

**andante, andante**

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# andante, andante

by [inverse](#)

## Summary

Noctis needs to learn how to dance for a ball, stat. An unlikely candidate comes to his aid.

## Notes

dear catlady86,

this was really fun to write and i hope you enjoy reading it!! i honestly don't really know a waltz from a tango from a paso doble, and have taken several liberties with the background of the story (because the crown definitely doesn't have its own in-house dance instructor, no, why would they...), but i can say that i had a lot of fun with this fic. thanks for giving me the opportunity to write this for you ♥

“But I don’t wanna dance,” Noctis grumbled, absentmindedly shooting at the zombies on the screen. “It’s just a formality, and I know what I’d rather be doing for the night. Eating my way through dinner, and then going home to get a good night’s sleep afterwards.”

“Is it because you suck at dancing?” Prompto sniggered, matching Noctis shot for shot. Curse Ifrit, he was way better at this than Noct expected him to be.

“Really? You really think that? Have you ever seen me suck at anything?”

“Yeah,” said Prompto, “this,” and annihilated all the remaining targets, leaving Noct with barely a scrap to score from. The segment ended and the scoreboard came up, and Prompto was the overwhelming winner. He gave a loud whoop, and two girls standing nearby at the Para Para machine turned to stare at them with raised eyebrows.

“*You* suck,” Noctis sulked, bitterly replacing the electronic gun into its sheath. He allowed himself five seconds to feel contrite about coming up with an insult that only a toddler would use, then forgave himself, because having to waltz with the daughters of several important noblemen and women and titans of industry in front of an entire ballroom of people, judging and commenting on his every move, was causing him to lose his mind.

They went to the counter to exchange the tickets they earned. Prompto managed to score a cactuar plushie. Noct’s tickets amounted to two packets of gummy bears.

“I don’t think you’re going to suck at it,” Prompto pondered later, as they walked home with milkshakes in hand. “Those girls are going to stare deeply into your eyes, and then bam! Before they know it, song’s over.”

“Not if I manage to step on their feet every twenty seconds or so,” said Noct. “Fine, I admit it, okay? I have two left feet. And honestly, I don’t know why I’m so worried, because that is Ignis’s problem, because he’s the one who’s supposed to make sure I’m presentable for the party by the time it comes around. So sue me.”

Except Ignis also had two left feet. He sputtered through the steps when they met up for their inaugural lesson the next day, his feet constantly moving out of time to the music, and he pulled and pushed and turned Noct in all sorts of directions until Noct felt like a human rubber band. The man was a virtuoso at the piano. How was this possible? The cheerful waltz contrasted with the sour look on his face, and how thoroughly hopeless Noctis now felt about the entire affair. This was it. He was totally going to be in the papers the day after the ball.

“Crown Prince Sucks at Dancing, Everybody Unimpressed,” said the headlines.

“I’m not used to dancing in the lady’s role,” Ignis said after they’d decided enough was enough, self-consciously adjusting his glasses.

“Really,” said Noct drily. “That’s the real reason you were missing all the beats.”

“I’ll find a better tutor in no time,” Ignis said determinedly. The statement had the air of an overpromise all over it.

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When Noctis turned up to the training room the next time, he found Gladio instead of Ignis, sitting cross-legged on the floor. He did a double-take, turned back towards the corridor, then back into the room again, and checked his phone for the date. He didn't get it wrong. Ignis did schedule practice for that day.

"Are we training again today, or what? Or did you come here by mistake?" he asked, confused.

"No, genius," Gladio grinned. "Ignis told me someone needed a dance partner."

It took a while for Noct to realise what he meant. "Oh, hell no. You get to throw me around three afternoons a week, I'm not having one more day of that."

Gladio got up and strong-armed him into the room. "Hey, if your dancing involves bashing people in with a huge sword, you're doing it wrong."

Noctis gave Ignis a call as Gladio set up the audio. "Ignis, why is Gladio here instead of you? What's the meaning of this?"

"I actually managed to get in touch with the best ballroom dancing teacher in Insomnia, but she is down with a tremendously infectious disease, and all her apprentices have been quarantined as well," Ignis said with a sigh. "I am looking for alternatives, but in the meantime, apparently the Amicitias have been trained in the fine art of social dance since young. Gladio has volunteered to coach you until I find another teacher. He is quite good. I have seen it with my own two eyes."

"Amicitias? You couldn't have asked Iris instead, then? At least our heights match!"

"I know you're the future King and all, but it'll be a hundred years before I let you get that close to my sister," Gladio interjected from where he was fiddling with the remote control.

"I don't harbour any designs on Iris, dude," said Noct, and Gladio made a face without saying anything.

"We're gonna do the basic steps first," he said, walking to the centre of the room as Noct ended his call with Ignis. "Specs said he tried to get you to dance with a partner right away. That's no way to do it, honestly."

Noctis stood with his feet apart and his arms positioned around an imaginary partner, imitating Gladio's pose. "Huh, I didn't peg you as the type to know how to dance, but you do sound like you know what you're talking about."

"Of course I do," scoffed Gladio. "It's a family tradition, and besides, it scores you points with the ladies. Now, shoulders back and stand straight, Prince Charmless, and we'll fix those

moves of yours in no time.”

\*

One, two, three, one, two, three, one, two, three; left, side right, close, right, side left, close. For the following week that was all Noctis thought about in his free time, sometimes replaying the steps in his mind as he zoned out during a boring history lesson, or walked back to his apartment alone after a session at the arcade with Prompto. At the very least, he was determined not to embarrass himself. The lessons were coming along nicely, but it would take a lot more practice for him not to look like a clumsy amateur.

Gladio had taken it upon himself to teach Noctis a couple of variant steps so that he wouldn't look like, in his own words, “a total noob”.

“You have to lead the lady, got it?” he said, demonstrating a step to the diagonal so that Noct and his partner wouldn't be stuck in the basic box portion of the dance for the entire evening. “Then you want to signal to her that you maybe want to do a twirl – like so – and here's how you step back in.”

“I have to signal – that's too difficult,” Noctis objected.

“Well, that's where the actual practice comes in,” Gladio said, and offered his hand. Noct groaned, but took it anyway. They clasped their hands together, and it had never occurred to Noct before, but this was making him uncomfortable, even a little nervous. As sparring partners, they were often at close quarters with each other, and Noct couldn't begin to count the number of times Gladio had him pinned down to the training room's marble floor and given him a thorough ass-kicking, but of all things, the ordinary act of holding hands was what made his heart beat a little faster? He shoved the thought away and tried to reach behind Gladio so he could plant his right hand on Gladio's shoulder blade.

“This is awkward,” he mumbled at Gladio's chest.

“Too close for comfort?”

“I'll probably never have to lead someone who's this tall in a waltz, but okay.”

Gladio had the least graceful twirl of anybody he'd ever seen, like a sentient turnip on stilts. Having to duck under Noct's arm when he was doing it probably also contributed to that.

“So yeah, that was – that was how you lead,” Gladio said later when they took a break, waving his hand in some vague direction, as if handwaving would magically make Noctis good at leading his partner. “Takes some getting used to. Sometimes it's all about whether you have chemistry with your partner. Don't sweat it.”

Noctis lay flat on the ground morosely. “I don't care as long as I don't make a big enough blunder. You know how it's been lately. People have really been scrutinising me left and

right. Prince Noctis did this, Prince Noctis did that.” He sat back up again. “Will you be there? At the party.”

“Think so. Will probably be sitting with the rest of the Crownsguard, keeping watch. Why?”

“Dunno. If I’m still not up to par when the time comes, you can take my place if anyone asks me to dance.”

Gladio snorted. “Hey, have some faith in my teaching. You’ll be fine.”

When Ignis next arrived at Noct’s apartment to help him clean up, he brought up the issue of hiring another dance instructor.

“I managed to speak to the head of another studio. According to my research, they are nowhere as good as Madame Antonia, but they have agreed to step into the role,” he said, washing the dishes. “If you are amenable, I can ask for them to begin right away.”

Noctis scrunched his nose from where he was seated at the dining table, devouring the hand pies that Ignis had brought over and pointedly ignoring the state reports he was supposed to read. “Nah, I think we’re good. I’m learning just fine from Gladio, and besides, it’s only a couple weeks till the party. I don’t have time to get used to another tutor. I don’t have to do anything too fancy, right? We’ll manage.”

“Really?” asked Ignis, raising his eyebrows. “Well, if you say so. A penny saved is a penny earned.”

\*

“So how’s the dance practice coming along, Don Juan?” Prompto asked, trying to hit the character Noctis was playing with a flying kick.

“Amazing. Wish you could come to the party too,” Noctis said, wrestling with the joystick.

“Ooh, why? Are you going to introduce me to members of the royal family? I’m free to go, you know! As your plus-one, or something. Astrals, maybe this is the first step to us becoming relatives.”

“No, wish you could come so you can watch me *murder the dancefloor*,” Noctis replied, smashing the buttons, and totalled Prompto’s player with a flashy combo that involved raining fiery hailstones from the sky.

“Hey, no fair! I was distracted!” cried Prompto. Noctis gave him the smuggest look he could muster.

In truth, it really wasn’t coming along so swimmingly. With only days to go, his dancing was still mediocre at best. It wasn’t terrible per se, but it wasn’t going to impress anyone either.

Secretly he wished that he would have been able to do a better job, both because people were definitely going to talk about it, and because – well, nothing wrong with aspiring to be good at something.

Past a certain point, Gladio had given up on trying to teach him any more than his skill level would allow him to learn. “Your dancing is fine as it is,” he’d said the last time they met up, with Noctis still struggling to lead. “If you still wanna pick it up after the ball is over, I’m sure Ignis will be glad you’re interested in learning something new for a change. Except you’ll have to look for a new coach – don’t think I got anything more to teach you. That teacher he talked about that time’s probably recovered by now, right?”

Preparation for the party was well under way. Ignis had even made several appointments with the royal tailor so Noctis could get his tuxedo fitted and altered, and then altered again, and then a third time for good measure. But some nights, before he went to bed, Noctis would lie underneath his blankets and watch tutorials on the web, stumbling across the odd video shot at a professional competition. He had no idea how to look that graceful. Yeah, what he’d been practising with Gladio was definitely at an amateur level. He’d fall asleep, resigned that that was as good as it was going to get.

The Friday afternoon before the ball, they were scheduled for their usual training instead. Gladio decided that they had done all that they could, and that Noctis should unwind by beating the crap out of Gladio, or getting the crap beaten out of him, most likely the latter.

“I’d like to see you try,” Noctis yelled from where he was perched atop a column, hanging off with one hand on his sword.

“Been there, done that,” Gladio responded from ground level, broadsword balanced on one shoulder. Noctis dove towards him.

He *did* get the crap beaten out of him. Gladio saw that move coming a mile away and dodged just in time so Noctis got to eat dirt, and then Noct barely managed to parry the broadsword swinging down towards him. All in all, as exhausting as any other training session Gladio put him through, and as he lay spreadeagled on the floor, staring up at the fresco on the ceiling, sweaty and tired, he had the sudden urge to move his feet.

“We should practise the dance,” he said between gasps for air, “one last time.”

“What? Now?” Gladio asked, eyes wide, looking down at Noct from where he was sitting next to him.

“Yeah, now,” Noctis insisted, fiddling with his phone until he found a suitable piece of music on the web browser. Then he put his phone down and got into position, waiting for Gladio to join him.

“You’re a real handful, you know that,” Gladio said, but locked their hands together anyway.

The song was a little faster than what they were used to practising with, but somehow Noct managed to keep up with ease. Gladio seemed slightly taken aback at the newfound enthusiasm, but kept pace. For the first time since they started practising, Noctis could say

that he felt like his feet were moving on their own. And then, when the song was nearing its end, a move that he'd seen the previous night while trawling the web popped into his head, one where the dancer pulled his partner into a dainty dip. On the last beat he pulled Gladio sideways, and Gladio gave the most undignified yelp Noctis had ever heard him give; because Gladio was too tall and too heavy, they fell backwards, but Gladio managed to twist them around and break their fall.

"Oof," said Noctis, falling squarely on top of Gladio, who in turn had landed on his ass. But he didn't seem displeased at all – instead, he looked astonished, as if he never really did expect his effort to bear fruit.

"You got it," he said, sounding impressed.

"I got it," said Noctis, feeling giddy.

\*

The heiress of SPIRA Securities was a good dancer — better than Noctis, not that that was difficult to accomplish. She smiled gracefully all through their waltz, and managed not to wince when Noctis accidentally stepped on her foot halfway through. Sometimes it even felt like she was leading him in the dance. Nonetheless Noctis could see the light in her eyes fade gradually as he gushed about his favourite fishing spots while they swayed across the floor, and when the song ended she curtsied politely and accepted Earl Octavian's invitation to dance instead. The same happened with the heiress of Lucis Rubber, and the daughter of Duke and Duchess Caecilius, and the daughter of Minister Tyndarus.

Well, that was that. He'd really worried about the event for nothing. Everybody else now seemed absorbed in their own social niceties, and nary an eye was trained on Noctis, or as far as he could tell. He breathed a sigh of relief and returned to his table, where his dessert was still waiting for him, untouched from when the music started and he was ripped away unceremoniously from his food.

"Good work out there," someone said as he tucked into the pudding with relish. "Or, I should say, good footwork. Didn't seem to win those girls over, though."

"Their loss," Noctis shrugged as Gladio took the empty seat next to him. "At least I didn't trip over my own feet and make a fool of myself, and that's a success in my book. How was *your* evening?"

"Sat in the back and asked for refills on the roasted dualhorn. Really good quality meat," Gladio replied, looking out towards the milling crowd as Noct continued to eat.

"Nobody asked you to dance?"

"Nope. Besides, don't do that stuff when I'm on duty, and technically, I am on duty tonight."



“Shame,” Noctis said, pulling a face. “Would have loved to see those fancy Amiticia moves in action.” He swallowed the last of his pudding. “You know what? I’m bored, and I’m still hungry. Let’s get some ice cream.”

Gladio raised his hand to get the waiter’s attention, but Noctis interrupted him. “No, not the posh stuff. I’m talking about the soft serve at the Crow’s Nest. I think there’s a 24-hour outlet still open near Citadel Plaza.”

“What? Is it fine if we just go?”

“Most of the old fogeys are drunk. I think we’re good.”

They snuck out the back of the ballroom, then called for one of the royal chauffeurs to ferry them to the drive-through where they got an ice cream cone each, and also a large serving of fries for good measure. Then they made the chauffeur drive them back to Noct’s apartment, where Gladio walked him up with the leftover fries they couldn’t finish on the way back.

“Wow, it’s as much of a mess as ever,” said Gladio, wrinkling his nose as he peeked in. Noctis rolled his eyes. He slung his tuxedo jacket over the back of the couch and loosened his bowtie, then turned on the radio. The late-night programme was on, and the DJ had put on a jazzy, funky pop song. “Well, that’s it for tonight then. See you day after tomorrow for training. We’re gonna work on your warping.”

“Hey, Gladio,” Noctis said before Gladio could turn to leave, “thanks for teaching me how to dance.”

Gladio gave him a look of mild surprise, then caught himself and waved Noctis off. “No biggie. You did well.”

“This is a nice song,” Noctis pressed on, hoping he came across significantly more confident saying that than he felt. He hadn’t had much fun at the party, and neither did Gladio, and hell if he was going to let the past month’s hard work culminate in such a lame ending. And, okay, if he had to be really honest about it, that sense of ease he felt dancing the day before – he wanted to feel it again. “Not the most conventional choice for a waltz, but it’ll do, right?”

He extended a hand. It took Gladio a few seconds to understand what he was getting at.

“It’ll do, alright,” he said finally, giving Noctis a fond smile, and stepped into the living room.

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