Missing Him

by elliapolis

Summary

Peeta’s away on a business trip, and Katniss misses him a little more than she’d thought she would.

She hadn’t really expected to miss him -- at least not to the degree that she does. Then again, the last time they’d been apart for more than four consecutive days she’d also been unprepared for how much she’d ended up missing him.

Of course, those circumstances, over thirteen years ago, had been completely different: after almost eleven months of dating, she’d gone to Scotland for two weeks to visit her grandmother. Before the trip, she’d figured that the excitement of being in Scotland and the constant company of her grandmother and Prim would be enough to distract her from missing him too much. She’d never been the type to pine, after all. And, she’d reasoned, two weeks wasn’t really very long at all.

But then, instead of being too busy to think of him, she’d felt this visceral pull in her chest whenever she saw something he would have loved, like that old stone church covered in ivy, or that steep goat path that wound through the greenest hills she’d ever seen. She’d felt the same pull whenever her Aunt Effie said something absurd and she’d wished she could catch his eye. And, though she was loathe to admit this, she’d also felt it every time she saw that one disgustingly happy couple everywhere -- strolling hand-in-hand and laughing, or riding their bikes into town, or sitting at a bar, leaning into each other, knees touching.

But that was then. This time it’s different. They’ve been married for over a decade now. This time, he’s the one who’s away, at a pediatric oncology meeting in Athens, and she’s certain that both the
work and the locale are distracting him from missing her too much. This time, she mostly goes about her day without thinking too much about him – she’s holed up in the lab all day, lost in her research, and afterwards, she’s shuttling the kids to their soccer practices and guitar lessons and play dates, and helping them with their ridiculous diorama projects…Really, the main reason she thinks of him at all during the day is when she’s cursing him for leaving her to single-parent three kids for ten days.

And aside from having known from the start that she’d miss the extra set of hands and wheels, she’d originally thought that what she’d mostly miss was the comfort of having him around at the end of the day, when the kids were finally in bed, when it was just the two of them tidying up the living room and then collapsing on the couch, talking about nothing and everything.

But unlike when she was in Scotland thirteen years ago, now they’ve got Skype. So she still gets to talk to him every night before she goes to bed, sometimes for five minutes when she’s just too tired, sometimes for more than half an hour, when he tells her stories about his sightseeing mishaps or the antics of his colleagues, or when they’re just talking about nothing.

So it turns out that what she actually misses is touching him. Placing her palms flat on his chest and feeling the muscles underneath the cotton of his button-down shirts. Running her fingertips along the smooth groove that runs down the middle of his back. Tracing the hard curves of his upper arm. Rubbing the stubble along the edge of his jaw.

And then, there’s the sex. She definitely misses that far more than she’d expected to. After all, even when he was around, there were times when they might go a week without it, when they were just too exhausted to do anything more than cuddle. And so far, he’s only been gone for five days. But god, she misses it. Even though now she’s even more exhausted than usual.

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One night on Skype, she sees that he’s gotten a haircut. It’s the shortest it’s ever been. She’s surprised, even though he’d told her yesterday that he was planning on it, because it was just so hot and humid there, and he couldn’t take how his hair was constantly plastered to his forehead. She’s not sure she likes it, but at least his curls aren’t completely shorn off. She can see his eyebrows now, and she can’t seem to take her eyes away from them. She sees how they move quite a bit when he’s talking, and if she squints, it’s almost as if she’s looking at a different person.

“So I finally made it to Karavaki last night,” he begins. Karavaki was at the top of the list of restaurants he’d compiled before the trip, after reading god-knows-how-many foodie blogs and forums -- and even Google Translating some of the ones written in Greek. But for one reason or another, he had been frustrated in his attempts to eat at Karavaki, until last night, apparently. “And it was fantastic. But it was just Cashmere and me – it would have been better with more people so that we could have tried more stuff. But everything we ordered was incredible – I’m going to try to make some of it for you when I get home.”

“You went to dinner with Cashmere again?” she asks. Earlier in the week, he’d told her about having lunch with her the day before the conference started. She’d supposedly invited both him and Haymitch, but Haymitch had been too hungover to leave his hotel room.

“Yeah, she’d been really wanting to go to Karavaki too, and everyone else just wanted to hang out at the reception at the conference,” he says. “You know, free booze and all. They don’t know what they were missing. You know, when I told the waiter how much I loved it, he had the chef come out and meet us. And he was a fantastic guy – really innovative in the way he thinks about food, but not into all that molecular gastronomy bullshit, just real food, and happy to talk about how he makes some of these things—”
“I didn’t know Cashmere was such a foodie.” She traces the water stains on her desk with her index finger.

“Oh, well, I don’t know if she is or not, but when I mentioned Karavaki to her, she said she’d read all about it too and was dying to go there.”

“Yeah, I’m sure.” She rolls her eyes.

He smiles. “I admit, I may not have believed her when she said she’d read all about it, but whatever – she knows I like to do my research, and she was looking for a good meal.”

“I’ll bet she was.”

“What?” he says, looking genuinely perplexed. “You don’t believe me?”

She sighs. “She – look, I totally trust you, and I know that you love me, and you’d never cheat on me or anything, but – she – I think she has the hots for you, okay?”

“What?” And then he’s grinning. “Why, Katniss, are you jealous? I never thought I’d see the day.”

“I’m not jealous.” She sighs again. “Like I said, I know you’d never cheat on me, and I know she’s not your type anyway – I mean, I’m right, right? You’re not – attracted to her, are you?”

He laughs. “God, no. You’re right; she’s definitely not my type. She’s a good colleague and all, but that’s about it. But if you know that I’m not into her, why do you care that I had dinner with her?”

She looks down at her fingernails. “I don’t know; she’s just – always touching you when she talks to you.”

“She’s a touchy-feely kind of person.”

“Uh, no – she never touches me.”

“No one ever touches you, Katniss. They know better.”

She lets out a huff. “Fair enough. But – it’s just that – the way she touches you.” She fidgets with the ring on her finger. “You – you can tell she’s just always looking for a reason to touch you,” she blurts out.

“Really? Ok, but even if that’s true, why do you care? I mean, since you believe me when I say I have zero interest in her.”

“I do believe you, I do. I just—” She looks off to the side. “I just don’t like the idea that she thinks it’s ok to touch you all the time. That she thinks you might be attracted to her. Even though I know you aren’t.”

He’s smiling again. She thinks he might actually be enjoying this. In the little window on the computer screen that shows her face, she can see that she’s scowling.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “I know it’s incredibly shallow of me, but I can’t believe you’re jealous.” She rolls her eyes and opens her mouth to protest, but he continues: “Or not jealous – just – annoyed at Cashmere. Whatever this is, I admit I’m getting just a little bit of a kick out of it.”

She wonders if she should hang up on him.

“You’ve just never shown any sign of jealousy – or possessiveness or anything over me,” he says,
laughing. She knows that this isn’t true; she has distinct memories of initiating public displays of affection toward Peeta in response to seeing other women flirting with him. But maybe he’d forgotten. Or maybe he’d been oblivious then anyway. “Can you blame me for enjoying this just a little bit?” he continues. “Especially after all those years I spent being jealous of you and Gale?”

She barks out a laugh. She and Gale had been best friends in high school, over twenty years ago. And Peeta had apparently nursed a crush on her from afar, too afraid to speak to her because he’d thought she was dating Gale.

“And then there was that guy in your department in grad school – Darius?”

“Ugh, he was such a douche. He hit on everyone, not just me. And I told him to fuck off, every single time.”

“I know. But I still hated him. Anyway, Katniss, even if you weren’t jealous,” he says with a grin, “and you just wanted Cashmere to know that she didn’t have a chance with me, I’m pretty sure that I took care of that last night.”

“How so?”

“I may have talked more to the waiter and the chef than I did to her.” He chuckles. “I was just really interested in the food and knowing more about the restaurant. And I thought she would be interested too, but she ended up being pretty quiet and looking bored. So then I apologized to her for boring her.”

She rolls her eyes. “Let me guess: and then you went out for a drink with her to make it up to her.”

He laughs. “No, no; I already had plans to meet Haymitch and Plutarch for a drink. I did invite Cashmere to join us, but she said she was too tired.” He shrugs. “So that was that.”

“For now,” she says, under her breath. But she doesn’t want to talk about this anymore. In fact, she really wants to go to bed, but she doesn’t want him to think she’s stewing over Cashmere, so she figures she should start a conversation about something else before she hangs up.

“How was hanging out with Haymitch and Plutarch?” she asks, though she’s not actually interested in the answer. She’s had plenty of encounters with both over the years, and while she has a grudging respect for Haymitch, she views Plutarch as nothing more than a big blowhard.

“Well, Haymitch was educating me on the finer points of all the local wines and liqueurs that he’s sampled over the past week, and Plutarch wouldn’t stop praising the paper I presented and saying how it’s going to really elevate the hospital’s profile…so, all in all, it was riveting. But at least the music was good.”

“Good,” she says, with a yawn, thinking she can hang up now.

He’s still talking, though. “You know, Plutarch asked me if I was looking forward to going home, and I said I was, because I really missed you…And then Haymitch made fun of me for being such a newlywed.”

She smiles.

“I do really miss you, Katniss. And the kids, of course, but that’s different – I mean, I don’t wish the kids were here in Athens with me. But I do wish you were.” He stops and just looks at her, and it’s almost as if he’s reaching out to place his hand over hers.
“I’ve been having this great little adventure, but I like it better when I have adventures with you,” he continues. “All the adventures I’ve had for a long time now have been with you. And they’re just more fun with you around.”

“What adventures? We’re pretty mundane people.”

“Are you kidding? We’ve had so many. Moving all the way to Oregon together and starting from scratch. And buying a fixer-upper and working on it ourselves. And god, having kids. Biggest adventure of all right there.”

She smiles. “I like having adventures with you too,” she says.

He smiles back, and she wishes she could reach out and touch his face.

And then she says, “Couldn’t you have said all that stuff about me when you were at dinner with Cashmere?”

He laughs, and then so does she. “I love you,” he says. “So much.”

“Me too.”

“I can’t wait to see you on Saturday.”

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She tries to stay awake; she really does. He’s supposed to get in just after midnight, which really isn’t that late, after all. But after two soccer matches, one gymnastics class, a barbecue at Finnick and Annie’s, and two hours of organizing lab notes after the kids are in bed, her body ignores the cup of coffee she had after dinner and insists that she lie down. So she gets in bed, telling herself that Peeta will probably be so worn out from his flights he’ll want to go straight to sleep anyway.

When she comes to, he’s pressing soft, warm kisses down the back of her neck, then moving back up again to just behind her earlobe. She turns around to face him and throws her arms around his neck.

“You’re back,” she says into his bare chest with a sigh and then breathes him in. He smells like soap and shaving cream. He must have taken a shower while she was asleep.

He presses his lips to her forehead. “I was so torn,” he whispers. “I didn’t want to wake you, but I just had to touch you.”

She smiles. “I wanted you to wake me.”

“And then your neck was right there, and I had to kiss it. I just missed your neck so much.”

She laughs. “Is that so? What else did you miss?”

“This,” he says, nibbling her earlobe. “and this,” he says, kissing the hollow of her throat. “And this,” and he’s moving to her mouth, and she can smell the toothpaste on his breath. She presses three fingers to his lips. “Wait,” she says, rolling over and jumping out of bed.

“Not this again,” he groans. “Katniss. You do not need to brush your teeth,” he says sternly.

“Easy for you to say. Yours are already brushed. And you just showered.”

“We’ve been over this. I don’t care.”
She doesn’t answer because the toothbrush is already in her mouth, and she knows he hates it when she tries to talk while she’s brushing her teeth.

“Katniss,” he growls. “Get back in here.”

She gives her tongue a few good, hard brushes and then rinses with mouthwash. When she emerges from the bathroom, she finds him sitting on the edge of the bed, and he pulls her to him so that she’s standing between his legs. She bends down to kiss him, and as their lips and then their tongues touch, she sighs into his mouth – she really did miss this.

But then he’s breaking the kiss, saying “Eww, mouthwash,” and laughing into her shoulder as she punches his arm.

“Just kidding – it’s just that I wanted to get to these,” he says, moving down to kiss her left nipple, and then her right, through the fabric of her tank top. “I missed these a lot.”

He lifts the bottom of her shirt, and she thinks he’s heading back to her breasts, but he stops and kisses her stomach. She fights the urge to suck it in. She’s always been thin and athletic, but age and three pregnancies have left her with a tiny potbelly that she still hasn’t fully accepted. But he always seems to like caressing it. And now he’s kissing the scar from her C-section and then running his tongue along her stretch marks. It tickles, and she gives him a light slap and tells him so.

“What?” he mumbles into her breast.

“There’s nothing for me to grab onto. It’s too short,” she grumbles.

She loves – or rather, loved – to run her fingers through his loose, messy curls, never failing to marvel at how soft it was, especially compared to her own coarse, straight hair. And, of course, she loved to pull it at times like these.

“Sorry,” he says, giving her right breast one last kiss before pulling her down to straddle his lap and turning his attention to the side of her neck. She reaches over his shoulders and runs her hands along the hard muscles of his back, spreading her fingers wide and sucking in a breath at the feel of his tongue just behind her ear. She can feel his hardness between her legs, and when she rocks her hips into him, she decides she needs more, immediately.

“I need you to fuck me now,” she says.

“But we were just getting started,” he says into the top of her shoulder.

“I think we can save the rest for tomorrow.” She rocks her hips into him again, and he groans.

“Ok, then,” he says, bringing his forehead to hers. “But I think you should fuck me.” And then he lets himself fall backwards onto the mattress, arms spread wide, one eyebrow raised, the corner of his mouth turned up.

She makes quick work of their underwear and then slowly lowers herself down onto him. This, she thinks, yes, this is what she really missed. She leans forward and puts her hands on his chest, and as she rotates her hips, she starts to lose herself in the feel of him. He reaches under her shirt and holds his palms so that they just brush her nipples, and she moans, rocking her hips faster.
“I missed seeing you like this,” he whispers. “Your gorgeous face above me, your hair hanging down... And watching you use me for your own pleasure...” He grins, and she laughs and leans down to peck him on the lips before sitting up again and continuing the rhythm she’d started.

He pushes himself up into a sitting position and leans forward to suck on her right nipple, and she cries out. The next rock of her hips takes her over the edge and she falls, shaking, onto his chest.

“Oh,” she breathes. “I just came.”

“I noticed,” he chuckles, running his hands up and down her back.

“Now let’s work on you,” she says, propping herself back up and swiveling her hips again.

“I’d rather work on you some more,” he says, pressing his thumb to her clit and sending a second, smaller wave crashing through her before she even realizes what’s happening.

“Oh my god,” she pants, collapsing against his chest again. “Ok, now we definitely have to work on you.” She starts rocking again, but slowly.

He grins. “You just want to be done so you can go to sleep,” he says.

“And you don’t? The kids are going to be up in less than six hours.” She starts pumping herself up and down him and moving faster, hoping it will get him there before she needs to continue this conversation. She’s surprised he’s held out for this long already.

“Wait...did you – did you, you know, take care of yourself in the shower or something?” she asks.

“Um, yeah – I knew I wouldn’t last otherwise,” he replies, chuckling.

“Ok, then you need to take over,” she says, lifting herself off of him and collapsing at his side.

He laughs. “Why don’t you just get some sleep?” he says, smoothing her hair back and kissing her temple. “We can continue this tomorrow night.”

“No, no,” she says, lifting up her head to look him in the eye. “I want you to come; I want to feel it. I’ve missed it.”

He smiles. “Then let’s make this easy for you. How about on your side?”

She nods and rolls onto her side, her back to him, and curls her knees in. He presses a soft kiss to the side of her neck and then shifts to line himself up behind her, and she raises her leg to let him in. As he pushes into her, she remembers how much she likes this angle.

And as he thrusts harder and deeper, she finds herself hurtling toward the brink, yet again.

“Oh god, I’m going to come again,” she says. And she does.

“Good,” he says, and she thinks she can hear the smirk in his voice.

“But you need to hurry up and come. I can’t take any more orgasms.”

“Are you sure about that?” He’s really panting now, and she hopes that he’s close.

“Yes. Don’t you remember that story about the woman who had to go to the emergency room because she couldn’t stop orgasming?”
“Katniss, this really isn’t helping me get to the goal here.”

“Sorry. I’ll shut up now.” She tries to clench more tightly around him to help him along. His thrusts get faster and more erratic, and she thinks, finally.

“Ok, I’m going to come,” he pants.

“Good.”

And then he does, making a strangled noise into her hair.

“Ok, I came,” he says, burying his face in her shoulder.

“Good.” She reaches up and behind to stroke the back of his neck.

“I’m so glad you’re back,” she says.

“Me too,” he sighs, kissing the top of her shoulder. “Now go to sleep.” He rolls out of bed and heads to the bathroom.

When he comes back, she’s vaguely aware of him wrapping himself back around her, one hand covering her right breast and the other lightly rubbing her belly, and then she loses consciousness.

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When she starts to wake, she sees that it’s barely light out and that he’s staring at her. She realizes that it must be at least mid-afternoon in Athens and wonders how long he’s been up.

“God, you’re gorgeous,” he whispers. He reaches over and strokes her cheek with his thumb. “I love seeing you like this, from four inches away…right when you’ve just woken up… and before you start scowling and pulling the covers over your head.” And then she scowls and he laughs.

“You’re still gorgeous when you scowl though,” he says, bringing her left hand to his lips.

She pulls it back to rub the blurriness from her eyes. Then she glares at him.

“You need to grow your hair back out,” she says.

“Already noted.”

“Good,” she says, pulling the covers back over her head.

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