Everything that was supposed to help her is slowly killing her, and the only thing that can make her feel more like breathing and less like suffocating are deathly vices. Haymitch himself is a deathly vice—he's vicious and a drunk but his embrace is warm and his kisses are the poison she needs.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Burnt, broken, bloodied.

*Boom.* Cannon-fire.

"*Prim!*"

Draw back, aim, fire, kill. So easy.

"*Are you kidding, sweetheart? You're a natural.*"

She yanks the arrow carefully out of the fox's shoulder, the wild animal breathing shallowly. The fox's pelt is stained red, and the intelligent golden eyes are going glassy despite her best efforts to
staunch the blood. Within seconds, her fingers are soaked in crimson and the animal is dead. It shouldn't hurt this much to see a stupid animal die, but it does, since the fox was so young. It isn't a curse, it's a talent—everything young and innocent around her dies. Prim. Rue. Herself. All of those Capitol children. All of the children who died in the war. It's all her fault and yet none of it is.

Just stay still and suffocate.

That's what it's like—stay still while all of this suffocates you. Don't kick now. Just let everything press down and press down until the grief fills up every inch of you, until it all rolls into one giant leaden ball that weighs you down into the snow. When that happens, she leaves; she grabs her jacket and bow and runs for the woods. Greasy Sae learned not to wait up for her, or to keep dinner warm, because when she came back she wouldn't quite be all there—there'd be something askew in her eyes and even looking at food could send her off.

Katniss slumps down in the snow, her back against a tree, looking at the carcass of the fox. It's a scrawny thing, too thin to eat. The cold seeps into her bones like a liquid but even that can't cool off the tremendous burning inside her, like she swallowed a phoenix. The Girl Who Used To Be On Fire. Now the fire just burns from the inside, quiet and low after destroying everything it touched.

"Hey!"

It's Peeta, come to say goodbye. She knows it, and even as she knows it she can't take it, because whenever Peeta is around she has to pretend like she's getting better, and she's not getting better she's getting worse. She looks up and tries to arrange her face to look calm, but it doesn't work because she can feel the way her mouth is tightened and she knows her eyes are full of tears.

"Don't cry, don't cry because he'll see you and he'll touch you, don't let him touch you, oh god...

"Hey, sweetheart, s'matter?"

It's not Peeta.

She sees the scruffy blonde hair swing into view and smells the alcohol. Everything that used to be tight and fragile inside her breaks suddenly, and the tears burn against her cheeks. She doesn't have to pretend, Haymitch knows exactly what's going on, and she wants to curl up against him until she's completely surrounded by warmth and booze and morphling. Everything that was supposed to help her is slowly killing her, and the only thing that can make her feel more like breathing and less like suffocating are deathly vices. Haymitch himself is a deathly vice—he's vicious and a drunk but his embrace is warm and his kisses are the poison she needs.

He glances at the dead fox, then the bloody arrow in Katniss's hand.

"Are you gonna sit in the snow all day?"

She nods, buries her face in her knees.

"Aw, hell."

He sits down next to her, and she grips the sleeve of his jacket. He grumbles something, a little slurry, a little broken, but puts an arm around her shoulder and squeezes. Surprisingly, mostly sober; she clutches her fist around his wrist until her knuckles go white. He winces, but doesn't say a word. The urge to sob against his shoulder passes. All of a sudden she realizes she's cold, and her pants are soaked, and she can breathe in the wintery air. Like a fever had just broken. Being near him dampens the fire, ceases the burning. Extinguishes the Girl On Fire.
"What are you doing out here?" Her voice sounds strong, steady. He isn't buying it.

"A goose got out."

"You don't care about your geese," she accuses, and he shrugs. He came out here looking for her—she knows it, and he knows that she knows it. But something fundamental would shift if he admitted it, and neither of them are willing to take that step.

"My ass is numb, can we go home?" he demands, pretending that he didn't come out here to make sure she hadn't killed herself yet; she shrugs like she doesn't care, when what she really wants to do is go home and pile a dozen blankets on top of them and stay together in bed, for the rest of their lives.

She stays still and breathes, lets him press soft kisses up her spine. Sometimes it's nice to just stay in bed like this, to be warm—not too cold, not too hot, just an even mix of both. Sometimes the blankets get tangled around them and then they fall asleep, in a nice way; not too deeply, because if that happens then they'll wake up to each other's screams. Mild dozing is best, and she likes drifting off with his hands on her. Her burned, charred, broken body, which somehow feels knitted back together once his fingers skim over her skin.

He bites her shoulder gently and she arches, stiffening a little because even after all this time it's still new to her. Last week she left angry red scratches up his back, and they broke two pieces of furniture; the Victor's Village rang with their combined shouts—for the first time, they screamed in a good way.

But right now they can just be warm. She rolls over onto her back and he drops his head between her breasts.

"Peeta isn't coming back, is he."

It's a statement, and he picks his head up. His blue eyes are almost black in this light, and he props his chin on the shelf of his hand. "No, he's not."

She lets her head fall back and tries not to think Thank you, God.

He resumes running his hands over her skin, piecing her back together.

She doesn't leave after that. They stay together, District Twelve slowly coming to life around them, but they stay mostly in the house with each other. Venturing out into the real world would just bring unwanted attention and asphyxiation; they're content where they are.

She doesn't know where Peeta is. Sometimes she thinks about him, wistfully on occasions and then gratefully on others. Gale and Peeta, the two men she thought she couldn't live without; both of them gone and she doesn't really mind. Because even though Haymitch doesn't bring her up and doesn't make her better, he doesn't make her worse. The two of them can spend days in silence, just healing and breathing and being alive.

For the first time in she doesn't know how long, she's glad to be alive.
Aberdeen is seriously addicting. –nylex

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