

IGNIS had trouble getting to sleep that night. He was certainly familiar to the level of luxury the hotel at Galdin Quay provided, but after being on the road for several days, he had grown used to staying in rural motels or even in Gladio's tent, which was starting to get more and more threadbare every time they used it. The opportunity to sleep in a room as opulent as this one was rather unexpected. But a few days later all four of them would be in Altissia, and then all this would be over.

Still, Ignis remained awake. There was a sort of buzz in the air, like electricity: he wondered if it was an effect of the air conditioning. Not that the building really needed any, being right beside the sea. Ignis fidgeted in his bed; it felt as if something very meaningful was about to happen. It was anticipation for Noctis' wedding, he supposed, that was making him think such thoughts.

Someone knocked on the door. It was loud: the visitor had obviously assumed nobody in the room would be awake. Indeed, with the noise it made, Ignis was surprised that none of the others woke up. He got up slowly and then headed straight for the door, noting the feeling of thick carpet under his bare feet.

The man who stood in the corridor was unrecognisable: it was the middle of the night, and there was very little light. After Ignis' eyes adjusted, he was no closer to guessing the man's identity, although he could now see he was wearing a uniform

that marked him out as a member of the hotel staff.

“What’s going on?” he whispered. The corridor was empty apart from him and this stranger; he could hear the echo of his own voice reflected back at him from the hotel walls.

“You’re travelling with the prince, right?” the man said. “Is he in there?” He craned his neck, as if trying to catch a glimpse of Noctis; Ignis mirrored his movements without realising it, subconsciously preventing him from seeing inside.

“That’s right,” he confirmed. “What are you after?”

“There’s been an incident,” said the man. “Thought you should know.”

He handed Ignis a newspaper: it was the next morning’s edition, freshly delivered, its pages still crisp. Ignis held it in both hands, looked down at it, and then realised: this was the moment he had been anticipating. This was the moment where everything changed.

“Do you have any more information?” he asked. Now, his voice sounded too quiet – or maybe too loud. He was suddenly finding it very difficult to speak in a way that might be comprehensible.

“There’s a radio at reception,” said the visitor. “We’ve already been listening. You can join us, if you like.”

Ignis nodded briefly. “Yes. But –” He didn’t want to go alone; the others would need to know what had happened. He wondered which of them would wake up first.

“Hold on,” he said. “Let me fetch one of my companions.”

He returned to the room, not understanding how he was still able to remain on two feet. His hands shook, but he still seemed to be capable of walking as if everything was perfectly all right. That fact in itself was something he found worrying.

In the silent bedroom, he came across Gladio.

“Gladio, wake up,” he hissed. “It’s important.”

Gladio awoke suddenly, and immediately tensed as if he expected to have to fight.

“It’s me,” said Ignis, and Gladio’s body loosened again. “You need to come with me. It’s urgent.”

“Iggy?” Gladio murmured. “What’s up?”

“You’ll see. Come on, get up.”

Gladio did so, muttering something incomprehensible, and followed Ignis back into the corridor, slow and disorientated like a lumbering beast. Ignis waited a few seconds for him to adjust, and then handed over the newspaper.

“Shit,” said Gladio.

“My thoughts exactly.”

“What are we gonna do?”

“That, I don’t know,” Ignis admitted. “They have a radio at reception. Shall we listen?”

They walked to the reception and sat down on a settee. Like all the furniture there, it was far too elegant for what it was now being used for, and for the sorts of words that had begun to intermittently escape Gladio’s mouth as he listened to the news report. To begin with, the two of them sat there with-

out trying to make any kind of conversation, but after a while, it became clear that there would be nothing more reported that they didn't already know by this point, so they gradually began to discuss it. Everything they said seemed utterly useless. What could possibly be done in a situation like this? Nonetheless, they managed to settle on a decision shortly before sunrise: they would tell Noctis what had happened, and if he was willing, they would return to Insomnia at once. That would tell them much more about what was going on.

“Time to go?” Gladio suggested.

“Indeed.”

Ignis got up and began to head back, away from the radio: after a minute or two, he could no longer hear it. Now the only sound came from his footsteps, and from Gladio's beside them. The two of them walked along the corridor, all the way back to their room. There, Ignis stretched out a hand, placed it against the door, and hesitated. Now he would have to explain all this to Noctis; after that, nothing would be the same.

He opened the door.