Summary

She ran away and he chased after her. Everytime he thought he finally had her, she slipped from his grasp once again. It was a dangerous dance of cat and mouse to be playing in the Hunger Games, but it was an addicting one that neither of them could stop.

Notes

woooooo hooray for my attempting a multi chapter fic. decided i wanted to dabble into twisting a universe and making everything darker and i figured cato was just so perfect for a dar katniss.
Insanity is the Key

She had to be insane; there was no way she would be doing this if she wasn't insane. Challenging a black bear for a beehive filled with honey was not something that perfectly sane people did.

Then again, was anyone who lived in Panem sane? The people in the Capitol sure weren’t sane, sending children to their deaths every year for their entertainment. The Peacekeepers, sure they weren’t all that bad, but they were definitely lacking a few brain cells. Just the other day Darius decided how lovely an idea it would be to juggle their guns, and it ended with him shooting himself in the foot. The Districts, well the Districts could be called sane. They did what had to be done to survive and made sure not to draw too much attention to themselves to make sure that they didn’t end up like District Thirteen.

Well there was District Two; they could only be called sane using the loosest definition. Every year dozens of children could be seen lunging forward to be a competitor in the Hunger Games. Always their eyes glittered with the prospect of bloodshed and they were always the favorites to win, and they nearly always did. No, Katniss wasn’t entirely sure that District Two was sane.

Then again, who was she to judge anybody on their sanity? Every day she ventured into the woods, going farther and farther each time, getting bolder and bolder each kill. Everything she did though, she did for her family, and she did for Prim.

Stop lying to yourself. A voice whispered in the back of her head. You know that you’re not doing this for your family; you’re doing this for the thrill of the kill. For the adrenaline pumping through you as you run after your prey, for the pounding in your ears when you’re silently stalking your next meal, for that feeling of triumph when you see that arrow sinking into their flesh. You live for it, you crave it.

So maybe that was true, maybe she did hunt for the thrill of it and that feeling of release when she was in the forest all on her own and she could let the bloodlust flow, not have to cage it in. The forest was the only place where she could truly be herself, the only place where she could lay her soul bare on the leafy floor and not have to worry about being judged.

After all, who were the animals to judge her after they had an arrow through their eye?

A small gasp of pain escaped her lips as the bear's claws grazed her stomach, ripping the fabric and staining it with blood at the same time. Immediately the world warped focus and everything became sharper, crystal clear. Noise faded from her hearing and was replaced by the sound of blood pounding in her ears. She shivered as her body pulsed and hummed in time with the blood flowing from her stomach, flashes of heat traveling along her body. A predatory gleam entered into her eyes and her lips upturned into bloodthirsty and vicious grin as she let the arrow fly straight and true from her bow.

The bear stumbled back before letting out a roar and Katniss responded with an unhinged laugh, head thrown back in abandon, and watched as the birds from the surrounding trees flew away startled.

Every District has a black sheep. She thought blithely to herself as she reloaded her bow.

~xXx~
Cato knew that he was insane.

In his defence, at least he admitted it instead of living in denial like so many of the people in his District. They went through the day self-righteously giving him fearful gazes, whispering about how unstable he was, pulling their children closer to themselves as he walked down the streets.

Fine, he had killed a classmate, but the moron didn't deserve to be preparing to enter the Hunger Games if his guard was that sloppy. The instructors had told the class to fight as if they were going to kill their opponent, and that's what he did. He killed him, and since then the rest of the District had begun to avoid him and in whispers that weren't really whispers talk about, "The boy Cato that went right 'round the bend."

Filthy hypocrites.

He didn't understand why they were all so defensive and appalled; they had done the exact same thing in their youth. Cato had searched up the records in the schools, and sure enough, beside the names of students there would be a deceased stamp listing the reason. More often than not, the reason was a "classroom accident".

The deaths were no accidents. They were cold, calculated, efficient, easy, and final. They were the act of an assassin in training a future victor.

As he walked to the District Square where the reaping would take place he titled his chin up and held his head higher as he listened to the words that were being spoken around him.

"He's unstable; don't know why they don't put him down."

"Billy, stay away. Don't ever go near him. Do you hear me?"

"Heard that he's going to volunteer this year."

"Hope he gets in, hopefully he'll be killed."

"This District doesn't need another insane Victor; we have enough as it is."

"Monster."

As Cato took his place among the throng of boys boys wanting so desperately to be men as he waited for the reaping, a sardonic smile fixated upon his face as he took in the terrified visages of those next to him. One of them was quaking in his boots, his entire frame shaking like a leaf as he hyperventilated, and the other keep shooting him glances and fidgeting; his posture saying how much he didn't want to be next to the District monster.

When the name for the boy tribute was reaped, Cato lunged forward, glaring at those who had their mouths open, their voices dying halfway through their attempt to volunteer. "I volunteer as tribute." He spoke in a powerful voice that left no room for contention.

He shook hands with Clove what a deadly pair they would make gripping her hand hard until tear formed in her eyes. He let the bloodlust begin to shine in his eyes and the unhinged grin to fixate itself upon his face.

It was time to let loose.
Introducing the Cat

It took all his willpower to not burst out laughing when Cato saw what he would be competing against.

District One was...adequate at what they did. They were better than those in the room, but he was still better; their stances were wrong and they were cocky. It wasn’t like he was any better, he was cocky as can be, but unlike Marvel and Glimmer, he could back it up.

Cato had been in school with Clove all of his life, he knew her strengths and weaknesses and she knew his, but it didn’t matter. Clove didn’t have enough skill to follow through on the fact that he tended to grip his sword too hard to allow proper flexibility and range with his wrist, or that he liked to play with his food before killing them.

District Three was laughable at best, they were afraid of their own shadows and the girl vomited into one of the many available trash cans when he had been practicing his knife work and grinned at her.

District Four, Cato was extremely disappointed in District Four this year. The tributes this year were not up to standard, were nothing like the tributes from last year. Sure they could do rope work, but what good would that do them? Would they bore the other tributes to death by showing them rope work? Cato thought that they would be at least half decent with a sword if they were swinging tridents around all the time, it would take a few adjustments, but they should be at least familiar with the swinging and stabbing motion.

The red head from District Five bugged him, she looked at down upon everyone acting as if she knew more then they all did. The look of disgust that seemed to be permanent upon her face made him want to run his sword through her, slowly and painfully. He wasn't even sure if there was a male tribute from District Five; if there was he, hadn't seen him.

The pair from District Six would be killed before the first day was over, he would make sure of it. They had the nerve to say to him that they hoped he died in the Cornucopia bloodbath. Cato gnashed his teeth together and threw the spear with more force than necessary, skewering the dummy and making the stuffing fly everywhere.

The girl from District Seven was a sniveling wreck and her District Partner held her at arm's length, but that didn't mean anything at all. Her mentor, Johanna Mason, could have simply told her to act like that since that was how she won her games.

District Eight and District Nine would be killed before the first day was over.

Cato let out a snort as he looked at the male tribute from District Ten, with that limp he would be lucky to even make it through training without doing something to kill himself by accident.

He wanted to know what they were feeding the kids in District Eleven. The black boy was a giant, bigger than himself, and reminded Cato of the oxen that he saw as the passed District Ten. The boy was a force to be reckoned with, Cato admitted. He had grabbed a flail and worked wonders with it, reducing the dummy, and the trainer he practiced with, to shreds. Cato wanted him on his team, that way he could kill him in his sleep the first night and eliminate the competition. The girl though so tiny and frail wouldn't last. There was no way that she would be able to survive the harsh reality of the Games, killing her would be an act mercy.

Cato wasn't sure about what to think of District Twelve. The boy was of no use that was for sure.
Sure he looked strong, but he was all soft baby eyes that didn't know a life of hardship and compassion and mercy. He had no place in the Games and would be one of the first to die. The girl though, Cato wasn't sure about. Logically he should have just written her off. She was easily the smallest person here, and that was counting those who were starved half to death, and she didn't seem to be able to do anything useful. He'd seen her handle a spear and she was average, not horrible, but not spectacular. She was sullen, withdrawn, and would get no love from the sponsors and from any of the tributes. His instinct screamed at him though with alarm bells ringing loudly in his head, and it irked him to no end. There was nothing spectacular about this girl with her black hair braided down her back, with those eyes grey as slate. There was no power behind those slender arms of hers to create a devastating swing with an axe or a sword. Those eyes of hers locked onto his and he stopped breathing.

And he saw.

Her eyes were as hard as flint as just as easily able to cause a spark. They were cold, calculated, jaded, closed off just like his and he suppressed the urge to flinch as he looked at a reflection of himself in this girl that he had been about to write off.

The connection broke as she flicked her eyes away and he let out a breath he hadn't been sure that he was holding. She walked past him and he wondered what she had seen when she had looked into his eyes. Did she see how alike they were? That he had the same eyes? He watched her as she walked around the room to scope out and evaluates the other tributes and Cato could now see the minute details that marked her as a hunter killer. Her gait was deliberate, not one step was unnecessary. It was sturdy, ready to withstand any force that came her way, but lightweight, ready to run if necessary. Her arms would twitch every now and then towards her back before she would let them fall, she was an archer then, or they would brush along her thigh or her ankle if she was sitting down, a knife most likely. Her muscles would tighten up if anyone came to close to her, her fists would clench, and her scowl would become even deeper was that even possible?

Cato continued watching the girl for the rest of the day. He still excelled at whatever he did even if his attention was diverted. As he watched her go to the knife station he saw her pick up a knife and his heart quickened in anticipation.

He wasn't disappointed.

It was obvious that a knife wasn't her main weapon with the way that she moved, but she wasn't inexperienced by any means. Inexperienced knife handlers weren't able to make it so that they were dazzling and almost as good as Clove while still hiding some of their skill.

And hiding was she ever.

Her movements were still to graceful to appear sloppy no matter how hard she tried, her swings to powerful, her stance while the trainer said was incorrect was perfect for her body and dozens of scenarios appeared in Cato's head of her weaving in and out of her opponents reach as she danced and sliced and sprayed blood and gore all around her.

His blood hummed and throbbed in a frenzied fervour. He had found his match, the person in these games that could keep up with him, the person who could possible kill him, the person who could give him the challenge he was so craving.

And she was perfection, absolute perfection.
Introducing the Mouse

She was going to kill Haymitch slowly, painfully, and she would enjoy it.

"You want me to do what?" She asked in a low and deadly voice.

Peeta shifted uncomfortably beside her, fiddling with his shirt and giving her nervous glances. Haymitch merely looked at Katniss with a dead expression and took a drink from his bottle before saying, "I want you to botch up everything that you do combat wise."

"No." She told him flatly. "There is no way that I will simply screw up everything that I do. I have worked too hard and long on these skills to pretend otherwise!"

"Well to bad sweetheart." Haymitch snarled angrily. "Your little stunt yesterday with the knives has put you on a priority list for the Careers!"

"The boy from District Two was looking at you with bloodthirsty eyes Katniss." Peeta told her softly.

*I hope he was watching.* Katniss thought to herself dryly. *That was the whole point of going to the knives station, even if I did hold back.* Katniss had seen the monstrous boy from District Two and when the two of them had looked into each other's eyes, she knew that they were the mirror image of each other. The point of using those knives was for him to understand that he was her, and she was him. *They were the same.* Katniss turned to Haymitch with an angry expression on her face, "I did what you told me to do Haymitch, I stayed away from archery and I downplayed my skills."

"Well obviously you didn't downplay them enough if District Two is gunning for you." He snorted. "I will not deliberately sabotage my chances to practice and learn a new combat skill days before I'm going to be thrown into an arena to fight to the death!" By now Katniss had risen from her chair was yelling.

"Katliss, sit down. A lady does not stand and shout at the dinner table, or ever really." Effie scolded. Katniss only looked at her with the dirtiest expression that she could muster, and Effie gave a small tut before returning to her dinner.

"Katniss." Peeta said softly grabbing onto her wrist, "We promised Haymitch that we would listen to and do whatever he said."

"That's right sweetheart," Haymitch slurs, "So that means botch every combat oriented thing you do. Feel free to excel at knot tying or edible plants, but become a horrible warrior. Got it?"

"Got it." She spit out before storming away from the dinner table and into her room to scream into her pillow and throw things around the room.

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"It's okay Katniss; it's only for two more days." Peeta said soothingly in hopes that he would be able to calm her down.

"It's not alright Peeta!" She hissed back angrily at him, aware that she could have an audience at any given moment. "It may be easy for you to pretend that you suck at combat, especially since you do no offense." She said hastily looking at him.
"None taken." He replied with a shrug. "It's true."

"I'm good at this type of thing though, it's one of the only things that I'm good at. Can you imagine deliberately doing badly at camouflage?" It seemed like the right analogy to make for Peeta to understand what she felt like.

A look of horror immediately crossed his face and she knew that he understood what she was feeling. "I am so sorry Katniss." He told her sincerely.

Katniss shifted uncomfortably at the sincerity in his tone. No matter what she did to keep him at arm's length, he was still as kind and carrying as possible to her. She couldn't deal with it though; she couldn't let the Boy-With-the-Bread to worm himself even deeper into her heart if she wanted to go home, what did he not understand about that?

"It's okay Peeta." She told him in a tired voice and, attempting to plaster a smile onto her face, said, "Smile Peeta, we've got company at five o'clock; quick start talking about something."

He then began to regale her with tales of the different type of customers they would get in the bakery until he came over and Peeta's voice faltered as he looked at who had come towards them. "C-Cato," he stuttered out, "what brings you over here?"

So his name is Cato. Katniss mused to herself. Interesting name, I wonder if he really is all knowing.

Cato ignored Peeta and turned to face Katniss, his square jaw set in annoyance, and said in a frustrated tone, "What are you doing?"

Raising a black eyebrow Katniss replied with sarcasm thick as the summer rain, "Currently I'm eating a bowl of clam chowder."

Peeta choked on the water he was drinking and gave Katniss an incredulous look wondering if she was in fact insane; she gave him a flat look wondering if he was insane.

Katniss saw Cato's mouth twitch before it became set in deep scowl so much like her own and he said through clenched teeth, "What are you doing screwing up everything that has to do with combat?"

Peeta and Katniss both froze momentarily before Peeta went back to eating and Katniss responded with a scowl of her own. "I don't know what you're talking about Cato." She took extra care enunciating his name, feeling it roll off her tongue; it was true, he was all knowing. The two of them were locked in a staring match with matching scowls upon their faces; Cato unwilling to say that he was wrong, Katniss unwilling to prove that he was right.

As she looked into his eyes, Katniss was able to see exactly what he was thinking. She could see his frustration in being superior in combat skills in these games. When he volunteered, he had volunteered for a challenge, for a place to unleash his inner monster, a place to find his equal. A place to find her.

Katniss wasn't being conceited, she just knew that was why he was so frustrated that she was hiding her skills and making sure she messed up every time that she went to a combat station. Cato had finally been able to glimpse an equal, even when she was downplaying her skills, and all of a sudden, that equal was gone. The hardened and skilled warrior had been replaced by the incompetent beginner.

It hurt to think that he had found his fellow monster in her, but Katniss knew that it was true; that she
was a monster. She had known that she was a monster from the moment that she had made her first kill and relished in it. She knew that she was a monster when Gale told her that shooting the other tributes couldn't be all that different from shooting animals, and she had known that it would be different.

As her grey eyes flickered towards Peeta's blue ones, breaking eye contact from Cato's light blue ones, her scowl deepened even more. Why did Haymitch have to tell them to always be with each other? If he wasn't there, she could tell Cato that she was his fellow monster, that she understood, that she had the same cravings, she could tell him how long she had waited for someone that was like her that understood.

She couldn't say any of that though with Peeta beside her, so Katniss settled with saying, "I have a drunk for a mentor."

As Cato's lips upturned into a cocky and amused smile, Katniss knew that he already knew everything that she couldn't say.

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