blinks. He looks gorgeous like this. His eyes are all blown-out, a little distant. There’s a deep flush spread across his cheeks, all the way down to his shoulders, dipping under the collar of the damn t-shirt he’s still wearing.

“Yeah, I’m off,” Prompto says, with a smile. “Fuck, Noct, I feel like I haven’t seen you in forever.”

“Seeing a whole lot of me right now,” Noct retorts, and maybe he’s just high on endorphins and a release that he hadn’t even realized he’d needed this badly, but he’s feeling brave.

Prompto flushes a little deeper, if at all possible, but there’s no hesitation, this time, when he leans in for another kiss. This one is slower, brimming with affection, and even though they’re both a mess, saliva smeared across their cheeks and chins from the frantic kissing earlier, lips kiss swollen, Noct doesn’t care. It’s a fucking perfect kiss, as dumb and cliché as it is, since they’re both not very good at it.

“Wanna see a lot more of you,” Prompto says, when they part. “If you want.”

“Yeah,” Noctis replies, instantly, “think I’m gonna be sick tomorrow.”

"You shouldn't do that, y'know." Prompto points out, with a quiet laugh, but he can't quite hold back the smile, as hard as he's trying to be sincere. "Ignis is totally gonna know what's up. Calling in sick on my day off?"

Noctis shrugs. He's been doing his best to be responsible. He's been working hard, and even if things are strained with Ignis right now, he really is trying. Besides, Luna called in. Let her work his shift.

"Luna's off tomorrow, too. Ignis can't say shit if I get her to cover." Noct's shifting, reaching behind them for his phone - it'd fallen out of his sweatpants pocket when they'd fallen onto the bed together - and quickly texts an awkward message to Luna, asking for her to cover for him.

"She might say no, y'know," Prompto points out, but Noctis rolls his eyes and tosses his phone to
the side again. Prompto slowly slides out of his lap, flopping down on the bed.

"She won't," Noctis replies, with a shrug, shifting back as well. "Might have mentioned that I wanna spend the day with my best friend."

Prompto laughs as he ducks his head down, burying his face in the mattress. "You're totally playing this up, aren't you?"

"Got to take what I can get," Noctis admits, a flush spreading across his cheeks as Prompto lifts his head up, their eyes meeting. Noctis shifts a little more, rolls onto his side, props his head up on a hand, and stares his best friend down.

There had been a bit of lingering fear that this would make things weird, that he wouldn't really know how to go forward from here. And... yeah, it's a little weird, if only because it's so new. Prompto's grinning, though, as he shimmies out of his pants, kicking them off one leg, then the other, shoving them off the side of the bed. He looks cute like that, just in a loose t-shirt and his underwear. It's decidedly a good look.

"You want some clean clothes to change into?" Noctis asks, quietly, offering up a smile that's a bit shy, but tentative--hopeful, even.

Prompto blinks, and then shifts his gaze down, at the dark stain on the front of his shirt, mess from earlier. "... oh. Uh. Gross, huh?" he laughs, though, tugging the shirt over his head, handing it over to Noctis to wipe away the cooling mess on his belly. As soon as Noct tosses the shirt aside, Prompto's closing the distance between them, pressing into Noct's chest.

They've cuddled before. They've been sharing a damn bed for ages, and Noctis realizes, abruptly, that it's not really any different at all. He still has that same fluttery feeling in his belly, that same heat spreading through his chest. The only thing that's changed is that he understands why he's feeling it now.

"Pretty gross," Noctis agrees. He scoots back, free hand shifting to Prompto's shoulder to gently ease him back. Before Prompto can say anything, Noct's quickly adding. "Hey. Wait. Just... I'm gross, too."

Noct's shirt comes off, next, and there's a bit of a half-hearted struggle as he kicks his sweats off, pushing them down to the bottom of the bed to tangle with the sheets. Then, he's inching back in. An arm curls around Prompto's waist, and his best friend eagerly curls in, their bodies slotting
together far too perfectly.

"Hey, Noct?" Prompto asks, after a moment of silence falls between them. It's a comfortable silence though, something that's so tangibly them, that reminds Noctis of why this feels so right. The snow's falling outside still, in slow, lazy flakes that meander their way through the air to mingle with the remnants of the last snowfall still frozen on the ground. The light in Noct's apartment is dim, but they're so close, Noctis can still make out all the soft details of his friend's features.

"Yeah?" Noctis replies, breaking the silence.

Prompto doesn't speak again for a few moments. "What does this make us?" he asks, finally, and Noctis can hear the faintest bit of hesitation there. Prompto's doing his best to make it casual, but Noct knows his best friend better than that, damnit. He can see it, with the way Prompto's eyes carefully flicker away, the way he's fidgeting just a little. One arm is tucked under his head, but his fingers are tugging at the edge of a pillowcase, playing with the loose corner.

Noctis has been so fucking confused by all of this. It's been a long road. He'd been so certain that they're just best friends, that everyone else has just been teasing them, overreacting for the sake of getting a rise. He's not confused in this moment, though. Everything's crystal clear.

"It makes us best friends," Noctis says, and then, before Prompto can say anything, because he sees the way his best friend's features shift into something that's confused and not entirely pleased, he adds. "... guess we're more than that, too, though. I dunno, Prom. Never done this before. Is this where I ask you out on a date?"

Noct's stomach does a nervous little flip, despite everything. He thinks, maybe, that his palms are sweaty, and he almost looks away. Okay, maybe it's going to be... a bit strange, for a while, until they figure this out. Eventually, they'll settle into an understand, though, right?

Prompto grins brightly, though. "Hey. If you call in sick tomorrow, we could totally get brunch. That's a good first date, right?"

"Can't make any promises on anything that involves me getting out of bed before noon," Noctis admits, and then the arm he has curled around Prompto's waist tightens, tugging him in. Prompto's face nestles against his chest, warm and happy, and his fingers tangle in Noct's hair again. It's nice, and warm, and their bodies pressed close makes Noctis feel like, for once, everything is right with the world. Ignis can do whatever he wants. Everyone can tease them relentlessly about this. Noct doesn't care. He's happy.
"Can't guarantee I'm gonna want to get out of your bed, anyway," Prompto admits. "We'll order delivery."

That's a good idea, Noctis agrees, silently, but he doesn't voice it, because he's reaching between them with his free hand, cupping Prompto's chin and tipping his head up to steal another kiss. And then, neither of them are really in the mood to talk any longer, because there's far better things to do.

Chapter End Notes

i'm happy i finally got to write porn 10 chapters in lmfao. <3 we're almost done. don't worry, for everyone worried about Ignis... well, if you read Cortado, you'll get a taste of resolution, there. <3 Noct is coming around. there's 2 more chapters after this one! this has been such a ride, thanks for reading, as always. and thank you everyone for the screaming comments last chapter - i didn't get a chance to respond, but i read them all and loved it so much! as always, you know where to find me.
Put It Into Words

Chapter Summary

A dinner date at Gladio's bar isn't exactly what Noctis had in mind--but, he'll do anything to please Prompto. And, hey, someone has to step in, right?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Noctis almost expects Ignis to blow his phone up the next day, when he absolutely doesn't go to work. Luna, at least, agrees to cover for him. She totally knows what's up. Noctis has questions of his own, since he knows for a fact that he's covering for her date with the dreaded Nyx. He's still grateful, in any case.

Ignis doesn't text him, though. Maybe he's realized he's being too harsh. Maybe he's just so pissed, that he's choosing silence. It's a fifty-fifty shot, and Noctis really doesn't wanna think about it.

He feels much better, though, after a day with Prompto. There's a lot of kissing. A lot of wandering hands, and a couple more fumbled attempts at figuring things out. There's even more video games, though, a few movies binged, and they do eventually tumble out of the apartment to get food. It's the exact day Noctis needs, one with laughter and smiles and just a whole lot of seeing the best friend he's missed over the past week.

It's enough that Noctis actually feels like maybe he really will suck it up and apologize to Ignis. Prompto wakes up when Noctis stumbles out of bed at the ungodly time of four thirty in the fucking morning, and it's less for moral support, and more because they're curled together, no pretenses of pretending that they aren't outright cuddling all night anymore.

"You gonna be okay?" Prompto asks, blearily, as Noctis fumbles around the dark room for a clean pair of jeans and a t-shirt. He's got a cleaned apron hung over the back of his computer chair, thank god, and Noctis quickly tosses it over his shoulder.

"I'll be fine," Noctis grumbles, and it almost sounds believable. He'll still never be a morning person, but he does feel a lot better than he has before. It's dark out, and the apartment is a bit cold, and Noctis shivers as he pauses in front of the bed. He can make out Prompto's form, burrowed under the blankets, curled up all warm. There's a heavy, deep urge to crawl back into bed, to get tucked in close against his best friend's body, but fuck, he can't be sick two days in a row.
"Text me if you want moral support," Prompto replies, stifling a yawn, and he's scooting up a little, tipping his face in Noct's direction. "Might come in later for breakfast."

There's still that thrill in Noct's belly, though, as he ducks down, bracing a hand against the mattress, their lips brushing together in a quick kiss. Prompto's breath smells bad - and so does Noct's, for that matter, because he's still half-asleep and his mouth is dry - but it's warm and affectionate, and that's enough.

"I'll be fine," Noct repeats. "Text me when you're on your way. I'll have your drink ready."

Prompto smiles sleepily, and then he rolls over and goes back to sleep. Noct's jealous, but hell, he has to face Ignis sometime, right?

---

Ignis is already at Stella's, when Noctis arrives. It's no surprise, really. Even though Noct's supposed to be opening, Ignis has been even more of a workaholic, and so the lights are already on, when Noct pulls his car into his usual parking spot. The door's still locked, but Noctis has a key, and he lets himself in.

Ignis looks exhausted. He looks like fucking shit, dark shadows under his eyes, glasses just the slightest bit crooked. There's a long checklist on the counter, and Ignis is quickly counting various bottles of syrup they have tucked away behind the counter. He's doing inventory, Noctis realizes, and damnit, there's the harsh feeling of guilt rising up, because he really shouldn't have called in sick yesterday. There's too much to do.

Noctis is nervous. He shouldn't be nervous. It's just Ignis, right?

"Hey," he says, awkwardly, after leaving his bag in the back room and shrugging his jacket off.

Ignis sighs, pushing his glasses up - realizing that they're crooked, apparently - and looks in Noct's direction. "I don't want to argue, Noctis," he says, quietly. "Feeling better?"

It's Ignis's way, of course, of saying, I know you weren't sick, forget about it. Damnit, Noctis feels even more guilty.
"... yeah," Noctis agrees. "You?"

Ignis sure as hell doesn't look any better, but his cousin is shrugging that off. "I've been better," he says, dismissively, "but I'll be fine, Noctis."

Noctis nods, and he's quick to get to work. Ignis might have been here first, but he hasn't begun the opening procedures yet, so Noctis gets the till set up for the day, does a quick run-over from the night before, making sure everything's in its place, that they aren't running low on supplies, and so on. He gets the drip coffee brewing. They've got a good fifteen minutes before the shop opens, when Noctis finishes, and he doesn't want to spend it standing in a silent, exhausted stupor.

If he stops moving, for one, he'll probably fall asleep. For another, it's awkward.

Ignis presses a coffee into Noct's hands, abruptly, and it takes Noct by surprise. He hadn't even really noticed what Ignis was doing.

"I added cream and syrup," Ignis says, wryly, before Noctis can protest. "Believe it or not, I'm not so self-absorbed that I don't know what you like."

Noctis flushes. Okay, so maybe he's been harsh on Ignis lately. Maybe his own reactions to everything have contributed to this weird, awkward place they're finding themselves in. Maybe.

"Ignis--" Noctis starts to say. He pauses, taking a sip of the coffee, and dammit, Ignis did make a good drink. It's overly sweet, just the way Noctis likes it, and it's a lighter roast, none of the usual, harsh acidity to it. It tastes good, even. It makes the following words just a little easier to spit out.

"Look," Noct sighs. "I'm sorry, Iggy. I didn't want to fight, I just..."

Ignis shakes his head, and he's sighing as well. "... I was too hard on you, Noctis. My apologies."

There's a moment of silence, and okay, it's a bit awkward. Noctis, honestly, had been expecting Ignis to push back. He'd been expecting a lecture, a sort of "I told you to stop fucking around" rant. He'd all but prepared for it. Noctis hadn't expected Ignis to agree with him, to seem so fucking defeated.
"Still shouldn't have been a jerk about it," Noctis grumbles, "c'mon, Specs, you're ruining my great apology... this was hard, y'know."

There's more silence, and then, Ignis is shaking his head, huffing out a quiet little burst of laughter. "I shan't kill your moment, then. Apology accepted, Noctis, now help me with this inventory?"

Noctis, for once in his fucking life, is perfectly happy to help Ignis with a task so early in the morning. The caffeine's buzzing through him, waking him up. And, okay, maybe the promise of things going back to normal is helping. Maybe, if he's helpful, Ignis will change the schedule back. And even if he doesn't? Somehow, the world seems brighter, just knowing that he'll have Prompto in his bed again, that he'll have those damn lips pressed into his.

They work in silence for a while. The clock turns to five, and Noctis unlocks the door, but it's too early for any customers, so they turn their attention back to counting inventory.

"You're in a good mood," Ignis comments, idly, as they're counting some fancy, engraved porcelain mugs they have on display in the front of the store.

Noctis flushes a little. Is it obvious, he wonders? It's probably obvious. As he obsesses about that, dwelling on the situation, it hits him, suddenly, that he wants to talk about it. Noctis hadn't even begun to really figure out what the hell they're going to say to everyone. There's no keeping it a secret, of course, but-- he hadn't expected to feel this way.

"I kissed Prompto," Noctis suddenly blurts out. His cheeks are flushing, and it's obvious he's flustered, even in the dimly-lit aesthetic that Stella's goes for. He dips his head down, and becomes suddenly very obsessed with counting, and then recounting, the twelve mugs they have.

“Oh?” Ignis says, carefully, after a heartbeat of silence. “Well, that’s unexpected.”

The words themselves are fairly neutral, but deadpanned in Ignis’s blandest tone, just the faintest hint of amusement edging in, has Noctis frowning, just a little. He stabs his pen through the checklist he’s working with, viciously enough that it tears through the paper. Oops.

“I mean. It’s not a big deal,” Noctis says, quickly enough, and he hates how much he cares about what his cousin’s opinion is, here. He’s also terrified, to some extent, that Ignis really will separate him. Or that he’ll fire one of them. Really, he’s worried about Ignis disapproving, in general, of this… relationship. Thing. Whatever it is. “Right?”
Ignis looks up from the bags of coffee beans he’s working on. He puts his clipboard down on the countertop. Noctis watches, mildly confused, as Ignis approaches, placing a hand gently on his shoulder. The warm weight is reassuring.

“Noctis,” Ignis says quietly, “I love you dearly. You’re family. Please, take no offense from this, but you two have been so painfully obvious about your feelings. Trust me when I say everyone saw this coming.”

Noctis groans. Of course he knows that, on some level. Everyone’s been teasing them nonstop. That fluttery feeling in his stomach has been there for ages, and Ignis himself had separated them for flirting. Still. He’s kinda embarrassed about it now.

“Ignis,” Noctis groans, “come on, don’t start—”

“I’m not starting anything. Merely stating the truth,” Ignis interrupts, smoothly enough. His hand’s still on Noct’s shoulder. Ignis lifts his other hand, placing it on the opposite shoulder, and then he’s gently turning Noctis, easing him into a hug. It’s a hug that, honestly, Noctis didn’t realize he needed until now. Suddenly, he’s curling his arms around his cousin, tugged into an embrace that has him clinging for dear life. Ignis’s shirt smells like fresh laundry, and it’s soft, and warm, and, more than anything else, makes Noct feel safe.

“I swear, we’ll get our shit together,” Noctis says, quietly, the words partially muffled by his face pressing against Ignis’s chest. He feels like a moron, but maybe he just needs to unload, needs to say the words. Really, Noct wants things to go back to normal with Ignis, before he was so fucking stressed out, irritable and snapping and grumpy all the time. Noct misses having his friend, because before they’re cousins, or boss-and-employee, all the other stuff, Ignis has always been there for him.

“I know,” Ignis says quietly, “Noctis, it’s… not about you and Prompto.”

That, at least, has Noctis blinking. His eyes are pathetically wet, Noct realizes, as he backs up a little. He tries his best to tip his face away, to lift a hand to wipe at his eyes. It’s blatantly obvious what he’s doing, but Ignis – thank god – pretends not to notice.

“What do you mean?” Noctis asks. “It was pretty clearly about me and Prom, dude. Unless you’re referring to the whole ‘horribly overworked, in need of a vacation’ thing. In which case, yeah, you’re right. That’s a problem.”
Ignis, despite everything, actually manages a goddamn smile and a quiet bit of laughter at that. “Ah, Noct. I can always count on you to be blunt, can’t I?” He pauses, and he looks thoughtful for a moment. That has Noctis feeling nervous. Whenever Ignis gets that serious, far-off look on his face, shit’s about to go down. Noct doesn’t push it, because he does want to help, but at the same time… what can he really do?

“I miss Gladiolus,” Ignis finally says, after a lengthy pause. This time, Ignis is the one to draw back, to turn and reach for his clipboard to continue the inventory count.

Oh. Oh.

For the second time in as many days, Noctis is suddenly on the verge of a revelation. All the signs have been there for this, too, haven’t they? Ignis’s sour mood after that night he and Prompto had spent at the bar with Gladio. The dreaded holiday party – and Iris’s gossipy texts about how badly shit had hit the fan when her brother had showed up with Nyx. The entire aftermath of that, Ignis’s fucking horrible mood. It all makes sense. Noct’s seeing it with crystal clarity. Damn. Prompto had been right all along, too, hadn’t he?

“… is there anything I can do?” Noctis asks, tentatively, the question half an offer, half an attempt to just get Ignis to goddamn talk here.

Ignis laughs bitterly. His back is turned to Noctis, but Noct can see the way his posture is slumping. That’s not necessarily uncharacteristic for Ignis, but certainly betrays how stressed he is, and how fucking caught up in his own little world he must be. Ignis has always been bad at emotions. He’s stubborn, and refuses to admit when he has a problem. It must run in the family.

“Unless you can turn back time, I doubt that very much, Noct,” Ignis says. He sighs, though, and begins to count the tins of teabags that line a shelf next to the counter. “… I know you all gossip about my past with Gladio. It’s accurate, the things you speculate.”

Noctis nods, slowly. He’d already figured that out. “So… you’re not over him. Why not just tell him?”

Ignis turns around and stares at Noctis like that’s the dumbest idea he’s ever come up with. And okay, objectively, it probably is a pretty dumb idea. But hey, stupid ideas have a tendency to work out, when Noctis is involved. Kissing Prompto had been a really stupid idea, after all.
“Don’t be foolish, Noctis,” Ignis says, quietly, in a voice that sounds… well, outright defeated. “He’s moved on. I’d accomplish nothing from such a conversation. It’d only make me look pathetic.”

Noctis isn’t so sure. He sighs, though. “… I’m sorry, Iggy, I didn’t know…”

There’s no chance to say anything further, though, because the door is chiming, and the first regular of the day is entering the shop. Noctis quickly ducks behind the counter, clipboard set aside, and from there, business picks up.

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Noct’s shift flies by, for once. Prompto shows up partway during the day, true to his word, and Ignis doesn’t bother to shoo him away. He even looks the other way when Prompto takes up his usual table, closest to the counter, and the two chat happily between customers for the rest of the day. Maybe that’s Ignis’s attempt to make things right.

Hell, Igis even retreats back to his office for a while, and returns with a new, freshly printed schedule.

“I suppose you two have earned this,” Ignis says somewhat stiffly, as he hands over a copy to each of them. Noctis is back to his usual shifts, afternoons and evenings, Prompto with his opens. And, much to their relief, they share a few shifts here and there, too.

“You’re the best, Iggy!” Prompto says, brightly, and poor Ignis has to suffer an overexcited, tight hug from Prompto in response. He’s a good sport, even though Noctis can tell his attitude is still not ideal. It’s simply shifted from anger into a sort of quiet, defeated acceptance. That’s not much better, honestly, even if they’re not directly in the line of fire anymore.

When Noct’s shift ends, he and Prompto maybe spend a couple of minutes making out in his car. Prompto’s got an arm curled around Noct’s neck, fingers tangled in his hair. Noct’s hand is a warm weight, braced on Prompto’s thigh for balance as he leans over. Their cheeks are flushed, and Noctis has half a mind to suggest they head back to his place, for a night in that involves a movie, takeout, and probably a whole lot of wandering hands.

“Noct,” Prompto mumbles, when their lips part, both of them flushed and panting, their lips chapped from all the kissing they’ve been doing. “… the thing with Ignis.”
Noctis doesn’t really want to talk about Ignis. He’d filled Prompto in, of course, in frantic whispers whenever his cousin was out of earshot. Prompto had been very pleased that his theories had been right. He, after all, has been insisting all along that Ignis and Gladio had a thing.

“What about it?” Noctis asks, tipping his head. “I told Iggy to talk to him, and he refused. I’m not getting involved.”

Prompto frowns. “C’mon, Noct. He’s your cousin. And your friend. They both are. It’s kind of our job to get involved, if they’re gonna be idiots.”

Noctis should have expected this. Prompto’s too nice for his own damn good. “How is it our job to butt into their business?” He’s pulling away, though, because clearly their nice little stolen makeout session in his car is over.

Prompto pouts. “Because Gladio’s totally still into Ignis. And clearly Iggy’s got feelings.”

Noctis drums at the steering wheel with one hand, while he buckles in and shifts the car into reverse with the other. Okay, yeah, Ignis clearly has it bad. Gladio, though…? Noctis isn’t so sure, there. He’s pretty sure he sensed something from his old friend, a sort of lingering, sad nostalgia, but that doesn’t necessarily translate to anything.

“You’re making me go to the bar for dinner and drinks, aren’t you?” Noctis intones, rather blandly. Gladio’s working tonight, he knows he is. The bar does make some pretty good snacks, too. And it’s happy hour, at least. So really, it’s not the worst idea, even if Noctis is dreading the pushback that comes with injecting themselves into his friends’ personal business. This could backfire, and badly.


“Not what I had in mind when I suggested a dinner date, y’know,” Noctis sighs, but he’s already turning his car in the direction of Behemoth’s. The battle, after all, was over before it even began, because Noctis can’t resist Prompto, ever. And, more than that, he really does want to help.
So, the two of them get happily settled in at a couple of bar stools in Gladio’s section of the bar, a couple of drinks and a huge plate of nachos between them. Noct’s disdainfully picking most of the toppings off his chip, pushing peppers and onions and dreaded black beans onto Prompto’s side of the late. Prompto finds this terribly amusing. He keeps lazily kicking Noct’s shin under the table, too, and Noctis finds it both irritating and endearing. He can’t decide which.

“How’s everything going, lovebirds?” Gladio asks, swooping in to check in on them. Noct’s slowly nursing his drink. Prompto’s trying to exercise self-control and pace himself, and he’s almost succeeding. He’s only sucked down half the drink, at least—something sugary and sweet, as usual. Noct has to admit, Gladio makes a mean cocktail.

“It’s good,” Noctis shrugs. Prompto positively beams at the words.

Gladio blinks, the tease not going over quite as he expected. “You two don’t normally come here for food. Special occasion?”

“We’re on a date,” Noctis offers, as nonchalantly as he can manage. So far, he’s only told Ignis. It’s only a matter of time until Iris finds out, though, and then it’s pretty much over, she’ll make sure everyone knows within minutes. Hell, just telling Gladio might speed that process up, because he goes soft whenever his baby sister is involved.

Gladio rolls his eyes. Then, he does a double take. He takes in how Noct and Prompto’s fingers are brushing, how they’re leaning in just a little closer than usual. It’s not that much different than their usual behavior, really, but maybe it’s just the fact that they’re aware of it, of how things have shifted.

“Given up on fighting it?” Gladio asks, “just gonna play it up, huh?”

“Not playing,” Noctis confesses. Prompto scoops a few stray peppers off a chip and lifts it to Noct’s mouth, and he’s grinning as Noct leans in, shoving it in his face with a giggle. Yeah, okay, so they’re feeding each other bites of food now. Apparently, the floodgates have opened, and there’s no going back. Noct and Prompto are absolutely going to be that couple.

“We just gave up on denying it,” Prompto chips out. He’s all bright-eyed, maybe flushing a little with the confession, but pleased as can be, leaning forward to pluck his drink off the table and take another long sip. “… so. Yeah. It’s a date-date.”

Gladio’s eyes widen, just a little, and he stares them down, as if he’s trying to figure out whether
or not they’re bullshitting him. “… about time,” he finally huffs, with a shake of his head. “Fuck. My sister doesn’t know yet, does she?”

“Nope,” Noctis groans. “I’m dreading that conversation.”

“She won’t be so bad,” Gladio laughs. “She’ll be awful for a day or two. Then she’ll calm down.”

Noctis isn’t so sure. But, well, Gladio knows his sister best, and he doesn’t want to argue about that. He sighs, and lifts a particularly loaded nacho, covered in beans and tomato and peppers, and offers it out to Prompto. His best friend accepts it eagerly, chomping down on the chip, a bit of sour cream clinging to the corner of his mouth.

“Prom, you’re a mess,” Noctis grins, though, and he’s leaning in, swiping the bit of mess from the corner of Prompto’s lips. It’s a soft gesture, warm, affectionate, and Noct can’t quite help it – he swoops in and gets their lips pressed together in a quick kiss. They’re both flushing outright when the kiss parts. Noct half feels like everyone’s staring them down, being so open in public. The reality, of course, is that it’s a bar, during happy hour, and nobody’s paying them a lick of attention.

Gladio’s watching, of course, leaning an arm casually over the edge of the bar. It’s still early enough that he doesn’t have a whole lot of work to do, and he’s clearly amused by the two of them. Noct, despite everything, half expects Gladio to judge them. It’s not that Noct’s insecure. Hell, he’s never even really given a thought about what any of this means. He’d expected to end up with a girlfriend, and he has Prompto instead, but somehow, it all makes sense in a way that… Noct doesn’t really have any questions about it.

Noct doesn’t really expect Gladio to look almost longing, when he watches them. His lips are quirked up into the faintest of smiles, and it’s got a rush of nostalgia to it. It’s the same fucking smile Ignis had offered them, earlier.

Noctis frowns, just a little, and reaches for Prompto’s hand again, squeezing. Prompto squeezes back, and his gaze follows Noct’s.

Prompto’s the more perceptive of the two of them. He’s been quietly pushing Noct that they should do something. So it comes as no surprise, really, when Prompto’s the one to speak up, here.

“Hey, Gladio. You okay?”
Gladio looks surprised at the call out. His expression shifts, and he laughs, pushing long bangs out of his face and shaking it off. He’s just wearing a black t-shirt and jeans, but Noctis doesn’t miss the awkward shift, the way he adjusts his posture, like he’s trying to impress, to act nonchalant.

“What? Yeah, everything’s fine. Just, about time, you two.”

“It’s just,” Prompto says, “that’s kinda the look Ignis gets, sometimes, too.”

Bingo. Noctis watches, and he sees the way Gladio looks just slightly surprised. He doesn’t miss the subtle shift of features, the hopeful way his eyes light up, just for a moment, at the mention. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Noctis replies. He reaches for his drink, and takes a long sip of it, the alcohol fueling him here. Noct’s not drunk, not by far, but there’s that pleasant, buzzing warmth in his belly, and it’s absolutely giving him the courage to push forward. “He misses you, dude.”

If Gladio looked mildly surprised before, he now looks outright uncomfortable. There’s a moment of silence, and then cursing, as he drops the rag that he’d been fumbling with. Gladio ducks down, retrieving it from the floor and tossing it into the bucket of dirty laundry behind the bar.

“… the fuck brought that on?” he asks, in a voice that’s way too harsh for it to be meaningless. “Noct, you tryin’ to play matchmaker now?”

Prompto’s a little drunker than Noctis is, thanks to the ridiculously sweet cocktail he can’t stop drinking. “Naw. I’m the matchmaker here, Noct’s just my reluctant partner-in-crime.” He straightens, though, and offers Gladio a smile that’s all sunny encouragement. “You gotta know how Iris talks, Gladio…”

There’s really no arguing that. Maybe Gladio had been about to go on the defensive, but as soon as his sister’s brought into the argument? Well, shit, there’s no denying that Iris loves to gossip. She’s also, likely, the one who knows what’s going on the most. As much as Noctis hates to admit it – and dammit, he hates to admit it – she’s usually right about these things.

Noctis playfully kicks his toe at Prompto’s shin, under the table. Prompto kicks back, in a silent, frantic game of footsie.
“It doesn’t matter,” Gladio says, abruptly, after a silence, and he’s reaching for another rag, a clean one, to scrub at an invisible dirty spot at the edge of the bar table. It’s something to keep himself busy. Noct knows that coping mechanism well. “Iggy might as well be married to Stella’s. He’s too busy for anything else.”

Oh. Oh. So that’s it. Noctis and Prompto exchange a look, and it’s scary, really, just how much they can silently communicate in those few moments.

“Work is gonna kill him,” Noctis says, “… I think he’s figured that out. That there’s more to life than the shop.”

It’s a feeling that Noctis has been getting. Ignis has been throwing himself more and more into Stella’s, but it’s not like it was before. Yeah, Ignis has always been a workaholic. Before, though, it was because he wanted to be. More and more, it’s turned into a thing of desperation, an escape, and Noctis doesn’t really know what his cousin has left, outside of the walls of the coffee shop.

“I ain’t some knight in shining armor,” Gladio shrugs, but his voice is rough with emotion.

“Never said you were,” Prompto quips back. “He doesn’t need one. He’s got it all figured out, Iggy does. I can see it. He just kinda… needs a giant kick in the ass. Some help to get in the right direction.”

Gladio doesn’t reply for a few moments. Noctis doesn’t push it. He’s idly poking at the plate of nachos. Prompto’s squirming in his seat a little. He’s getting fidgety and a bit giggly, the way he always does when he drinks. His tongue ring is clacking against his front teeth, and Noctis can tell he’s fighting to keep his mouth shut.

“He won’t listen to me,” Gladio says, but his voice is quiet. He’s reaching for a bottle of whiskey, and quickly pours out three shots. Despite the words, he’s pushing two of the shotglasses across the table. “Whatever, you idiots. Let’s toast. To you two finally figuring your shit out.”

Noctis hates whiskey, but he lifts the shotglass anyway. “To you figuring your shit out, too, dude,” he says. Prompto echoes it, with a grin, and then Noct’s tipping the shot down his throat. It burns straight down – he really fucking hates whiskey – and he’s shuddering.

Prompto makes a quiet, pained noise, because he sucks at hard liquor, too. “That’s gross. Ugh.”
Gladio laughs, and he doesn’t look phased by it. Maybe it’s Noct’s imagination, though, but he thinks he sees some sort of new resolve there. “You should probably just rip the bandaid off. Let everyone know about your… thing.”

Their thing. Noct laughs. “It’s called a relationship, Gladio.”

“That’s what it is?” Prompto asks, and he’s teasing, yeah, but there’s something, a thrill, about referring to it that way, in public, with a close friend. Yeah, Noctis decides, in that moment, this is absolutely a relationship.

“I mean, if you want it to be,” Noctis shrugs, but, okay, Prompto’s maybe a little more drunk than he’d thought, because his best friend’s jumping up off his bar stool, curling an arm around Noct’s lips and swooping in for a kiss. He reeks of whiskey, and it hangs heavy on his lips. The kiss is messy, too, but Noctis doesn’t care. He’s curling an arm around Prompto’s neck, kissing back just as fiercely, and it feels good, doing this, unrestrained, young, and stupid.

“Looks like a relationship to me,” Gladio comments, when the two of them part, but he’s grinning, and shaking his head. “Noct… Prom. I’m happy for you lovesick idiots.”

Noctis flushes, and ducks his head down. Prompto’s flushing, too, but he looks impossibly pleased with himself.

“I know we all shit on you, but…” Gladio pauses, eyeing them both. It’s the type of gaze that’s magnetic, that has Noctis lifting his head, as embarrassed as he is. Gladio’s expression is soft, his eyes fond, and okay, maybe they haven’t spent enough time together, but they love each other, like the big, extended family they are. That will never change.

“We only did it cuz we could see it, Noct. I’ve never seen you this happy,” Gladio says, quietly. He shifts his gaze to Prompto, and adds, “you take care of my boy, you hear me? You run off for ten years again, and I’m going to hunt you down and kick your ass.”

Prompto flushes even brighter, and he makes a faint, squeaking sound – totally the alcohol – but he’s leaning closer to Noct again, their shoulders brushing, and his eyes are shining bright when he speaks. “I’m never leaving Noct’s side again, can promise you that.”

Gladio nods, satisfied. “Enough with the serious bullshit,” he says. “Eat your food so I don’t have
Noctis doesn’t need any more encouragement, there. He and Prompto are both notorious snackers, when alcohol’s involved, and he even dares to eat a couple of stray peppers as he chows down on the now-soggy, cheese-covered nachos. All things considered, that went better than expected. Gladio’s right, anyway. Everyone’s been awful, but it’s only because they saw the truth all along, didn’t they?

Besides, Noctis has Prompto at his side, and like this? He feels as though the two of them can face anything.

Chapter End Notes

we are almost at the end. <3 there's one chapter after this, i can't even believe we made it so far!
Thank you everyone for your love and support through all of this! It's just a silly little idea Unsteady and I had with a few friends, and we're so happy it took off and lured people in!
Also, if you read her half of the story--yeah, you got the Ignis & Noctis scene last chapter, I was very pleased that her bit came out first. :D
As always: kudos, comments, and general screaming is so greatly appreciated! See you next chapter for the finale EEE!
You are in Love

Chapter Summary

Maybe they've finally figured things out. Or, maybe it's just the beginning.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“... I can’t believe this,” Iris is saying, outright disbelief in her voice as she stares down the little list scribbled out on a piece of paper she’s got tucked into a notebook. “This isn’t fair.”

Noctis had expected a somewhat different reaction from Iris, honestly, when he told her the news. Yes, he and Prompto are dating. No, it’s none of her business about their sex life. No, he isn’t blushing, it’s not like that—! And, well, initially, he had gotten that from her.

Of course, it’d turned into immediate distress, when she’d remembered that god-awful, long-standing bet that apparently everyone was in on. There’d been a bit of mental math, a strange look crossing her face, and then she’d outright scrambled to the back room to get the chart.

“Are you seriously pissed that you didn’t win?” Noctis sighs. “Sorry that Prompto and I couldn’t come to a life-changing revelation when it’s convenient for you.”

“That’s not it,” Iris says, lifting the paper up, practically cramming it in Noct’s face, “look.”

Noctis blinks a few times, the page pressed too close for him to properly focus on the words written there. He grabs the paper, holds it out, and skims over it. First: goddamn, a lot of people were in on this. Pretty much everyone at the shop, and more than a few of the regulars. Even fucking Gladio’s name is on there, too.

Second: oh. Noctis realizes, immediately, why Iris is so upset.

Christmas is next week. He and Prompto had gotten together last week. One person actually managed to pick the day, spot on, and the name that’s written down?
Oh god.

“Iris, why the _hell_ did you let him join your stupid bet?” Noctis groans. Iris reaches for the paper back, but fuck that, Noctis crumples it up into a ball and tosses it into the trash. “You should know better.”

“I know!” she sighs, and doesn’t even seem that pissed that Noct’s just thrown away the evidence. “But Luna and I were talking, and neither of us felt like dealing with him—it was just dumb and stupid, we didn’t _think_—”

“We are not telling him about this,” Noctis says, firmly.

“Deal,” Iris agrees.

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Of course, Noctis and Prompto are working together, later, when they’re blessed by the presence of Stella’s most enigmatic – and definitively problematic – customer.

Things at Stella’s have gone well. Noctis and Prompto hadn’t really known what to expect, after their little date at Gladio’s bar. They’d told each other not to really think much of it. Of course, Ignis had showed up to work the next day in very good spirits, and that, if nothing else, told them all they need to know.

Gladio’s been stopping in at the coffee shop, too, and Ignis is always coming out to greet him, comping him coffee and pastries, and there’s no denying the way they’re flirting. It’s helped ease some of the pressure from the two of them, because Iris’s attention is totally on her brother, and his apparent shiny new relationship status. That’s a relief.

But, there’s that saying, that when things are going too well…

So, Noct’s face goes a little pale, when the door opens, and in swaggers Ardyn.
He’d been far too close to Prompto, the two of them maybe slacking off a little, in favor of doing stupid quizzes on their phones and playfully nudging each other. Ignis is in the back room, but Noct’s been helping out some with the paperwork, and he’s only in for the evening, apparently, while Gladio works the bar. Ignis has been letting it slide. His mood has been so much better.

“Why, hello,” Ardyn says, stopping at the register, a sinister, overly cheerful smile plastered across his face. “A little birdie informed me that I’ve won a bet.”

Prompto blinks. Noctis stiffens, just a little. How the fuck does he know?! Does Noctis want to know? Does he have the place wired? Did someone tell him, just to make their lives miserable?

“Don’t know what you’re talking about,” Noctis replies, “what can I get you, Yargen?”

Ardyn’s expression doesn’t falter. “You’re not nearly as friendly as Pronto.” He turns his attention to Prompto, who is half-hiding behind Noctis, clearly not in the mood to deal with this bullshit. “Pronto! My favourite lad! Why don’t you get me your boss – Igloo? Is that his name? – so that I can cash in on my prize? Free coffee for life, I believe that’s what the young lass said! What’s her name? Aeris?”

“Iris,” Prompto grits out, before he can hold it back. “… fuck, Noct--?”

There’s a bit of a dilemma, Noctis can tell, as they exchange a quick look. There’s a silent debate about whether or not they should get Ignis, here. He’s been in a good mood, and Noct doesn’t want to ruin that. He has no doubt that Ignis isn’t going to give the guy free coffee for life, but if he decides to comp Ardyn’s drink today, just to smooth things out, well, that could make things way worse for them.

They don’t have to make that decision, anyway, because Ignis apparently heard the commotion, and he’s wandering out from the back office. No surprise, really, given how distinct Ardyn’s self-important drawl is.

“What’s going on?” Ignis asks, and his eyes narrow as he takes in the sight of their problematic favourite. Ardyn’s swaying a little on the spot. He’s wearing the same, ugly hat, though it’s a little more frayed around the edges than usual. He’s got a cane – even though it’s not helping him walk in a steady path at all – and for some fucking reason, he’s wearing a cape. Why the hell does he have a fucking cape?
“Ah,” Ardyn sounds pleased. “Excellent. Igloo, my good man, one of your strapping young employees promised me coffee for life. I won the bet, you see!”

Iris had apparently clued Ignis in to that, at least, because his eyes are narrowing, and there’s no haze of confusion. “My employee was not authorized to act on behalf of the coffee shop. That was a joke. I’d kindly ask you make your order and pay, and stop bothering my colleagues.”

Ardyn looks somewhat bored, heaving a great, theatrical sigh. “I have a law firm, you know,” he says, as if that’s supposed to be some sort of minor threat.

“Last week you owned a company that made dry erase markers,” Ignis replies, wryly. There’s a story there, and Noctis is eyeing Prompto, who quickly mouths, ‘I’ll tell you later’, because he’d been the one there for that particular incident. It had never really come up, with everything else going on, and Noct’s painfully curious.

“Yes. I own both,” Ardyn shrugs. “Dare you tempt fate?”

“I think I will.”

Ignis, it appears, finally has had enough. He’s finally at a different sort of breaking point. It’s not the utter meltdown sort of breaking point he’d reached before, where he’d snapped at Noctis and Prompto. This time, Yargen Zootopia is the – rightful – subject of all of Ignis’s wrath and vengeance.

“Get the fuck out,” Ignis says, and he’s pulling his phone out of his pocket, glaring Ardyn down, “or I will call the police and forcibly remove you.”

Ardyn stares for a long moment. He lifts his cane, and Noctis worries, just for a moment, that this is where it’s revealed that their crazy customer is an actual, gun-toting psychopath, or that his cane converts to a sword or something insane. But no, instead, Ardyn is simply talking again.

“You’ll regret this, I’m afraid. I’ll have to ban you from my theme park, Izunialand, we plan on opening it next month—”

“I’ll live,” Ignis groans, “now get out.”
Ardyn sighs, and slowly turns around. “Fine. I merely wanted a latte, but I’ll return another time. Or, perhaps, it’s time to find a new shop.”

Please, Noctis thinks, silently. Prompto’s standing next to him, a little awkward, and the two are staring down as Ignis glares in Ardyn’s direction, watching him retreat.

“You will have to find a new coffee shop,” Ignis says, suddenly. “Yargen Zootopia, you’re banned from Stella’s. For life. I’m sick of you heckling my employees.”

“You’ll regret this,” Ardyn says, as he stops in front of the door. “And I want my ring back. It’s a magic ring, you know, I’m descended from a king!”

Noctis can’t help it. He bursts into laughter, because this is just getting fucking ridiculous. “Oh yeah? Me too, funny how that works, I’m heir to the throne! Fight you for it!”

“Noctis, don’t encourage him,” Ignis says, but Ardyn, for once, seems to decide it’s not worth it. He’s grumbling under his breath as he exits the shop, staggering out and across the parking lot to his disgusting, run-down, crappy looking car. Noctis wonders, really, if the guy even has a job. He’s still convinced that Ardyn’s a cough syrup addicted hobo and living in an alleyway somewhere.

“Think he’ll be back?” Prompto asks, nervously, breaking the silence, once he’s gone. The coffee shop is empty, except for the two weird regular girls who sit and write in the corner. They’d totally been watching the whole exchange, and they’re giggling and poking each other, heads close together. Let them gossip. Noct’s pretty sure their names were on the list, too, anyway.

“Oh, certainly,” Ignis replies, mildly, “those types never seem to get the hint and go away. I’m sure he’ll return in a few weeks in some awful disguise. We’ll keep an eye out.”

“Maybe you need to hire Gladio as your bodyguard,” Noctis teases, with a grin.

Ignis’s expression shifts, just a little, but Noctis sees right through him. “Speaking of…” he begins.

“Spill it,” Noctis grins. He’d been poking at Ignis the entire week now, just dying to know what
happened between him and Gladio. Prompto, too, is suddenly very attentive, bouncing on the spot. It’s a good thing there aren’t any customers, currently. It’s almost close, and Ignis, it seems, really has mellowed out because he’s not making them do any extra cleaning.

Ignis sighs. “My life is not a public spectacle, Noctis.” Despite that, he’s continuing, “… although, I have a favour to ask.”

“I’m listening,” Noctis is absolutely intrigued. Ignis doesn’t generally ask for favors. And when he does, it usually means opening shifts. He doesn’t want to work opens. But… Ignis is his cousin, and Noctis is torn, because he’s been so much more relaxed. And, well, he’s just banned Yargen from the shop. Noct’s feeling rather agreeable.

“I’m going away for the holidays,” Ignis says.

Noctis blinks. That is absolutely not what he expected to hear. Ignis doesn’t take vacations. It’s just a fact of life. It might as well be a personality trait. Ignis is addicted to his job. “Excuse me?”

“Shortly before Christmas, until New Year’s,” Ignis clarifies. “Gladiolus and I are going to Galdin.”

“Iggy got laid,” Prompto says, brightly, and if looks could kill, Prompto may very well be keeling over dead right about now. Ignis’s mood might be better, but it’s apparently not that good.

“Prom,” Noctis says, but he’s grinning, because he can’t help it, and ribbing at his cousin is a good time, when he’s not convinced Ignis is going to burst into flames and devour them both on the spot. “… Iggy, man, you totally got laid, huh?”

“None of your business,” Ignis replies, quite stiffly. “Anyway. Noctis. I’d like to leave Stella’s in your care.”

Wait. What?

Noctis blinks. “… you’ve never trusted me with the shop,” he points out the obvious, there. Even though Noct thinks he’s pretty fucking competent, at this point – his attitude in the mornings aside – Ignis hasn’t really recognized that. His cousin tends to still treat him like an immature kid brother. He never seems to trust him alone with things. It’s part of what had led Ignis down this path in the first place, his refusal to unload some of the burden onto others.
“I’m trusting you with it now,” Ignis says, quietly. “… I’d rather not make a huge deal of this, Noctis, but you know how to do everything. Most of the month-end stuff is done in advance, and the yearly just needs to be reconciled, I’ll do that when I get back—”

“Yeah,” Noctis says, quickly, interrupting Ignis before he can change his mind, before he can take this back. There’s a different sort of thrill building in the pit of his stomach. It’s none of the fluttery, warm feeling he gets for Prompto. It’s a sort of exhilaration, knowing that Ignis trusts him. It makes him feel like he’s maybe growing up, too, figuring things out. Holding the responsibility of the shop makes Noct feel like he’s got a purpose in the world. Things, maybe, are coming together.

“I’ll watch the shop. Just let me know what you want me to do,” Noctis says, quickly. “… Iggy. I’m glad you’re taking a vacation. I think… you really need one. I hope you and Gladio have fun, dude.”

The smile Ignis offers Noctis warms his heart to the very fucking core. It’s been a rough struggle, the past few months, but it feels like, finally, they’re all on the right path. “Thank you, Noctis. It’s going to be an excellent vacation.”

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Noctis and Prompto have fallen into a nice little habit of curling up on Noct’s couch, cuddled together. It’s pretty similar to how it’s been for a while now, except there’s less hesitance, when Noct outright lays his head in Prompto’s lap, and it feels nice, when Prompto’s fingers idly play through his hair. There’s a couple of mostly-eaten cartons of Chinese takeout stacked on the coffee table. Some movie’s playing in the background. It’s snowing outside.

Stella’s is closing for the holidays, so Noctis only has to worry about it for half the time that Ignis is gone. Noct had offered to keep it open, but nobody wants to work, and Ignis had pointed out that really, they all have family to be with. Noctis appreciates that, more than he wants to say, because he misses his dad. He hasn’t seen him enough.

“You staying the night?” he asks Prompto, stifling a yawn. It’s not that late, but Noctis is warm. There’s a blanket tucked up over his body, and he’s exhausted, as always.

“If it’s okay,” Prompto grins. “I dunno how much we’re gonna see each other over the holidays. I know you’re gonna be busy—”
Noctis blinks. He sits up, slowly, as comfortable as he is, because he’s starting to drift off. “Hey. I meant to ask,” he starts, leaning in, nudging their shoulders together, head tipped to the side. “Thought maybe you could come spend Christmas with me and dad. We do some stuff with Gladio – though I guess not this year -- and Iris and their dad, too, but… well, I’d like it. If you were there.”

Prompto blinks. He shifts, tugging some of the edge of the blanket, pulling it to wrap around his shoulders, too, so that they’re cocooned together, warm and happy, wrapped up away from the rest of the world. “… damn, Noct. I didn’t know if you’d want me there. I mean, yeah, I’d love to, but my dad’s flying in….”

Noctis flushes. Now that he thinks about it, he’s pretty sure Prompto might have mentioned that. It’s hard to say for sure. Everything had been a mess, for a while, because of Ignis, and Gladio, and the whole confused about their relationship thing. Life working in a coffee shop, after all, tends to drone on, the days full of the scent of roasting coffee beans, indie rock playing in the background, and a whole lot of drama.

“Why not invite your dad, too?” Noctis says, quietly. “I’m sure my dad will be fine with it. I… it’d be nice, for everyone to meet.”

Prompto doesn’t speak for a moment. Noctis worries, maybe, that he’s taking things too fast. They’ve barely started to figure things out. But this really feels perfect. Noctis feels content, complete in a way he hasn’t felt ever. It feels right, and he can’t imagine a life without Prompto, ever again.

“… yeah,” Prompto reaches for Noct’s hand, and twines their fingers together. “I think that’d be awesome, dude. I’ll ask dad.”

“Cool. I will too,” Noctis agrees. He leans in, and rests his cheek against Prompto’s shoulder, and they go back to watching the movie.

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Ignis and Gladio leave for Galdin, and Noctis and Prompto see them off. Ignis stops by his place to drop off the keys to the safe, and to give a final rundown, after the shop closes on a Sunday night. Noct’s opening in the morning. It’s nothing that he hasn’t done before, it’s just now, he’s actually, properly in charge.
Igis lectures for a good, solid ten minutes, while Prompto and Gladio chat in the kitchen. Noctis takes it in stride, though. His former self might’ve argued that yes, he knows what he’s doing. But, hell, Ignis carefully places a hand on his shoulder, and mutters, an “I trust you, Noctis. I know you’ll do fine.”

Gladio’s giving Prompto a rough hug, too, when the two get ready to leave.

“Have fun,” Noctis says, grinning, “We’ll miss you guys, this year.”

Gladio grins. “Take care of Iris, will ya? And be a brat to my old man, since I won’t be around.” Gladio still holds a bit of a grudge from his days shipped off to military school, but that’s a different story.

“Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” Prompto grins, waving, bouncing at Noct’s side, and the two of them exchange looks when Gladio curls an arm around Ignis’s waist as they retreat.

“Bad advice. You’d do anything,” Ignis sighs, but then they’re gone, and it’s just Noctis and Prompto, a coffee shop that they’re – well, Noctis is, at least – in charge of, and an empty apartment. They’ve got a long way to go, but they’ll get there together.

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They take another step forward, that night. Maybe they’re getting more comfortable with each other. Maybe they’re just getting brave. Maybe they feel more grown up. Likely, it’s a combination of everything, and a good dose of hormones, from being young, and dumb, and incredibly stupid, despite it all.

“Prom, fuck,” Noct’s groaning. He’s propped up against the pillows, and Prompto’s sprawled over top of him. They’ve been kissing for a while, and they’re both rock hard. Noct’s sweatpants are half pushed down, and Prompto’s just wearing his underwear, and he’s got a knee pressed between Noct’s thighs. It’s hot as hell, and they’re grinding against each other. Their stamina’s gotten a bit better, and they can at least mess around some without getting off instantly. Noctis thinks this is a nice improvement.

Prompto’s lips are working over Noct’s jaw, and that feels so fucking good. Noctis has one hand tangled in his best friend’s hair, and the other’s raking down between his shoulder blades, leaving
bright red lines standing out against freckled skin.

“Noct…” Prompto mumbles, inching back, sitting on his heels between Noct’s parted legs. Prompto looks fucking amazing, as Noctis drags his eyes over his best friend. Any pretense of shyness has long gone out the window, when it’s the two of them. Prompto’s fully hard, his cock pressing against the front of his boxers, a wet smear visible where the head is leaking against the fabric. He’s all gangly limbs, freckles and flushed skin, and Noctis fucking loves it.

“Why’d you stop?” Noctis asks, a little demanding. He probably has a hickey blossoming on his throat, and Noctis doesn’t care. Let people gossip. He’s running Stella’s tomorrow, and he doesn’t care.

Prompto flushed a little. “How do you wanna do this?” he asks.

They’ve done lots of things, by now. Lots of grinding against each other. They’ve mutually jerked each other off, and they’ve started getting brave with mouths. One night, a few days ago, Prompto got down on his knees when they were watching a movie on the couch, and he’d given Noctis a very brief, but incredibly enjoyable blowjob.

Noct’s not in the mood for that, though. He feels accomplished. He wants to celebrate. He’s nervous, and that goddamn feeling is back, his stomach doing somersaults. “… there’s lube and condoms in the drawer,” he says, quietly. He’d ordered it online, and quickly shoved the supplies in there, when they’d arrived.


Noctis nods. He absolutely fucking does. “Wouldn’t have mentioned it if I didn’t want to.”

Prompto nearly falls off the fucking bed – the perfect example of seduction and grace, clearly – as he scrambles over to fumble through the drawer. He pulls out the tube of lubricant and a condom, tossing them onto the bed, and then he practically dives back onto Noct’s body, devouring him in a rough, heated kiss.

“You wanna switch off, or…?” Prompto asks, when they part. Noctis groans, and lifts a hand, playfully swatting at Prompto’s shoulder.

“Dude. Just fuck me, already.”
Prompto shudders, and then he’s reaching for the lube. Noctis parts his thighs further, lifts his ass up, and somehow, the nerves mostly melt away. This is new, yeah, but as usual, broaching the subject is the hard part. Once they actually get past the weird, awkward conversation bit, things always work out for them. Noctis wants this.

It’s easy to get lost, anyway, because Prompto’s spreading warm, open-mouthed kisses over his neck and across his shoulders, when a slick finger works inside. It’s uncomfortable, but maybe Noctis experimented in the shower a couple of days ago, thinking about this. Maybe he’d practiced alone, getting used to the strange, burning stretching feeling. Yeah, it feels weird, but it’s not necessarily bad.

“Fuck, Noctis,” Prompto gasps, “this is gonna be like, the shortest fuck of my life.”

“Thought you’ve watched a lot of porn,” Noctis teases, then shudders, and it’s not an entirely pleasant one, when Prompto works a second slick finger inside. The stretch is starting to properly hurt, a dull ache that’s slowly spreading through him. He’s groaning, clenching around the intrusion, fingers digging into Prompto’s shoulders.

Prompto hesitates, for a moment, enough to tip his head up, to nuzzle into Noct’s cheek. “I have,” he laughs, “doesn’t mean shit, Noct. You’re the hottest thing I’ve ever seen, dude. You gotta relax, though, or we aren’t doing much of anything—”

“Sorry,” Noctis groans, and he tries to relax. He doesn’t think it’s working, but apparently it does something, because Prompto’s crooking his fingers inside of him. It feels pleasant, a strange, subtle shift, turning from outright pain into something beyond that. “Fuck—better?”

“Yeah,” Prompto agrees, breathlessly, “now c’mon, just breathe, I wanna do this.”

Prompto’s so damn cute when he’s eager, Noctis thinks vaguely. Even though they’d both been loners in high school, Prompto’s more adventurous, apparently. He’d dated enough to actually make it to the sex part. Noct had been jealous, when he’d found out, but now he’s grateful that at least one of them knows what they’re doing.

Noct’s even more grateful, impossibly so, when Prompto twists his fingers again, finding his prostate, and the world jerks around him. The pain is still there, but far-off, distant, when the burning pleasure ebbs through him.
“Fuck—Prom— keep doin’ that—” Noctis shudder, his half-hard cock twitching to life again on his belly.

Somewhere in between Prompto mouthing against his neck and petting delicious, heated pressure against his prostate, he works a third finger in. It hurts, and Noctis thinks, somewhere through it all, that he’s probably going to be limping at work tomorrow. Maybe he should’ve made a slightly different decision. He isn’t stopping Prompto though. Hell, he’s fully erect, his cock drooling against his belly, eyes glazed over when Prompto finally pulls his fingers free.

Prompto sits back on his heels, and fumbles with the condom, ripping it open and rolling it down his erection. He’s achingly hard, wet at the tip, cock bobbing between his thighs as he squeezes near the base, trying to calm himself down. “Fuck, Noct are—”

“Don’t ask me if I’m sure,” Noctis groans, lifting his hips up, “fuck, Prom, just do it.”

Prompto shudders. Noctis is the one to reach for the lube, discarded on the bed next to him, and he hands it over. He watches as Prompto spreads more over his erection, and then he’s settling in between Noct’s thighs.

Noctis hooks a leg around Prompto’s waist, as he feels the blunt head nudge against him. For a moment, he worries if they’ll even get anywhere, as there’s dull pressure, but Prompto, somehow, knows what he’s doing here. Noctis is gasping into Prompto’s neck, and then he’s full, spread open, slow and steady. It hurts a little, yeah, but it’s nothing he can’t handle.

“Okay?” Prompto asks, as Noctis breathes deep, shuddery breaths into his best friend’s neck, lifting his hips, clenching around the cock that’s splitting him open, slow and experimental.

“Yeah,” Noct gasps, “move,” and then he stops thinking about much of anything.

Neither of them last long, and that’s okay. Noctis is fully hard between their bellies, and even though it hurts, Prompto’s bracing himself on one hand, free hand snaking down to jerk Noctis in time with his thrusts. The angle isn’t quite right, the rhythm erratic and unpredictable, but Prompto’s touching him, and Noct’s hot and tight, clenching around Prompto’s cock with every thrust.

Noctis shifts, lifting his hips up, and suddenly, there’s pleasure bursting before his eyes. He’s
gasping, clawing at Prompto’s shoulders, and before he can think, before he can do much of anything, his cock’s spurting between them, coating Prompto’s fingers and his own belly. He’s almost embarrassed at how fast it had been – it’s barely been more than a few minutes – but the way he’s shuddering, gasping out his release, bucking against Prompto, it’s spurring Prompto on, too.

“Fuck, Noct, you’re amazing,” Prompto murmurs, or so Noctis thinks, against his skin. His hips are snapping forward, and he’s shifting, both arms braced on the bed, hips rocking fast and urgent, and it’s only a few minutes of frantic thrusting before Noctis feels his cock jump and twitch inside, Prompto tensing up, gasping Noct’s name as he comes.

Slowly, Prompto withdraws, and there’s a moment of them clinging together, panting and gasping. Noct’s holding on for dear life. He’s riding out the rush of orgasm, his body aching, sore and worn, but feeling so fucking good from it all. It’d been bad sex, probably, but Noctis has no concept of that. All he knows is that he feels amazing, that he feels complete, that he wants Prompto by his side, always—

“Where you going?” Noctis asks, blearily, as Prompto rolls to the side, wobbling as he gets to his feet.

“Cleaning up,” Prompto explains, “you gonna get needy on me, Noct?”

“Well I did just get fucked,” Noctis laughs, but Prompto’s smiling at him, and Noct can’t help but smile back. “Just hurry up and come back to bed.”

Prompto ties off the condom and tosses it away, and he returns with a towel for the two of them. Noctis is a hot mess, his ass and thighs slick with lube, semen spattering over his belly. His hair’s a sweaty mess, and his skin feels sticky. He doesn’t care, though. Prompto crawls into bed, when they’re adequately cleaned off, and he’s quick to curl up at Noct’s side, an arm thrown over his chest, head tipped into his shoulder.

Noctis smiles sleepily.

“… that was good?” Prompto asks, quietly.

“Yeah,” Noctis agrees, not bothering to hold back the yawn. “‘s good.”
“You can top next time,” Prompto offers, as he snuggles in closer, fingers squeezing at Noct’s hip.

That sounds good, Noctis agrees, but he’s too tired to voice it. Instead, he closes his eyes, reaching down blindly to find the edge of the blankets, tugging it up over them. They should change the sheets. There’s a wet spot, and it’s directly under both of them. There’s really no way to move, without cramming at the edge of the mattress. Noctis doesn’t care, though, and Prompto doesn’t seem to, either.

“Hey, Noct?” Prompto mumbles, quietly, as they slip into silence.

“Yeah?” Noct’s tired, but he’s just aware enough to shake past the exhaustion, enough to form vague words. “What’s up?”

Prompto lifts up, just a little, and it’s enough to inspire Noctis to force his eyes open. Prompto’s watching him, eyes intent, shining bright with emotion. It’s almost – almost – enough to have Noctis saying three special little words. They’re right there, on the tip of his tongue, and fuck, he’s in love. He’s hopelessly in love. Maybe it’s too early to say it, but he is.

“We should go back to school in the fall,” Prompto says, quietly. “I know we talked about it, but… Ignis letting you handle the shop, it has me thinking… we should like. Do something together. Maybe not Stella’s but… we could run a business together too, don’t you think?”

Noctis blinks. He’s tired, maybe too tired to talk about this now. It’s an idea, though, and he does like the idea of facing the world together, of doing something that’s theirs. “Yeah,” he agrees, “maybe. Don’t wanna end up like Iggy and Gladio.”

Prompto laughs, burying his face in Noct’s neck again, pressing a kiss there. “Don’t say that. They figured it out in the end, dude.”

“Guess so,” Noctis smiles. “Let’s just figure out Christmas. Our dads might kill each other.”

“They’ll be fine,” Prompto replies, but he’s settling down again, his breath evening out, a little, as he rests his head on Noct’s shoulder. Noctis can feel the warm buff of breath against his skin, and it’s a bit ticklish, but it’s comforting, too. He tips his head to the side, nuzzling into Prompto’s hair, and his eyes slide shut again.
“… Noct?” Prompto asks, in a distant sort of tone that suggests he’s drifting off, too.

“Yeah?” Noct replies.

Noctis isn’t sure if what comes next is actually spoken, or if he’s already slipped off into dreams. Everything’s taking on a hazy, far-off quality. It could be either.

“Love you,” Prompto says, quietly, though.

Noctis has hesitated a lot, during the past few months. It’s taken him a while to get here. For once, though, awake or dreaming, it doesn’t matter. He doesn’t hesitate.

“Love you too,” he mumbles, and then, Noctis is dreaming, of coffee shops and far-off possibilities. Maybe Prompto’s right. Maybe, someday, they’ll have a Stella’s of their very own.

Chapter End Notes

AAAAAAAAND WE ARE DONE!

thank you to everyone who read this fic! we didn't ever expect Affogato & Cortado to really pick up steam, it was just a silly little project between two friends. It's been so much fun, and I've never had as much of a good time collaborating with a fellow writer as I did doing this series. <3

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Till next time, friends!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!