

## Once a Sinner

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# Once a Sinner

by [VioletPoppy](#).

## Summary

Lucy Heartfilia is just a young woman trying to overcome her past, get her journalism career off the ground, and remember to feed her dog on time in the face of manic 21st century life. After repeatedly (and literally) bumping into the same edgy looking stranger again, and again, her life begins to feel like a noir novel. All she dreams of is to be able to write stories that can help change lives by day, and zonk out on her sofa with ice cream and a glass of pinot by night. None of this is possible as the dangerous veins of the underworld unfurl into Lucy's life, unbeknown to her.

## Notes

This is my first ever fic, I have been sat on it a while working up the guts to post! I have a lot of chapters already typed out so updating will hopefully be quick at first. I'm not sure my summary has done the story justice, but I hope you enjoy!

# Chapter One

## Chapter Notes

### IN THE PROCESS OF EDITING CHAPTERS TO TIDY THINGS UP

Lucy was late.

She dashed through her apartment pulling on her navy, midi dress, diving for the wash basket to find a clean pair of socks. Her little dog, Plue, was crashing around her feet as she stood on one leg, then the other, pulling her socks on.

"Really, Plue? Are we doing this this morning? I haven't got time to walk you buddy, I'm a crappy owner, I know, I get it," she mumbled as she petted his head.

Quickly tying up her long blonde locks into a messy pony tail she gave him a smile.

"See you later ok, don't mess up the place!"

She grabbed her satchel and leather jacket, pulled on her heeled boots and dashed out the door.

She paced as fast as she could down the apartment building stairs without working too much of a sweat. As she reached the great outdoors, her dress, a light cotton material, fitted at the top with no sleeves, and loosely pleated from the waist down, was flying around in the breeze behind her as she scrambled to get her jacket on. She checked her watch, ten minutes until she was meant to be at work.

"Goddamnit," she grumbled.

It was an half hour journey. Hopefully her colleague Levy would cover for her.

Lucy was a journalist. Kind of. When she was a child she dreamed of becoming a famous author, yet as she grew up her curiosity developed and that dream turned into becoming an investigative reporter. Using her flair for writing to help expose the wrongs of this world. Instead, she ended up working for the Magnolia Daily Inquirer as a photographer's assistant. Helping out now and then in an attempt to prove herself, by writing the fluff pieces none of the serious journalists could be bothered to cover.

Always trying to prove herself meant she was always under scrutiny, and turning up late was sure to be noticed by the editor, Mr. Leo.

As her mind was racing with all these thoughts it was safe to say, she was not paying attention to her surroundings and suddenly found herself crashing into someone. She made

the least graceful noise possible as she stood there feeling winded.

"Achhh!" she wretched.

Gathering back her breathe she whipped her neck round to see what seemed to be a pink haired man, walking down the street as if nothing happened.

"I'm sorry!" She called after him, for the man to only half turn his head and grimace in her general direction.

"*Rude*," she thought, and carried on her way.

Lucy dived into the wooden doors of the grand, old building that housed the newspaper offices, and pummeled the marble stairs beneath her feet as she raced to the top. When she reached her office door she sighed with relief, but as she stepped in noticed the grimace on her co-worker, Levy's face.

Levy was one of the most positive girls Lucy had ever met; always trying to find the best outlook on all things. Not only this, but she was stunning. Petite in stature, with striking blue hair that she always managed to have up in that way that looked casual and cute, but took a lot of meticulous maneuvering to get the right side of messy. She manned the arts desk at the paper.

However right now her positivity waned, as her bright eyes stared at Lucy apologetically as Lucy noticed Mr. Leo stepping out from behind a cubicle. There was no denying that the red headed man was also stunning, however he did not share Levy's approachability.

He was down right intimidating.

"Again, Miss Heartfilia? How many times do we have to revise the ability to read a clock?" He pushed his glasses up his nose and stared at her as she was struck dumb.

He sighed.

"You know, there a women tripping over themselves to be in my company, and you appear to do everything in your power to avoid me," smirking, he adjusted his impeccably fitted suit and carried on, "the next time will be the last time, Miss Heartfilia. There's no shortage of pretty girls, willing to polish camera lenses and write about puppies. You are replaceable. Don't forget that."

Lucy stood silently watching him strut away, then collapsed into the chair next to Levy's desk. Lucy didn't get her own desk, she just shared her friend's when she needed to write something.

"Goddamnit," she whimpered and threw her head up to the ceiling, "I've had enough of asshole men already this morning and it's not even ten o'clock."

Levy gave her a sympathetic smile and patted her shoulder.

"Well I have a proposition which might cheer you up... Fancy coming to a gig with me? I'm going to review the local music scene as part of a piece on whether or not the city council is right to cut arts funding in schools, and a band called Sabertooth is playing tonight. We can get dressed up, drink sassy sounding drinks, and put it all on the work tab. Sounds like good pay back, yes?"

Lucy slowly lowered her head and looked at Levy cautiously but slowly cracked a smile.

"You had me at dressed up, I've been wanting to go out and feel nice. Swing by my place at seven?"

"Perfect," Levy mused, "see you there!"

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The rest of Lucy's work day was uneventful.

After she left Levy, she went to the photography lab to find out who she would be shadowing for the day. She got through her menial tasks and helped dress some models who were in a photo shoot for the Sunday style supplement.

Even though she hardly exerted herself, as she reached home she still felt exhausted. Unlocking her door, she prepared herself to be greeted by Plue, who jumped up and licked her as much as he could. After feeding both him and herself, she set to work on glamming herself up.

She settled for keeping her hair up in a messy ponytail, and added simple makeup with emphasis on defining her eyes. She dressed in a ruby, strappy tea dress, made of satin, boasting a plunging neckline. All in all the garment looked more like a night-slip than anything suitable for outside the house. She liked it though, teaming it with her leather jacket, sheer black tights and platform boots. She felt grungey enough for a gig, but sexy enough to give her the confidence boost her ego was crying for.

"Bring on the gin and tonic! I am forgetting all about this crappy day, Plue!" She cheered, putting her hand out to high five the dog, who just stared at her and walked off.

"Fine. Ignore me then..."

As Lucy harumphed and slouched back into her couch the buzzer for her door went off and she could hear Levy's excited babbling through the speaker. Lucy grabbed her things and ran to meet her friend.

Levy wore an orange, high waist, mini skirt teamed with a baggy band tee tied to be a crop top, under a leather jacket. She finished the outfit with thigh high boots, a hint of blue knee socks poking over the top. Lucy couldn't help but think they looked like a force to be reckoned with, and got even more pumped to take on the night.

They turned up at a bar called the Kotoko Inn that was dimly lit, with walls lined with peeling band posters.

Lucy noticed Levy's eyes were darting around everywhere as if she was trying to find someone in the crowd of people. They ordered their drinks and treated themselves to the most expensive gin in the place, courtesy of the Magnolia Daily Inquirer. Pushing themselves to the front, Levy pulled out her work pad and it held it with one hand.

"You know, got to keep up appearances and at least look like I'm working," she winked.

Soon Sabertooth came onstage, the lead singer was a skinny, yet muscle bound blonde guy, who wore his hair all spiked up, and donned the tightest black jeans imaginable teamed with an unusual cropped white tee. The guitarist looked gothic; his hair and clothes all black. He didn't even bother to register the crowd. The bassist was gorgeous; a curvy woman with long blue hair, wearing a long skirt with a slit all the way to the top of her thigh.

The person that garnered the most of Lucy's attention however was the drummer.

He was huge, muscles bigger than any Lucy had ever seen. Long messy black hair, and piercings all over his face. He wore a tight tank top which showed off his arm tattoos and he looked fierce. It wasn't his looks that struck Lucy however, it was the fact he was staring directly at Levy, and he unmistakably gave her a wink.

Levy blushed.

"What the hell was going on there," Lucy mumbled out of the corner of her mouth.

The gig got started and the band was heavy; the lead singer half shouting, half singing.

The crowd was manic and Lucy was instantly regretting the platform boots. This was not the kind of night you, 'get dressed up' for she internally grumbled.

Levy on the other hand let completely loose, jumping around and hollering her praise. Even going as far as wolf whistling during the drum solo.

Once the band had finished, Lucy stared at her friend.

"Spill it, Miss," she poked her friend in the shoulder and waited.

"Ok you got me, there may be an ulterior motive as to why I bagged this particular job," Levy fumbled with the hem of her skirt and looked at her feet as she mumbled, "I may or may not have been talking to the drummer, Gajeel, and we may or may not have ended up on a date last week."

Lucy stared a moment longer before she cooed, "Aww, Levy! Why didn't you tell me? He is so, so not the kind of guy I ever imagined you with though!"

"What's the type of person you think Shrimp should be with then?" A rough voice growled from behind Lucy.

"Goddamnit," Lucy mumbled under her breath before spinning on her heels to face the man she now knew as Gajeel.

"I didn't mean any offence, I was just surprised is a- wait, Shrimp? Is that really what you call Levy?" she laughed.

"No it is most definitely not what he calls me, it shall never be uttered from his lips again!" Levy stepped around Lucy to berate the giant in front of her and pound his arm with her fists.

"Whatever, Shrimp. You wanna drink?" Gajeel said with a smirk as he turned to walk towards the bar, "And your friend, she want one too?"

Levy ran up to his side nodding. Lucy just stood there stunned into disbelief.

"There goes our girl's night then..." she sighed.

Once Gajeel had fetched the drinks, the three of them sat down in a booth and Levy formally introduced her two friends to each other. Lucy attempted to exchange pleasantries but soon clocked that Gajeel did not concern himself with small talk. Thankfully, the rest of the band came to find them, and introduced themselves to Lucy, cutting the tension.

"Juvia. Nice to meet you," the blue haired girl stuck out her hand, which Lucy apprehensively shook.

"Nice to meet you too, Juvia!" Lucy tried her best to smile with feeling.

"I'm Rogue and this imbecile is Sting," the black haired guy stated monotonously as he hit his friend in the chest with the back of his hand, "don't let him fool you, he has a girlfriend."

Lucy again looked up apprehensively at the blonde, who was scowling at his friend's remark but also making no attempt at hiding the way he was staring at her chest.

"Right... Thank you for the heads up?" Lucy questioned, as Sting slid into the booth beside her.

"Ignore ol' grumpy guts over there, he just can't stand that I have such natural charm, women can't help but fall in love with me!" Sting jested.

Rogue sat opposite the two of them, next to Gajeel. Juvia followed him.

"Don't flatter yourself. Juvia has not once even considered you to be worthy of her love interest," Juvia jibed, confusing Lucy even more by talking in the third person.

The drinks kept coming, and the conversation eventually became less tense.

They were joined by Sting's girlfriend, who was a suprisngly meek girl, but altogether gorgeous. She was slim but possessed a big chest, and had stark white hair cut into a bob. She looked so pure and innocent, but she commanded Stings attention all the same. The guy might have been a natural flirt, but the look in his eyes as he stared at his girlfriend was that of hopeless devotion.

Lucy sighed, maybe one day she'd know what that felt like.

She was then snapped out of her day dream by Gajeel's phone ringing. Again.

"Aren't you going to get that?" Levy pried.

"It's my flame brain cousin, he just wants a place to crash. I'm not giving him the time of day," Gajeel retorted.

"Oh... Natsu is in town?" Rogue said, all too seriously.

"Great," Sting shifted in his seat with an annoyed look on his face, "I could do without that."

"What's wrong with your cousin?" Levy asked the question Lucy didn't feel like she had the right to.

Gajeel downed his drink.

"Nothing is wrong with him particularly. He's my best friend and my worst enemy rolled into one. I just don't need his drama around tonight when I'm just trying to have a good time. Flame brain always attracts trouble," he tried to explain.

"Stay away from him Yukino, he always, always tries to steal my girlfriends. Spits them up and chews them out just to prove he can, all to wind me up. Guy's an asshole..." Sting slammed his glass on the table looking like he was chewing on a wasp.

"Oh... Huh, how many girlfriends have you had?" Yukino looks up at Sting, a little taken back.

Gajeel butted in before the couple's conversation got too awkward.

"Sting and Natsu have been rivals since the moment they first laid eyes on each other. Everything has been a competition to them since they learned how to catch a ball," he grunted.

"Well there's no competition for who I have eyes for," Yukino innocently cooes under her breath.

Sting spat his drink out and blushed, as Rogue and Gajeel laughed at the gushiness of it all.

Lucy and Levy looked at each other amused, before Lucy looked at the time.

"Ok, I'm beat. It's been a blast meeting you guys, but I need to get going. I've got a needy dog at home who will be pulling apart my furniture, and a job to save in the morning!"

"Ugh, don't remind me of that place!" Levy buried her head into her arms on the table, "You're right though, we should go."

Gajeel suddenly looked at the two girls with a pained, yet eager expression as they stood up.

Wait, do you want me to call a cab, we can ride together?"



Levy smirks, knowing all too well what the man might be hoping for from the cab ride.

"No it's fine, we'll manage. You can stay here with your friends and plot revenge against your infamous cousin," she jeered.

As everyone got up to let the girls out, Levy reached up as she walked past Gajeel, patted his face and gave him a wink.

"Maybe next time!"

Gajeel looked slightly stunned but recovered quickly. Lucy linked arms with her friend and laughed, the girl might seem sweet, but Levy sure had a devious side.

As they approached the exit however, the door swung open and a figure nearly crashed into them. Lucy gathered her bearings and looked at the figure from the feet up.

They were wearing black Dr. Martens, dark jeans rolled up to just above the ankle, what looked like a white scaled scarf sticking out of his back pocket, a white tee tucked in slightly to the front of his jeans, and a leather biker jacket. Then she noticed the hair.

It was pink.

It was the same guy she crashed into this morning.

He looked straight into her eyes with his own, a piercing onyx. His skin was tanned and he had a scar on his face. He was, for the lack of a better word, hot. The obnoxious grin on his face told Lucy that this guy was trouble though.

Not forgetting his rudeness that morning, she took a step back and glared at him.

"Watch where you're going, would you!" she snapped rolling her eyes.

She didn't know why those words escaped her mouth, considering she was the one who crashed into him earlier, but she stood strong.

He raised an eyebrow.

"Really? Rich coming from you," he looked her up and down, "you leavin'?"

Lucy gulped, he did remember her.

"What are you doing here, Natsu?" All of a sudden Gajeel was by their side again.

"You weren't returnin' my calls, but I'd done some detective work and found out you'd played here tonight. Rude of ya not to invite me, really," his cousin explained.

Gajeel growled under his breathe.

"The others are over there, I'll meet you in a minute," he said gesturing to the table behind him with his head.

The two men stared each other out and then Natsu smirked, and began to walk off before stopping and leaning close to Lucy.

"I prefer this look on you," he practically purred in a husky tone.

Gajeel took a protective step towards the girls, and Natsu chuckled as he disappeared towards the rest of the band.

Levy looked all kinds of confused and Lucy just stood there, stunned, yet again.

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The next morning Lucy felt rough, but she had definitely felt worse.

She lay in bed collecting her thoughts, replaying Natsu's wink in her head.

"What an obnoxious jerk," she decided.

Why was it even in her head? She's had her fair share of men hit on her, she's done her fair share of flirting herself. The way everyone talked about that man though, he seemed like a whirl wind. Also, a man that liked to play with women's emotions because he knew he could get anyone he wanted...

She was startled from her thoughts by Plue scratching at her bedroom door.

"Ok, let's forget about that, it's time to face the music. Ugh, today is going to be long," she sighed, as she got up and trudged towards that incessant scratching.

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Across the city, Natsu was also waking up, to find a heavy weight on his chest.

"Fuck is this?" He muttered, half asleep.

"That's my goddamn cat telling you to get the fuck up because it's morning."

The sound of Gajeel snapping from somewhere in the distance whilst banging about getting ready for work jarred Natsu.

He sat up, pushing the cat, Pantherlily, off him, and ran his hands through his tousled hair.

"Ah, I see, but he's forgotten my breakfast in bed," he drawled sarcastically.

A wad of dirty clothing was flung at his head.

"Fuck off, Natsu," Gajeel snapped again.

"I wish you were the first person to greet me with that in the morning. You're definitely the least sexy though."

Gajeel didn't even bother with a retort and went to the kitchen to make his breakfast. He refused to look at Natsu, who was lying on his sofa in just his boxers under a moth-eared

blanket. He was angry with the man who had crashed his apartment and persuaded him to drink flaming whiskies until the early hours, despite having work in his chop shop the next morning.

Natsu just stared at him, hoping Gajeel's humanity would get the better of him and an extra plate of bacon and eggs would be made. Natsu won out as a plate slammed down on the side that divided the kitchenette and living room. Gajeel still made no eye contact with him as Natsu crept from under the blanket and grabbed the plate before returning to the sofa. Gajeel joined him, and they both sat in silence eating their food.

"So, now I know all about this Levy chick you're hopelessly in love with..." Natsu started.

Gajeel growled.

"...I didn't forget as much as you hoped I would after a night on the whisky. However the one thing I can't remember, is the name of her rambunctious, blonde friend?"

"Rambunctious?" Gajeel sneered, "Where did *you* learn a word like that? And where did ya get the idea she is *rambunctious* anyway?"

"Aren't blondes meant to be more fun?"

"Fuck off, Natsu."

"Right. Her name though?"

"Don't you dare go near her. You're right, I might like Levy, and I don't think she'll take kindly to my cousin sticking his hamster dick in her best friend and screwing with her goddamn heart. Stay. Away."

"Gaj, I hate to admit it, but you've seen my di-"

"I'm going to work, Natsu."

The steel studded giant stormed off to grab his things, and headed out the door slamming it behind him. Natsu was left with his thoughts.

Why did everyone see him as a liability? He had a chequered past, sure, but couldn't a man change? He looked out of Gajeel's apartment window, observing the city skyline. It brought back too many memories.

"Whatever," he muttered, "I wasn't even interested in her anyway."

He skulked off towards Gajeel's en suite to take a shower, suddenly feeling suffocated by the recollections of a past best left forgotten.

The problem being, that it was a past he missed.

# Chapter Two

## Chapter Notes

Edited

It was Friday. Finally.

Lucy had gotten over her hangover from her escapade with Levy two days ago, and the Friday feeling coursing through her had her ready to do it all again.

She was strutting her way to work, wearing a brown tartan pencil skirt and her favourite pussy bow blouse. It was warmer today so she had slung her leather jacket over her shoulder and braved going without tights.

Just eight more hours to get through, and she could let loose.

She dived for her phone from her satchel and scrolled to find her old friend's contact. She checked the time - enough spare to get a coffee and donut before work. She then pressed the dial button on her phone, hoping her friend would pick up.

"Hey Lucy, you ok? Sorry I've got to be quick, I'm on shift," a gravelly voice answered.

"Hey Gray, I'm fine, sorry that I caught you! I was just wondering if you were free to go out tonight? Sounds like you might be if you're on shift this morning, hmm?"

Gray was one of Lucy's oldest friends, and also one of the most hardworking cops in the city. He had an almost awe inspiring sense for right and wrong, and was stubborn when it came to his values. He had always wanted to be a cop, and the streets of Magnolia definitely needed his prevailing sense of justice.

Gray sighed, he knew his body and mind would both be aching after this 12 hour shift, but he could never say no to Lucy.

"Sure thing. I'm off duty tomorrow too, but that's not an excuse to get so drunk I can't enjoy my day off, right?"

"I know your limits, princess," Lucy teased.

"I'll pick you up at eight."

"Look forward to it!" Lucy hung up with a smile as she arrived at the coffee shop.

However before Lucy was even properly through the doors, she sensed a commotion which dampened her spirits.

"I've been standing here five minutes and still not been served!"

"Sorry sir," a small voice eeked out.

Lucy despised rude customers, believing anyone who could snap at someone working to please, had never worked in a service role themselves and had no idea how demanding it could be. She approached the counter and saw the root of the problem, there was a large queue and only one girl working.

"Someone called in sick this morning, I am truly sorry!" The poor girl choked out as she was darting between the coffee machine and the dishwasher.

"Not my problem," the voice sneered back.

Lucy couldn't believe her eyes. It was Gajeel's cousin, Natsu, snapping at the girl.

Lucy saw red and stormed over.

"Hey!" She demanded, as she pushed his shoulder, "Where do you get off speaking to someone like that?"

Natsu turned to face her, eyes wide and slightly stunned. Only Gajeel ever talked to him like that, sometimes Sting. The odd ghost from his past perhaps, too he mused.

He cracked a smile.

"You think it's funny to be rude to a poor girl working her ass off, just so you can get a caffeine hit?" Lucy was beyond boiling point.

"I think you need to calm down before that vein in your forehead explodes over all of us," Natsu smirked.

Some voices behind them in the queue quietly mumbled about the pink haired man being rude, and that he shouldn't talk to women that way. He shot them a fiery glare, and the voices instantly stopped.

The barista handed Natsu his coffee.

"On the house, for all your trouble."

"Thanks doll," he winked.

That wink. It almost bowled Lucy over and it wasn't even directed at her. She could have pulled her hair out and thrown it at him.

He strutted out of the cafe in his Dr. Martens, jeans rolled up, and well worn biker jacket. His scarf was still hanging out of his back pocket, but he was wearing a t-shirt for some metal

band this time. As he reached the door, he pulled out a pair of Raybans and slipped them over his eyes.

"What just happened?" Lucy asked no one in particular, but got a response from the barista.

"I have no idea, but thanks for trying. Here, a coffee for you too, on the house."

Lucy tried paying for it, but then realised the time and suddenly she had no time to argue, as the commotion meant she was running late. Again.

She sprinted to the offices - a noteworthy skill in heels and pencil skirt. She reached the office door just in time. Two minutes late if you were going to be pedantic, but who was counting that?

"Miss Heartfilia. My office."

"Shit," she mumbled, as she felt Mr. Leo's presence behind her.

Levy looked up from her desk, and then the time, then shrugged at Lucy as if to say, "I have no idea."

Lucy followed the editor-in-chief to his office, and waited to be told to sit. Once instructed, she sat in front of his mahogany desk, littered with copy ready for his eyes to pull apart.

"I want to apologise. For the way I spoke to you the other morning. It's fair to say, I was in a ratty mood," he started.

Lucy's jaw could have hit the floor. She stayed silent.

"I know you've been trying your best to impress, and your dedication hasn't been going unnoticed. A pretty face like yours, how could anyone not?"

Lucy tried not to scowl at his unabashed sexism.

"Thank you, sir," she chirped politely.

"Enough with the sir, I'm your boss, not your master. Anyway, a member of the investigative team is going on maternity. I'm moving Levy to their team to cover, and wondered if you were interested in trying to fill her boots in the arts department? Temporarily of course, but if you impress enough, there may be a role somewhere for you."

Mr. Leo pushed his glasses up his nose and gazed at her with his piercing eyes. Lucy couldn't believe her ears.

Finally, a lucky break.

"Yes, of course I'd be interested, sir! I mean- Mr. Leo!"

The man smiled.

"Call me Loke. I like my reporters to feel comfortable enough around me to ask for help. Mr. Leo is reserved for those not in the know."

He stuck out his hand, and Lucy hastily grabbed it and shook it manically. Too excited to be embarrassed.

"You start on Monday, don't let us down."

Loke shot her a wink, and signaled with his hand for her to leave.

Lucy ran out and headed straight for Levy, who she grabbed as tight as she could and squealed. Levy looked taken back, but soon clocked on.

"You are looking at the new Levy McGarden!" Lucy sang.

"Creepy. But I get your gist," Levy laughed, "I best start handing over my jobs hey! Take a seat, Ms. McGarden!"

The two girls sat at Levy's desk as Lucy soaked in all of Levy's information.

She and Gray sure would be celebrating tonight.

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Gray sat in the cab outside Lucy's apartment building, waiting for her to come down and join him. As he had finished his shift earlier that day, she had rang him to tell him all about her good news. He felt relieved for her, that job was crushing her spirit, and the editor seemed like a pig, but finally she caught a break.

Lucy bounded out the door and into the cab, her smile beaming. It automatically illuminated Gray's heart. He hadn't seen her smile like that in a while.

"Here she is, the girl of the hour," he laughed coolly, reaching over the car seats to give her a hug.

She fit perfectly in his arms, and her familiar smell of vanilla and strawberries warmed him.

"Thanks Gray! I am so pumped for tonight, where we heading first?" she danced in her seat with anticipation.

Gray just tapped the side of his nose implying it was a secret, and watched Lucy pout about being kept out of the loop.

Soon enough, they got out at a cocktail bar, where Gray insisted on buying her whatever drink she wanted despite the price seeing as they were celebrating.

Lucy sat on a stool at the bar sipping her pornstar martini, unaware of how tantalising she looked.

She wore a grey t-shirt dress with black suede, thigh high boots, and her infamous leather jacket. Her golden hair was down in messy curls, and she had splashed out with some red

lipstick.

She looked like a rockstar, Gray noted.

He had always had a soft spot for Lucy. They'd both dated people over the 9 years they'd known each other, but Gray could never escape the 'what if' that hung over his best friend. He could never do anything to explore it now, he valued their friendship far too much, and he knew for a fact Lucy did not see him romantically. Alas, he settled for being her shoulder to cry on, and thought of himself as her protector from all the utter douche bags she had been with. To really get to Lucy's heart, you had to win over Gray first.

It didn't mean he wouldn't allow his mind to wonder every now and then though, and he couldn't help but admire the flash of thigh that was growing larger as Lucy's dress rode up with each movement.

As they laughed and sipped their drinks, ordering another round, neither of them noticed the pink haired observer, sat in a dark booth with an intoxicated brunette clinging to his arm. He sat there playing with a pack of cigarettes and a glass of neat whisky in front of him. Instead of his usual punk look, tonight he was rocking a black, Italian suit, paired with a white shirt and a skinny black tie. He had silver cufflinks to match the array of silver piercings in his ears.

It had been a while since Natsu had donned a suit, but tonight he wanted to rock it in some classy establishments, meet a higher quality of woman. Ultimately he knew when returning to his hometown, he always had to ensure he didn't let his reputation slip. He wasn't one to be messed with, and this suit showed he still meant business.

When the couple he was watching got up to leave, he stood up and dumped the brunette on the first guy that walked past. Running his hands through his spiked locks, he downed the rest of his drink and followed them into the night.

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Lucy picked the next bar, a slightly more down market place, but there was a dance floor and boy was she ready to loosen up.

She pulled Gray with her to the bar where she ordered a round of shots for them both, Gray raised an eyebrow at her, but she giggled and flung the shot towards him. He sourly accepted the challenge. Two more shots later, they ordered some gin and tonics and found a place to perch.

"You look great tonight, Lucy. Think every guy in here is eyeing you up!" Gray teased.

Lucy looked up at him through her eyelashes as she sipped on her drink through a straw.

"I think you're crazy Gray," she flicked his nose and giggled some more.

Gray shrugged and looked round the room. He didn't want to say anything to Lucy, but the place was actually making him uncomfortable. There were a couple of familiar faces in there- one too many of them he had booked into jail himself.



However there was a particular man lurking in the shadows, a burly guy with a blonde buzzcut and a lightening shaped scar over his eye, that made Gray really nervous. He had never dealt with the guy himself, but he looked like he could be a big player in the underworld. Gray gulped down his drink and hoped that everyone was just here to enjoy themselves, and the bar could be seen as neutral territory. Just in case, he kept his head down.

Natsu had entered the bar not long after Gray and Lucy, after stalling for time outside with a cigarette. Upon entering, he clocked everyone around him, sneering as he laid eyes on his old friend Laxus.

"Just what I need," he muttered under his breathe.

Hopefully the brute was there for a specific job and would ignore him. Natsu had other things on his mind.

For one, why the hell was he in a bar like this? Secondly, why was he bothering following this blonde chick? He couldn't tell if it was his dick doing the thinking, or something else.

Regardless, he stepped through the crowd of gyrating bodies and ordered himself a whisky. The two people he'd been following were laughing, but the man looked uncomfortable. The busty blonde was in her element. She pawed at her partner's shoulder, who winced with a slight look of longing at the contact.

"Heh," Natsu mulled, "not a proper couple then."

He saw the guy get up to head to the bathroom, leaving his target swiveling around on her stool by herself. As he approached her, she suddenly got up and headed for the dance floor. His eyes weren't the only ones that followed her; those thigh high boots were working wonders on pretty much every man in the room.

Lucy began to dance to the music by herself, her dress riding up dangerously high as she lifted her arms above her head. Her golden locks framing her sultry face, her eyes closed and lips pouting as she felt the music.

Natsu smiled. She was a wild one.

A pudgy looking guy worked up the guts to approach her, but went about it all wrong. Grabbing her by the hips and whispering in her ear, Lucy's eyes shot open and elbowed the guy in the ribs.

"Bingo!" Natsu leered, as he was presented with his entry and stalked over to the pair.

"There you are, I've been looking all over for you baby, I didn't know what drink you wanted? Everything ok?" Natsu drawled in his smoothest voice, as he hung his arm around her waist, locking eyes with the guy.

Lucy looked at him with wide eyes before clocking on to his act.

She spoke through gritted teeth, "I'm fine. Didn't realise how long you were going to be, must have been those tacos we had on the way over here, honey."

Natsu raised an eyebrow and was proud of himself for not rising to the bait, but also found himself enamored with her snark.

"Oh, you!" He chuckled, mussing up her hair.

He then turned back to glare at the guy stood in front of him, who was suddenly quaking in his boots before quickly turning on his heels back to his friends.

"I had that under control," Lucy snapped once he was out of hearing distance.

Natsu tapped his ears and pretended he couldn't hear her.

"What did you say?"

"I said, I had that under control, you jerk!" She snapped again, and pushed him away.

"You shouldn't be alone in a place like this girly, there's bad people around."

Lucy smirked, "I know there's definitely a plague of arseholes around."

Natsu ignored her comment, "Where's your boyfriend gone?"

"He's not my boyfriend."

"He wants to be."

"No. He doesn't. He's my oldest friend. We're out celebrating."

"You're bad at reading people," Natsu bent down and spoke into her ear softly, attempting to drown out the loud music.

Lucy pushed him away again.

"I read you like a book. Narcissistic ladies man, thinks he's the toughest guy in the room, doesn't have a shred of care for anyone or anything but himself."

Natsu grabbed her by the shoulders and looked into her eyes.

"Like I said, bad at reading people," he smirked.

Lucy shrugged him off for the final time as Gray appeared, looking bemused at the scene in front of him.

"You ok, Lucy?" He asked, poorly masking the annoyance in his voice.

"She's fine, aren't ya *Lucy*?" Natsu said smugly, taking a note of her name.

Lucy scowled, and Gray growled under his breathe.

"Then let her answer for herself," he said as he took a step towards the mysterious, suited man, before Lucy grabbed his hand and went to pull him away.

"C'mon Gray, it's fine, let's get another drink!"

The blonde smiled at her friend encouragingly, defiant that she should not be the one to stop enjoying her night.

Natsu smirked at the icy look on Gray's face.

"See you around, Blondie!" He saluted after her.

She turned, and he shot her a wink. She slammed her eyes shut and cursed under her breathe.

Natsu watched them walk away for a moment, then made his way towards the exit, where a low voice reached him from the dark corner next to the door.

"That was a poor show, Natsu."

The pinkette stopped in his tracks for a minute, but didn't bother to look towards the voice.

"Like you could do better, Laxus."

"Fuck off, Natsu," Laxus scoffed instantaneously.

Natsu just growled in response as he pushed the door open into the dark outside.

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Later that night Natsu lay on Gajeel's sofa, staring at the ceiling, feeling pissed off.

He was drunk, horny, and extremely bored. This is why he had such mixed feelings about ever coming back to Magnolia, even though it housed his oldest friends, it was a lonely place.

People were either scared of him, wanted to kill him, or were too boring for him to care what they thought.

However, this blonde chick, Lucy, didn't seem to fit any of those categories.

Sure, she was trying her best to act annoyed at him, but he didn't miss the tell tale signs. There was a hint of blush to her cheeks when he gazed at her, she licked her lips as he spoke, she seemed to enjoy winding him up. She definitely was not scared of him, and whatever it was about her, he wanted to find out more.

His interest had peeked.

It helped that she was definitely a beauty. He smiled to himself as he replayed the memory of her dancing, the very tops of her milky thighs almost on show, the smallest hint of the panties she was wearing teasing him.

His hand crawled down to the waistline of his boxers, as he propped his head up with his other arm and closed his eyes.

He imagined those bouncing breasts in that tiny satin dress she was in the other day. He wondered how soft they felt through that material. How soft they felt, *under* that material.

He licked his lips and felt himself hardening, he slowly crawled his hand under the material of his boxers and gave his cock a long stroke.

He was startled from his pining by a crash, as Gajeel must have gotten out of bed to go for a piss.

"Shit," Natsu breathed, yanking his hand from his crotch.

He groaned in frustration, scrunching up his face and closing his eyes, his thoughts greeting him with more images of the blonde.

Natsu sighed.

He wasn't meant to stay more than a night or two in Magnolia, but he was suddenly motivated to book a hotel room for the week.

# Chapter Three

## Chapter Notes

Edited

The next morning Natsu made sure to get up before Gajeel and start the breakfast. The least he could do was cook his host a nice meal.

As Gajeel stumbled into the open plan kitchen come living room in his boxers, Natsu started, "You'll be pleased to know I'll be out of your hair by this evening, I'm gonna get a hotel room."

"You're staying in Magnolia even longer? I already thought it was weird how long you *have* stayed. Don't tell me you've got mixed up in some jobs? I thought you were done with that shit. I thought *we* were done with that shit," Gajeel replied irately.

Natsu sighed, plating up some food with a grimace on his face.

"Jesus, Gaj. Can't a man just miss his home town? I feel like staying a bit longer, sheesh!"

"A man might, but a flame brained idiot like you always has an ulterior motive for staying in the same place too long."

"I'm remembering my roots."

"Our roots are best long forgotten," Gajeel huffed, grabbing a plate and heading to the sofa.

Natsu followed him and the two men devoured the breakfast he had prepared and sat in silence.

"It wasn't that bad," Natsu declared out of the blue.

"Huh?" Gajeel grunted.

"Your past, it wasn't that bad. You stayed in Magnolia after all."

"Just because my past wasn't as bad as yours, doesn't mean it wasn't bad. Hell, Satan himself doesn't have a past as lethal as yours."

"Satan himself was the reason it got so lethal," Natsu hummed, looking deep in thought.

He broke away from where his mind was taking him.

"I saw Laxus last night," he proffered instead.

"Great, so *Satan himself* is going to know you're in town. Is that why you're staying, to purposefully piss off your big brother?"

"As much as you know I miss winding Zeref up, it's not that. He won't bother me anyway. I don't think he's ever really taken his eyes off me; he's always known when I'm back in town. He's just biding his time," Natsu just sounded like he was trying to reassure himself more.

Gajeel sighed and ran his hand through his hair, sinking into the couch.

"Don't get me messed up in anything, Natsu. I'm done with that, you hear me?"

"Oh c'mon metal face, I know. Everyone knows. You left Fairy Tail five whole years before I did. It couldn't be more goddamn clear. Your petty misdemeanours have never left a shadow of a bounty over your head."

"Just because they're petty misdemeanours, doesn't mean I'm ok with what I've done. I may have never raised to the ranks of all out murderer bu-"

"Who do you know who became a murderer?" Natsu interrupted, feigning shock.

Gajeel shook his head and stared at the ceiling. After a pregnant pause, he spoke up again.

"Levy has joined the investigative reporters at the Inquirer. I'm already shit scared she's going to connect some dots one day and figure us out, don't do anything to stoke the flames."

"No one knows anything about me except you, and some high ranking members of Fairy Tail. Not even the police. How is some pokey city newspaper gonna crack us?"

"Levy is clever," was all Gajeel could offer.

"I'm more clever. Remember that every time you're walking down Magnolia high street, not being bothered for this supposedly shitty past of yours," Natsu stood up and took the plates to the kitchen, "when did you become so high and mighty, anyway?"

Gajeel lumbered out of the room, shaking his head some more. This cousin of his was a mystery alright. He hated to admit he cared for the guy, but he was the last real family he had left. Not counting Natsu's older brother that is, but he was a man who abandoned all ties to family many years ago. Gajeel really hoped that Natsu wasn't up to no good.

The thing of it was, they grew up as a gang of orphans: Gajeel, Sting, Rogue, Juvia and the two brothers, Natsu and Zeref.

Zeref was the oldest, and watched over the younger kids with a ferocity that scared anyone who dared bother them. Gajeel was the second oldest, blood cousin to the brothers. Natsu was the youngest, but he never let that hold him back.

Zeref and Gajeel remembered their life with their fathers, Igneel and Metalicana, before they passed in a car accident caused by a speeding police car. Natsu didn't remember so much. His memories of the men played out more like legendary fantasies, putting his father on a pedestal.

After the accident, the boys were taken to a care home, which they hated. That's where they befriended Sting, Rogue and Juvia, and together they escaped to live their life of freedom. They lived on the streets, squatting in derelict buildings, stealing to survive. They all looked up to Zeref; he always had a plan, always got them what they wanted and tried to make them feel like normal children.

As they grew older, things began to escalate; the Dragneel brothers' distaste for the police fueling many a dangerous escapade. The rag tag group eventually joined a small time gang, Fairy Tail, which was ruled over by a comical yet fierce leader, Makarov Dreyar.

After a few incidents concerning the kids he considered his family, it was soon apparent that Zeref hated being told what to do, and that he believed he had a better idea of how to run things. He rose up the ranks in the gang quickly; he was cunning and fearless, and saw the true potential of Fairy Tail. Makarov fed his eagerness at first, happy to see some young blood with fire in their belly, and reaped the rewards of Zeref's shady deals and brutal fights.

It actually confused a lot of people, as Makarov must have known Zeref was plotting, but a few surmised the old geezer was just ready to hand over his title and wanted to be sure Fairy Tail was going to be ruled by the best.

One day the change of the guard finally happened. Zeref challenged Makarov in a gun fight, which Makarov lost far too easily, letting himself slip from this mortal realm.

With his death, Zeref became the don. Things got darker. Drugs, weapons, and murder? They became the everyday.

However almost everyone, even Makarov's grandson Laxus, took to Fairy Tail's new path. Zeref's charm and ferocity winning people over. Laxus and Natsu became Zeref's right hand men, doing whatever grim jobs they were assigned, no matter how dangerous and illegal.

Gajeel and the others hated it however, not recognising the man who once tucked them in at night. Him, Sting, Rogue, and Juvia left. Natsu stayed and protected his friends by striking an unknown deal with Zeref.

Why Natsu left several years later is still a mystery, even to Gajeel. He knew it had to have something to do with Natsu's immense skillset and Zeref's inferiority complex, but Natsu would never reveal the truth.

He disappeared for a couple of years, working as a gun for hire, before even that began to bore him. Now Natsu worked doing whatever jobs interested him and paid him enough money. He had a specific talent for tracking down individuals or items, and had an almost supernatural ability to read a person. It was like he could practically smell their emotions. He was one hell of a fighter too. The mighty Salamander they used to call him, thanks to his penchant for explosives and flames.

Gajeel lay on his bed mulling all this over. There was so much he still didn't know about Natsu, which meant he always got tetchy when the man came to stay. His life was just starting to feel normal, he didn't want to be reminded of the blood on his cousins' hands.

He was eventually jostled from his thoughts by the front door slamming shut.

"Off he goes," he sighed.

---

Natsu leaned against the wall of the coffee shop, holding two cups of the steaming liquid. He was wearing his scarf around his neck, where possible he had this scarf out with him at all times. It was one belonging he still had from his childhood, given to him by his father. He wore it over his navy corduroy shirt, that was layered like a jacket over a baggy white v-neck tee. The sleeves were rolled up to reveal his muscled forearms. He wore dark blue skinny jeans and some low-top skate shoes.

This was a dress down day.

He finished the look with his Raybans, the many silver hoops and studs pierced through his right ear glistening in the low, spring sun.

Lucy spotted him a mile off, but was not prepared to let him get into her head.

Today was a big day for her; her first day with her own actual desk, and her own actual stories to right. There was no Monday morning gloom lurking over. She was too excited.

"Coffee?" Natsu pushed himself off the wall and extended a cup out to her.

"Are you stalking me?" Lucy scowled.

"I don't know, maybe? Maybe I just have a specific talent for hunting people down? Or maybe this is just a coincidence and I like hanging around on street corners with two cups of coffee?"

Lucy looked him up and down from the corner of her eye and took the coffee from his hand, trying her best to seem reluctant.

"Well that's not in the slightest bit ominous," she muttered.

"Heh, I thought you said you could read me like a book? Can't be too ominous then, can I?" Natsu jibed.

"There's figuring out someone's a flirt, and then there's trying to decipher if you're about to be stuffed into a van with a bag over your head," Lucy mused.

"Nah, I've outgrown that behaviour," Natsu laughed before he pulled up his sunglasses and turned to give her a wide grin.

Lucy just stared at him with wide eyes as she walked forward.

"I'm jokin' obviously," Natsu attempted to reassure her, "my name is Natsu, by the way."

"I know who you are," Lucy grimaced.



"Oh? My reputation proceeds me?" Natsu suddenly felt a bit uneasy, although he knew she couldn't possibly have known the gravity of her words.

"Your Gajeel's cousin, I heard him talking to his friends about you when Levy introduced me to him the other night. They don't look at you all that favourably," she laughed to herself.

"Urgh, bet it was that jerk, Sting, bad mouthin' me?"

"He says you steal all his girlfriends, chew them up and spit them out like they're nothing, just to get to him."

It was Natsu's turn to grimace.

"He said that huh? I have to say, anyone I have supposedly stolen from him has come willingly, he isn't the most upstanding young man himself," Natsu grumbled.

"Yeah, I gathered that too. He seems happy with his current girl though, you should stay away," Lucy eyed him cautiously before taking a sip of her drink.

"I'm not interested in anything he has anyway. I've got my sights set on something altogether more impressive, I'm sure." Natsu stared off into the distance as he spoke, not acknowledging the beauty walking next to him.

"I don't know, she seemed gorgeous and sweet, the whole package if you ask me."

"Are you trying to encourage me to steal her now, Luce?" Natsu smirked.

Lucy stopped as they reached her office building.

"Lucy. My name is Lucy."

Natsu pulled off his sunglasses and looked down into her eyes with a serious expression, "Luigi. Got it."

Lucy let out an exasperated sigh.

"Whatever. Thanks for the coffee. This is me," she pointed to the office building.

"The Magnolia Daily Inquirer, huh? You a journalist?" Natsu pondered out loud.

Lucy looked uncomfortable and gazed down at her shoes.

"Kind of, I'm hoping to be, if today goes right. I've been promoted whilst someone is on maternity. I kind of need to kick as much ass as possible to land the proper job."

"From what I've witnessed of you so far, Luce, I think you'll find that pretty easy."

The pink haired man smiled and shot her one of his deadly winks. She did her best not to crumble and just shuffled on the spot awkwardly.

"How about I take you out for dinner tonight, I can prove to you that I'm not a narcissistic ladies man, and you can debrief me on this exciting first day?" Natsu spoke after a short pause, with too much confidence for this situation.

Lucy looked uneasy, but she couldn't ignore the strange need she felt rising in her to say yes. Were his startling good looks getting the better of her? Was this man just viewing her as another conquest? Did she really care? Why couldn't she just have a bit of fun, no strings attached? It didn't have to be up to him anyway.

"Maybe," she cocked her head, "depends where you plan to take me."

"Way to put a man on the spot. I'll tell ya what," Natsu began to walk backwards away from her, "I'll ring you at lunch with the time and place, and if it passes the Lucy test, you can meet me there."

He smiled and turned around, walking away before she could reject the offer.

"But you don't have my number!" She called after him.

Natsu just waved his hand in the air above his head to say bye, and before she knew it he had disappeared into the crowd of people on the sidewalk. She stood there, once again in disbelief thanks to the mysterious Natsu.

# Chapter Four

## Chapter Notes

Edited

Lunch time for Lucy came around surprisingly quickly. It was nice knowing how much speedier a day can go by when you're not hating every minute of your job.

As she indulged in these thoughts, she was jolted out of them as the phone on her desk rang. It was the first time it had gone off, and she'd be lying if she said she didn't feel a slight panic.

She grabbed the receiver in haste, "Hello, Magnolia Daily Inquirer's Cultural Arts desk, Lucy Heartfilia speaking!"

That was far too wordy she noted; she will have to practice that.

She heard a low chuckle through the speaker.

"You have a cute phone voice," a smooth, recognisable drawl stated.

"Natsu! Why are you ringing me here! How did you even get this desk number?"

"Erm, I rang reception and asked to speak to the Lucy who had just been promoted to cover someone's maternity? Sound about right? Now I know your last name is *Heartfilia* though, I'm sure it will be much easier next time."

"Next time?!" Lucy snapped. She didn't know what it was about this man that meant she had such a short temper.

"Yeah. *Anyway*, Blue Pegasus, at half seven?" Natsu suggested, shrugging off Lucy's question.

"Erm, what? Blue Pegasus? How did you get seats *there*? That's one of the most *exclusive* restaurants in the whole of Fiore!" Lucy was gobsmacked.

"I'm going to take that as a yes then," Natsu chuckled, "see you there, Luce!"

The phone then went dead. Natsu had hung up. She was left staring at the receiver in her hand in annoyance. The *nerve* of that man. Lucy couldn't even piece together what the hell just happened. However Blue Pegasus? Ok, she was excited. To try the food at the very least.

---

The day continued to speed by after that, and the clock had soon struck 5pm. Lucy gathered her stuff and as she left the work building, she noted there was an expensive looking black car waiting outside. The tinted window rolled down and a guy who looked barely 21 years old sat in the drivers seat wearing a suit and a flat cap over his messy blue hair.

"Lucy Heartfilia?" The boy asked.

"Why..." She replied warily.

"The name's Happy, Natsu asked me to come pick ya up. He said ya wanted to go shopping for a new dress? And then told me to take ya to a guy he knows for some pampering, or somethin' before taking you to dinner."

"What the fuck?" Lucy couldn't help but let the words slip out.

"I have no idea Miss, I just do as I'm told, he wrote the itinerary down and everything!" Happy waved a piece of paper.

Lucy leaned in the window and took it from his hands, the note read "Cana's store for 5.30, Cancer's salon for 6.30, Blue Pegasus for 7.30."

Her eyes bulged.

"He can't mean Cana Alberona's fashion house? And the hair stylist to the stars, Cancer? He just can't mean them?" Lucy continued to stare stunned at the piece of paper.

"Look Miss, I told ya I have no idea, but if ya get in the car we can find out a hell of a lot sooner, aye?" Happy moaned.

Lucy strapped herself in the back seat and couldn't decide whether she was revolted or secretly excited about this grandiose plan of Natsu's. Before she could really get to grips with it however, she was outside Cana Alberona's flagship store. She got out of the vehicle to be greeted by the woman herself. She reeked of booze and was clutching a hip flask in one hand, but the woman's alcoholism didn't seem to stifle her success.

"Wow, you are pretty, hey!" Cana reached out and grabbed Lucy's boobs, "He was right, they're big!"

"What?!" Lucy's face flushed as she folded her arms over her chest.

"Natsu came by earlier to pick some outfits for you. I just thought must really be bored or somethin', but now I can see he wants a piece of your fine ass," Cana laughed, shooting Lucy a wink.

Lucy was so lost in the series of events unfolding she just gave up trying to get a grip, and went with the flow. She followed Cana to the changing room with the dresses Natsu picked out. Lucy was amazed, they were all stunning. Flattering, but sexy, and all way out of her price range.

"Erm, they're gorgeous! But I can't afford these..." Lucy shuffled on the spot not wanting to make eye contact with Cana.

"Huh?! Oh don't worry about that girl, Natsu has got it all taken care of. Take your pick!"

Lucy tried on the entire range in front of her, but settled for the second dress she tried. It was a black, pure silk, maxi number. It was fitted at the top with cap sleeves, and a deep v-neck. It flared out slightly from the waist where the material gathered and hung loosely, with a slit all the way to the top of her thigh. It fit her perfectly and accentuated all the right parts. How did Natsu pick this?

"Oh my god, girl, I love it!" Cana clapped her hands together in glee as Lucy exited the fitting room, "Here finish it off with this!"

Cana produced a belt made of silver hoops, that hung loosely on her waist, with a dangling chain of hoops down her side where it fastened. She went on to produce some classic black, sky high, stilettos, and a small suede clutch bag with Cana's logo, three playing cards, embroidered on the front.

"Perfect! Glam but with the right amount of edge. Why don't you punk it up with that leather jacket you bought in? Mix a bit of the true you in!" Cana encouraged, taking a swig from her hip flask.

Lucy had to admit she felt amazing. She could not believe this was happening, it felt like a scene from a cheesey rom-com.

"Thank you, but erm, what do I do with my clothes?" These were the logistics not discussed in rom-coms.

"Bung 'em in a bag and I'll keep them in the car?" Happy offered.

Lucy tried not to frown, but supposed it would do.

Next stop was Cancer's salon. The man was a wizard when it came to styling.

"Hello, gorgeous baby!" He cooed as she walked in, "Take a seat!"

Lucy sat down and before she even knew what was happening, he was undoing her hair from its pony tail and whizzing it around some curling tongues. Within minutes Lucy had loose curls in the bottom lengths of her hair. The stylist carried on, and the finished product was voluminous at the top with large messy curls hanging loose past her shoulders. It was almost a morning after the night before kind of hair style, but had a cleaner edge to it and Lucy loved how strangely sexy it made her feel.

Cancer snapped his fingers and a young girl came out to do her make-up, giving her what appeared to be a bare face, that was actually masterly sculpted with all sorts of ointments and colour palettes, with nothing but black mascara on her eyes, and ruby red lips.

"Amazing, baby! I see why he wants you on his arm!" Cancer pouted.

Lucy looked up in confusion yet again, and gave Happy a questioning glance.

The boy shrugged, "I told ya Miss, don't ask me."

Now ready for the meal, Lucy piled into the car in the least lady like fashion, and was chauffeured to Blue Pegasus. Happy opened her door and escorted her to the front doors, where he bid his adieu.

The words, "what the fuck, what the fuck, what the fuck," playing over and over again in her head, Lucy approached the podium and explained she was meeting Natsu.

The waiter took her straight to a secluded table at the back end of the restaurant. There sat Natsu in yet another perfectly fitted suit, this time he had no tie on however and had cracked open the top few buttons of his white dress shirt. His legs were crossed to the side of the table as he leaned back in his chair nonchalantly, playing with a Zippo lighter. He stood up and smiled when he saw Lucy, and watched with thirst as she took off her jacket to give to the waiter.

"Hey! So is this a great end to a good day, or the saving grace of a bad one?" He smirked.

Lucy pushed him back with one hand before he could get too close.

"What the fuck?" Was all she could utter.

"Huh?" Natsu eyed her up and down, hovering over the top of her thigh visible through the slit in her dress, and of course her buxom chest. Her eyes are where he stopped though. They froze him. Gods, was this girl really having such a strange effect on him? He tried to shake the thoughts out of his head.

"If you're trying to prove you're not a narcissistic ladies man, pulling out the Pretty Woman moves only makes me more suspicious of you. What's with the outfit? Didn't think I could look the part?" Lucy sulked as she strided to her chair.

"*Gods,*" Natsu thought again.

"I just wanted to surprise you. I get the impression you never treat yourself, and some people still owed me some favours and I thought this was the perfect opportunity to finally cash them in. Did you really not like it?" He frowned.

Lucy shuffled in her seat not wanting to make eye contact, her face glowing with a faint blush.

"You liked it," he smirked.

He ordered them a bottle of wine and let Lucy pick as much as she wanted from the menu. They discussed her day, how nice it was to get stuck into proper writing, how weird it was to sit at a desk that was actually hers. Lucy hated to admit, but as the wine flowed, she was starting to really enjoy herself.

"So what do you do?" She asked.

Natsu nearly choked on his food, "Erm, all sorts. I'm a freelance of sorts. I guess you could call me a private investigator?"

Lucy raised an eyebrow, "A private investigator? Is that code for hit man or something?"

Natsu laughed, "Nah, my work is a lot more broad than that."

"You're not denying you do hit-man type things, though," Lucy smirked with a hint of unease.

"I'm not a hit man. That I can whole heartedly *deny*," Natsu said seriously whilst looking straight into her eyes, "I just meant, I have to do all sorts of jobs. One day I'm finding a lost relative, the next a rare artifact. I couldn't possibly narrow my job down to one thing, such as being a hit man."

*Not anymore*, he thought.

"I don't know if that makes me feel better or not? It sounds like you still do seedy things?" Lucy pried.

"Being a private investigator can mean you unearth some sticky situations, not as sticky as those of a hit-man though."

Lucy's eyes narrowed at that remark.

"I feel like this is just a comparison spiralling out of control, now," he laughed nervously and rubbed the back of his neck, closing his eyes.

As he opened them again, he noticed a man with black hair and an impeccable suit walking into the restaurant, followed by what appeared to be Laxus and a woman with long white hair. Natsu tried not to react and looked away, focusing on Lucy, but not letting them escape his attention entirely.

"So, have I passed the test?" Natsu chuckled with a smile that oozed confidence, slipping into his overly cocky mode as he tried to mask his sudden unease.

"What test?" Lucy replied absentmindedly as she put down her knife and fork.

"The let's-find-out-if-this-Natsu-guy-is-as-big-a-douche-as-everyone-says-or-is-just-misunderstood, test."

Lucy sighed, "It's hard to say after one night. When you had your friend drive me to those places, I was most definitely believing you were a flashy douche, but after chatting to you, I'm starting to see there might be more. I'm not sure."

"So what you're saying is, you'd like to do this again?" Natsu grinned.

Taking advantage of the moment Lucy looked at the table in embarrassment, he studied the group that sat down a few tables away from him. Only the white haired woman looked back in his direction. Natsu had worried cashing all these flashy favours in in one night would attract this attention, but thought his brother could have let it slide just this once. It wasn't like

Natsu made a habit of this, but he should have known better to play games. He'd only known this girl a few days after all.

"Maybe something a little more casual next time?" Lucy interjected his thoughts.

"Sounds good. Perhaps a film and some room service?" Natsu followed that offer up with another wink.

"R-room service?" Lucy stuttered.

"Yeah, I'm staying in a hotel in town, we can get one of everything on the menu, make it a picnic, whatever you want," Natsu shrugged.

"Maybe we could just go to the cinema, get some popcorn?" Somewhere without a bed and the connotations that come with it, Lucy thought.

Natsu smiled softly, but Lucy noticed his eyes dart behind her. She went to turn her head to follow his gaze, but he grabbed her cheek. Her eyes widened and both of them flushed at his sudden action. He followed the motion through though, and rubbed her cheek with his thumb.

"I think this is my favourite look on you yet," Natsu spoke low and soft, "thank you for coming."

Lucy grabbed his hand and pulled it off her face, wishing she wasn't so obviously flustered.

"Thanks for inviting me," she mumbled quietly, "but erm, will you excuse me a moment?"

The blonde stumbled out of her chair and headed towards the bathroom in an attempt to gather her thoughts. Her hips swayed from side to side as she strutted in those killer heels, her hair swinging and catching the light with every movement. Natsu wanted to bang his head on the table in awe, but snapped out of it when he saw the white haired girl follow Lucy.

"Shit," he snapped under his breath.

Inside the bathroom, Lucy stared in the mirror and tried to clear her thoughts.

"Get a goddamn grip of yourself, Lucy!" She pleaded with her reflection as she clumsily combed her hair with her fingers and reapplied her lipstick.

The lady with long, wavy white hair had appeared next to her, preening her face.

"You ok, hun?" The lady sang, her voice as sweet as treacle, her head cocked to the side with curiosity.

"Oh! Yeah. Sorry. Don't mind me!" Lucy babbled in embarrassment.

This woman looked stunning, curves in all the right places, tight black gown that looked like it cost more than Lucy's rent. This was the kind of woman that belonged in Blue Pegasus, not her.



"Lucy, did you say?" The woman asked comfortingly.

"Uh, yeah..." Lucy suddenly felt ill at ease.

"You look gorgeous hun, that man you're with, he is one lucky guy. Where'd he find a girl like you?" The mysterious woman's demeanour suddenly began to shift into something a bit more intimidating.

"Erm, I guess we kept bumping into each other... Literally... And I finally caved?" Lucy thought out loud.

"Oh is this a first date? There going to be more?"

"I- I don't know? Maybe?" Lucy was getting uncomfortable with the way she was being underhandedly grilled.

"Hmm, well a stunning couple like you have attracted a lot of attention out there. I'd sleep with one eye open, you never know who's watching!" The woman trilled before flicking her hair over her shoulder, smiling wickedly, and walking off.

"What the *fuck*?" Lucy repeated for the hundredth time that night, "Is everyone talking about me out there? Do I really look that out of place that everyone has noticed I shouldn't be here? Ugh, talking to myself in this mirror isn't going to help, is it?"

Lucy gathered her belongings in a huff and took a deep breathe before strutting out of the bathroom, trying to act like she deserved to be there as much as anyone else. After what felt like an eternity walking across the restaurant wondering if she was being judged, she reached the table, but Natsu stood up straight away.

"Let's get out of here, hey?" He hurried before she could say anything, and grabbed her hand gesturing towards the door with a nod of his head.

Lucy was startled by his quick reaction, and worried she'd embarrassed him, but strode along beside him trying not to let her confidence crack any further.

When they got outside Happy pulled up in his car. Natsu opened the door for Lucy and watched as she climbed in, before looking around to check his surroundings. He looked towards the restaurant doors with a pained face, and saw a silhouetted figure standing there. The pair locked eyes. The figure lit his cigarette and smirked, not breaking contact. Natsu kept his face expressionless and made sure to also hold his stare as he climbed into the car.

Natsu growled internally.

*Fuck Zeref*, honestly.

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Once in the car they sat in an uncomfortable silence, Natsu seemingly stewing in what Lucy thought was anger.

"Is everything ok? Sorry if I did something wrong, I've not been to such a posh place since I was youn-"

Natsu's face suddenly softened as he spun his head around to take in her anxiety. He cut Lucy off before she could descend further into worry.

"No, it wasn't you, honest. Sorry I bundled us out so fast..."

Natsu had to quickly think of an excuse that would leave the least room for interrogation from the curious blonde.

"...It was an, erm, ex-girlfriend of mine, sorry. She likes to make a scene. I've not seen her in years, but I didn't want to run the risk of inflicting that on you," he looked at her sheepishly.

"Oh," Lucy looked out the car window into the night, not knowing what to do with that information. *Of course* the man had exes all over the place.

"I'll make it up to you for cutting our night so short? How about we go back to my hotel room, order a stupidly expensive bottle of wine?" He offered.

"And then what?" Lucy couldn't tell where this was going.

"Talk?" Natsu's mouth curled up into a crooked smile.

Lucy stared at him with a frown, trying to come up with a suitable response to his cheap flirting. However her phone then rang, cutting the tension. She looked at the caller ID and declined the call. It rang again straight away. Natsu looked at her with a raised eyebrow.

"Is that your ice princess calling?"

Lucy whipped her head towards the man, "Ice princess?"

She knew he was referring to Gray.

"Well he sure wasn't warm and friendly," Natsu explained.

The phone rang again. She declined it, *again*. Gray could be persistent. It was riling Natsu up further though, how many mood killers was this night going to throw at him?

"You afraid he's not going to approve of your night on the tiles, or are you scared of hurting his feelings? Seeing as he's your standby option 'n' all?" Natsu pried with a cutting tone.

There was a long pause, and Natsu started to curse his temper.

"I think it's best you take me home now," was all Lucy replied, a stern scowl spreading across her features.

He sighed, but nodded knowingly.

"Happy, you heard the lady. What's your address?"

Lucy told Happy her address and turned back to staring out the window. As they pulled up outside her apartment building she rummaged around for her bag of old clothes, then climbed out the car door to look back at Natsu sadly. The phone rang again, but this time she answered it. The door slammed shut without a goodbye, and Natsu could hear the girl apologising profusely to her wet blanket of a friend.

"Well that did not end the way I intended," sighed Natsu as they pulled off from the sidewalk, locking eyes with Happy in the rear view mirror.

"I think bringing up your imaginary ex was where it went wrong, if you ask me," Happy teased.

"It went wrong way before that. Seems your boss found me," Natsu said as he rolled his eyes.

"*Shit*. Now you're gonna have got me in trouble too, thanks flame brain."

"Ya know he can't hurt you, Happy. Ugh, I wish you'd just leave and come with me anyway. I miss my best bud!" Natsu whined.

"And *you* know, I can't leave Charle, Natsu," Happy replied, his voice riddled with melancholy.

The two men locked eyes through their reflections for a moment.

Natsu broke the tension first.

"Do you want to come back to my hotel room and drink with me?"

"I think I'm already in enough shit, don't you?" Happy pouted.

"Yeah, yeah. It's not like I need an excuse to drink by myself anyway. And Happy?"

"Hmm?" The young man looked back at Natsu and swiped some of his blue hair out of his eyes.

Natsu raised his arm slightly, and pointed one finger towards the ceiling; the old Fairy Tail salute.

"As my brother in chaos, I will still always have your back. Please, don't tell Zeref where I'm sleeping tonight. I'd rather not be turfed out of bed in the early hours."

Happy huffed and gripped the steering wheel tighter.

"Brothers in chaos," he nodded.

Happy was one of Natsu's first recruits, and after his care home friends abandoned ship, Happy became his best friend. It's not that he didn't trust Happy, and the two men were both aware Zeref probably already knew where Natsu was holed up. It was more that he was seeking some sense of higher companionship and loyalty after his disaster date, and reaffirming their old mantra filled him with warmth.

Sighing, Natsu got out of the back seat and pulled out 100 jewels and handed it to Happy through the drivers window, before giving him a wink and disappearing into the night.

# Chapter Five

## Chapter Notes

Towards the end of this chapter there is the beginnings of some smut, but doesn't go far!

Lucy sat cupping a mug of warm, sludgy coffee between her hands, staring at her computer screen. She was attempting to finish Levy's expose on the council's plan to cut arts funding, but she felt like a fraud. Levy had done most of the ground work, Lucy was just trying to string the pieces together in a manner which would pluck at the public's heart strings. She let out a long sigh.

Her phone vibrated, it was a text from Gray, *"Congratulations on completing your first half a week on the job!"*

She smiled, she needed that pick me up.

*"Thanks Gray, want to meet tonight so I can whinge to you all about it?"* She typed.

He quickly typed back, *"I'm on the night shift, sorry Luce. I'm sure it's going much better than you think! I'm free all of Sunday if you wanna go for lunch?"*

Lucy sighed, but was still up for lunch.

*"Sounds great,"* she replied.

She dumped her phone on her desk and stared up the ceiling. She didn't even notice Levy bounding up to her.

"Wanna go out tonight?" Levy beamed as she leaned onto her old desk.

"Huh? What, sorry? Where?" Lucy took a minute to get out of her thoughts.

"Sabertooth have got another gig tonight, wanna come?"

Lucy frowned. She wanted to, but was scared of bumping into him. Her dinner with Natsu on Monday ended terribly. She wasn't sure if it was her fault, or his, but she new she was mortified. She let herself get swept up in his ridiculous shennigans, forgetting that ultimately she thought he was a jerk.

However, if she didn't join Levy she faced another night in alone, over analysing the whole situation. Screw it, she thought, what did she have to lose?

"Sure, why the hell not?" Lucy spouted before she could change her mind.

"Yes girl!" Levy held out her hand for a high five to which Lucy complied.

She had nothing to lose, she reminded herself.

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Later that night Lucy turned up at the bar a little later than Levy told her, not wanting to be the first to arrive and face making awkward conversation with any of the band. She found Levy and Yukino chatting in a corner.

"Hey girls!" Lucy butted in, not wanting to be left alone, either.

Yukino gave her a warm smile, "Nice to see you again! We were just about to grab a drink!"

The three of them headed to the bar and placed their orders, then propped themselves against one end of it, chatting aimlessly and giggling.

All of a sudden the sound of distant shouting echoed over the background music of the bar. A cymbal crashed. Sting came storming out from the door that was labelled as backstage. Juvia ran out following him, and Gajeel appeared, holding Natsu by the collar of his jacket, and flung him out the door.

"Don't start anything else, flame brain!"

"He was the one spreading shitty rumours about me, lug face!" Natsu straightened out his clothes and headed after Sting, oblivious to everything else around him.

The three girls just stood watching mouths agape. Gajeel noticed Levy and frowned.

"Sorry about that, Shrimp," he grimaced as he walked over.

Levy just shrugged and smiled, but Yukino suddenly snapped back to reality.

"Is Sting ok?" She fretted, and went to run after him.

Gajeel attempted to stop her but just sighed and gave up. Those testosterone fuelled dorks could embarrass themselves in front of her all they wanted, he couldn't be bothered to get anymore involved. He propped himself up next to Levy and eyed Lucy, who was fidgeting in her spot, looking towards the door everyone left out of.

"You wanna watch too?" He questioned, "all they'll do is throw a couple more punches, Sting will quit the band, Sting will rejoin the band, Natsu will call him a stupid name, they'll stare each other out until one of them cracks up laughing, they'll share a cigarette. Every. Goddamn. Time. If Natsu came to a show and this didn't happen, I'd regard it as a bad omen."

"What set them off?" Lucy blurted without thinking.

Gajeel became uneasy, but wanted to confirm his suspicions.

"Apparently Sting was chatting shit about Natsu's lack of ability to keep it in his pants, to a girl Natsu really didn't want to think that way about him. Sound like something you might know about?"

Lucy blushed slightly and Levy screwed her face up and then widened her eyes as she clocked on to what Gajeel was saying.

"Not got a clue, why would I know about the girls Natsu tries to impress?" Lucy couldn't make eye contact with either of them as she said it.

Surely she wasn't the girl Natsu was so concerned about, was she?

"Heh, well it's very rare for flame brain to actually give a rat's ass about something like that. Either he was really hankering for a fight with Sting, or someone has got him hot under the collar."

Lucy gulped, Gajeel eyed her one last time.

"Don't say I didn't warn you, girly," the studded giant croaked out.

"About wha-" Lucy couldn't finish her sentence before the doors to the outside swung open again. Natsu and Sting walked in with arms over each other's shoulders, faces slightly sweaty and bruised.

"Where's Rogue?" Sting called.

"Juvia bets he's still reading his book in the back, ignoring you two idiots," the gorgeous bassist huffed as she followed them in.

Natsu finally noticed Lucy, leaning against the bar in a velvet red wrap dress, and her leather jacket, the clutch bag he bought her down by her side. In her other hand she held a nearly empty glass. He wasn't sure if he was going to ever get to see her again after the disaster of the other night, but she couldn't seem to stay away. He smiled to himself.

"Want a refill?" He offered, gesturing towards her drink with his eyes.

Lucy looked up at him coolly, "I'm ok, pacing myself, work in the morning y'know."

Natsu shrugged, "Suit yourself."

He didn't want to seem too pushy, not after he lost his cool the other night. He didn't know if he was annoyed at Zeref, or the way her dopey friend was trying to get in on their night, but he knew he came across as an ass.

Lucy half smiled, and went to carry on her conversation with Levy and Yukino.

Sabertooth went to tune their guitars and Natsu stood there, beer in hand. Suddenly he felt like he was being watched. Scouring the room he saw no one, but the very fact he couldn't automatically see who it was, meant he knew who it was.

Bickslow.

Despite being such a bruiser, he was one of Fairy Tail's stealthiest and one of Laxus' best recruits. He wasn't good enough to outwit Natsu though.

The band began to play and the girls made their way to the front of the small crowd. When Natsu was sure Gajeel and the others could see them, he downed his drink, and slammed the empty bottle on the bar as he strided towards the back door which exited into a dark alley. Confident he would be followed.

He didn't even have to turn around before he greeted his old work colleague.

"Evening, Bicks."

Bickslow sported sunglasses even though it was night, his large face tattoo poking out above and below the frames. He smirked and sparked a cigarette.

"Natsu," he nodded.

"Whatever you're going to do, just get it over with," Natsu tried to sound disinterested.

"I'm not here to do anything to you. Zeref just wanted us to remind you something, and Laxus sent me," he took a drag on his cigarette and blew out the smoke in rings, "Zeref says if you want to reap the rewards of what Fairy Tail built for you, then you owe him something in return."

Natsu smirked, "I was the one who actually helped build Fairy Tail, remember?"

Bickslow stayed silent.

"Couldn't he have come to tell his lil ol' brother that himself, anyway? I owe him nothing. I was cashing in I.O.U.s a decade old. Tell him I'm not here to encroach on his goddamn turf and reinstate my power, blah blah, whatever," Natsu kicked an empty beer can.

Bickslow finished his cigarette and flicked it onto the ground, stomping it out with his Gucci dress shoes, and readjusted his suit.

"We understand you've got a girl, now? That mean you coming back to Magnolia permanently? You know that will encroach on the agreement you came to," he reminded Natsu.

Natsu scoffed, "If you think she's my girl, I dare you to go ask her that yourself and see what reaction she gives you. Guarantee you won't have a head left on your shoulders."

Bickslow let out a long sigh and rubbed his hand over his mouth as he looked up at the night sky.

"Just do what you gotta do Bicks, I need another drink." Natsu drawled.

"I told you, I ain't gotta do nothing."



"But you're going to."

Before Natsu could even blink Bickslow's fist came swinging out, Natsu calmly stepped to the side and chuckled. The brute grabbed him by the collar, and Natsu just stood there staring into his eyes, willing him to try. Bickslow threw his old boss backwards.

"It's no fun if you're not gonna fight back, not like old times," Bickslow sneered.

"As per the agreement," Natsu reminded him.

Bickslow frowned slightly and skulked off into the darkness.

"He misses you, Natsu," he called.

Natsu grumbled, "the feeling is not mutual."

All Zeref missed was having someone around actually strong enough to challenge him, brother or not.

After he was confident the Fairy Tail member was gone, Natsu straightened out his clothes and stepped back into the light of the bar.

The first thing he noticed was that Lucy's head was turned away from the band and her eyes were darting around the room. She found her mark, and the two of them locked eyes. Natsu winked, she scowled and whipped her head back around to the band.

Natsu went to the bar and ordered a whisky and a gin and tonic. He stomped over to her in his Docs and handed her the glass. She accepted without saying anything. He leaned down and breathed into her neck, Lucy tingled all over.

"I'm sorry for the other night," he whispered into her ear over the music, "I would have liked it to end another way."

Lucy could almost feel his lips touching her. She wanted to collapse into a puddle of jelly. She held her resolve and continued to watch the band without acknowledging him. She couldn't hide the blush dusting her cheeks though. Natsu gave a small smile.

He positioned himself so the right side of his body was directly behind her left. A hairs width of a gap between them, accidentally bumping into each other every now and then. Natsu felt a hint of the curve of her ass against his thigh, Lucy could feel his breath on her neck. He shouldn't have been so smug about such a small thing, but he was certain she was purposefully rubbing herself against him as she moved. He closed his eyes as he took in her scent, vanilla and strawberries.

The band finished playing and Sting looked at his old rival from the stage before he climbed down, giving him a knowing smile. Natsu raised his glass in salute to him and winked.

"How about we all grab some food? Burgers at 8-Island?" Sting suggested as he reached the crowd, laying a hand on Natsu's shoulders, "yours are on the house bud, consider it an apology for my past digressions."

Natsu nodded.

"Obviously," he said dryly, before looking at Lucy, "you guys coming?"

Lucy just shrugged and looked at the other girls who were already sipping up their drinks ready to go. The band quickly tidied up the stage and locked their instruments in a back room, the owner of the bar knowing to keep watch over their stuff. Then the team headed into the cold, night air.

As they walked to the burger joint, the boys wrestled, watched over by a solemn Rogue from the sidelines, and the girls gossiped behind them. Lucy was even beginning to like Juvia, the bassist who's cold resolve intimidated her at first.

Sting slowed down to put his arm around Yukino, who he steered off from the group as he whispered into her ear, making her giggle. Gajeel followed suit until he stood next to Levy, who he looked at from the corner of his eyes before messing up her hair and pulling towards him playfully with his palm on her head.

Juvia sighed, "One day Juvia will find love."

Natsu slowed down and eyed Lucy, who kept her eyes on the ground. He gave her a friendly push to get her attention. It worked, as she glared at him and punched his arm back, he laughed, she cracked a smile, they stepped closer to each other.

"Lucy?!" A familiar voice rang through the night.

A patrol car had pulled up on the side of the road and a raven haired cop was hanging out of its door. The whole gang stopped. Lucy felt a weight in the bottom of her stomach.

"Hey Gray!" She pushed herself away from Natsu, "what you doing?"

Gray looked towards his partner in the patrol car, before fully getting out of the car and jogging over to his friend. He laid his hands on her shoulders and eyed the crowd behind her suspiciously.

"Who are those guys? Is that- Is that the guy from the bar the other night?!" Gray was gobsmacked.

Lucy wriggled out of his grasp with a sheepish laugh, "Err yeah, guess it is. Turns out he's the cousin of the guy Levy's dating. Small world huh?"

"They look like criminals," Gray said in a hushed whisper.

"Everything ok, Lu?" She heard Levy call, she turned round and saw the gang staring at her with a mixture of confused expressions.

Natsu just stood glaring, chewing his cheek, hands in his jacket pockets as if he was trying to hold back both his words and his fists.

Lucy gave a meek smile, "Sure it is, this is Gray, my old friend that I've told you about!"

Levy escaped from Gajeel's grasp and bounded over, sticking her hand out for Gray to shake.

"Nice to finally meet you officer Gray! I was starting to think Lu was making up having friends that weren't me!" Levy chirped.

Gray shook her hand, but kept his eyes on the degenerate looking men behind her. Covered in piercings and tattoos, wearing ripped clothes and all having crazy hair. He didn't trust them. He noted there was a couple of other girls in the group at least, the one with long, blue hair staring at him so intensely he began to feel a cold sweat coming on.

"Nice to meet you Levy. I best be going actually, but be careful Lucy. Give me a ring later?" Gray almost pleaded.

"If she isn't too busy!" Sting shouted from up the street as he clapped Natsu on the back and laughed, causing his buddy to grimace.

Lucy scowled. Were they fifteen year olds?

"Sure," she smiled up at her friend, "stay safe out there, officer!" She cheered before giving him a salute and heading back to the group.

Natsu walked towards her, watching the police car intently as it drove off.

All of a sudden Juvia was in Lucy's face.

"Who was that Lucy? Juvia thinks he might just be the love of her life!"

The woman clapped her hands together and hummed with delight. Lucy looked at Natsu for help, who just shrugged. Lucy went on to explain all about her friend, and she was sure she could actually hear Juvia's heart sing.

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After the gang finished at 8-Island, people split into groups to walk home. Lucy noted that Levy was actually letting Gajeel take her home this time. She will have to get filled in about that at work tomorrow.

Sting and Yukino were the last left standing outside with Natsu and Lucy. Sting studied Natsu for a moment before grabbing Yukino.

"Come on girly, I think my bed is calling us," he crooned as he swung his arm around her and steered her away, waving his arm over his head in farewell.

Lucy just stood there, shivering slightly in the cold spring night. Eyes like globes, staring at the night sky.

"Whatcha staring at?" Natsu prodded her shoulder.

"The stars." Lucy hummed, "my mum taught me all about astrology, told me the stars were the souls of old friends, lighting up the path before me."

"You must have lost a lot of friends, look at them all up there!" Natsu scrunched up his face in confusion.

"They're not lost, they're right up there, where they've always been and where they always will be. Comforting me." Lucy smiled, but her eyes were sad.

"Your mum sounds kooky," Natsu sighed.

"She wasn't kooky! She was beautiful, and clever, and so, so kind. She was a good person. A concept you might struggle to understand," Lucy playfully punched his arm, avoiding his gaze.

Natsu noticed the use of past tense, and thought he saw her eyes welling up.

"I'll walk you home," he stated.

She nodded and set off, Natsu kicked the ground below his feet and followed her.

He was wary about walking her home, not just because he wasn't sure he would want to stop at her front door, but because of who might have been watching.

He would have been a total jackass to leave a girl crying in the night though, and he was desperate to prove to Lucy that he could be a gentleman. He all of a sudden felt the urge just to feel normal for a change. Not to feel like he was constantly on the lamb, but to just be able to walk a nice girl home, and say goodnight. It was the first time he didn't miss the action of his old life in a while.

Anyway, Zeref would be taking things way too far if he got a girl like Lucy involved in their affairs, just to annoy his little brother. The less people who knew who they really were, the better. Plus a small part of him hoped the blood shared between them still meant a little something.

After a small silence, Natsu couldn't take it any longer.

"Hey Luce, I didn't mean to upset you, talking about your mom," he spoke softly, "I never even knew my mom, been an orphan since I was real small, actually."

"It's fine, I just miss her... I'm sorry to hear that Natsu. I guess, I'm technically an orphan too," she sighed.

"That so? Huh. Everyone from Sabertooth, they're orphans too y'know. We grew up together, battling the mean streets!" Natsu threw up his fists in a jokey pose, hoping to crack a smile from Lucy's sweet lips.

"Really? I only recently lost my father, I guess I was lucky that I got to reach adulthood before he went."

"I don't think losing anybody counts as lucky, Lucy."

"You didn't know my father," she spat out.

Natsu stopped in his tracks for a second.

"Heartfilia, right? Was he the train magnate? I've heard of the guy," he confessed before skipping to catch up with her.

He didn't want to say anything, but he knew as soon as he heard her second name. Jude Heartfilia was as crooked as they came, and Fairy Tail had dipped their toes into his business from time to time. Natsu couldn't believe that he didn't know about the man's gorgeous daughter though.

"You might have heard of him, seen him on the telly even, but nobody knew him, Natsu. Not like I knew him."

Natsu felt uncomfortable, he didn't like how bitter Lucy sounded. Even when she was being mean to him, her words weren't laced with actual venom, not like they were now.

"You can tell me, if you want?" He offered.

She snapped her eyes shut and shook her head, "Nope. I'm ok, nearly at my place anyway!"

She sped up as they rounded the corner of Strawberry Street. Just before they reached her apartment building, Natsu grabbed her by the hand and made her stop, he pulled her towards him until he could feel her breath on his cheeks and placed his hands on her shoulders.

"What are you doing? My building is just there, Natsu," she gestured behind her with her head.

"Don't bottle it up, Lucy. You don't have to tell me, but talk to someone. Your cop friend, Levy, someone. It will eat you up and your inner light will snuff out," he stared down into her brown eyes, "trust me, I've seen it time, and time again."

They stood there for a moment, gazing into each other's eyes. A breeze blew some of Lucy's hair across her face, Natsu reached up and tucked it behind her ear. His hand lingered over her cheek, he subconsciously licked his lips. Lucy did the same.

He slowly leant in.

Lucy panicked.

"I'll bear that in mind," she sputtered out, as she pulled away from him.

Natsu's face stiffened in surprise, and then he gave her a half smile that didn't reach his eyes.

"Good," he breathed.

They walked the last few paces to Lucy's building and Natsu waved at her as she ran up the steps to the door.

"Fuck sake, Natsu," he mumbled to himself as he shoved his hands in his pockets and lumbered into the night.

Once Lucy was in her apartment she collapsed against her door, rubbed her hands against her face and stifled a frustrated scream with her palms. Shaking her head at her awkwardness, she distracted herself by checking on Plue and getting ready for bed.

She climbed into bed in an old baggy t-shirt and her thong, and looked at the time on her alarm clock.

"Its nearly half past midnight already? Ugh!" She groaned.

She harumphed down onto the mattress and lay there, splayed like a starfish, staring at the cracks in her ceiling. She kept replaying the earlier scene with Natsu in her head.

She could still smell him, clean and sharp like sandalwood, but with a dirtier base smell, something darker. Like slow burning embers; she couldn't quite place it.

She felt the warmth from his hands tingling on her shoulders, and the burning feeling she had from being so close to him.

She thought about the dangerous tinge to his expression as he spoke. It seemed like he was trying to be kind and genuinely care about her happiness for some reason, but she could feel his onyx eyes burning into her. There was something darker within him, and that part of him was hungry. It was smouldering at the back of his gaze.

She felt a heat building at the bottom of her stomach, as she thought about the way the moonlight bounced off his tan skin, illuminating that jagged scar down his cheek. The way it highlighted how his Adams Apple bobbed as he swallowed. The way his lips glistened as he wet them ever so slightly with his tongue.

His tongue. Lucy imagined how that tongue would have tasted against hers if she hadn't chickened out. His musky smell engulfing her as she explored his mouth with her own. She imagined it to taste like diesel. Sharp, addictive.

She took in a deep breathe, and felt her hand pawing at her lower stomach. She felt the space between her legs moistening, as she imagined him kissing her neck, and down beyond her collar bone. Her hand crept further down, tucking itself under thong.

She imagined him picking her up and throwing her on his shoulders as he stepped to her apartment building door. She pictured him swinging her down and pressing her against the wood, picking her up by her thighs and grinding into her core as he kissed her hungrily and she ran her hands through his spiked locks of hair.

She felt the heat inside her building, as she pictured them kissing each other all the way up the stairs, and landing on her living room couch. She imagined feeling his muscles flexing as he peeled off her clothes.

Her fingers had crept deeper between her legs now, slowly rubbing against her sweet spot. She breathed heavier, feeling the tension within her beginning to coil, as she thought of the many things they could do together on her couch.

Then, her phone rang, snapping her out of her devious thoughts. She groaned with frustration. Not knowing whether she was frustrated that she didn't get to finish her fantasy, or frustrated she was even having that fantasy in the first place.

She looked at the caller ID: Gray.

"Shit!" She fumbled around, sitting herself up to answer the call.

"Hey Gray! Sorry I forgo-"

"Oh good, Lucy! I was getting worried for a moment there! Sorry if I woke you, I just wanted to make sure you got home ok is all. Those guys looked like bad new-"

"Gray," Lucy cut him off before she could be made to feel more guilty about her previous illicit thoughts, "they're not as bad as they seem, y'know? I think you'd like them."

"I doubt that. I'm not a fan of anyone who doesn't know how to use a hair brush," he replied with a sting to his voice.

Lucy flinched, maybe Gray was right, but Levy liked them? Surely that stood for something?

"You're just too old school sometimes. It surprises me really, for a guy who can't keep his top on for more than five minutes and likes to shoot guns for a living," Lucy teased.

"I'm just trying to look out for you, Luce. You're a nice girl, you shouldn't be getting mixed up with bad men," Gray muttered sheepishly.

Lucy frowned however, why was Gray trying to dictate her life so much?

"What, you'd rather I settled down with a nice guy, like say, a cop, and sit at home squeezing babies out?" Lucy snapped.

"That's not what I mean Lu-"

"Gray, you need to let me make my own mistakes. I've already spent half of my life being dictated by my father. I thought you'd know better than that."

There was silence on the other end of the phone.

"Sorry, Luce. I really didn't mean to. You're right. Have all the fun you want... Sweet dreams." Gray hung up.

Lucy sat staring at the device in her hand, before throwing it across the room at her laundry pile.

She dived under her duvet and switched off her lamp, shutting her eyes as tight as she could as not to cry. She was so fed up of idiot men trying to tell her what to do, whether they intended to or not.

She hoped the morning would bring her some new clarity.





## Chapter 6

The next day at work, Lucy padded over to Levy's new desk at lunchtime to see if she wanted to grab some lunch in the fresh air.

"Hey Lev, you got a min?"

The blonde crept over and twirled a bit of Levy's hair as she looked down at her in her seat.

"Huh?"

Levy pulled her reading glasses off her face, and realised it was Lucy standing next to her. She quickly switched her computer screen off and hid the newspaper articles she was reading, before smiling up at her friend.

"Err... Everything alright, Lev?" Lucy asked suspiciously.

"Yeah! Just working on a top secret hunch, girl!" Levy chimed, beaming up at her friend a little too enthusiastically.

"Ok... Well, lunch?" Lucy asked as she shook the brown paper bag containing her crappy sandwich.

"Oh Lu, I'm so sorry. I really don't have the time, but you should get some air!"

"No fair! I wanted to interrogate you about last night!" Lucy whined.

Levy smirked.

"You'll hear all the juicy details in due time! Let's just say, his face isn't the only thing pierced..." She winked.

Lucy groaned, not knowing if she wanted to find out that level of detail. Another reporter in the room cleared his throat, and stared at the two girls in disbelief.

Lucy smiled sheepishly, Levy waved him off.

"Don't act like you don't want to know about my sex life, Jet!" The blue haired girl retorted.

Levy was a tiny force to be reckoned with, that's for sure.

Lucy went on to make her way down the marble stairs of the offices and towards the sunlight shining through the door. Her intention was to sit in the park across the street for a few minutes, and air out her brain.

As she reached the bottom of the stairs, the cranky woman at the reception desk called for her, "Ah! Miss Heartfilia! This, supposed, *gentleman*, has been trying to get in to see you!"

She looked over to be greeted by a dopey smile from a pink haired moron, holding up two cups of coffee. He stood there in his signature look, jeans, Docs, leather jacket. His hair touselled and messy, his piercings catching in the light.

"I thought you might need a pick me up, considering how late you were up on a school night!" Natsu beamed and shot her a wink.

Lucy blushed.

"That is most definitely not how it sounds, Ms. Porlyusica!" She babbled as she waved her arms around awkwardly.

"Like I care," the woman snarled back.

Natsu smiled dumbly again and held out the coffee. Lucy grabbed it and headed towards the door.

"You don't give up, do you?" Lucy pondered out loud.

"Well there's nothing else for me to do in this place. It was either annoy you or annoy Gajeel," Natsu shrugged.

"Great. So I'm just who you run to when you're bored, huh?" She said, rolling her eyes.

They sat down next to each other on the wall that lined the park on the opposite side of the street. Natsu took a swig of his coffee and shuffled closer to her, Lucy's stomach flipped as she looked up at him to study his chiselled face, and he eyed her back carefully.

"Isn't that a compliment? You interest me. Not many people I can say that about," he hummed.

They sat in silence for a while.

Natsu was the first to crack, "what you doing tonight?"

"Why?" Lucy eyed him suspiciously.

"Thought we could do what you said, go catch a movie, eat some popcorn, the whole works?"

"I'm busy tonight," Lucy lied for some reason she couldn't even fathom herself.

"Doing what? Washing your hair?" Natsu teased.

"None of your business," she gulped a load of coffee to hide the anxiety caused from trying to play hard to get.

Natsu smirked, he knew she was just trying to play him. It was cute that she thought she could try. He wouldn't play into her hand however, if she thought he was going to beg, she was wrong.

"Fine. See you around, *Luce!*"

He winked as he pushed himself off the wall and swaggered down the road.

Lucy sighed, realising how yet again, she had spectacularly messed up. Why couldn't she just go with her gut? Why did she keep putting barriers up?

She shook her head before grabbing her uneaten sandwich and storming back into the office building. She was so annoyed she completely did not see Mr. Leo turning the corner in front of her, and she collided straight into his chest, spilling the last of her coffee all over both of them.

"Shit!" She squealed.

Mr. Leo looked stunned, and was about to break all hell, until he saw quite how upset the woman in front of him was.

"I am so, so, sorry Mr. Leo! Oh my god, let me grab something to wipe down your suit. I'm so sorry. Oh my god. I understand if you want to fire me. I'll pay for any damages. I'm sorry!" Lucy babbled patting at his jacket with her hands, as if that would help.

"Stop, Lucy," he ordered.

She jumped back, her hands behind her back, head down, waiting for her punishment.

"This isn't the first time this has happened. I actually did it to my old boss once, too," he spoke softly, reaching out to grab her chin and raise her head up, "accidents happen."

The man cocked his head and smiled. Lucy thought she was going to throw up.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Leo," she whispered for good measure.

"What did I say about calling me that? My name is Loke. How you finding the new job? Nearly a week in right? Getting a feel for things?"

Lucy didn't know what to say, so just nodded.

Her boss chuckled, "How about you fill me in over some drinks tonight? You can show me your story, I'll give you some pointers, and we can celebrate your temporary promotion, all in one."

Now Lucy knew she was going to throw up. Was the boss asking her out on a date?

The world started spinning.

"Strictly professional of course," he added, "I just hate being stuck in this office all the time, it's nice to have a change of scenery."

Lucy nodded and smiled, "Sure."

"Great, meet me downstairs at six, I should be finished up by then. Don't forget your notes."

Lucy watched him walk away before gripping on to the wall for dear life. Could the men in her life please just let her have a night on the couch with her dog?

-----

After leaving Lucy, Natsu strolled down Magnolia's high street in search of something to do. Why was he still even here? He rattled his brain for an answer, but didn't like where his thoughts went.

It's not just for Lucy, no good jobs have come up either, there was nowhere else to go, he thought.

He stepped past one of the old bars that Fairy Tail acquired in a hostile take over. It was now used for money laundering and a front for shady deals. The cops could never get enough evidence to prove it though. The best they ever came up with warranted the arrest of a few low level drug dealers that hung around there, but nothing more.

Zeref ruled from the shadows. He was an expert at keeping those important to operations hidden from scrutiny. The cops knew Fairy Tail existed, and that it was ruled by a ruthless leader, but could never get enough info to track down any of the true kingpins. The higher ranks of the gang were one of the best kept secrets in Fiore. For that, Natsu was still grateful to his brother.

"Hoping to catch a glimpse of an old bud, hot head?" Laxus' voice carried heavily on the air behind Natsu.

He spun on his heels slowly.

"Why you hangin' around a place like this? You been demoted to babysittin' the new recruits?" Natsu said dismissively.

"I fancied a breather. A drink away from the politics of the inner circle, if you will."

"Cool. See you round," Natsu tried to walk away.

"Meet me at Love and Lucky tonight," Laxus said smoothly as he lit a cigarette, not even bothering to look at Natsu.

Natsu didn't even turn around to reply, "Nope."

"It will be like old times, you can fill me in on your latest adventures," Laxus called after him.

Natsu stopped and turned to scowl at the blonde brute.

"You that desperate for a friend? Things really that bad?"

"Nah. I'm just bored and fancied mixing it up a bit. It can be completely unofficial, no politics whatsoever," Laxus attempted to reassure.

Natsu didn't trust Laxus as far as he could throw him, and he didn't believe for a second that Zeref would allow them to meet without a reason, but his devious nature got the better of him. Lucy had already ditched him tonight, what else was he gonna do?

"See you there at six," Natsu confirmed as he carried on his way.

Laxus let out a low chuckle behind him.

-----

Lucy followed Loke into a cocktail bar called Love & Lucky, a bar that always appeared far too expensive for her to bother going in.

She clutched her satchel, feeling far too under dressed for such an establishment. She was in the blue maxi dress she wore the first time she bumped into Natsu, which wasn't too bad, but the coffee stains all over her didn't help her confidence. Loke had seemingly changed out of his stained clothes into another black suit, white shirt combo. He must have a stash of them in his office, Lucy surmised.

As he walked towards the bar, he pulled off his tie and stashed it in his jacket pocket. Loosening his top shirt buttons he ordered a scotch on the rocks.

He turned to Lucy, "And the lady will have?"

"A water will be fine," she panicked.

"Nonsense, no serious work gets done over water!"

"Erm... A gin and tonic then, please," she half whispered.

Her heart was beating at a million pounds a minute. Was this really normal work place behaviour?

The bartender handed Loke their drinks and the boss guided the two of them to a booth. Lucy was too freaked out about what she was getting herself into, to notice the men donned in fine suits sat in the booth in the furthest corner of the bar.

"Isn't that your lady?" Laxus scoffed.

Natsu could feel his jaw clenching and his fists tightening. Who the fuck was that douche with Lucy?

"She ain't my lady."

Natsu tried to be nonchalant as he took a swig of his whisky.

"That's not what word on the street says," Laxus pried.

"Oughtta get better sources then," Natsu snarled.

"I saw you with my own eyes wining and dining her at Blue Pegasus." Laxus teased.

"I was bored. Same reason I'm sat here with you right now. Everyone gonna start think we're datin' next?"

Laxus just smirked and took a sip of his drink. He knew Natsu well enough to realise when he was getting all fired up, and whatever scene was unfolding in the booth across the bar, was certainly sending sparks flying around his brain.

"I'll get us another round," Laxus yawned.

The man clicked his fingers and the bar keep knew exactly what to do. He rushed straight over with two glasses of top shelf whisky, ignoring all the other customers at the bar.

Natsu took it and knocked it straight back, not taking his eyes off the ginger prick sat with Lucy for a second.

Laxus sighed.

"Just go bash his brains in in the parking lot already. I can't be fucked to sit here all night with you brooding."

"I have no reason to give a shit who that girl drinks with," Natsu sounded like he was reminding himself that, rather than Laxus.

"Whatever, I'm going for a smoke."

Laxus stood up and straightened out his suit jacket, but didn't button it up. He walked towards the doors to the smoking area, and as he walked past Lucy's table, dropped his lighter next to her.

"Sorry miss," he said as he went to bend down.

"Oh! It's no problem, let me!" Lucy bent down and grabbed the lighter, as she did so, Laxus looked at Natsu from the corner of his eye and smirked.

As she held out the lighter for him, Laxus bent down to meet her. He stroked her hand and let his fingers linger for a second too long, whilst making sure his jacket flipped open a little, flashing Loke the gun he had in his shoulder holster.

"Thank you, miss," he sent her her a dashing smile and a wink with his scarred eye.

As he opened the back door he spared a second to glance at Natsu again. The man was close to erupting as he pulled at the collar of the white shirt he was wearing under his suit jacket. Instead of stripping for a fight, he snapped his fingers aggressively at the waiter for another whisky. Laxus felt pained for a slight second, for a moment he thought Natsu actually looked like he could be his old friend again. He missed winding up that hot head.

Loke looked slightly stunned, not being able to make sense of the show the blonde stranger just put on. Lucy carried on arranging her notes for him to read completely unaware of what just happened.

"I'm just gonna head to the bathroom before we get started. Back in a second, Lucy." He smiled as he stumbled from the booth.

Lucy watched him walk off, relieved she could actually breathe for a second, when she noticed the blonde man walk back into the bar. She admired how muscle bound he appeared to be, and how finely groomed he was despite his jagged scar, but she could have sworn she recognised him from somewhere. She turned to follow him with her eyes, telling herself she wasn't checking him out, just being nosey, when her mouth dropped open as she saw who he went to sit with.

Without even thinking she stormed over to their booth.

"Natsu! What are you doing here?" She demanded.

Natsu didn't look up from his drink, as he raised it to his mouth and knocked the dark liquid back in one go again. He seemed more formidable than normal, Lucy took a step back.

"Drinkin', you?" He shrugged.

"Erm, working..." Lucy shuffled on the spot.

Lexus raised an eyebrow, Natsu shot him a look that told him to keep quiet.

"Enjoy," Natsu drawled sarcastically.

Lucy stared at him a moment longer before turning around, not liking the uncomfortable energy between them.

"So you paid her to hang out with you? It finally makes sense!" Lexus jeered when she was out of earshot.

"She didn't mean it like that," Natsu said bluntly.

"If she didn't realise how that sounded, then she's way too innocent to keep you entertained," Lexus scoffed.

All Natsu wanted to do by this point, was leave the bar. Leave shit head Lexus, leave Lucy on her date. Just fucking, leave.

Instead, he clicked his fingers for another drink. He had to play this one out.

He steered conversation away from Lucy, got Lexus interested with a story about hunting down a dowager's favourite rent boy, who tried to escape to a village in Alvarez he was so fed up of looking at her saggy tits.

He stayed wary of letting any real information slip to Laxus, but he tried to relax. He was biding his time, waiting for Lucy and the ginger prick to leave.

His mood started to shift to some form of mild adoration, as he watched her enthusiastically flick through all the notebooks and scraps of paper in front of her, excitedly pointing to bits of the page and looking up at the man in front of her. The guy grabbed a page and read it whilst sipping his drink and leaning nonchalantly into the booth.

Lucy looked at him hopefully, before sinking into her seat and staring at the table, as the man dropped the page he was holding and let it float down. Natsu could tell whatever the man had said had crushed her. He was no longer annoyed at Lucy, but infuriated at the man who could have that effect on her.

He wanted to go over, but Laxus spoke up.

"Natsu, the real reason I wanted to meet tonight. Your brother. He's getting kookier than ever. I respect him, I admire him, but I want him never to forget that my grandfather was the one who took him in and created the foundations of his kingdom. He's walking around like a fucking emperor. He's getting consumed by the shadows. He needs you back."

Natsu stiffened, "When hell freezes over."

"He needs to remember he's not untouchable, before he fucks us all."

"Then considered yourselves all fucked," Natsu retorted bluntly and downed the rest of his drink.

He watched Loke stand up to go to the smoking area, and Lucy gather up all her notes looking deflated. He stood up to follow the man.

Laxus sighed.

Natsu strutted across the bar in his fitted black suit, tightening up his skinny black tie, and running his hand through his jagged hair as he went.

Lucy looked up to see him walk past, she went to say something but the dark energy pouring from the man made her stop.

He swung the smoking area doors open, pulled a cigarette and leant against the wall.

"Nice catch," he spoke as he lit the cigarette in his mouth.

"You talking to me?" Loke turned.

"Don't see anyone else standin' out here, do ya?" Natsu spoke bluntly.

"Yeah she's alright, a bit too eager to please, but I guess I am her boss afterall," Loke chuckled.

Natsu inhaled another drag of smoke and pulled himself off the wall.



"You make a habit of taking out the girls from your work?"

"Only the busty ones," Loke winked.

Natsu scowled.

"She looked pretty dejected in there."

Loke eyed him, "You been watching us all evening, huh? You know how it is, feed their insecurities, and swoop in and care for their wounds at the last minute. Become the hero offering hope. Then they're putty in your hands."

Natsu had heard enough, he flicked his cigarette across the walled in courtyard, and calmly lifted his jacket, pulling the gun he packed in his shoulder holster just in case Laxus got funny. Slowly he turned it over in his hand.

Loke gulped.

Natsu looked up at him with an expression he reserved for those he wanted to kill. His face was calm, but the fire in his eyes was unmistakable. He slowly walked closer to Lucy's boss and lifted the gun at a leisurely pace. He placed it loosely under Loke's chin.

"You go near her again with that bullshit, and you'll wake up bleeding out with no cock left," Natsu lowered the gun and patted Loke's groin with it.

He carried on.

"You will stop manipulating her just for a blow job in your office, and show her some respect. I only want to hear about how you've praised her for her talent from now on," Natsu hissed as he pulled the gun away.

Loke looked like he was gonna piss himself.

"Y-yeah," he stuttered.

Natsu left to turn around, but before he did, couldn't resist punching the man in the gut and spitting on his shoe.

As he walked away he called, "You mention one word of this to her, and your cock won't be the only thing I cut off."

Natsu pointed to his neck as he walked through the doors.

Lucy looked up at the sound of the door opening and tried to make eye contact with Natsu, who just blanked her. She watched him march across the bar and signal to his friend that they were leaving.

The bartender bowed to them as they left and Lucy felt a bit sick as she watched them head out the exit without looking back. The confidence and the outfits they both donned made the two of them look like they belonged to the mafia.

Loke came stumbling back in, eyeing the room nervously before bowing to Lucy and telling her that she was doing a good job really, and that another week or so would mean she'd get the hang of it. Then told her he was leaving.

Lucy just sat by herself, stunned at the drastically fast turn of events, staring at her still full glass of gin and the notes scattered around her.

"What the fuck?" She muttered the phrase that was fast becoming her mantra.

# Chapter 7

## Chapter Notes

This is a reaaally long chapter, but covers a fair bit of ground, so bear with. I just didn't know where to cut it off... Also some proper Nalu developments creeping in!

Have to declare, trigger warning for familial abuse towards the end of the chapter. I'll mark with \*\*\*

It was finally Friday evening and Lucy was looking forward to having the whole weekend ahead of her. She needed to put this bizarre week behind her.

As Lucy gathered her things, she noted how she hadn't seen Loke around all day. Not a particularly rare occurrence, but after the night before, something didn't sit right with her.

She decided to make her way to Levy's desk.

"Hey Lev, can I ask you a favour?" She asked cautiously.

Levy sat at her desk with a collection of pens stuck in her hair, staring at her computer screen with an irked expression.

"Sure, Lu?" She yawned.

"Could you ask Gajeel for Natsu's number? I need to ask him something."

Levy widened her eyes, "I don't know, Lu... I mean, I think Natsu is a great guy, with biceps to die for, and is misunderstood definitely, but do you really want to go, like, *there*?"

"Why is everyone so set against me even being near the guy?" Lucy groaned, "You just said yourself you think he's a great guy? I just, I just want to figure him out a bit more, is all?"

Levy cocked a soft smile, "Oh Lu... Ok. I'll ask him."

"Thanks, Lev," Lucy reciprocated her friend's smile, but gave her a knowing look, "don't stay here too late."

Levy rolled her eyes and shooed her friend away with her hand, "Get out of here girl, go home and fantasize about Natsu already!"

Lucy darted off and made it out of the building without having to talk to anyone else, and felt her phone vibrate in her bag as she lifted it out to see Levy had sent her a mobile number.

She walked all the way home thinking about that certain pink haired moron. Replaying the ominous way he carried himself in the bar last night, compared to the childish way he acted around Gajeel and the others. She had figured Natsu was probably a trouble maker from the way his friends talked about him and the scraps she'd witnessed between them. She also knew he was a ladies man just from the way he so confidently flirted and, well, the way he looked. There was no way a guy who looked so rugged and handsome hadn't had his fair share of women. But she had never pegged him as truly dangerous or threatening before. Gray would skin her alive, but she had to admit Natsu's tough guy act from the night before actually only had her craving him more.

When she eventually reached her apartment, she collapsed on the couch as she got in. There she let Plue jump all over her before he snuggled into her lap. She stared at the ceiling deep in thought for a while, before pulling out her phone out.

"Fuck it," she nodded to herself.

She scrolled down to Levy's message, clicked on the number she sent, and pressed the dial button. She held her breath.

No answer.

"Huh, didn't plan for that," Lucy acknowledged.

She decided to send a text, *"Hey Natsu, it's Lucy. I hope this is the right number. Sorry, I asked Levy to get it from Gajeel. Hope you don't mind. I just wanted to ask you something?"*

Seconds later, her phone started ringing. It was him.

"Hey," she tried to sound less nervous than she actually was.

"Hey," Natsu replied.

"Erm, yeah, sorry if it's weird that I got your number," she mumbled.

"Nah. Was surprised you would actually want it," he stated.

Lucy let out a forced laugh. She supposed she was meant to have been put off by him being a dick last night.

"I'm sorry. For being a dick last night." Natsu declared.

Lucy hadn't planned for that either.

She tried to be nonchalant, "Huh, yeah, you were weird... Who was that guy you were with?"

"An old friend. I know, I just didn't want to impact on your date. So thought it would be best to kind of avoid you."

"Oh. It wasn't a date, Natsu," Lucy said with a hint of concern.

She didn't know why she was so worried he thought it was.

"Well whatever, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I was so cold to you. So, what did you wanna ask?" He asked trying to lighten the tone.

"I thought maybe I'd see if your offer still stood, for the film?" Lucy's heart felt like it was going to beat out of her chest.

"Really? After last night? But yeah, sure thing, we can go to the movies," he chuckled.

"Well, I'm not sure I can be bothered to face anymore of the public at large this week, I kind of just wanted to chill," she gulped, "how about I come round to your hotel? Order room service? Like you first suggested?"

There was a pause and she heard Natsu let out a deep breath, followed by yet another chuckle.

Finally, he replied, "Sure. I'll send a cab to pick you up at seven?"

"Sounds good," Lucy smiled to herself.

-----

Soon enough, Lucy found herself climbing out of a taxi in front of one of the most expensive hotels in Magnolia; Raven Tail. It used to be the kind of place only criminals and business men hiding from their wives would frequent. A new business strategy meant that it upped it's game to compete with the other five star establishments, but it could never quite shift it's shady history. Lucy didn't want to read too much into that.

She entered the building and quickly realised she had no idea which room Natsu was staying in. She mulled ringing him over in her head, but wanted to seem independent and resourceful, so she asked the front desk.

The two women receptionists eyed her up and down, before smirking at each other and ringing his room. Lucy waited patiently, whilst their eyes continued to burrow into her. When the one woman eventually hung up the phone she looked slightly disappointed, before telling Lucy the room number and to head up.

Lucy suddenly felt smug. She was the one visiting Natsu's room tonight. But then that realisation hit, she really was the one visiting Natsu's room tonight. Her smugness soon turned into nerves, as she replayed the image of the man looming over her, ready to kiss her outside her apartment the other night.

However having gone this far, she knew she couldn't turn back now, and jumped in the lift. She inspected herself in the mirror; she hadn't wanted to dress up too much, seeing as they were just meant to be sitting in, but still wanted to feel appealing. Only for herself, of course. She wore her grey t-shirt dress, liking how it sat on her thighs, but this time paired it with some biker boots. She wore her hair loosely pulled back in a messy plait, and some very simple, classy make up.

The lift stopped at its floor and she took a deep breathe as she stepped into the hallway. She found the room that housed the man who plagued her thoughts, and hesitated.

What was she doing, stepping into the dragon's lair?

"Screw it," she nodded to herself with determination.

She knocked.

A few seconds passed before the door swung open.

Natsu filled the doorway before stepping to the side and leaning on the door frame slightly. Lucy oggled him for a fleeting moment. He wore loose black skinny jeans and a baggy, deep v-neck white tee that accentuated his tan and clung slightly to his bulging pecs. She noticed a scar on his neck that she hadn't clocked before, and his chiselled collar bones had a weird effect on her. His hair looked slightly damp, and his musky smell filled her nose. She looked down to see he was just wearing black socks on his feet, a fact that for some reason made her blush. It felt suddenly intimate to see him so dressed down.

"You gonna just stand there like a weirdo or you comin' in?" Natsu winked.

Lucy huffed.

"Hello to you too, Natsu," she grumbled as she pushed past him and headed into the room.

Natsu turned to watch her and leant back on the door as he closed it. He studied her frame from behind. She was wearing that grey dress that had him fantasizing nights before, and his brain was overloaded with the scent of her vanilla perfume from when she pushed past him. He admired the way the dress slightly clung to her peachy ass, and unashamedly he imagined bending her over the back of the couch, pulling her by her hair, and sliding the material up her milky skin to reveal the utopia that hid beneath.

Lucy stopped in the middle of the room and looked around.

"Being a private investigator must really pay off, huh?" She said absentmindedly, inspecting the lavish decor.

Natsu chuckled and pushed himself off the door, abandoning his fantasy.

"Depends if I'm interested in a job for the money or the challenge," he shrugged.

"The most challenging jobs aren't the highest paid?"

"Not always. Rich people tend to be the most lazy. They will just throw money at the most basic problems if it means someone else will deal with it."

Lucy's thoughts shot to her father, and the maids he hired to watch over her after her mother's death. He left his whole daughters life for someone else to deal with.

"Yeah," she simply replied.

Lucy walked over to the massive bed with what looked to be white silk bed linen, and plonked herself on it, bouncing up and down as if she was testing the mattress.

Natsu raised an eyebrow, "I thought we'd at least watch one film before we climbed into bed, Lucy."

Lucy stopped bouncing and shot him an icy glare.

Natsu laughed, "I was joking, obviously."

He padded over to a mahogany sideboard and grabbed the t.v. remote and room service menu, before walking to the other side of the room and throwing himself down on to the navy velvet Chesterfield that sat in front of the wall mounted telly.

Lucy slowly got up and followed suit.

"Do you mind if I take my boots off?" She asked.

Natsu looked at her oddly, "Do whatever you want, ya weirdo."

Lucy narrowed her eyes at the man before bending down and removing the offending items. She pulled her legs up and curled them under herself, keeping a wide gap between them both.

Natsu was perhaps a little too disappointed when he observed that she managed to do so without even the smallest flash of her underwear, but he soon found that her lingerie wasn't the only thing he wanted to admire about her. He studied her for a second, feeling engulfed by her presence. Her eyes were like small universes, her hair like spun gold, her lips were plump and begging to be explored with his own...

He shook himself free from her captivating good looks, and held the menu out directly in front of her face to block it, "Pick whatever you want!"

Lucy grabbed the menu and looked at him dubiously from the corner of her eyes before studying the piece of paper.

"I really like the sound of waffles, but can't pick what type," she sighed.

Natsu plucked the menu from her hands and walked over to the phone on the bedside table.

"Hey! I wasn't done with that!" Lucy protested.

"Send us one of every waffle on the menu, and two bottles of the '69 Chateau Cheval Blanc. Two glasses." He spoke smoothly into the receiver before placing it back in the cradle and walking back towards the couch.

Lucy raised an eyebrow, "You could have at least said please and thank you."

Natsu lowered himself to sit facing her from the opposite side of the sofa, drinking up the way she challenged him so much.

"Guess so," he smiled.

They stared at each other for a moment, lost in their own personal fantasies all over again.

Natsu resurfaced once more, and he shut his eyes for a second preparing himself for what he was about to do next.

"Lucy, something's been playin' on my mind. I don't wanna offend you though. Do ya mind if I ask you?" Natsu eyed her cautiously.

Lucy took in a deep breath, "I guess not. I kind of came here because I wanted to ask you something too."

"Ok. I'll make mine quick... I've been wonderin', how did a girl who was the heir to a fortune such as the Heartfilias, end up living in a small apartment by herself, working for a city newspaper?" Natsu grimaced as he waited for her reaction.

Lucy stared into open space, for so long that Natsu wondered if she'd even registered what he'd said.

"Don't you follow the news? Father lost everything before he died," Lucy shrugged.

Natsu frowned, "Which was what? Just over a year ago? It seems like you've been livin' this life a lot longer than that."

Lucy looked up at him with her eyes wide, and shifted in her seat a little, before glancing away. There was a long pause.

"Well, I- I ran away," she half whispered and wrapped her arms around herself.

"Huh. That so," Natsu simply replied as he stared into the distance.

"Don't you want to know why?" She spoke softly.

Sensing how uncomfortable she was he smiled softly, "I figure you'll tell me when you want to. Now... Your turn to ask the questions."

"Oh, y-yeah. Erm..." Lucy eyed the mysterious man wearily, "Last night... Did you do something... To Loke, my boss?"

Natsu laughed, "What?!"

"It's just, you didn't seem like, well, you, last night. Or at least not the you that I have come to know. And I saw you follow him outside, for him to come back in a babbling mess. Did you, threaten him, or something?"

"Why would I do that ya weirdo?" Natsu chuckled, doing his best to hide his discomfort. He hadn't countered on Lucy so being goddamn smart.

"I don't know. But did you?" She breathed.



"Nope," he went on to lie with ease.

"I don't think I believe you," she whispered.

"What do you want me to say, Luce? I stormed out there and threatened him with a loaded gun? I know you think you're hot and all, but men don't just lose their minds at the sight of ya," he teased.

Lucy's face turned bright red, she grabbed the pillow next to her and threw it at his head.

"You jerk! That's not what I think!"

She sat up to throw another cushion at him, but there was a knock at the door.

"Thank the Gods, I think my life just flashed before my eyes!" Natsu laughed as he ran up to the door.

Room service wheeled in a cart and the suited man went to open the wine for the guests, but Natsu grabbed it before he could.

"I've got it from here, thanks," he half demanded.

"As you wish sir," the man bowed and stepped back into the hallway, closing the door behind him.

Lucy watched, her mouth slightly agape, as Natsu's biceps flexed as he effortlessly uncorked the wine. He poured two glasses and passed one over to her, before collecting the plates of waffles a couple at a time and placing them on the mahogany coffee table before them.

"I can't believe you ordered all this, I don't think I'll even be able to finish one plate, let alone eight!" Lucy laughed.

"You don't have to act all girly and polite, I bet you could devour at least half of them by yourself," Natsu smirked.

"Well I think I'm going to have to try a bite of each at the very least," the blonde admitted as she leant in with a fork.

Natsu sipped his wine, leaning against the arm of the sofa, feeling all kinds of content as he watched Lucy smile as she bit into a piece of the strawberry cheesecake flavoured waffle.

"What movie you in the mood for?" He asked as he turned the telly on and started flicking the movies loaded onto the telly.

"Something that will keep me awake so I don't drift into a food coma," Lucy sighed happily.

"A horror movie then!" Natsu's eyes brightened.

Natsu didn't give Lucy much time to respond as he picked out a movie and got up to switch off the lights like an excited kid. Settling back into the couch he started digging into some of

the waffles too.

Lucy sipped her glass of wine and hummed in appreciation. It had been a while since anyone had even attempted to spoil her half as much as Natsu. She knew she was playing into his hand, but she started to simply not care. However she also knew that even though he was winning her over, she was not going to just lie back and let him get his way entirely. She made sure to leave plenty of distance between them on the couch.

As the movie went on, Lucy jumped several times and had to cover her eyes so not to scream. Natsu found it hilarious, handing her back the cushion she threw at him so she could hide behind it.

"This is like some form of sadistic torture! Did you just play this to watch me squirm?" She groaned, and chucked back another glass of wine.

Natsu laughed as he topped up her drink, a crude comment about knowing other ways to make her squirm on the tip of his tongue but as he leant over her to get to her glass, he felt her breath fan his cheeks.

Her sweet smell engulfed his thoughts all over again. He lingered for a second, and turned his head towards her. They were eye to eye, barely millimetres away from each other's faces. After gazing at each other for a moment too long, he felt Lucy's breath hitch. He looked down at her lips, her tongue darted across them ever so subtly.

His mind went blank. He stole a kiss.

Then he pulled back almost immediately.

"Sorry," he blurted out.

The wine must have truly gone to Lucy's head, as in that moment the plan to not lay everything out for Natsu went out the window. She reached out to hold his cheek, and pulled him back towards her lips. She closed her eyes, and bridged the gap, pressing her mouth against his.

Natsu was hesitant for a second, but let his urges take over. Returning the kiss, he slipped his hand up Lucy's arm, resting it on her shoulder for a second, before roughly taking her cheek in his hand, letting his fingers become entwined in her hair.

Lucy hummed in approval from the extra contact. She laid her hand on his shoulder, pressing into him as she shifted her position slightly so she could lean closer to his body.

Natsu made his motions firmer, more intense, then swiped his tongue across her lips. Lucy opened her mouth to let him in and their tongues stroked each other, before they both became hungry for more. Natsu grabbed her hips and started to push Lucy back up to the corner of the couch, draping himself over her slightly. They began to paw at each other more desperately. Lucy ran her hands through Natsu's soft hair and his tee rode up to reveal his abs as their kiss got more heated. Suddenly however, Lucy hiccupped.

Natsu suddenly came to his senses. This girl was probably drunk. That may have not stopped him in the past, but for some reason he didn't want it to be that way with Lucy.

He stopped kissing her. Pressing his forehead against hers, he cracked a small smile.

"We should stop," he breathed.

Lucy pulled herself up from underneath him looking slightly embarrassed.

"I never figured you would be the perfect gentleman," she mumbled.

"You'd rather I wasn't?" Natsu looked at her slightly confused as he sat up straighter and ran his fingers through his hair, mussing it back up the way he liked it after Lucy's pawing.

"I don't know... I should probably go..." Lucy mused to herself and almost tripped over as she got up to look for her shoes.

Natsu grabbed her hand and pulled her back down to the sofa.

"We've still got the second film in the series to watch, and it would be a shame not to finish the last bottle of wine," he shuffled in his seat awkwardly whilst lowering his head to try and capture her gaze.

"Am I wrong in thinking you were just acting concerned about how inebriated I possibly was?" Lucy scowled.

"No. You're not wrong. Ugh, I don't think my brain is processing things very well right now," he scratched the back of his neck, "But there's no harm in us just sitting here having a good time, carrying on like it was before?"

Lucy felt a slight pang rocket through her, was it actually that he realised he just wasn't attracted to her like that? She twisted her hands in her lap and stared at the floor.

"I've really screwed this up, haven't I?" Natsu said concerned.

"No, it's fine. You're right. Let's finish the films."

Lucy grabbed the bottle of wine and topped up her glass, before settling back into the corner of the sofa. She stared intently at the screen, not daring to look anywhere else.

Natsu sighed, and followed suit. They watched the rest of the films in silence, aside from the grimaces Lucy let slip every now and then.

Half way through the second film, Natsu noticed Lucy fighting to keep her eyes open. She had curled up into a ball and had her head tucked in her arms on the side of the couch. Before he knew it, she was properly asleep.

He let the rest of the film play out. As the end credits rolled onto the screen he sat up and turned the telly off. Lucy had barely moved, she was well and truly gone. He leant over her

and stroked her hair in an attempt to wake her up, but she just nestled into his touch, murmuring something faintly.

His heart flipped at how vulnerable she was allowing herself to be.

"Gods," he sighed.

This girl was going to be the death of him, he already knew.

He padded softly over to his bed and rolled the covers back, before returning to the sofa and gently scooping her up, princess style. She barely flinched, just moulded to the shape of his body and breathed his name. He nuzzled her hair with his nose in response, getting lost in himself once more. He slowly lay her down on to the mattress and tucked her into the duvet. She coiled up into the soft material and rolled over away from him.

Natsu watched over her for a small while before heading to the wardrobe to grab a throw and some grey, jersey jogging bottoms. Somehow he didn't think he should sleep in the nude tonight. He collapsed onto the sofa and propped his head up on his arm. He closed his eyes, willing himself to fall asleep, smiling to himself as he could hear Lucy's faint breathing close by.

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The next morning, Lucy opened her eyes slightly and stretched her body, feeling soft silk brush against her cheek. Her eyes then snapped completely open, and she bolted up right.

"What the fuck?" She whispered to herself.

She looked down at herself, she was still fully dressed.

"That's a good sign," she nodded.

She looked to the side of the bed and saw no evidence of anyone having slept on the opposite pillows.

"Ok, this is ok," she reassured herself, speaking louder now.

She heard some faint grumbling come from the couch across the room. An arm poked up over the top, and grabbed the back as it pulled up the rest of the person who resided there. Natsu's head appeared and he blinked a couple of times before running his hand through his messy hair and turning to face Lucy.

"Are you always so noisy in the morning?" Natsu croaked.

"Huh? I've hardly said anything! Wait, that's not the problem here. Why am I in this bed?!" Lucy snapped.

"Ughhh, noisy!" Natsu reiterated.

Lucy huffed and waited for the man to get his bearings. He slowly swung his legs off the couch and stood up. Grabbing an empty glass off the sideboard and heading into the bathroom to fill it with water.

He lumbered out gulping it down and rubbing a hand over his bare stomach. Lucy blushed as she took in his rock hard abs and the way his flesh was chiselled into the shape of a v that disappeared beyond his waistband. He had a painful looking scar in the shape of a cross on his left hip.

If Natsu noticed her oggling, he didn't say anything. He just offered her the rest of his glass of water and sat on the side of the bed.

"You fell asleep and I couldn't wake you, so carried you to the bed. I slept on the sofa the whole night. You don't need to worry," he reassured her.

She sipped some of the cold water, not realising until that moment quite how dry her mouth was.

Natsu leaned back and stretched across the bottom of the bed.

"Breakfast, that's what we need," he thought out loud, "want to go somewhere nice?"

Lucy did like the sound of that, but groaned.

"It's already midday. Plus I don't have any fresh clothes to wear..."

Natsu turned his head to face her and screwed his face up in thought.

"You can wear one of my shirts if you want, seeing as that's pretty much what you're wearing anyway. You can have a shower too so you can feel clean. There's spare towels, and a hair dryer 'n' all that girly shit provided in the bathroom," he gazed at her intently, waiting for her to reply.

He was right, she was pretty much just wearing one baggy t-shirt.

"Ok," she mumbled, "if you've got a shirt long enough."

Natsu yawned as he stood up and stalked over to the room's wardrobe, flinging it open.

"Take your pick," he shrugged, before selecting some stuff for himself to wear.

Whilst Lucy got up out of bed and inspected his clothes, Natsu quickly took his turn in the shower.

He came out of the bathroom drying his hair with a towel, with just a pair of jeans on as the t-shirt he selected hung in his hand. Lucy was starting to get annoyed by the man's refusal to wear a shirt. She was surely going to get a nose bleed if she had to stare at him like that much longer.

Lucy brushed past him and made sure to lock the bathroom door behind her. She didn't want to admit it to him, but she was actually quite touched that he let her sleep in his bed. However she didn't want him to think an unlocked door was an invitation. Not that she was even sure he'd want to join her.

The memories of her drunken fumble with the man came flooding back. She couldn't deny that she liked it, feeling hot between her legs as she remembered the way he pushed himself on top of her, but she had no idea what his later reaction meant. Had he just let the alcohol get the better of him before he remembered who he was actually kissing, and got revolted by it? None of it made any sense to her.

She tried to wash away the confusion with the steaming hot shower. Either way, today was a new day, and they were starting it with breakfast.

Natsu paced about as he waited for Lucy, the memories of last night messing with his head too. He'd never in his life had a hot girl throwing herself at him, for him to turn away. Plenty of ugly chicks and old bags that's for sure, but never someone like Lucy.

That was the thing though, he realised, he'd never had someone like Lucy. He couldn't place what the hell it was about her. Sure she was beautiful, and had sex appeal by the droves, but there was more to it. He thought it could be the way she challenged him, teased him, didn't just mindlessly agree with him. Natsu would admit she thought she was attractive from the moment she first bumped into him, but he never thought of her as more than a possible fuck. It was when she stood up for that coffee shop girl, that he felt the first spark.

Lucy was a girl who clearly possessed a vulnerable side, a side where she was desperate to prove her worth to somebody, anybody. However that just made Natsu all the more impressed when she didn't sacrifice her integrity, and stood up to him, not caring what he thought of her if it meant defending what she believed in.

Then of course there was the mystery of her childhood. It sounded like they couldn't have grown up in more different environments, but they perhaps faced equal hardships and betrayals, both running to survive. In that sense, maybe they were birds of a feather.

He snapped out of his over analysing as he heard the bathroom door unlock. He quickly threw on his t-shirt and went to grab his boots. He sat on the sofa and looked up to see Lucy emerge in one of his white dress shirts, her hair tied up in a messy pony tail. The shirt was almost too short, but she was just managing to get away with it, as it cut off mid way down her thighs. She would just have to be wary of bending over.

She sat herself next to him on the sofa, and pulled on her boots, then grabbed for her leather jacket and pulled it on over his shirt. The overall result looked amazingly badass and stupidly arousing. Natsu steamed up inside, smug that it was an article of his clothing that she was pulling off so well.

"Where we heading then Mr. Swanky?" Lucy teased.

"Mr. Swanky? You need to work on your name callin' if you're gonna be a journalist. I dunno, let's just go for a stroll in the sun and see what takes our fancy?" Natsu was fed up of

planning, he much preferred just seeing where life lead him.

They made their way out of the building, Lucy smiled to the women at the reception desk who in response just eyed her up and down in disgust. She didn't care, if they were jealous she was getting to wear Natsu's clothes after spending the night with him, it only made her feel smug.

The two of them walked in content silence as the sun shone down. Lucy admired the way the trees were beginning to blossom and the songs the birds were singing. Natsu admired Lucy.

They settled on a small bakery with outside seating across from one of Magnolia's small parks. Natsu ordered them coffee, orange juice and the breakfast special, then leaned back in his chair and looked at the sky.

Lucy studied him, "How did you get your scars?" She asked without thinking.

Natsu kept his head facing towards the sky but looked down his nose at her.

"I told ya I grew up as an orphaned street rat right? The life meant I got myself into some rough situations is all."

That wasn't a lie, but it wasn't the truth.

The one on his neck was nothing much, a battle scar from a bullet that got perilously close to taking his life. The one on his hip was a bigger story. It was a stab wound he received just as him and his friends started with Fairy Tail.

One of Makarov's old recruits had started a fight with Rogue. Rogue didn't like to fight, but when he did he was dangerous, it's like he became a shadow and he moved with stealth. The man got more than he bargained for, Rogue's temper soared and before he could accidentally snuff out the old drunk's life, Zeref nodded to Natsu to intervene. Natsu pulled his friend away, but as he turned to face his opponent, the old man stabbed him. At that point Natsu didn't care about the man's life anymore, punching him in the head until he fell to the ground, where he carried on until his face was nothing but a bloody pulp. This incident was what sparked Zeref to really want control; the silent rage he felt at someone harming his brother.

The irony then, that the scar on his face was caused by Zeref. Natsu was getting too big for his boots, ignoring Zeref's well calculated orders, to do things guns blazing instead. Really, Zeref was just getting concerned for his brother's safety. When Natsu came home from a job that he'd been specifically told to hang back on, Zeref finally snapped. The older brother ordered everyone out of the room bar Natsu and Laxus. He wanted Laxus to witness what would happen if he got as cocky as his partner. The brothers fought, but Zeref outpowered him. Whereas Natsu raged like a flame, Zeref was calm and collected. He managed to get his younger brother on his back before pulling out a small knife from his belt buckle, he ran it slowly down Natsu's cheek, before throwing it across the room in a rage and walking away.

Natsu shivered at the memory.

"Natsu? Natsu! The food's here!"

Her voice like honey, pulling him back to reality. He blinked and stared at her wide eyed. Lucy, he thought. Sweet Lucy. This girl was the first thing that ever made him want to truly escape his past.

"You alright?" Lucy seemed genuinely concerned, lowering her head in an attempt to meet his eyes with her own.

She touched his shoulder and he finally looked up.

"Your eyes, they get so dark. I can't tell if it's anger or sadness. Why do you get like this? Where is your mind taking you?" The blonde pried.

Natsu closed his eyes and sighed. He wasn't deserving of a girl like Lucy. When he opened his eyes again he grinned down at the plate of food before him, then looked at Lucy like a dope.

Lucy frowned.

"You told me not to keep things bottled up Natsu, otherwise you lose your light, remember?" Lucy pointed her fork at him.

"Why do you care? It's not like you're gonna ever tell me your secrets," Natsu tried not to sound threatening, but even he heard the cut in his voice.

"You don't want to know. Would spoil a perfectly good breakfast," she dismissed.

"I guarantee I can deal with more discomfort than most, Lucy," he pressed.

Lucy placed her cutlery down and rested her chin in her hand, staring at the cherry blossoms falling in the breeze. She stayed silent for a small while.

Natsu suddenly felt guilty, if she didn't want to tell him she didn't have to. He was just being defensive about his own past. He was about to apologise, when she finally spoke up.

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"After my mother died, my father became a lost man. His grief consumed him, he bottled it up and like you said, he became dark..." she paused, "He couldn't look at me anymore, reminding him too much of the woman who left him. He hired a whole legion of people to care for me, just so he could be no where near me.

If I even tried to seek him out, you know, like a 10 year old girl would do, he'd become... violent. Smacking me, throwing me across the room, spanking me with his belt. I became the outlet for his pain."

Lucy's eyes began to mist. Natsu felt suddenly sick, this was a drastic turn of events.

"Lu-" he went to stop her, she held out her hand to still him.

There was more.



"I learnt to avoid him. I grew tough. We hardly saw each other, even though we lived in the same house. That was - that was until I started to hit puberty," she paused again, as if she was calculating the pros and cons of carrying her story on.

Natsu gulped, not liking where this was heading. He hated himself right now.

"I guess as I grew, there were things about me that reminded him of my mother other than my face. Things that he craved," Lucy began again, trying to remain firm, "he began to seek me out to punish me. Making up some menial thing I had done wrong, before bending me over so he couldn't see my true face, and spanking me with his belt, lifting up my skirts, admiring me from y'know, behind..." she grew quieter and closed her eyes, taking in a deep breath.

Natsu felt like he was shrinking to the size of a pea, he felt so shitty.

"He imagined I was her. The maids must have known what he was doing, but no one ever stopped him. He came to find me at least once a week to do this. Eventually he didn't just spank me, he started to - to... He evolved what he did..." Lucy snapped her eyes shut and began to shake her head, she couldn't say anymore.

Natsu went to grab her hand that was gripping her knee so tight her knuckles were white.

"You don't have to tell me anymore Luce, I'm sorry. I was a dick, I shouldn't have made you feel like you had to say. It's fine, you can stop," he pleaded.

She shook her head.

"I coped until I was 17, and then I couldn't do it any longer. I snapped, filled a bag with my clothes and some cash. Grabbed some pictures of my mother, her old charm bracelet full of star signs, and ran off into the night. I caught the train to Magnolia and spent the night asleep on a bench. That's where I met Gray, him and some other boys were walking to school. The other boys sniggered at me but he stopped to check I was ok. He skipped school and took me to his adoptive mother. They looked after me. That was nine years ago now, and my father never bothered to find me. I think he was as relieved as me that whatever that chapter was, it was over."

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Natsu nodded. That would explain why his intel had never revealed Lucy when it came to prior dealings with Jude Heartfilia. He was relieved really, as Fairy Tail would have no doubt used her against him in some way.

"So there you have it. The truth. Not even Gray knows all of it. I couldn't bring myself to admit what had been happening at first, and then it was always too late. I've known you just over a week, and you know my darkest secret," Lucy threw her hands up in the air and laughed at the madness of it all.

"Sorry. I have a bad habit of sucking information out of people, but I really didn't mean to upset you, Lucy."

Natsu looked sullen, but met her eyes and gave her a soft smile.

"Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me," he reassured her.

Lucy hadn't thought of it like that, but she supposed she really must have trusted him on some level.

"So do I get to hear about you now?" She cocked her head.

Natsu closed his eyes again and sighed, "You already know the gist. I lived a hardknock life, did some questionable things to survive."

"The specific skill set for tracking things down, the old friend's that look like mafia gunmen, the darkness in your eyes. Do I not get to hear about all that?" She pressed.

Natsu felt sick. She had just bared all, but he couldn't bring himself to divulge any further. Lucy had been through enough, he didn't want to become another man for her to fear.

"Not today," was the only reply he could muster.

"Do you not trust me?" Lucy eyed him.

"I don't trust you to longer no trust me once we go there. I will tell you Lucy, but not today. I understand if that answer makes you want to walk away. If it doesn't, then let me try to cheer you up, make up for what I made you just do?" He asked hopefully.

Lucy stared at him, she knew the man in front of her should have made her feel nervous, but he just didn't. He made her feel safe. Not even Gray had made her feel like he could really protect her from the past evils she had known, but whatever resided in Natsu's soul, she knew he possessed the strength to fight until the bitter end. His darkness almost thrilled her.

"Our food has gone cold," was all she replied.

Natsu looked down at his plate of bacon, eggs and pancakes.

"You're right," he laughed, "we can go get a hotdog in the park instead?"

Natsu paid the bill, despite Lucy insisting it was her turn to pay for something. He told her she could get the hotdogs if she was really that bothered.

They got their snack and Natsu lead them to sit beneath the biggest cherry tree in the park. They lay under it, gazing up at the sky, letting the blossoms fall and kiss their cheeks. Natsu turned to look at Lucy, she looked like a goddess. Her face glowing in the low spring sun, blossoms peppered her hair. She felt him staring and turned to return his gaze.

"What?" She scoffed.

"A man like me doesn't deserve to be here with a woman like you," he breathed.

She smiled softly, her eyes became hooded, "I think I'll be the judge of that."

He turned on his side to face her and pushed a stray hair to the side of her face. He was working up the courage to lean in and kiss her, to do it properly this time, when a dog barked in the distance.

"Shit!" Lucy bolted up right and nearly knocked Natsu's head off his shoulders.

"Shit, shit, shit!" She scrambled to her feet.

"What the hell?" Natsu looked up at her semi-annoyed.

"I forgot about Plue!"

Natsu just raised an eyebrow in reply.

"My dog! Come on, he will need feeding! Oh shit, I'm terrible!" She cried.

Lucy pulled Natsu to his feet and began to run.

"Easy Luce! I'll hail a cab!" He called after her.

Natsu had gotten so engulfed by Lucy, he never noticed the white haired she-devil that had been studying them from a bench. Mira smirked, Laxus had been right. Natsu really was falling in love, and was foolish enough to show it off to the whole world.

Zeref would be furious.

# Chapter 8

## Chapter Summary

Hello, sorry for the delay! Thank you so much for the amazing feedback! Way more than I ever expected.

This is a short chapter, some smut, main plot points at the end.

Mira stepped out of her black Lamborghini after parking it in an abandoned factory on an industrial estate. She strutted in her black bodycon midi dress, and blood red heels, out of the building and to a hidden bunker door, that doubled as the gates to hell, the entrance to Fairy Tail's den.

She walked down the dark concrete steps, and followed a complex route of tunnels, until she reached a certain stretch of wall. She pulled open what appeared to be an old electrical fuse box, and pounded a keycode into a certain panel. Beside her the wall cracked open in the shape of a door, she stepped to it and pushed with a lot of might, regaining her composure to enter the lair.

The first room was lowlit, with red walls and black furniture, a bar in the corner. There were a couple of couches and tables dotted around with criminals draped over them. This room functioned as the main club house, and Mira didn't concern herself with what went on in there. Orgies, gambling, fights: they didn't interest her.

No one dared look at her as she carried on her way, heading toward the door which only Fairy Tail's elites had access to. Here, she punched in another keycode which allowed the door to swing open. She entered the corridor which housed Zeref's quarters at the end of it. The sound of her heels clacking on the polished black glass floor echoing around her.

She stopped outside a door just before Zeref's, and paused for a moment to fix her hair, smooth out her dress, and hoist her cleavage up. Then opened it without knocking.

Lexus quickly snapped his neck to look up at her from the black leather bucket chair he was draped in. He wasn't wearing his suit jacket, and his white shirt was unbuttoned to half way down his chiselled chest. He still wore his shoulder holster, but his guns were lying on the side table next to him. His black slacks were crumpled, and he was just in his socks, his shoes kicked across the room.

Mira stalked over to him, he eyed her warily but hungrily. She stopped in front of the blonde, and ran her finger along his shoulder, past his collar bone and down his exposed chest.

"You're right, the moron's going soft. He's falling for her," she spoke softly yet decisively.

Lexus cocked his eyebrow, grabbed her finger and lowered her arm, pulling himself up so he loomed above her.

He chuckled darkly and paused, staring into the she-devil's eyes.

"Who has time for something like falling for someone, hmm?" He drawled as he grabbed Mira's upper arms cautiously and lowered his head to her neck. He hovered for a second, before kissing her softly, then suddenly biting her playfully. He went on to lick and suck the same spot.

Mira laughed as she cocked her head further to the side, "Fools facing an early grave."

Lexus growled in agreement, before yanking her tight dress up, and picking her up by her thighs. Mira wrapped her legs around him and giggled, letting him carry on devouring her neck. He carried them through his living quarters, kicking open the door to his bedroom, and threw her on the bed.

"What a way to greet a girl," Mira cooed as she lay there smirking, crossing her ankles and running one of her heels up her other leg along to her thigh.

Lexus pulled off his shirt and threw it across the room, "Mira you know I can't help it when you come in here dressed like this, wiggling those goddamn hips."

The woman giggled more and he crawled up the bed, pushing her legs apart and fitting himself between them. Mira grabbed him by his hair to lower him down to her, and began to kiss him.

Lexus was already hard, so he pressed himself into her core. Mira pushed back on to him appreciatively. His trousers and her thong feeling far too thick between them. He broke away from her mouth, and trailed his kisses down her neck, to her chest, kissing the cleavage on show. He hovered over her breasts. Braless, her nipples were pushing against the tight black fabric of the dress that restrained them. He flicked one and then began to suck it through the material. Mira bucked, and pulled the dress down so her breasts spilled out, pushed up by the tightness of the neckline.

Lexus growled with lust, and began to suck on her pink nipple, pinching her other. He swapped sides and sucked on her other breast before pushing himself down to the sweet musky scent that was dripping from between her legs. He knew they never had much time to waste.

He smirked as he kissed her thighs, pulling her dress up to her belly button, and pushed her black lace thong to one side.

Her core was dripping wet, as he slowly kissed her lips, teasing his tongue along their opening. She bucked again, but this time Lexus grabbed her ass cheeks and pulled her down. He buried his nose into her, and started lapping the juices from her entrance upwards. He flicked his tongue over her now swollen clit and she let out a long moan. He felt his cock twitch and began to suck on that bundle of nerves. His lips clacking against her as she

wriggled beneath him. He kept going until he saw her hands clawing at the sheets, she was close.

He stopped and began to kiss her thighs again. Mira was too out of breath to speak, but bucked up to get him to start again. He complied, this time entering a finger into her core too. He flicked her clit with his tongue over and over whilst he pumped her insides, entering another finger and curling them to hit her g-spot. The noises that sputtered from her were enough to make Laxus almost cum in his pants with anticipation.

She bucked aggressively, grabbing him by his hair and pushing his face deeper into her pussy.

"Fuck me with your tongue," she commanded.

He smiled into her as he moved his tongue down inside her, and rested his hand on the bottom of her stomach, rubbing her clit with his thumb. She was soon a quivering mess, he was lapping up more and more of her juices until she stiffened underneath him, her toes curling. All of a sudden she squirted all over Laxus' face, he groaned as he drank her up. She tasted like treacle; sweet, naughty.

He pulled away and she lay there for a second gathering her wits again before she started to rub herself.

"Fuck me, Laxus" she breathed.

He didn't have to be told twice. He sat up undoing his trousers, and pulled them down with his boxers just enough that his erection bounced free. He flipped Mira over on to her stomach and pulled her up on to all fours, and slid himself inside her.

He pounded her frantically, reaching round and rubbing her nipples and clit. She started moaning again.

"Call my name," he said as he pulled Mira's hair.

"Laxus!" She screamed.

He growled and pounded harder, feeling the woman beneath him begin to quiver and tighten around his cock. She let out a guttural moan as she stiffened all over before melting towards the bed. Laxus held her up by her stomach, and feeling her convulse around himself, roared as he came inside her.

They collapsed to the bed, covered in sweat, clothes askew. They paused for all of about 30 seconds before Mira let out a deep breath, rearranged her thong and pulled her dress back down, tucking her breasts back in place too. Laxus wiped himself off before tucking his dick back in his pants.

They sat in silence staring at the ceiling for a while, hands brushing against each other's slightly.

"What do you think's going to happen?" Mira asked quietly.

"I won't let anything to happen to you, Mira. I know that much," Laxus nodded to himself.

"That's exactly the attitude that's going to put you in an early grave, Laxus. I can look after myself," the woman scolded.

Laxus frowned, he didn't want her to have to look after herself, but the truth was he didn't know what was going to happen.

Zeref had slowly been expanding his reach outside of Magnolia for a couple of years now, either destroying or incorporating other gangs. Their latest acquisition was a group called Tartaros, headed by some mad bastard called Mard Geer. They surrendered willingly. Zeref almost had a god like quality to him when he was really on form, and people fell to serve him like he was some cult leader. Laxus was starting to get sick of it, and weary that his position as Zeref's right hand man was probably not going to last much longer.

On top of this, the winds brought news of an impending war. Finally, someone was telling Zeref that he had taken a step too far. A gang called Crime Sorciere, ran by an equally as blood thirsty and caniving leader, named Jellal Fernandez. They were a gang that started as vigilantes, putting a stop to the criminals that the cops couldn't reach. Over time they evolved into something more, ruling over whole towns on the basis that they would provide them protection from men like Zeref. The public paid the gang a lot of money in return, and over time, Jellal had created an empire. The man knew no restraint when it came to defending that.

"We won't get through any of this without Natsu," Mira reminded Laxus, "whether it's to bring Zeref back down to his roots and remember the meaning of loyalty and what's really important to Fairy Tail, or to be our ace in the hole for this upcoming fight. We need his strength."

"Natsu will come," Laxus assured her, "he's flying too close to the sun. Staying in Magnolia this long, flaunting that girl on his arm. Something is bound to happen. Then he will come."

## Chapter 9

Natsu stood before the threshold that was Lucy's front door. She had bounded into her apartment to find her dog, and not looked back to see Natsu's hesitation.

He'd never gone back to a girl's apartment sober before. He preferred to not even do it drunk, feeling safer and more in control if it was neutral territory for him like a hotel room, or in the past, one of Fairy Tail's club houses. He had never been previously bothered about getting to know any female he was attracted to and he wanted what happened in the bedroom to be just that. All he needed was a bed (or a wall, or a couch, or even just the floor). He never needed to get any sense of the personality of the girl he was fucking beyond the fact she was either going to be a wild lay or something chilled and casual.

Yet there he was, on the precipice of finding out the intimacies of Lucy's every day life, without even a hint there could be sex at the end of it. Here he was, becoming something new for Lucy.

Eventually he stepped in, and instantly admired how tidy it was. The entrance taking him into her living room, with white walls covered in frames full of band posters and quirky art. Oak floorboards complimented by large patterned rugs. Houseplants hanging from the walls and standing on any available surface. There was a massive bookcase spanning across the whole side wall, it was so full of books that Lucy had obviously given up trying to be neat and just started piling new ones in front of it. There was a desk in the far corner beside a window, covered in paper and piles of sealed envelopes. Her couch was just a beaten up beige corduroy thing, but was covered in stylish scatter cushions to make up for it.

Natsu stepped around the corner of her open plan living room to find Lucy in her kitchenette, sitting on the floor, legs splayed like a kid, cuddling her dog. The kitchen had pans hanging from the ceiling and housed even more pot plants. The cupboards were wood painted white, and her sideboard looked like solid oak. There was a large window that spanned pretty much the height of one whole wall, illuminating Lucy and her pet with the orange glow of the low afternoon sun.

Natsu was taken aback, he loved everything about it. The place felt like a proper home. He felt strange.

"I know, Plue! I'm a horrible owner, I'm just horrible aren't I? Yes I am!" Lucy cooed in a baby voice, Natsu raised an eyebrow at the sound of it, and crossed his arms, leaning against the wall continuing to watch her.

Lucy looked up oblivious of his slight judgement, "I'm going to head out and walk him before it gets dark. You can come if you want?" She tried to sound casual, but in reality her heart was in her throat as she secretly hoped he would stay with her longer.

"Before it gets dark?" Natsu pondered out loud as he looked at the time on the clock on Lucy's wall, "Shit, how is it 4 o'clock already?!" He sputtered.



Where had the day gone? Had he really been having that much fun doing not much of anything with Lucy that he hadn't noticed the time disappear. Lucy looked up at him worried for a second, but Natsu reassured her with a smile.

"Of course I'll come," he nodded.

"Cool! Maybe when we get back, we can watch another film, and I'll cook us some dinner? If you don't have anywhere else to be, that is," Lucy said sheepishly, a blush creeping across her face.

Natsu's stomach flipped at how adorable she looked, and the way she actually wanted him to stay, to cook him a meal.

"Sure. No where else I'd rather be, anyway," he said softly with a small grin.

They headed off back into the outside world, Plue in tow. Natsu spent most of the walk teasing Lucy about what a weird looking dog she had. He discovered he loved watching her get in a huff, teasing out her fiery streak and lapping up the way she challenged him without fear. After she calmed down, they spent the rest of the walk exploring the streets of Magnolia lost in their laughing and teasing.

Natsu didn't know what was happening to him, he had never felt so light headed yet grounded at the same time. This girl was like therapy.

On their way back to her apartment, they stopped at the convenience store so Lucy could grab some ingredients for dinner. She left Plue outside with Natsu, who didn't know what to make of the pink haired stranger lighting up a cigarette.

"It's alright boy, she'll be back in a minute," Natsu bent down to pat his head in an attempt to comfort him, "I know, I'm no comparison to her hey. You've done a good job looking after her."

The sun was starting to set and he gazed at the sky contemplatively, inhaling deeply from his cigarette and running his hand through his hair, trying to figure out if any of this situation was a good idea.

"Hey, all sorted!" Lucy tumbled out of the shop.

Natsu was snapped from his thoughts and his bizarrely panicked reaction meant he quickly threw his cigarette aside and stood up straight to sheepishly smile at Lucy, who eyed him and laughed.

"Why are you trying to hide the fact you smoke? I already knew that you idiot. It's not like I care anyway," she chuckled.

For the life of him Natsu didn't know why he'd just reacted like some naughty school kid caught by a teacher. His brain was just going into overdrive trying to impress her, turning his cognitive abilities to mush.

He just shrugged and tried to change the subject, "Here, I'll take those bags and you can have Plue back. I don't think he knows what to make of me."

"Him and me both," she quietly muttered under her breath with an exasperated laugh.

Natsu frowned slightly as he heard her, but decided it was better to pretend he didn't.

They got back to her apartment just as the sun was almost all the way down. Lucy went round turning all her small lamps on, making the place seem even homelier. She switched the telly on and told Natsu to pick something whilst she went to the kitchen to begin cooking. She had decided to make lasagne, something classic.

Natsu placed himself on the couch feeling put of place, and picked up the remote to start scanning. Before he knew it Lucy came over and bought him a glass of wine which he eyed with surprise.

"It's past five, so it's fine," she winked, not knowing that it wasn't the alcohol that surprised him, but the fact she was waiting on him.

As she turned back to the kitchen she stopped in her tracks and turned to face him.

"Sorry, it's not like the expensive stuff you're used to. It will go alright with the lasagne though, I hope."

Natsu's heart twisted slightly, not liking how she was worrying about impressing him, so he took a sip from the glass she placed in his hand.

"Tastes great to me," He reassured her with his most charming smile.

Soon Natsu was getting antsy being banished to the couch, and the smells coming from the kitchen lured him over.

"This smells amazing already, Luce. Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Erm not really. You could get the plates out of that cupboard if you want?"

Natsu did just that, before pulling himself up to sit on the counter next to her. Sipping his wine, he smiled down at her. He loved how goddamn normal he felt. Lucy's cheeks started to burn slightly as she felt him staring, but she carried on her task.

Once the food was in the oven, Lucy washed her hands and turned to the man staring at her.

"You picked a film?" She smiled.

"You got it. I went for something less gory this time. Supposed to be bit of a thriller though. You think you'll cope?" Natsu teased.

She rolled her eyes before heading to the couch with the bottle of wine. He followed her and plonked himself next to her, purposefully encroaching on her personal space, testing how close he could get, but she didn't move away from him.

He pressed play on the remote and the two of them sat watching in a content silence. It was some cops and robbers style flick. Lucy didn't say it, but the bad guys donned in their suits, wielding their pistols, reminded her a lot of Natsu.

When the food was ready Lucy dished up and brought the plates over to them on the sofa. Lucy couldn't help but feel like she did when she was a kid, playing house. Was this what being in a relationship would look like? She internally grimaced at that thought, she needed to get a grip.

"Luce, hope you dont mind me saying, this food is fuckin' amazing," Natsu exclaimed as he devoured the plate.

Lucy scoffed, "Huh, I figured you liked from the way you were literally inhaling it. You're going to choke if you don't chew you know."

"Whatever, mom." Natsu said as he dropped the empty plate on to Lucy's coffee table.

As Lucy finished and put hers down too, she looked at Natsu, studying his sharp features, trying to work out what was going on in his head. Eventually, she worked up some courage.

"Why are you still here, Natsu?"

"Erm, because you asked me to stay. You forgot already ya weirdo?"

"Yeah but why did you say yes? Why stay with me when you came to Magnolia to visit your friends? In fact, why have you even stayed in Magnolia so long? Everyone says you're usually just here a day or so at a time?"

Natsu took a deep breath and eyed her strangely.

"Lucy, you hit your head or somethin'? Where is this coming from?" He attempted to joke in order to deflect.

"It's coming from the part of me that has been wondering what the hell happened last night. From the part of me that still can't believe I told you what I did about my past earlier today. From the part of me, that doesn't get why I keep coming back to hang out with you?" Lucy was aware she was sounding slightly deranged, but the words just kept coming.

Natsu stayed silent.

"From the part of me that feels like I've known you all my life, but it's not even been two weeks," she finished before she could stop herself.

Lucy felt like her whole body was on fire as she slowly fell back to reality, her confession still ringing in the air around her.

"Lucy I - I should maybe just go then?" Natsu had no idea how to answer her and his douchebag fight or flight instinct was taking over; he should run.

This angered Lucy however, how could he just dip out on her after she made herself so vulnerable, "That doesn't answer any of my questions, Natsu. Just be truthful. Ugh, am I just a game to you? Are people like Sting and Gajeel right, girls should stay away from you if they want to keep their minds?"

Natsu scowled at the fact even Gajeel had told Lucy to stay away.

Lucy continued with her meltdown.

"I know I'm probably not the calibre of girl you're used to. I know I'm just some dork with a fucked up past, but I just need to know the truth so I can put it behind me. If you were never attracted to me at all, why do you keep trying so hard to get my attention? What game are you playing?"

"What makes you think I've never been attracted to you, Lucy?" Natsu finally spoke up.

"Well fine, maybe at some point you were, maybe it's that after kissing me last night and finally winning the chase you realised I didn't do it for you. All I'm asking, is don't just keep hanging out with me out of guilt, or some challenge to yourself. My head is getting so confused. I'd rather you just went instead of treating me like a wind up toy."

Natsu was really baffled by this point. Was this girl crazy?

"You're crazy, Lucy," he had to voice it.

"I know. Sorry. You can leave now. I should have taken that as the answer to everything anyway."

Lucy got off the sofa to walk towards the door to let him out, feeling hollow and embarrassed but glad she stood up for herself.

Natsu grabbed her hand, and pulled himself up to stand behind her, then spun her around to face him.

"I'm glad you didn't," he smiled in a manner which he hoped conveyed his longing and hope.

He cupped her face with his hands and glanced down into her eyes, before closing his own and kissing her.

Lucy stood frozen, her arms remaining by her sides, her lips not kissing back. Natsu pulled away and pressed his forehead against hers.

"The truth is Lucy, I don't think I've ever been more attracted to anyone in my life."

Lucy's breathing hitched but before she could say anything, Natsu carried on.

"I thought it was just my dick thinking, but every time I've seen you, I've fallen a little bit further. I've been battling with myself. I'm not a very good man Luce, and I might not be able to stick around much longer, but I know I want to stay with you for as long as possible."

Lucy gulped and reached up and touched his cheek. They stood like that for a second before Lucy shifted and dusted her lips over his, lingering, not fully committing. Natsu slowly moved and closed the gap, pressing their lips together.

This time Lucy let herself fall into the kiss, lowering her hands to grab his shoulders. Natsu lowered his to hold her up by the waist. They showered each other in short, yet deep kisses.

The kisses began to grow longer, and Natsu started to step backwards towards the couch. Once the back of his legs were touching it he broke away to sit down, Lucy followed him.

Natsu stared at the beauty in front of him, before running his hand down her face, as if checking she was real.

"Thank you for letting me in, Luce," he spoke low and huskily.

Lucy just leant in and kissed him some more.

## Chapter 10

Lucy woke up feeling way warmer than usual. She tried to turn over from lying on her front, but there was a dead weight inhibiting her. She pushed herself with more force and the weight on her shifted. As she flipped on to her side, a warm silky arm draped across her bare belly and pulled her closer to the heat radiating from behind her. She heard a sleepy sigh, as the man sharing her bed nuzzled his nose into her hair and kissed the top of her head, his naked body pressed against hers. Lucy froze, his scent engulfed her, her mind transported her to how she got here...

After Lucy had leant in to kiss Natsu on the couch, things began to get more heated.

It seemed the switch had flicked in Natsu's head, and his instincts were taking over. He had started prodding her plump lips with his tongue and pushing open her mouth. Lucy let him intrude, and felt her stomach begin to coil, allowing her worries to melt away. She wrapped her arms around his neck and tried to push as much of her body against his as possible.

Natsu grabbed her by the shoulders and started peppering her jawline with kisses, going on to nip at her ear lobe. Lucy's back arched and it was like Natsu had anticipated it, as he ran his hands down to hold her up by the small of her back. He descended from her ear down her neck, kissing and sucking ever so slightly. As he reached the point where Lucy's neck met her shoulders, she let out a soft mewl which made Natsu's already hard cock twitch. He bit down, she gasped.

Lucy felt like she was going to melt, all her nerves tingling with anticipation, it had been too long, but Natsu kept her upright with his firm arms still wrapped around her waist. He went on to lick and kiss the tender patch of skin he just mawled, before continuing to nuzzle past his white dress shirt that she still donned, and kiss along her collar bone. He wanted to go lower, but didn't want to push her too far, the admission she had shared about her father playing at the very back of his mind.

He needn't have worried too much, Lucy had gone on to reclaim her body random hook ups and experimentation, being triggered occasionally but always learning more about herself. She ran her fingers through his hair, gripping his pink locks slightly as she pushed his head down and arched her chest towards him. He smiled into her skin.

Moving his hands from around her back, he grabbed her waist, pushed her up the sofa, and propped her on her back against the couch's arm rest. He climbed in between her legs and loomed over, arms either side of her shoulders. His gaze had turned primal, the darkness Lucy had begun to become familiar with burning itself into her through his eyes. Lucy reached up and stroked his face, and Natsu's lips curled up into a smirk. He bent down and kissed her now swollen lips, before carrying on his mission down towards her chest.

He lowered himself and started to peel back the white shirt even further, pulling it downwards as he trailed kisses towards her cleavage. Lucy's breathing was getting heavier and heavier, he moved one hand slowly to begin to massage her right breast, when she didn't

stop him he applied more pressure and felt her hard nipple trying to protrude through her layers of clothes. He pinched it with his thumb, and Lucy squirmed beneath him.

The way she moved meant she pressed herself against his groin for a moment, even through his jeans the friction felt amazing. He lost it for a second and yanked open the shirt, sending buttons flying everywhere as he gazed at her ample breasts, sheathed in a black lace bra. Natsu growled his appreciation.

Lucy raised her hand to rub one of her own breasts, almost toppling Natsu over the edge there and then. He pulled himself together and flicked a nipple through the lace with his tongue. Lucy moaned and carried on rubbing her other breast. Natsu pushed her hand away and yanked the material aside, letting her chest bounce free. Her nipples were glorious. Pert and a deep shade of pink. He hungrily started lapping and sucking on one, as his hand went to pinch the other. Lucy's moans were becoming more frequent, and she started to squirm against him. The build up of lust forming between her legs needing to rub against something to relieve the pressure. Natsu arched his back and lifted himself slightly, so he could push into her with the mound that had formed in his pants.

Lucy began to grind against him, and Natsu thought he was going to lose his mind. He indulged for a minute or so, before lowering himself further to start kissing her stomach.

Lucy suddenly panicked, realising that although she had showered, she never actually changed her underwear from the day before, having never intended on staying the previous night with Natsu and then being caught up in the day's events.

Natsu must have read her mind, as he pushed the tails of his shirt away from her hips revealing the high waisted, lacy black thong she was wearing. He growled in frustration.

"Are you telling me, I had a hot girl stay in my bed all night wearing underwear as naughty as this, and I just slept on the couch?"

"I'm sorry, you know I showered, I should have changed when I got in I just got caught-"

Natsu stopped her by kissing the lacy material and letting out a hum of approval.

"It just means they're even more loaded with your sweet smell," he muttered into her body, as he kissed her lower stomach and pulled at the waistband of the offending garment with his teeth, pinching it against her skin.

Lucy shuddered.

"Fuck," she whispered.

Natsu couldn't help but smirk to himself, he knew he was good, but the way she was unravelling to his touch was just too fantastic.

He went on to kiss the tops of her thighs and descend further. He switched his attention to different legs a couple of times, hovering his mouth perilously close to her core every time he

did, but was careful to never even graze it. He just blew on her gently, and Lucy couldn't help but buck towards him everytime he did.

Her actions were starting to get desperate, clawing at the couch cushions in anticipation. Natsu wasn't sure how much longer he could wait either, so gave in and pulled her thong down slowly to around her ankles, where Lucy kicked it off across the room. Natsu followed their trajectory, and told himself he would pocket those later.

He then looked down at her between her legs, although he never really cared how a woman looked down there as long as she was clean, he had to admit even there Lucy was especially gorgeous. Perfectly shaven, tight and pink. Her insides glistened with the dripping wet juices of her heat. He gave it a kiss. Lucy squeaked slightly and Natsu loved it. How was she managing to be adorable whilst being this sexy?

He slowly poked the tip of his tongue between her lips, starting at her entrance, he dragged himself up, sampling every inch of her. She tasted amazing. She was sweet and musky, and her vanilla scent mixed in to make her even more addictive. As he reached the top of her core, he flicked her clit ever so faintly. It was enough to make her whole body arch. He stared up at her and they met each other's gazes.

"Tell me if I do anything you don't want me to do, Lucy," he said sincerely in a low voice loaded with lust.

"I don't want you to stop," she gasped as she squirmed beneath him some more.

Natsu wrapped his arms around her thighs and began to lick her up and down, burying his face in her folds. He slid his tongue in and out of her hole, lapping up the juices that kept flooding out. He then moved up to work her clit, sucking on it and nipping it with his teeth. Lucy was already close to the edge he could tell. He surmised, rightly, that she probably hadn't had a decent lover in a while.

Natsu pulled himself back and crawled up her body, Lucy moaned in frustration as she sunk further down the couch. He lifted her arms and held them above her head, one side of his mouth cocked in a fiendish smile. He made sure to hold himself high over her, so as little as his body was touching her as possible. He didn't want her to find any release, he wanted her begging for his touch.

"Natsu," she breathed as she tried to rub her thighs together, her cheeks and chest flushed red.

He lowered his head so their noses touched, his mouth hovering over hers, a hairs width from kissing her lips.

"What?" He smirked.

"Please," she moaned.

He leant in and kissed her hungrily, pushing his tongue straight into her mouth, licking her tongue and the roof of her mouth with vigour. He wanted her to taste herself, to feel how she had marked him. She lapped up every second of it.



Her arms still held over her head, she tried to wrap her legs around him, and realised he was still fully dressed.

"How am I supposed to make you feel good if you're still dressed?" She questioned as she salaciously ran one of her feet up the back of his thigh.

"You don't have to worry about me," he nuzzled himself into her neck to attack her there all over again.

He kept her arms raised with one hand, held himself up with his knees, and traced his other hand all the way down her body as he sucked her neck. Tracing circles around her nipples and on her lower stomach with his finger. Lucy felt herself tingling all over, the build up was beginning all over again. He suddenly pushed his fingers between her folds, and started to slowly rub circles around her clit. The sensation almost pushed her over the edge straight away, before he slid his fingers inside her and started pumping.

"Natsu please," Lucy moaned breathlessly as she bucked into his hand, "Let me pleasure you."

"Not until you've cum," he looked up before kissing her lips again.

He started pumping into her with more vigour, then slowing his pace back down again, curling his fingers around to hit her sweet spot. He carried on mixing his pace like this until she was a quivering mess, moaning into their kiss. He broke the kiss, biting and pulling her lower lip as he did.

His hand was soaked in her juices now, he made his way back down to her core with his tongue and flicked her clit as he kept pumping. She started pinching her own nipples and then before she knew it, her body had given in.

Natsu kept going as he felt her warmth clench around his fingers. Her whole body arched and convulsed, as she let out a deep moan, grabbing at his hair as she rode out her orgasm.

He looked up her body to see her dishevelled and panting, seeming more beautiful than ever.

He couldn't help himself as he lifted his arm and pushed his fingers in her mouth. She held his hand and lapped her juices off his fingers, pulling the digits in and out of her mouth, humming as she wrapped her tongue around them.

Natsu sat up right on knees staring at the show she was putting on for a moment.

"Fuck," he breathed.

It was her turn to smirk fiendishly, as she let go of his hand and ran her own down his chest, reaching the bottom hem of his t shirt and pulling it up. Natsu helped her pull it off, whilst trying to maintain eye contact.

She sat up slightly and ran her fingers over the indents his muscles made, pausing for a second when she reached the scar on his hip. She sat up more and kissed it. As she did so she let her fingers find his belt buckle and began to undo his pants. Natsu still loomed over as she

began to pepper his six pack and lower stomach with kisses and nips. The man gulped, and stroked the top of her head where her pony tail was looking worse for wear. He let his fingers find her bobble and he carefully eased it free. Her hair fell across her shoulders and breasts, she looked up at him with her wide eyes and smiled, before pulling his pants and boxers down his thighs.

His erection bounced free, and Lucy couldn't help but admire it. She had never seen a dick so attractive. It was girthy and tanned, framed by small curls of pink pubic hair. She noticed a speck of precum dripping from his tip. She sat herself up more so she was comfortable and began kissing around his groin, before kissing the base of his erection.

Natsu took in a sharp breath and his cock bobbed, relieved to finally be getting some attention.

She kept kissing him, lowering her attention to his balls. She started to lick and suck on the crease in his sack, grabbing his dick with her hand, rubbing the precum down his length with her thumb. She took one of his balls in her mouth and hummed. Natsu's eyes rolled into the back of his head.

Lucy kept pumping him as she nibbled and licked his creases, before working her way to his shaft in one long lick. As she reached his tip she took his length into her mouth, and Natsu growled.

He was starting to struggle to hold himself in the kneeling position he was in, and had to grab on to Lucy's head for support. He entwined his fingers in her hair, and started to push her head back and forth. Before he realised what he was doing, he was fucking her mouth. She sputtered slightly as his tip reached the back of her throat, but she recovered herself and took his entire length time and time again.

"Fuck!" Natsu roared under his breath as he watched his length repeatedly disappear inside her.

Lucy was starting to get really turned on again, and was pinching her nipples with one hand as she held on to Natsu's thigh with the other.

Natsu couldn't take it any longer, "Can I fuck you, Lucy?" He breathed.

Lucy looked up at him through her eyelashes and pulled his length out of her mouth.

"Yes," she gasped.

Natsu stood up off the sofa and pulled his pants off and threw them across the floor, followed by his socks. Lucy entangled herself from his shirt, throwing that and her bra in the same direction.

"I have condoms in my bedroom," she sat up to go get them.

He grabbed her and pulled her towards him, their groins rubbing together slightly as they stood in the middle of her living room kissing, hands running all over each other.

All of a sudden, Plue came bounding over and jumping up Lucy's legs.

"Ahhhh!" She squealed out of embarrassment, pushing him down desperately.

Natsu looked down to see what was going on before bursting out into churlish laughter. He scooped Lucy up in his arms and looked down at the dog.

"Sorry buddy, I'm not sharing," he said smugly.

He carried her princess style to her bedroom, kicking the door closed behind him. Lucy blushed at the awkward position she was in whilst naked. Natsu didn't care, looking down into her eyes before giving her a gentle kiss with his swollen lips.

"Are you sure this is ok?" He uttered softly.

"Yes," Lucy nodded.

"Good, cause I really want to fuck your brains out right now," he smiled slyly before kissing Lucy hungrily again.

As his shins met her bed, he gently threw her down, before climbing between her legs. He pushed some hair out of her eyes and put his hands either side of her head. They kissed some more before Lucy rolled over to her bedside drawer, pulling out a tin of condoms.

The sight made Natsu feel weird for a second, disliking the idea of other men having been in her bed, but his thoughts soon shifted as he felt her grab his cock, pumping him slightly as she wriggled into position below him, and sliding the condom over his length.

He took in the sight of how beautiful she was, her golden locks fanned out around her, her milky skin coated in the slightest layer of sweat making her appear like she glowed. He bent down and stole a slow and passionate kiss, before licking her ear lobe and kissing her neck again. As she hummed in approval, he lined himself up with her core, rubbing her up and down with his tip a few times, before sliding himself in.

"Lucy," he whispered into her ear, as he slowly pulled himself out again, feeling her shudder beneath him.

She reached up and wrapped herself around his neck, and he pushed himself back inside her. She was so tight he could feel every muscle stretching.

Lucy pushed herself against Natsu's steady thrusting, and took in the way his biceps flexed with every movement. She couldn't escape the feeling he was holding back though.

"You don't have to be gentle with me," she drawled into his ear before pinching it with her teeth.

Natsu gulped as he realised he was trying to hold himself back too much. All he wanted to do was flip her round on all fours and pound her until she screamed his name, but he hadn't dared, the fear at of triggering her consuming him again.

With one swift movement, Lucy pushed against him and flipped them both so she was on top. This wasn't what Natsu planned, having wanted to show her how good he could make her feel, but the sight he gazed up at was too good to pass up.

Her hair was messed up from being thrust against the pillow but its lengths still draped around her shoulders. They made eye contact for an agonisingly long few seconds, the admiration for each other pouring out of their souls.

Lucy bit her bottom lip as she eventually rolled her hips back and forth, pushing against his pelvic bone. She began to paw at her breasts and rub her stomach sensually, her eyes closing as her head rolled on her shoulders in satisfaction.

Natsu felt his cock twitching, the way she looked combined with the tightness of her walls taking him to the edge. He placed his hand on her lower stomach and started rubbing his thumb against her clit. She moaned with desire, and started thrusting harder.

"Natsu," she sighed.

He couldn't handle it anymore, he needed to just fuck her senseless. He grabbed her by the hips and halted her movements, before pulling himself out of her slightly and then ramming himself back inside. He held her there as he thrust again and again, harder and more vigorously each time.

He could feel her clenching around him, tighter and tighter, as she once more moaned his name under her breath.

He wouldn't settle until she was screaming it.

He held her upper arms tightly as he sat himself up. He pulled out of her for a second so he could pull his legs under himself and sit on his knees, his erection standing tall from his body. He yanked her back down on to it, moved his arms under her armpits and slid his forearms up her shoulder blades, grabbing on to her shoulders from behind so he could control the pace he thrust into her better. His face was level with her breasts, and he got to work sucking on her nipples, biting the areas around them and littering her soft flesh with hickies.

He started snapping his hips harder into her core, and her breasts began to bounce higher. He shifted his arms so he was holding her up by the small of her back, she grabbed on to his shoulder with one arm and leant back so his thrusts reached even deeper. With her other hand she started rubbing at her clit. She began to tense and her nails dug into Natsu's flesh as she felt the build up of tension rise within her. She was starting to sweat and her face was bright red, she flung her head back and felt Natsu's dick slam into her g-spot at the same time as she rubbed her clit.

"Natsu!" She screamed.

He kept pounding her as she convulsed in his arms, she clenched so tightly around his cock he couldn't hold it back any longer.

He roared, as he thrust as deep into her as he possibly could one last time.

They rode their orgasms out together, clinging on to each other's naked bodies for dear life.

Natsu collapsed face first into Lucy's chest, and he lost the grip he had on her back that was holding them both up. They fell to the bed together. Heads at the end of the bed, feet on the pillows.

They lay there for a good few minutes, unable to speak.

Lucy rolled on to her back and stretched out her limbs, they still throbbed with the fire of her orgasm.

Natsu did the same, before rolling the condom off his now flacid penis and tying it up at the end. He slowly sat up and kissed Lucy tenderly before he swung his legs off the bed, then padded over to Lucy's ensuite bathroom to dispose of it and freshen himself up. Despite feeling like she had no energy left, when Natsu returned she went to the bathroom to clean herself up too.

As she made her way back to the bed that Natsu had already made himself at home in, he reached out to grab her by her arm, pulling her in to his warmth. She tucked up under his arms, burrowing away as the little spoon.

Natsu rested his chin on her cheek and kissed the hair above her ear.

"You're actually amazing, Luce," he crooned softly.

Lucy drifted in and out of consciousness tracing patterns with her finger on to the arm that Natsu had tucked around her belly.

They both lay there slipping into sleep wondering the same thing, was that what it felt like to actually make love?

Lucy was stirred from this whole recollection by Plue scratching at her door. Natsu groaned his disapproval as Lucy shimmied out of his grasp. She went to give Plue his breakfast and make the two of them a coffee. As she padded back into her room she stood in the door way with the two mugs in her hands, and took in the sight before her.

The morning sun was shining through a gap in her curtains, a crack of light illuminating her bed. Natsu had kicked her white cotton duvet down so it hung around his torso. He had one arm propped behind his head and the other on his chest. His eyes were closed as he dozed in the morning glow, breathing slowly and peacefully amongst the askew bedding. Lucy felt her stomach flip as she admired him.

She didn't want this moment to end.

## Chapter 11

Lucy gasped and her eyes rolled into the back of her head, clawing at Natsu's back as he thrust deeply into her one last time, his head tucked next to hers, his hands either side of her body. He kissed her softly and longingly as he eventually rolled off her to collapse at her side, the duvet clinging around his hips. After Lucy woke Natsu up with coffee they couldn't help but indulge in some slow and soft morning sex, but now they really knew they had to wash and face the day.

After Lucy managed to pry herself away from the mysterious man in her bed to shower, Natsu wiped himself up and stumbled out into Lucy's living room to find his boxers. As he pulled them up his body there was a knock at the door, and Plue ran over to scratch it excitedly, appearing to already sense who it was.

Natsu stood for a moment not sure what he should do, before deciding to look through the peep hole at who it could be.

He frowned.

He knew shouldn't have, but his infamous gung-ho attitude got the better of him and he unlocked the door and swung it open.

"Hey Lu- Huh?!" Gray sputtered.

"She's in the shower," Natsu grunted leaning on the door frame, folding his arms across his bare chest.

"What are you doing here?" Gray snarled as he pushed past him.

Natsu raised an eyebrow in disbelief, what did it look like he was doing here?

"Reading the gas metre," he bit back sarcastically.

Gray growled slightly under his breath.

Natsu eyed him up and down and saw he was holding a bouquet of flowers.

"And what are you doing here?" He pried.

Gray looked down at the flowers in his hand too, feeling suddenly slightly pathetic.

All of a sudden Lucy's bedroom door opened and the two men snapped their heads in that direction. Lucy came out wearing just a white, fluffy towel, combing her damp hair through with her hands.

"Natsu the showers free- Oh! Gray!" She stopped in her tracks, gripping the towel tighter around her naked frame.

Gray blushed and looked away, then noticed the state of the apartment. Couch cushions messed up, scatter cushions fallen to the floor, clothes thrown around the room. Lucy's thong by his feet.

He stepped backwards.

"Sorry Lucy, I'm- I'm clearly interrupting something," he dropped the flowers on the sideboard by her front door next to a framed photo of the girl's late mother, "I had just come to apologise for the other day, to see if you still wanted lunch, but I see you're busy."

He turned to leave and Natsu smirked with satisfaction.

"Gray! Don't go, I'm sorry!" Lucy called quickly and ran over to him, "we can still go to lunch! I'll get dressed, Natsu will just need to have a quick shower, and then we can all grab something together."

The two men froze on their feet.

Natsu eyed her warily, he couldn't believe what he was hearing, was she really about to interrupt their potentially glorious day together to entertain this icicle?

"I think I speak for the both of us, when I say I would rather not, Lucy," Gray spoke bluntly in reply, but couldn't help let out a small smile as he gazed admiringly at his friend.

Even now, Lucy was always trying her best to please everyone.

Lucy's shoulders visibly slumped at his answer however, and more tension began to flood the room. Natsu shuffled in his spot, wanting to go to Lucy who stood on the other side of their morning's intruder. He just wanted to put his arm around her, to physically claim her in some stupid, school boyish way.

Gray turned to take a step towards Natsu before he could though. Natsu instinctively straightened himself out so he loomed taller, crossed his arms against his torso and glared back at the man who was now encroaching on his personal space.

"If you hurt her," Gray prodded the hot head's shoulder, "I will personally hunt you down, castrate you, and throw you to the police dogs."

Natsu chuckled darkly, before removing Gray's finger from his shoulder and thrusting it back at him, maintaining eye contact all the while.

"Good luck with that," he simply spat in reply.

They held each others gaze for a minute that stretched on too long.

Gray knew this would be eating Lucy up, so conceded in order to be the bigger man. Moving to leave her apartment, he gave his friend one last fleeting glance before he opened the door and stepped out.

"Gray!" She called after him, but it was too late, the door was closed shut.

Lucy then turned to Natsu and huffed, stomping towards him and smacking his shoulder with such force he couldn't help but take a step backwards.

"What the hell was that?!" She snapped.

"What?!" He scoffed in surprise, "He was the one who came storming into here with attitude Lucy!"

Lucy smacked his shoulder again, still clutching her towel around her chest, "And you did nothing to dispel it, Natsu!"

Natsu just grabbed her wrist before she could smack him again and ran his other hand through his hair, exasperated. Twenty minutes ago this goddess before him had been shouting his name for a whole other reason, and here he was now being blamed for the icy attitude of her dopey friend. He looked down into her eyes and saw her confusion and hurt, he sighed again before letting her wrist go and stroking her upper arm.

"You still believe that he doesn't want to be your boyfriend?" He sighed in frustration.

Lucy's eyes widened and she stuttered in response. Not being able to get words out, she looked down at her feet and went silent.

Something about this reaction made Natsu feel uneasy. She was finally realising how Gray felt, and he had to admit it made him jealous, as if she would choose him instead.

"I'm getting in the shower, Luce. You can run after your ice princess if you really want," he tried to curve the bite in his tone, but couldn't quite manage it.

He tried to do his best to hold his temper in check, grabbing his clothes and pacing off to the bathroom, but still ended up slamming and locking the door behind him.

Once he was finished he'd calmed down tenfold, suddenly feeling guilty for snapping at Lucy when all she had done was get caught in the cross fire. He padded back into the living room mussing up his damp hair, ready to apologise and give the girl some space if she needed it, to find that she had gotten dressed, but that was about it. She had curled up on the still messed up sofa, her head on her knees, clutching her phone in one hand. She was staring into space looking worse than upset or teary eyed. She looked numb, emotionless.

Natsu felt a weight in his stomach as he placed himself next to her on the couch, and waited for her to speak.

"I love him," she started, Natsu winced, but Lucy carried on unaware, "he- he saved me. I just can't ever see him the way he wants me to, Natsu. He's my best friend. My brother. But now he won't even pick up the phone to me, and probably never will again," she spoke so softly Natsu could only just tell her voice was beginning to crack.

The man frowned. He really didn't like that guy, but he didn't like seeing Lucy upset even more. Before either of them knew what he was doing, he grabbed her chin and turned her head to face him, then stroked her cheek.



"I'll fix this," he stated as he stared into her eyes, before kissing her and pushing himself up.

"Wait, Natsu don't-" Lucy began to tell him not to get anymore involved, but it had taken her a minute to register what he had meant, meaning it was too late.

The man had grabbed his leather jacket and his phone, and shucked his boots on. He was checking his pockets for his wallet and hotel room keys as she stood up to head towards him, but he just turned and threw her an immobilising wink, and headed out the door.

Lucy stared as the door closed and then gulped.

Plue ran up to comfort her.

"What the fuck, Plue?" She whispered.

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Gray looked at his watch as he sauntered down the street. It was gone midday. His phone started vibrating in his pocket again, but he ignored it, knowing who it would be and needing some space from that particular blonde.

"Fuck it," he said to himself, looking up at the sun in the sky, and headed in the direction of his favourite bar.

He felt like a massive idiot, for storming both in and out of Lucy's apartment; a cold beer was the only thing that was going to appease him.

He didn't know why he was letting that pink haired punk bother him so much. Lucy had dated people before, and Gray had even actually got on with a few of them himself. He never let underlying feelings get in the way of her trying to find happiness. Lucy *deserved* to explore and live on the wild side a little. He knew best of all, or so he thought, that she had had a rough childhood.

That was *it*, he suddenly thought, that was why he didn't like the guy. This man, with his crazy pink hair, piercings and stupid clothes, he seemed *rough* too. He got the feeling the mystery lover was not as clean as Lucy realised, and was going to damage her even more.

Gray reached the doors of Mermaid Heel and allowed the darkness of the dingy bar to wash over him. The place was a known hang out for cops, a safe haven away from the degenerates that plagued the city. He stalked over the sticky floor littered with nut shells to the bar and collapsed on to a worn stool. The fierce looking woman behind the bar didn't even have to ask. She pulled out two bottles of beer and placed them in front of him.

"Thanks Kagura," he nodded, then necked the first bottle and began to slowly sip the second.

After ten minutes or so, the door swung open flooding the bar with light once more, before quickly extinguishing it as the door slammed shut.

A scrappy looking kid with scruffy blue hair poking out from under a flat cap had walked in. He looked around the room, locking eyes with Gray for a moment before heading to the bar

and ordering a whisky.

The kid seemed pissed off, kicking his feet on the floor as he took the whisky to a table in the corner, sitting with his back to the wall and staring at Gray for a moment before going to grab his phone from his pocket.

Gray turned back to face his drink bemused, the guy looked like a trouble maker, and must be really stupid to enter a known cop hang out.

He tried to listen as the kid spoke down the phone, missing what he first muttered.

"Would you just get down here already... Calm the fuck down? I'm *calm*! I just don't wanna spend my Sunday afternoon sitting in goddamn cop bars... I can't believe I'm even in this place... Whatever... If *he* finds out I'm sending ya my hospital bills, you piece of shit... Yeah... Aye, sir... Bye."

The kid huffed as he hung up and downed half his whisky. Gray chuckled. Subtlety obviously wasn't this kid's strong suit. Whatever, he thought, it was his day off and he had enough to deal with.

He signalled Kagura with a salute and she delivered him two more bottles of beer. He stared at the ceiling, trying to numb his mind from all thoughts. Not in the mood to actually psychoanalyse his situation any further. The door of the bar opened again, but this time Gray paid it no attention.

"You really enjoy drinkin' in a shit hole like this?" A familiar voice questioned after a minute.

Gray didn't even lower his head, but just glanced out of the corner of his eye to see Natsu had appeared and sat on the stool next to him. He stood up to leave, Natsu grabbed him by the shoulder and pushed him back down to his seat.

"Whisky please doll, and whatever this guy has," Natsu grinned up at Kagura and winked.

The usually stonefaced bartender shot the newcomer a devious grin and fetched the drinks, Gray rolled his eyes.

"How did you find me?" He demanded.

Natsu watched the bartender drop the drinks he ordered in front of them and ignored his question. Gray looked around the room in frustration, then noticed that the blue haired kid had left.

"Did you set a tail on me?!" He laughed in disbelief.

Natsu carried on ignoring his questions and sipped his drink. Gray shook his head in frustration and sipped his too.

"So, we never formally got introduced. My name is Natsu," the pinkette said dryly, and extended his hand across his body towards Gray, keeping his head facing forwards.

Gray ignored the gesture.

"Gray," he replied, taking another swig of his beer, keeping his head facing forward too.

Natsu dropped his hand and sighed.

"Yeah, I know," he muttered, "Lucy has told me all about you."

Gray raised an eyebrow and finally turned to face his new drinking companion, "She hasn't said anything about you."

"Yeah. I know," Natsu scoffed bitterly.

They sat in silence.

Gray caved, "What do you want with her?"

"I've only known the girl a little under two weeks."

"Answer my question."

Natsu raised an eyebrow at the bite in Gray's tone. He knew the man wasn't going to settle for less than the truth, so he took a deep breath and downed the rest of his drink.

"I think I'm in love with her," Natsu admitted.

"Be serious, you asshole," Gray growled.

Natsu turned to face Lucy's friend dead on and stared.

"I am."

Gray stared back in disbelief, lost for words.

"What you said, about how if I ever hurt her, you would throw me to the dogs and all that shit. I want you to promise to uphold that. I'd deserve it," Natsu said sincerely.

"Are you telling me, that you know you're going to end up hurting her?" Gray laughed in yet more disbelief.

"I don't want to. I want you to believe me when I say that, icicle breath. But I know you sense something is off about me, I'm not the best of men. I'm going to promise that I won't ever do anything *intentionally* to hurt her. That I can do."

Gray stared, silently willing the man beside him to carry on his confession. Natsu sighed and swivelled back in his stool to face the bar and signal for another drink.

"But I don't know how much longer I can stay in Magnolia. I've already overstayed my welcome, all 'cause of her. I've never met anyone like her. It's like when she's with me, the stars align and life finally makes sense. She makes me want to be good. I can sit doing the

most boring shit with her and be happy. She doesn't seem of this world, y'know. It's like, she's celestial, or somethin'," Natsu laughed at himself, "She has me hook, line and sinker, huh?"

"Why would you have to leave?" Gray eyed him.

"It's complicated," Natsu scoffed, "but there's one thing that's certain, I will come back for her."

"How you gonna come back if the dogs I've thrown you to have ripped you apart?"

"Guess you'll just have to pull me back before they snuff me out." Natsu joked.

Gray laughed a little.

"I'm sorry," Natsu muttered.

"What for?" Gray asked cautiously.

"That it wasn't you."

"Huh?" Gray was just plain confused now.

"That she ever fell for," Natsu proffered.

"Oh," Gray's eyes widened, "You never know, there's still time yet."

"I'm starting to like you ice princess, but as long as my head is still on my shoulders, you ain't gonna win," Natsu chided.

Gray chuckled and shook his head, "That, you're probably right about."

"You gonna text her or what then? When I left her apartment, she was really beating herself up."

Gray rubbed his face with both his hands and groaned, "I've been a jerk."

"And that, you're probably right about," Natsu snickered.

Gray stood up to leave.

"I'll accept you for now, Natsu, but rest assured, if I find even one spec of dirt, one small thing that I think could get Lucy in trouble, I'll end you."

"Fair enough," Natsu nodded confidently.

He had spent years outsmarting the cops, Gray was nothing.

Just after Gray left the bar another person walked in. Natsu didn't have to look up to know who it was.

"I thought you said you didn't wanna spend your Sunday afternoon in cop bars?"

"I thought you owed me a drink for all my troubles," a young voice teased back.

"Sure. Hey, Happy?"

"Yeah Natsu?"

"I really have missed ya, bud."

"Aye, sir."

A few rounds of whiskies later, Natsu stumbled out of the shitty bar, and he noticed the sun was starting to set.

"Shit," he laughed to himself.

He looked up to find his friend, but Happy had already dissipated into the darkness. Probably for the best, Natsu acknowledged. He really was pushing his luck with Zeref now. Not only was he still in town, but he'd socialised with two of Fairy Tail's men without the leader's permission. He half expected a bullet in the head where he stood. He froze on his feet to listen for any signs someone was watching him. Nothing.

Natsu shook his head. What was he doing? All because of goddamn Lucy.

Lucy.

He smiled, and pulled his phone out his pocket to ring her.

"Natsu?"

"Hey, sexy," he drawled, cringing with embarrassment almost immediately after he said it.

He really had had too much whisky.

"I was starting to wonder where you'd got to Natsu, glad you're ok. Gray rang me, said he'd spoken to you. Wouldn't tell me what you said though..."

Natsu smirked, "That's good, probably for the best."

"Hmm, well whatever you said to calm him down, thank you. He told me he was sorry. Told me to keep one eye open with you though," she laughed, "everyone seems to think you're one dangerous man, Natsu."

"That's because I am," he replied soberly.

"You are a mystery, that's for certain... Natsu?"

"Hmm?"

"I really enjoyed last night, and this morning. I'm sorry it ended the way it did."

Natsu rubbed his hand over his face, "It's alright Luce, it wasn't your fault. I could come over now if you want?"

His dick twitched just at the thought of it.

"I would really like that Natsu, but I need to get some work done ready for tomorrow. I need to have this story finalised for Loke by midday."

"Urgh, that guy..." Natsu grumbled.

"My boss, yeah."

"Ok well kick some ass Luce. I'll speak to you tomorrow?"

"Yeah."

"Goodnight, beautiful."

He could hear the smile in her voice as she replied, "Night Natsu."

Natsu rammed his phone back into his pocket and stumbled in the direction of his hotel, smirking to himself like the cat that got the cream. He was going to have sweet dreams tonight, he thought.

Then, he noticed a car appear behind him, but he didn't turn to look at it, just kept one ear listening. The car pulled up slowly to the side of him, and the back door opened.

It was Laxus.

"Get in you stupid fuck," the man ordered with a smirk.

Natsu eyed him up and down, trying to maintain a poker face, "Nope and nope."

Natsu went to carry on walking, but the black mercedes slowly followed him and he heard a gun hammer clicking.

"Just do it, Natsu."

Natsu looked to see Laxus had pulled out his Colt and had rested it on his lap. Natsu rolled his eyes and jumped in and slammed the door.

"Nice to see ya again, Bicks," Natsu called to the man in the drivers seat.

They locked eyes in the rear view mirror for a second, before Natsu turned to face Laxus, "You better not have hurt Happy."

Laxus scoffed, "That dope is fine. I covered for his ass. Figured it makes us even, seeing as the two of us were both stupid enough to enjoy your company."

"Zeref really must be losing his mind if he hasn't noticed you guys running around bars with me."

Lexus scowled, "I'm pretty sure he's noticed, but we're fast becoming old news. He has new loyal followers now, and bigger fish to fry."

"You sound jealous, Lexus. You're still his go to. You know too much for that to ever change," Natsu jeered.

"That's what we all thought about you Natsu, and you were his own brother."

Natsu stayed silent for a minute, Lexus had him there.

"Why have you pulled me in here, Lexus?" He finally spat.

"I'm relaying a message. Zeref is giving you two days."

"That so?" The pinkette half smirked at the challenge.

"Yeah. Two days to finish up whatever game you're playing and get gone, before he finishes it himself."

Natsu whistled and rubbed his hands through his hair.

"My brother. The almighty ruler of the underworld. A paranoid *fuck*. I'm not bothered about takin' anything from him. I'm done with the politics of your world," he spat.

Lexus rolled his eyes with frustration, "He isn't concerned about you taking anything from him. He's concerned about how it looks having you prance around with some dumb blonde, undermining his authority and inviting trouble. Like I said Natsu, he has bigger fish to fry these days, and having you around as another weakness was not part of his calculations."

"I'm a weakness?" Natsu laughed.

"You know what I mean," Lexus sighed.

"No. I don't think I do. How do I make my brother weak?"

"Because no matter what, Natsu, he will always care. If something happens to you, he won't admit it to any of us, but us old school members know. We know he will let all hell loose to remedy it. So do him a favour, do us a favour, and go back underground. Carry on your Indiana Jones act. Fuck some chicks in a tropical beach hut and snort coke off their tits. Go back to your piece of shit ways living a better life than all of us. Get. Out. Of. Here."

Natsu hummed in thought for a moment and nodded to himself.

"You could just leave too, you know?" He finally offered.

"You must really be losing your touch if you think that that was an option for anyone but you and your cousin. For us it's Fairy Tail or a bullet in the head," Lexus said waving his gun.

There was another long silence, Natsu stared out of the car window at the darkness.

"Two days?" Natsu rolled the words in his mouth and let it sink in.

Lexus nodded and went to stare out his own window, "At least you had some fun whilst it lasted, kid."

"Right..." Natsu said absently.

He looked up at Bickslow and hit his car door a couple of times with his fist. Bickslow stopped the car, and let the pink haired man pile out into the dark abyss that was the cold night.

Natsu straightened his leather jacket out and slammed the car door shut without another word to his ex comrades, and marched onwards.

"Fuck. Zeref." Natsu uttered through gritted teeth.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Lucy felt a spring in her step as she walked to work that morning. For the first time in a while she was feeling satisfied with herself.

The past week or so of her life had been crazy, but all that craziness had been easily worth it for the night she had spent with Natsu. It had been too long since anyone had made her feel *that* good and valued.

On top of her long overdue sexual reawakening, she finally felt like she'd finished the story Levy had started. Loke was sure to find some faults, but that was his job as editor she surmised. The actual exposé itself – it felt complete.

As she walked down the road she half hoped she would see Natsu leaning against the coffee shop wall waiting for her. He wasn't though, and she tried not to frown. He sounded drunk on the phone the night before, so she had to assume he was probably still in bed nursing a hangover.

"A hangover on a Monday morning? Chance would be a fine thing," she scoffed under her breath, and then let her mind wonder once more, "I wonder who he was with..."

She shook her head in fortitude, trying to not let paranoid thoughts get the better of her. They'd only just met after all. They weren't an item; she could just be one among a collection of many girls if he wanted it that way. The thought made her sad, but it was the truth, despite the fact she felt like they had really connected over the weekend. She had literally *born* all, physically and emotionally to him after all.

"He rang *you* Lucy, he *wanted* to come round to see *you*," she reassured herself.

Eventually the doors to her office were in front of her and it was time to put her professional head on. She strutted into the marble floored reception with determination to kick the day's ass.

"Miss Heartfilia!" Ms. Porlyusica's voice screeched dampening her vibe almost instantly, "A delivery boy dropped this off for you just!"

The cranky receptionist waved a paper bag in the air and pointed to a cup of coffee.

"May I remind you I am *not* a waitress!" The witch snapped.

Lucy sheepishly stepped over to fetch the package and scamper away from her, "I'm sorry, Ms. Porlyusica."

Lucy waited until she was at her desk to look in the brown paper bag. There was a takeaway box and a note.

*"Morning beautiful. Some fuel to keep you kicking ass this morning. Natsu."*

She giggled a little as she read those words, then opened up the container. It housed a waffle covered in strawberries and chunks of cheesecake, and looked identical to the one she had eaten in Natsu's hotel room. She couldn't help but blush.

"What's this?!" Came a high pitched squeal.

Levy had appeared, seemingly out of thin air, and loomed over Lucy's desk, plucking the note Lucy still had between her fingers.

"Oh, boy!" Levy started cackling.

"Levy, *stop*," Lucy groaned as she waved her arms about, trying to reclaim the note and hush her friend before she drew any attention to them.

"Oh, c'mon Lu! Seems like you had an interesting weekend! I thought it was bizarre I hadn't had a single text from you," the bluenette chuckled, shooting her a wink.

"It's not like you think, Lev."

"Then what is it like?" Levy pried, sidling up to her friend.

Lucy just let out a long sigh, stared up at the ceiling and accepted her fate, "Ok. It is kinda what you think."

Levy pulled up the spare chair that used to be designated as Lucy's, and leaned on the desk with her elbows propping up her head.

"Tell me everything," she cooed with a look of whimsy enveloping her face.

"That's not fair Lev, you still have a lot to tell me, *remember*?" Lucy objected, before smirking herself, "How is Gajeel by the way?"

Levy rolled her eyes before grinning wolfishly, "He's fine. Even better after last night I should hope."

"For such a sweet looking girl, your sex drive is insatiable, Lev."

Levy shrugged, "And yours isn't?"

Lucy pulled out the plastic fork that was sent with the waffle and took a bite, before handing the fork to Levy to try some too. Levy took it without thinking and dug in.

"I guess no one's been around to spark it," Lucy shrugged.

"Until now," Levy pointed the fork at her friend and looked down it.

"It was just once. Well, *twice*. It was nice..." Lucy's eyes fogged over as she reminisced, the corners of her mouth tugging up into a smile.

"Ha! I'm happy for you Lu. You needed a good fu-" Levy was cut off as Loke strutted into the room, donning yet another designer suit, and spoke over her.

"Morning ladies, having a picnic?" he drawled sarcastically.

"Sorry boss, we forgot to offer you some!" Levy tried to joke her way out of any impending scolding and held the fork out to him.

Loke scowled at the pair.

"How are you eating such a thing this early in the morning?" He looked disgusted.

"Lucy's boyfriend sent it," Levy mused with a shrug.

Loke's eyes widened.

"He is *not* my boyfriend Levy!" Lucy screeched, only slightly aware of her boss' sudden nervous twitch.

"Very well. Finish it and get to work. You have deadlines ladies. Lucy, you all set for this afternoon?" Was all the man supplied in reply.

"Yes, sir!" she responded with false enthusiasm, smiling up at him cautiously.

Loke then swivelled on his heels, adjusted his glasses, and walked off to his office.

Levy blinked a couple of times and then turned to Lucy, "How did we just get away with that?"

"I'm not sure, Lev. We owe someone, somewhere, that's for sure," the blonde shrugged in mock ignorance.

Lucy knew exactly who she owed however. The thought made her slightly uncomfortable, but as she looked down at the note on her desk, the feeling melted away.

Levy made her way back to her desk, refusing to tell Lucy what she had been working so hard on recently. Apparently it was on a need to know basis.

Once Lucy was alone, she pulled out her phone and fired out a text.

*"Thank you for the waffles. Seems to have powered me up already, the boss didn't even tell me and Levy off when he saw us eating it at my desk. Didn't dare mess with how kickass we were obviously. Hope you have a good day!"*

Lucy hoped he clocked on to what she was hinting at. Whatever Natsu did to Loke that day, the boss had born it in mind.

A little while later her phone buzzed next to her, Lucy looked up from her hunk of junk computer where she was sending copies of her article to the printer.

*"I'm glad you liked it. I was gonna come see you this morning on the way to work. I overslept tho. Rang room service to send that to you to make up for being a mess. Happy to hear your boss has learnt not to mess with big, bad ol' you. Careful, you'll get a reputation ;)"*

Lucy's stomach did a flip as she read Natsu's reply, and she text back probably too quickly.

*"I think I've already got a reputation, after hanging out with you."*

Natsu wasted no time either though, as her phone buzzed almost instantly. She imagined he was lying in bed staring at his phone. The thought of him naked in bed made her blush like she was a teenager again; she shook her head and read his reply.

*"You hanging out with me tonight?"*

Lucy smiled.

*"Sure :)"*

*"I'll pick you up from work. 5.30 ok?"*

*"Sounds perfect!"*

*"See you later, beautiful!"*

She chewed on her bottom lip as she gazed down at her phone; his new habit of calling her beautiful was getting her worked up in all kinds of bizarre ways. She had to put it all out of her head though, as she got ready to see Loke with her article.

Eventually it was time, and she reminded herself that Natsu thought she could kick ass, so she would. She reached Loke's mahogany office door and knocked.

"Come in!" He hollered.

She opened the door and strutted in, trying to ooze confidence, taking inspiration from a mixture of Levy and Natsu.

"Ok Lucy, let's have it," the editor nodded at her as he crossed his arms across his chest, and leaned back into his chair nonchalantly.

Lucy handed over her article and he scoured it for a moment. Lucy held her breath.

Eventually he looked back up at her, "Looks great. You double checked all the budgets you're talking about?"

Lucy nodded.

"And this band, *Sabertooth*, they have given you their permission to use them as an example of music changing lives? I'm not going to get a case for libel sent to my desk because they weren't the roughians you claim?"

"Certain, sir."

Lucy had gone back to calling Loke sir; it made her feel more comfortable, setting such a boundary after the strange night they spent together at Love & Lucky. He didn't correct her now, either.

"Great. Send it to Droy and he will get it laid out ready for tomorrow's print. Your next job is to cover Magnolia's spring festival next week. I want to know all about everyone who's performing, and a step by step guide of how to experience the event."

Lucy stood there stunned for a moment, before realising she had to supply an answer, "Sure thing!"

Loke smiled at her thoughtfully for a second and then turned back to his computer screen, signalling that she should leave.

Lucy couldn't believe she had been getting so worked up about such a simple meeting. She'd be lying if she wasn't slightly disappointed at the anticlimax, but all the same was pumped to start her next job.

The rest of the day whizzed by quickly as Lucy got stuck in to her new assignment, and before she knew it Levy was at her desk telling her to pack up.

"Gajeel has come to meet me from work. He's just rang me to say he's arrived, and guess who he says is outside?" Levy cooed.

"Oh *god*, the time. Ok wait, I'm coming Lev!" Lucy stood up smashing her belongings into her bag and saving her work multiple times, just in case, before shutting the computer down.

Outside, Natsu and Gajeel leant against the wall of the Inquirer's offices.

"I feel like school kids waitin' out here," Natsu scowled.

"Well that woman on reception is a piece of work, I'm not getting into another word battle with her," Gajeel grunted.

Natsu rolled his eyes. Gajeel just stared at him from the corner of his own.

"I can't believe you're still here, cuz," Gajeel pried after a pause.

Natsu just nodded, scrunched up his face, then rubbed his hands down it in exasperation, "I don't know if I will be much longer. Laxus picked me up yesterday. I have two days apparently. Well, one day now."

"One day, huh? I told you not to get caught up in anything flame brain. You knew this was never gonna end well. What you gonna do?" Gajeel replied stonily, trying to mask his concern.

"I either fuck off like they want, or stand up and fight," Natsu shrugged, staring off into the distance at the wall across the street that him and Lucy sat on together days prior.

Gajeel scoffed, "You'd really do that? All cause of this chick you've barely known for a second?"

"I'm aware of how stupid it sounds, Gaj."

"The thing is Natsu, it's not just about *you*. You know that it'll be Lucy they hit, right? Or worse, someone like me or Levy," Gajeel frowned, turning to properly face his cousin now.

"I don't see how any of those are worse than the other," Natsu turned to meet him, his tone getting irritable.

He knew Gajeel was right though. To keep Lucy safe, he should just go.

"One more day. I can figure it out in that time." Natsu nodded to himself before Gajeel could lecture him further.

"Figure out what?" The two men heard a familiar voice sing.

They looked up to see Lucy and Levy with smiles on their faces like they'd just been giggling. Probably at the sorry sight the two men made waiting for the girls.

"Hey, Luce! Ah, nothing. Don't worry," Natsu smiled as he walked towards her and grabbed her pile of notes off her, "I'll take those."

"Such a gentleman!" Levy snickered.

Natsu raised an eyebrow at her, "Hey, Levy."

"C'mon Shrimp, let's leave those two to their mess," Gajeel grabbed the top of Levy's head and spun her round.

"And *you* are such a cynic, Gajeel!" She berated as she punched him in the ribs. Gajeel barely flinched.

"See you around, Natsu," he called without turning around, "Let's leave it a little longer next time!"

Natsu grimaced, and snapped to look at Lucy who was pulling a confused face.

"What does that mean?" She pried.

"Nothin', he's just a weirdo," Natsu tried to brush it off, "kinda like you, I guess!"

Lucy scowled and hit him in the shoulder, causing Natsu to feign being hurt before he broke into a cackle. Lucy just stepped forward ignoring his antics.

"Let's go, Plue will be waiting for m-" Lucy cut herself off, "Oh wait, if you want to come back to mine that is? I guess we should probably go back to yours, seeing as you're paying for a hotel room?"

"It's just money," Natsu shrugged, "I reckon feedin' your dog so he doesn't die, is probably more important than that."

"You have a good point," Lucy nodded, and Natsu chuckled softly.

They turned to head to Lucy's apartment, but bumped into Loke leaving the offices. The boss looked at the couple warily, and Natsu put his arm around Lucy's waist territorially, shooting him a knowing look.

"Good work today, Lucy. Enjoy your evening with your boyfriend!" Loke almost bowed, whilst pushing his glasses up his nose, then waving goodbye and dashing off towards the parking lot at the rear of the building.

Lucy blushed furiously, keeping her eyes glued down to the floor.

Natsu turned to her with a raised eyebrow, "*Boyfriend?*"

"Blame Levy!" Lucy cried, snapping her head to look at the man before her, "She was winding me up after she saw the waffles you sent me! She told Loke they were from my boyfriend! I'm sorry Natsu I promise I'm not telling people you're my boyf-"

Natsu leant in and kissed her.

"Shut up, ya weirdo."

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"If this was your last night left on this earth, what food would you want to eat right now?"

"Dramatic much, Natsu?"

Lucy and Natsu had collapsed on to Lucy's couch when they got in and not moved. They sat at opposite ends, entwining their legs in the middle. Lucy had been scribbling something down into her work note pad and Natsu was just staring into space.

Staring at her.

Lucy looked picture perfect, like always. She still wore her work clothes, a navy pencil skirt and a white silk pussy bow blouse. She had given her ensemble her usual edge by wrapping the hooped belt Natsu had bought her round her waist. Her black suede court shoes kicked off next to the coffee table, her bare feet nestled inbetween Natsu's legs.

"Is it lame to admit, that all I really want right now, is a pepperoni pizza?" Lucy sounded out loud.

"It would make my job a hell of a lot easier if you did," Natsu grinned playfully.

"Pepperoni pizza, then," Lucy smiled, cocking her head to the side.

Natsu pulled out his mobile and dialled, "Hey, two large pepperoni pizzas please, one with extra jalapenos..."

Lucy zoned out of what Natsu was telling the pizza place, admiring him for a second. He was the epitome of desire. He wore a tight white t-shirt with his loosely fit black skinny jeans, his scarf still hanging out of his back pocket even whilst sitting on the couch. The t-shirt had ridden up slightly so Lucy could see his faint pink snail trail and the v shape his muscles made above his waist band. His pink hair was all askew, sticking up at different angles, complimenting his carefree attitude. Just looking at him was giving Lucy devious thoughts. She bore a fiendish smile as she began to softly rub her bare foot along the inside of Natsu's thigh. His onyx eyes snapped up at her as he finished up his phone call.

"Pizza will be half an hour," he stated.

Lucy rubbed her foot back up his thigh, slowly, sensually.

"Sounds good," she nodded.

Natsu eyed her like she was prey as he sat up slowly.

"Half an hour, with nothing to do..." Natsu crooned softly.

"Hmm, I'm sure I can think of something," Lucy smirked.

Natsu smirked back and began to pull himself up the couch towards her. Lucy then sat up and swung her legs off the couch. Natsu was taken back.

"I've got to walk Plue and feed him, do some laundry, get out of these work clothes," Lucy grinned impishly.

Natsu widened his eyes, he had been played, "The devil works hard, but you work harder Miss Heartfilia."

If only she knew how precious time was.

"How about, I deal with Plue whilst you get yourself sorted?" He offered, wanting to race through the chores in half the time.

Lucy nodded, "Sure. Just take him to the end of the street to that cherry tree, he'll be happy with that."

Natsu sighed as Lucy handed him Plue's lead. If a fortnight ago he had been told he'd be sitting in a girl's apartment offering to walk her dog, he would have hurt the person for even



suggesting such ludicrousness. He still didn't know if this domestic life was for him, but he knew he enjoyed being with Lucy.

When he returned Lucy answered the door to let him in and she had already changed. He looked her up and down and his body twitched with need. She had slipped into a black silk nightdress, cut off dangerously high at her thigh with a slight notch of a slit up one leg, and triangular cups barely holding up her breasts in the flimsy material. She wore an old plaid shirt unbuttoned over the top.

Without thinking, Natsu bent down, grabbed her neck, and kissed her on the lips.

"Ok... Good walk?" Lucy breathed.

"Sure," Natsu smiled as he walked past her.

He collapsed back on to her couch and watched her dart around her apartment in her skimpy get up doing the last of her chores. There was a knock at the door and Natsu got up to answer it.

"Pizza?" A strange looking delivery guy asked.

He was lanky, had dark blue, slightly quiffed hair, with a few bangs dangling across his forehead. The thing that really caught Natsu's eye though, was the man's tattoo: a strange symbol over the right side of his forehead. He wasn't wearing a uniform from the delivery place either, and suddenly Natsu felt incredibly uneasy.

"Do you need some money Natsu?" Lucy called in the distance and began to walk to the door.

"I got it! Get some plates?" He said too quickly, turning to Lucy who raised her eyebrow at him.

Natsu turned back to the delivery driver who smirked back at him and tried to peer into the apartment. Natsu's instincts were flaming up, and whoever this man was, he didn't want him to have the satisfaction of seeing Lucy.

"Thanks," Natsu briskly grabbed the pizza, and handed him the money.

"Nice looking apartment, just yours or?" The delivery driver asked nonchalantly.

"Don't see why that matters to you," Natsu glared before shutting the door in the guy's face.

Natsu walked back into the apartment and dumped the pizza on the coffee table, ignoring Lucy's confused look as he stalked over to the window. He watched the guy get into a car that looked like it had someone else in the driver's seat.

"Zeref..." Natsu grumbled quietly.

"Huh? You ok?" Lucy came up behind him and grabbed his elbow.

Natsu pushed her off and pulled the curtains shut and stormed across the room to lock the apartment door, his aura turning blacker by the second, the fire in his eyes sparking.

"Natsu? What are you doing? You're kind of... *Scaring* me?" Lucy's voice was tense.

Natsu stopped in his tracks, but didn't acknowledge her concern. He was too lost in his thoughts; he didn't have a gun. How could he be so *stupid*? If they came now, he had nothing to protect her. He turned and headed into the kitchen, pulling open drawers frantically, letting them crash to the floor, spilling their contents, looking for something, *anything*, he could wield as a weapon.

Lucy ran up behind him again, pulling on his arm repeatedly until he stopped rifling through her belongings.

"Natsu! Answer me!" She practically shouted this time.

He finally turned his head to look at her, and noticed how wide her eyes were. Wide with fear. Fear of him.

He stopped.

"Lucy..." he whispered, pained.

Lucy softened at what she realised was him being vulnerable, and reached her hand up to stroke his cheek. He closed his eyes and leant into her touch. He opened them again to see her still afraid, but still trying to comfort him and appear calm. She was selfless. At that realisation, he cracked a small, soft smile.

"Lucy, I'm- I'm sorry. I thought- I thought the pizza guy... It's stupid. I'm... sorry," he leant down and pressed his forehead against hers.

"It's ok. I get it, I think. Sometimes, I think I see people from my past... A maid, or one of my father's employees... I panic. I think they're going to take me back. Then I realise there's nothing to go back to anymore. Whoever you thought you saw Natsu, you don't have to go back to them anymore. You're safe here," she spoke soothingly.

Natsu felt sick. She had no idea how wrong she was. It was dawning on him how he never truly left his brother's grasp, and that neither of them were in the slightest bit safe. However Lucy wrapped her arms around his torso and pulled herself into him, tucking her head under his chin and squeezing him tight. Natsu just stood with his arms by his side's not daring to reciprocate the hug. He didn't deserve it. Lucy needed to get as far away from him as possible.

Before he knew what was happening though, Lucy had started to kiss his neck softly. He moved to look down at her slightly boggled, but she reached up and put her arms around his neck, and kissed him on the lips. Natsu grabbed her waist to steady himself.

She kissed him again.

"You're safe," she whispered.

A better man would have stopped her, would have explained everything to her, left her to live her life. Natsu wasn't a better man though, he thought. He couldn't help himself. He melted into her touches and began to kiss her back. Soon they were desperately pawing at each other, their kisses getting more heated. Natsu could feel Lucy's breasts pressing against him through her thin nightdress. At the point he completely gave in, and emerged himself in the moment. He pulled the plaid shirt off her shoulders and threw it aside, and began kissing her neck and shoulders. He started nipping her collarbone and she began to softly moan, he pulled at the strap on her shoulder with his teeth. He kept his head down though; he couldn't look her in the eye.

He didn't want to give her the chance to see the angst that was truly within him.

As if she had a sixth sense, Lucy suddenly pulled away and pulled his head up to look at her. Natsu closed his eyes and looked in the other direction. Lucy frowned, but grabbed his hand and started pulling him towards the bedroom, determined to pull him from this rut.

"The pizza?" Natsu questioned.

"It's just as good cold," she winked.

They reached the bedroom and Lucy pushed him onto the bed and climbed on top of him. She started kissing him again and running her hands under his t-shirt, feeling his muscles stiffen at her touch. She pulled her hands out and then began to yank the material upwards. Natsu helped her and pulled the t-shirt off over his head, and then grabbed both her cheeks, pulling her lips back to his.

Lucy began to grind against the bulge forming in his crotch. He started to massage her breasts through her night slip, and rub his thumbs over her hardened nipples. Lucy started moaning into Natsu's mouth as they kissed, and he drank up every last one of her sounds.

Lucy moved to start undoing his jeans, pulling them down and accidentally pulling his boxers with them. Both of them went with it and Natsu shuffled them down to his ankles. Lucy eyed his member before rubbing it softly with her right hand, and began kissing his neck. Natsu let out a heavy breath and closed his eyes as she began to manipulate his body. She trailed her kisses down from his neck, over his pecs, flicking one of his nipples with her tongue. She kept lowering her body, pumping him all the while. Natsu felt himself beginning to buck into her hand, he placed his hands loosely over the top of her arms as she continued downwards. Once she reached her goal, she gave the base of his cock a kiss before running her tongue all the way up his length.

A small growl rolled in Natsu's throat.

She placed her mouth over him and Natsu looked down at her for a second; her wide brown eyes stared back at him mischievously. Her blonde hair falling around her shoulders, her cheeks flushed as her soft lips took him inside her mouth. He had to fight the urge to suddenly call her name. He couldn't handle the guilt flooding through him. He needed to distance himself from her in his head.

Here was this beautiful woman, selflessly pleasuring him after having opened up to him so much over the past week, and he was on the cusp of abandoning her, or worse, risking her life to stay with her. Either option was selfish of him.

He was snapped out of his thoughts as Lucy started humming slightly, the vibrations rocking through him. He looked down and saw her eyes like galaxies staring up at him once more.

He couldn't take it any longer.

He pulled her up by her shoulders and kissed her, before rolling over so he was on top. He pulled off her panties from under her nightdress and spread her legs slightly, and dived into Lucy's bedside drawer to find the tin of condoms she had produced days earlier. Once he had sheathed himself, he flipped her over on to her front and pulled her onto all fours.

He needed to be free from her gaze.

Lucy stayed silent and gripped the duvet tightly with both hands.

Natsu started pounding her slowly at first, before grabbing one of her shoulders to thrust more vigorously. Her blonde hair still shining in the light of her bedside lamp, reminding him of who he was with.

What he was doing.

What he was going to have to do.

He snapped his eyes shut and growled in frustration, getting even rougher with her body as he gripped her waist with his other hand, leaving faint marks where his fingers dug in.

All of a sudden he felt Lucy stiffening beneath him, and mistaking this for her building towards climax he started thrusting deeper and pulling her hair, however all of a sudden Lucy started to wriggle in his grasp, before letting out a guttural sob.

"Stop!" She whimpered.

"Huh?" Natsu snapped his head down towards her and saw tears streaming down her face.

He stopped and Lucy crawled away from him, "P-please, stop."

She sobbed again so hard her whole body convulsed, she then collapsed onto her side, curling into a ball.

Natsu stared for a second, looking down at his dick and his hands, before the realisation of what he had been doing to her sunk in. He had bent her over, retreated into his own mind, and was roughing her up, probably triggering memories of her father's abuse.

"Shit! Lucy!" Natsu bent down to grab her, but stopped short, not knowing what to do for the best.

"Lucy! I'm so sorry. I got lost in my head, I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

He placed a hand on her head to stroke her hair, she flinched slightly at his touch and Natsu wanted to throw up. How many ways did Natsu possess of damaging this girl?

"I'm s-sorry, N-Natsu," Lucy sniffed, taking in a deep breath.

That broke Natsu's heart, and he swooped into scoop her up into his arms, resting her head on his shoulder.

"Don't you ever, ever apologise, Lucy," he whispered into her ear, "You are a wonderful person who doesn't deserve this, doesn't deserve someone as shitty as me."

Lucy moved to bury her head into the crook of his neck.

"You're not shitty," she whimpered.

Natsu moved a hand to stroke the back of her head, trying to soothe her as best he could. It's a good job Jude Heartfilia was already dead, he thought, else Natsu would have ripped him apart limb by limb.

He eventually felt her relax into his hold, sniffing as she nuzzled further into his neck. She fit so perfectly in his arms, and he knew in that moment he could never leave her. He wanted to protect her for as long as he lived. He took in her scent and his heart surged, his mouth opened...

"I love you, Lucy."

There was silence.

Lucy slowly pulled away from his grasp and looked up at him with puffy red eyes.

"You... You love me?" Lucy asked incredulously.

Natsu's face flushed and his heart felt like it was going to pound out of his chest. He had never said those words to a woman before, and he began to panic that his habit of living fast and hard had probably jumped the gun on this issue.

"Erm, yeah."

More silence.

"I'm sorry, that was a shitty thing for me to say at a moment like this hey? I told you I was a shitty man," Natsu grimaced, rubbing the back of his neck.

Lucy shook her head. She reached up and stroked his cheek with her fingers, lingering over his scar, staring into his eyes. She sat up and kissed him on the lips softly. Natsu closed his eyes and rested his forehead against hers once she had finished.

"You hardly know me? How can you possibly think you love me?" Lucy whispered.

Natsu grabbed her hand and pulled it up to his mouth, kissing it and gazed into her eyes, letting his soul pour out through them. Just hearing her voice reassured him; he knew he had never felt this attracted to a person so wholly before. That must mean something.

"I just know," he whispered back.

Lucy smiled, but looked away. Natsu guided them down towards the bed together, where he held her against his body, tucking her head under his chin. He bent his head to kiss her hair and breathed her in.

"Natsu, you are the craziest person I have ever met. Don't ever leave," the blonde spoke tenderly.

Natsu closed his eyes tight and pressed a harder kiss into her hair.

"Never. I promise."

#### Chapter End Notes

Been far too long - hope you enjoy! Thank you for all the comments and kudos, I am back in the zone! I'm also in the process of editing past chapters to tidy things up

# Chapter 13

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Natsu awoke the next morning to the sound of Lucy falling on to her backside as she was trying to put on socks.

"Luce? What time is it? What are you doing?" Natsu asked half asleep still.

"Oh, sorry Natsu," she mumbled whilst rushing over to him, "I woke up extra early so I'm just going to take Plue for a walk before work. I'll bring us some breakfast back."

She reached down to the bed and stroked his head, Natsu sat up a little and pulled her hand to his lips and kissed it.

"Don't be too long," Natsu smiled lazily, rubbing his nose against her skin.

"Half an hour, tops!" Lucy nodded, prying her hand from his grasp.

Natsu collapsed back into the bed and listened to the apartment door closing as Lucy rushed out. The morning sun was starting to rise and it illuminated the bedroom through a crack in the curtains. He felt it warm his skin, and in that moment he felt so at peace, so whole.

Then he remembered.

He remembered Lucy's selfless attempts to pleasure him last night, but him triggering her into reliving past wrongs. He shuddered and covered his face with his hands.

He then also remembered telling Lucy he loved her, and the way she didn't run away freaked out, but how she went on to spend the night in his arms.

*"Don't ever leave."*

He replayed her words in his head.

Was that her way of saying she could love him back eventually? Gods, he was losing his mind. He never thought he'd have the time or understanding for something as pitiful as *love*.

Natsu got up and skulked into the living room, grabbing a slice of the pizza that still sat untouched from the night before. They must have crashed out real early. No wonder Lucy was already up and out of the house at half past seven. He headed to the living room window and opened the curtains. His mind turned to the strange delivery guy and whether or not he truly was sent by Zeref to scope the place out, or if in actual fact he was turning just as paranoid as his older brother.

Natsu sighed and ran his hands through his hair.

Today was his supposed last day with Lucy. He had the next 12 hours to come up with a plan that would mean they could stay together.

He could just bust Zeref's door down and demand clemency, but that was risky.

He decided his best option was to finally just tell Lucy the truth. That he was a former criminal kingpin who was guilty of a thousand sins. That he left his old way of life in a disagreement with his brother, self-declared leader of the underworld. That as part of his departure he made a specific deal to protect those he cares about which meant he wasn't allowed in Magnolia for longer than a couple of days, or to have any contact with his former colleagues. That he had to travel around the country, not settling anywhere in order to prove to his brother that he wasn't going to form a power which could rival Fairy Tail. That he had selfishly been risking his friends' and Lucy's lives by staying so long.

He could only hope she wouldn't be terrified of him.

His ultimate plan was to see if she would escape with him, despite them only knowing each other a couple of weeks, he hoped he could get across to her how amazing it was for him to feel so connected to a person. This should still be within the realms of his deal with Zeref too; he wouldn't be settling in one place, just with one person. Lucy had already run away once in her life, she was clearly brave. Surely she could adapt to his way of living? It would be like one non-stop adventure.

Natsu looked at his watch; it had been about 20 minutes since Lucy had left.

He went to the shower to freshen himself up before she got home. Once he was out and dressed back into yesterday's clothes, he threw himself on to the couch, gazing up at the titles of books on Lucy's shelves, getting a feel for the things she liked to read. Another 15 minutes quickly passed, he supposed there was just a long queue in the coffee shop. He got up to flick through the CDs in the rack by the telly to keep himself busy. Soon however, 50 minutes had gone by in total, with still no sign of Lucy.

Natsu now had an uneasy feeling in his stomach. Something was clearly wrong.

Why had he let her leave the apartment on her own after the potential threat from last night? He tried to shake the thought out of his head. He had one more day left.

Zeref was many things, but he always upheld a deal. Lucy would be back.

He picked up his phone and rang her, just in case. It went to voicemail. He tried again, but the same thing happened.

"Shit!" He snarled to himself under his breath.

He stood up and started to pace, trying to think rationally.

There was a knock on the door and he could hear Plue barking.

"Oh thank the gods!" He breathed as he raced over, Lucy must have just forgotten her keys.



As he flung the door open he wasn't greeted by his celestial goddess however, but an old lady with long white hair piled into a bun on top of her head, and a slight hunchback.

"Is this your dog? I found him running around outside by himself. I thought he maybe escaped but he's got his lead on? Quite odd..." The woman pondered.

In a matter of seconds, Natsu's world started crashing down around him.

He struggled to breathe; he gripped the door knob in his hand so tight his knuckles felt like they were going to pop out of his skin.

"Son? Are you ok?" The lady croaked, worried.

"Did ya see a girl? With the dog? A blonde girl, she looks like..." Natsu desperately looked to find a photo of Lucy to show the lady, he saw the picture of Lucy's mother on the side table next to the door, "...like this. But younger. This is her... *mother*? They look identical."

Natsu desperately tapped at the framed photo in his hands, taking a stab in the dark that it housed the image of Lucy's deceased mom, his jaw clenched in anticipation for the lady's answer.

"No, sorry son. Is something wrong? Can I help?" Came the reply he dreaded.

"No, it's fine thank you ma'am. Thanks for returnin' the dog."

The lady nodded, smiled warily and handed Plue over. Natsu closed the door, counting the seconds until he could explode.

"Shit!" He screamed, throwing the picture frame in his hand to the floor, smashing the glass across the room.

Plue yelped, jumped out of his arms and went to cower in the corner, watching as Natsu crossed his arms behind his head and paced back and forth.

"Be *clever*, Natsu. Calm down," he turned to Plue, "where did Luce go, boy? Did someone take her? Did she have to run and hide? Or did you just run off, and now she's out there looking for ya? Yeah, that makes the most sense, hey?"

Natsu nodded to himself and grabbed his phone to try her number again. Nothing.

He then tried a different number.

"It's half eight in the morning, mouth breather!" A voice snarled out of the phone speaker.

"Gajeel are you with Levy?"

"Why do you care?!"

"Just answer the question, Gaj," Natsu spoke through gritted teeth.

"Yes, I am," replied the studded giant curtly.

"Can you ask her if she's heard from Lucy this morning? Told her she's gonna be late for work, anything at all?"

"What have you done, Natsu?" Gajeel sighed.

Natsu was truly losing all control now, and he shouted down the phone, "Gajeel, just ask her the fuck damn question!"

There was silence for a moment followed by a deep huff, but Natsu heard his cousin mumbling to Levy. After an agonising minute or two, he returned back to the phone.

"Nope. Shrimp's heard nothin'. What's going *on*?" Gajeel sounded overly serious now.

"Probably nothing. Lucy just hasn't come back from her walk this morning, but someone's returned her dog," Natsu took in a deep breath, shaking his head, still trying to believe the more rational explanations.

"Shit. You tried ringing her?" Was Gajeel's less than comforting reply.

"Of course I fucking have ya lughead!"

"Fuck Natsu, calm down. You think something has happened?"

"I don't know."

"I told you this wouldn't end well Nats-"

Natsu hung up on him, not in the mood for another lecture. He didn't have that time to waste. Instead he grabbed his jacket, keys and wallet, before chucking on his boots and scribbling a note telling Lucy to ring him ASAP if she got home.

"Stay put, boy!" Natsu called to Plue before running out the door.

He sprinted down the street looking for any signs that could point to Lucy's whereabouts. He headed in the direction of the coffee shop he knew she would have gone to, the one which had fuelled many of their meetings. He slowed down as he saw the very thing he dreaded however.

On the floor, a brown paper bag and two coffee cups had crashed to the ground and spilled their contents all over the sidewalk. He kicked one of the cups with his foot, rolling it over to read the name the barista had written on it.

"*Lucy*"

Natsu closed his eyes and took in a deep breath, trying to compose himself. He couldn't contain it though. He kicked the cup and screamed.

"FUUUUUUCK!"

He pulled at his hair and swivelled on his feet inspecting his surroundings, desperately trying to find someone obviously watching him. He found nothing but concerned passers-by. That was when his breath hitched in his throat and he truly began to see red.

"Zeref!" He snarled, his voice thick with bloodlust.

As he turned to head off towards his hotel, something shiny caught his eye. He bent down and grabbed it; it was one of Lucy's heart shaped earrings. He gripped it in the palm of his hand and choked back the guilt he felt flooding through his body.

"Don't worry Luce, I will rip them apart before they harm you," he growled.

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Once in his hotel room, Natsu stormed towards his wardrobe. He flung open the wooden door and pulled out a canvas duffle bag from the bottom of it. He chucked it onto his bed and started rifling through it to find the wooden box he kept his guns locked in. He had contacts throughout Fiore who would hook him up with different weapons if he really wanted them, but he often found the two Berettas he packed wherever he went were more than sufficient.

Once he had the box unlocked, he shucked off his jacket and slipped on his shoulder holster with a rhythm that betrayed the fact he had done this a million times before. He loaded his guns and stuck them in the holsters. Pulling his jacket back on, he rummaged in the bag further to pull out spare ammunition and a silencer which he stashed in his inside pockets.

Lastly, he pulled the lighter out of his jeans pocket and checked it burnt bright fuel. Just in case.

Once satisfied he was as well-equipped as he could be, he grabbed a packet of cigarettes that he had left on the room's sideboard and headed out the door. He went into the hotel parking lot, grabbed a conveniently abandoned piece of pipe left by the dumpsters, and smashed the passenger window of a fast looking Audi. Cracking the window through with his elbow, he unlocked the door and quickly disengaged the intruder alarm by yanking out the cables from the bottom of the glove box.

He took a minute to look around, and satisfied that no one had noticed, or gave enough of a fuck to stop him at least, he leant in to unlock the driver's door from the inside. He sighed heavily as he then walked around the other side of the car to hotwire the engine.

He hated driving. It wasn't his strong suit. He never paid enough attention to the road, he often found himself going too fast, he was basically too erratic for it and was always ending up in trouble.

When he finally got the car started and sped out of the lot, he barely noticed the onlookers who suddenly realised a crime may have occurred; all he could bring himself to care about was heading towards the place he knew Zeref would be hiding.

As he thought of the million ways he would tear his brother apart if he had laid a finger on Lucy, he gripped the steering wheel so tightly his knuckles were white as bone, his teeth grinding as his jaw clenched.

Other than his fantasies, Natsu had no plan. He was relying on his intuition and fighting skill alone, going in guns blazing like the old days.

He followed the roads out of town, taking the route he knew off by heart to the old industrial compound where he knew Zeref and his rats resided. Once he neared the desolate area, he slowed the car down and parked it slightly down the street, on the opposite side of the road from the gates to the lot. There he took a minute, taking a deep breath and lighting a cigarette. He kept watch in his rear view mirror; hunting for any signs of people making their way in and out.

Although a large part of him was certain his brother was still here, he still needed to confirm that nothing had changed and he wasn't going to be caught breaking into the wrong rats nest.

After around ten minutes, and three cigarettes, a couple of guys stumbled, seemingly drunk, into Natsu's view. The clowns laughed and patted each other on the back clumsily, naively flashing the guns under their suit jackets like it didn't matter.

Natsu stubbed his cigarette out on the dashboard, and grabbed the silencer from his coat pocket, keeping both eyes fastened on the couple. Affixing the attachment to his gun with practiced ease, he watched as the guys turned the corner into the lot. This was all the proof he needed, and he crept out of the car.

From a distance, he followed them into where he swore he would not step foot again: he followed them into the gates of hell.

The men took the turning Natsu expected them to, heading left to a certain abandoned factory, where they pulled open the door to the underground steps.

Natsu couldn't help but scoff; the fact Zeref was holed up in the same den after all these years, in such an open place, was testament to how many police the man probably now had on his payroll. Zeref's infection ran deep.

Keeping to the shadows, pressing himself against the corrugated walls of the old factory buildings, Natsu darted towards the entrance to below which was now being swung shut by his unwitting tour guides. He carefully peeled the door back, and crept down the stairs, aiming his gun into the darkness. He could hear the men's guffaws; they were laughing about some stupid bar fight.

Natsu rolled his eyes, but remained pressed against the wall as he stepped into the abyss, he then watched the men head towards the secret entrance.

He nodded to himself, he would only have a few seconds once they typed in the code to enter in behind them, at which point he would have even less than a few seconds to get his wits about him and fend off the impending defensive from the gang inside.

As one of the lumbering fools raised his hand to the electronics box to begin typing, Natsu readied himself. He waited for the first small beep from the keys, before lunging forward at full pace, running on pure instinct. He was behind the men before they could even register that they needed to stop inputting the code.

As the door unlocked, he shot one guy straight through the chest, killing him. Natsu then quickly wrapped his arm around the other's neck, holding the gun to his temple.

As the door swung open, the dead man's body collapsed into the parlour room face first and the hostage swore loudly. Every head in the room snapped around to view the commotion.

Eyes went wide as the older recruits who could remember Natsu clocked on to what was happening; younger recruits who had no idea who he was stood up and pointed their guns arrogantly.

"Kill me and I *promise* your boss will kill *you*, despite allegiances," Natsu hissed instantly.

He knew that Zeref would want to be the person to hold the honour of putting him in the ground.

Some of the old guard grimaced and nodded.

A man Natsu remembered as Wakaba reached out and lowered the gun of a young man who stood next to him to the ground.

"Don't shoot!" The old man ordered to his comrades.

"But Wakaba, who the fu-" the young guy started.

"He is someone who could have blown us all up in seconds if he wanted, but hasn't, so shut the fuck up kid," Wakaba snapped.

Natsu smirked, "I always liked you, old man."

Wakaba just fixed a cold glare in his direction and remained silent.

"Ok, so let's get this over with. Nobody else has to die. Where the fuck is he?" Natsu demanded, tightening his grip on the man in his arms.

"Like we know where the boss is, Salamander," a woman Natsu was pretty sure to be called Bisca countered.

Natsu growled in annoyance, "Bullshit. A load of ya would have been sent out on guard duty if he was out of the compound. You're all just sat here getting fucked. So someone best get him, or your buddy here loses his brains."

The room remained silent. No one moved an inch.

Natsu cocked the gun.

"You know I'm fucking serious!" He snarled, abruptly lifting the gun to the ceiling and firing a round which went on to ricochet down by his feet.

More silence.

Then suddenly, there were fast and heavy footsteps.

“And *you* should know, no one gives a shit about the fuckup you got there anyway,” a familiar voice drawled behind him.

Before Natsu could turn around to see his old comrade, he felt the cold metal of a pistol being pressed against his own temple too, accompanied by the sound of a long sigh.

“Will you ever grow up, flame brain?”

Natsu sneered in response, practically spitting his reply, “*Fuck off*, Laxus.”

Laxus just laughed.

## Chapter End Notes

A short chapter as I get back into the flow of writing - hope it's ok!

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