Lost and Found

by titania522

Summary

Christmas is going to be a little different for the Mellarks and Everdeens this year. Written for the FYeah Everlark Secret Santa Exchange for Litharalen.

Lost and Found

His face was bruised again.

Katniss watched as Peeta responded to his name being called and went up to the teacher’s desk, head down, perhaps to hide the flower-shaped wound that had blossomed below his eye. But Mrs. Trinket, their second grade teacher, had already noticed it too and touched Peeta’s chin as she lifted his head to better examine his cheek. She tutted before getting up to buzz the office on the intercom. As soon as Mr. Heavensbee appeared, they both stepped outside the classroom to talk, leaving Peeta out of his seat, in front of the entire class, unsure of what to do with himself. This made him even more self-conscious so that, by the time Mrs. Trinket had returned, he was the color of the strawberry lollipop Katniss had eaten the day before.
Mrs. Trinket gently pushed Peeta towards the door, where Mr. Heavensbee stood patiently, awaiting his charge. The seat next to Katniss remained empty for the rest of the day.

Katniss raced through the snow, dodging Christmas carolers singing outside of the Main Street shops. She didn’t pause, even though they were singing her favorite song, *We Three Kings*, but continued to barrel her way towards Mellark’s Family Bakery. As she made to push the door open, she crashed into the solid resistance of the sturdy, white painted wood, heavy deadbolt locks barring it shut and the uninviting sight of the blinds shuttered against the outside world.

Katniss burst into her house, bringing with her ice-cold winter air and droplets of water from the slush still attached to her boots. The rule at home was to remove shoes upon entering, but she was too excited to remember her routine.

“Katniss Everdeen! I just mopped that floor!” exclaimed her mother in exasperation.

“Momma!” she said, ignoring her mother’s chagrin at her clean, shiny, wood floor covered in winter’s dirt. With a sigh, Mrs. Everdeen pulled Katniss’ coat and boots off and promptly went to fetch a towel as the little girl launched into a full account of the events leading to Peeta’s removal from class.

“Poor child,” said Mrs. Everdeen, shaking her head in pity for the boy when Katniss had concluded her report. She led her oldest daughter to the kitchen and passed her the pestle and mortar. “Grind these peppermint leaves, honey.”

“Delly says his momma’s mean, but Peeta gets mad if you say anything,” she said as she set her small arms to work on the handful of herbs her mother had given her.

“Of course. She’s his mother, no matter what. You wouldn’t like someone talking about your
mother that way."

“But she is mean!” groused Katniss in indignation. It was hard to turn her opinion once she’d made up her mind. “He missed the whole day of school because of her.”

Mrs. Everdeen paused in her work. “You mean when Mr. Heavensbee took him to the office, he didn’t bring him back?”

“No, he didn’t. Isn’t that what I just said?” responded Katniss with impatience as she pounded away at the leaves, perhaps more than was necessary.

Mrs. Everdeen’s face took on a look of distant concentration. The only words she muttered were, “Poor Dale.” Unwrapping her apron, she made her way to the stove, where a pot of stew was simmering. “We’re going to pay him a visit.”

“Peeta?” Katniss asked excitedly, dropping the pestle onto the counter, the plump leaves nothing but a smear on the smooth, wooden head.

“Yes. Peeta - and Dale,” Mrs. Everdeen said, the fine lines, normally invisible along the curve of her smooth skin now deepening around her mouth as she set her jaw in determination. “Your father won’t be back for awhile yet so we have time to go and come back before dinner…” she continued, more to herself than Katniss, as she served a generous portion of soup into an extra large serving dish made for transporting. “We can pick Prim up from her play date with Daisy on the way back.”

Katniss’ mother was still pensive as they trudged down the slick sidewalk while Katniss happily kicked up slush at the prospect of seeing Peeta again. It was a short walk to their house, though the Mellark’s home was much bigger and more elaborate than the Everdeen’s cottage, with soaring ceilings and a spiral staircase. And yet, when Katniss and Peeta played together, it was always at the Everdeen’s home, with it’s worn but polished wooden floors and old-fashioned dumbwaiter that Mr. Everdeen made sure to keep in good repair for the kids. Katniss and Peeta spent hours propelling their toys up and down, whether they were escaping invading armies or embarking on magical arctic expeditions. When they were feeling particularly reckless, Peeta hoisted Katniss from the basement to the second floor, which usually earned them a scolding whenever they were discovered by Mrs. Everdeen.

When they arrived before the heavy wooden doors of the Mellark home, Katniss helpfully pressed the doorbell, practically hopping in place with impatience. When the door opened, it was a haggard Mr. Mellark who greeted them.
“Elise!” he exclaimed, his dull eyes brightening, the blue just a shade lighter than his youngest son’s striking color. His gaze lingered on Mrs. Everdeen before he turned his attention to the little girl straining to keep her place. “Hello, Katniss. Peeta will be so happy to see you. Come in,” he said kindly.

“Thank you, Dale. I brought some stew. I know how much you like it,” said Mrs. Everdeen graciously.

Katniss and her mother removed their coats and boots before following Mr. Mellark into the kitchen. Peeta met them at the doorway, his bruise less swollen but a deeper magenta color than it had been that morning in school. He smiled at the sight of his playmate.

“Me and dad made chocolate chip cookies,” he said by way of greeting. Katniss’ eyes lit up at the sight of her friend and the prospect of a treat. She threw her arms around Peeta before following him into the kitchen, taking in the gleaming counters and fancy appliances with greedy eyes, for she rarely came to this part of the house.

Mr. Mellark meanwhile set out plates on the kitchen island. “I also made peppermint hot chocolate. We made too much - lucky for you.” He poked Katniss’ nose before filling their mugs with the thick, sweet-smelling liquid.

As Mr. Mellark placed the warm cookies on the plates, Katniss turned towards Peeta. “Where did you go today? You missed the spelling test. Mrs. Trinkett made everyone practice the words, just like a spelling bee,” she said, as if in accusation.

Peeta’s face fell at Katniss’ question, his eyes flicking furtively towards his father in wordless appeal. Mrs. Everdeen, ever sensitive to the shift in mood, placed a hand on Katniss’ arm.

“Why don’t you wait for Peeta to finish his cookies before interrogating him, dear,” she said kindly but firmly.

“It’s okay, Elise,” said Mr. Mellark. “Peeta’s mother is...going away for a while.” The way he said Peeta’s mother held a note of steel that did not escape Katniss’ notice, though for what reason, she did not understand.

Katniss looked at Peeta again with open curiosity. “Where is she going? Is she sick?”
Peeta, who had, up until now, sat nibbling inconsequently on the edge of his cookie, sank further into his chair, a blush of shame spreading over his cheeks.

“Well...um...” Mr. Everdeen fumbled his words. “She’s been ill for a while, and she’s going for treatment,” Mr. Mellark said, sending a look of appeal in Mrs. Everdeen’s direction.

“Y-esss…” she said, “I remember something about that. So she’s finally going to see someone about...that...thing?”

Mr. Mellark visibly relaxed in relief. “Yes, she’ll be gone for at least a month, maybe longer, depending on how the treatment goes.”

“That’s good to hear!” Mrs. Everdeen looked at Mr. Mellark meaningfully. Peeta continued to eat his cookie half-heartedly until he set it down and pushed the chair out from behind him.

“Do you want to see my Christmas gift? Dad let me open one early today,” he asked Katniss.

“Really?” Katniss turned towards her mother. “Can I open one gift early, too? The big one with the purple bow?”

“We’ll talk to your father about that when he gets home. Why don’t you go into the living room and play with Peeta’s new toy?”

Katniss deflated at her mother’s words. “That always means no,” she muttered grumpily as she followed Peeta out of the room.

Lowering himself onto the plush white carpet, Peeta pulled out a colorful toybox, inside of which was a large, remote controlled truck which he handed to Katniss. It was heavy and metallic, painted bright yellow, with a giant shovel that could be maneuvered with the remote. Katniss looked at it with wide eyes.

“That’s neat! Can you lift that race car with it?” she said with excitement.
“Yeah. Watch.” He took a red matchbox car and set it inside. “You just use this lever.” He showed Katniss how to use the remote, and they spent the next several minutes driving the truck around the living room and lifting toys of different sizes. As Katniss neared the doorway, she heard snatches of the conversation taking place in the kitchen, words that made her stop and listen.

“You can’t blame yourself. You didn’t realize the extent of it,” said Mrs. Everdeen to Peeta’s distraught father.

“But I should have! It’s been going on for years. I saw the signs, Elise. I just didn’t want to believe that she could be so cruel to him.” He shook his head. “I don’t know what to do…”

“Now that you know, you have to think of your children. Was she like that with Rye and Bannock?”

“I spoke to them today. She was always stern but with Peeta...it was different. She didn’t want another boy. She made that clear when he was born…”

“Hey!” came Peeta’s voice from behind Katniss, making her leap in surprise, her stomach twisted in knots. “Want to watch tv?”

Katniss stepped away from the door so as not to be seen by her mother or Mr. Mellark. She looked at Peeta’s face as if seeing it for the first time, - the enormous wound that swallowed his cheek - and was seized with sudden pity. Without saying a word, she nodded and sat down next to him, staring at him surreptitiously while he turned on one of his cartoon channels. He stared fixedly at the screen as if seeing and yet not seeing what was in front of him.

“Mom’s in jail,” he whispered at length.

Katniss brought her hand up to hide the expression of horror that crossed her face. All she could imagine was police cars and sirens and burly officers taking the tall, thin woman away to a stone building with bars. “Why?”

Peeta turned to look at her with eyes gone wide. “It’s my fault. I was bad, and she hit me. Now she’s in jail.”

Katniss shook her head in confusion, recalling what her mother had said to Mr. Everdeen, finding it
hard to put into words what she had understood, so she instead she said, “Delly always said your mom was mean.” Peeta put his head down as she spoke. “When mom gets mad at me, she doesn’t hit me, and Delly’s mom doesn’t hit her.”

“Still...” he said uncertainly. It was then that Katniss saw that he was crying, though he tried his hardest to hide his sniffles under his curly blond hair.

Scooting next to him, she wrapped her arms around him and squeezed him tightly, the way her father did whenever she woke from nightmares. “Don’t cry, Peeta. It’ll be okay,” she said soothingly. “Do you want some more cookies? You didn’t eat yours.”

Wiping his puffy eyes and nose on his sleeve, he nodded and added, “And the hot chocolate maybe?”

“Okay!” she jumped up, happy to be able to do something to please him and ran to the kitchen, pausing just outside the door again. Mr. Everdeen’s voice as mournful as Peeta’s had been just a moment ago.

“It should have been you, Elise. That’s when it all went wrong...” he said, the misery hanging heavily in the room.

“Please, Dale. Don’t say those things,” said Mrs. Everdeen, a strange tension in her voice.

“Maybe if I had fought harder, I wouldn’t have lost you,” he continued, at which point Mrs. Everdeen turned quickly around to find Katniss standing at the door like a startled doe.

“Katniss!” her mother exclaimed.

“Momma, I...Peeta...I wanted to bring cookies and cocoa to Peeta. He didn’t get to have his...” she trailed off in embarrassment.

Mr. Mellark gave Katniss a tender smile that warmed her down to her feet. “You are a good friend to Peeta. Just like your mother is to me.” He patted Mrs. Everdeen’s folded hands as he warmed the hot chocolate in the microwave and prepared a plate of cookies for Peeta. Katniss tried to avoid her mother’s searching eyes.
“I usually don’t let anyone eat in the living room but given the circumstances…” His face seemed to give way to a powerful emotion that he reigned in at the last moment. “I think we’ll make an exception just this once. What do you say?”

Katniss nodded her head before escaping the strangeness of the kitchen and returning to place Peeta’s cup and plate on the coffee table. Peeta had stopped crying by then and settled down to eat his cookies, the nasally sound of *Spongebob Squarepants* filling the the room. He passed his last cookie to Katniss and when they were both done, they leaned against each other, watching a few more episodes while the snow fell serenely outside the window pane. Katniss thought of her mother and Mr. Mellark’s wistful tone when he’d said her mother was a good friend, though it had sounded more like the moan of a low musical note, full of heaviness and sadness.

She turned her head to look at Peeta, who was completely engrossed in his cartoon, his purple cheek peering angrily back at her. Katniss couldn’t help but think that something big had happened, something she should understand, but couldn’t. For now, she shrugged it off. It would be Christmas soon and maybe Momma would finally let her open her gift. With that in mind, Katniss settled in to wait until her mother told her it was time to go home.

9 years later

“Shhhh...in here!” Peeta hissed, nudging Katniss into the large closet of his bedroom. He promptly shut the door just as Mr. Mellark simultaneously opened the bedroom door, holding a laundry basket easily in his large hands.

“Laundry delivery!” Peeta said with false happiness, casting a surreptitious look at the closed closet door, hoping that his father would not try to go inside and find Katniss in nothing more than her bra and underwear. There was no way they’d be able to explain that away.

Mr. Mellark paused to consider his son’s bedroom, nodding his head in approval. “I really wish your neatness would rub off on Rye. His room looks like a bomb went off in it.” He laid the folded clothes along the end of Peeta’s bed. “You can sort these, can’t you?”

“Yeah, Dad! No problem!” Peeta said, almost too eagerly, his skin flushed a deep red color despite his efforts to remain calm.

Mr. Mellark eyed his son carefully before putting his hand to Peeta’s forehead, testing his skin. “You seem a little warm. Do you feel sick?” he asked, his brow furrowed with worry.
“Nah, I was just…” Peeta scratched the back of his neck nervously, casting around for an excuse that would not get him grounded until college. “Sit-ups! Yeah...gotta stay in shape. I was doing situps for the off-season. Don’t wanna be soft when wrestling starts up again.”

Mr. Mellark nodded again, patting Peeta’s shoulder. “You’re a good kid, you know that?” he said affectionately. “I’m heading out in a little bit but would you please remind Rye that I put his laundry in his room, and he now has two piles of clothing he has to put away?”

“Okay,” Peeta answered, exhaling in relief when his father made to leave. But he turned around again at the last moment.

“Oh, and by the way, we’re going over to Elise’s for Christmas Eve, so make sure you’re dressed and ready to go by six o’clock,” he said with an odd twinkle in his eye. Peeta nodded wildly, repressing the urge to push his father out onto the landing as he finally shut the door behind him. Peeta promptly turned the key when Katniss burst out of the closet.

“I thought you locked the door!” she hissed angrily, pulling on her sweater.

“I’m sorry!” he said, panicked. “But don’t worry. He’s not coming back.”

“It will be both our asses if we get caught!” she whispered, pulling her socks and pants out from beneath the bed where she’d shoved them. Peeta knelt before her, running his hands over her smooth, olive thighs before plucking the socks out of her hand.

“I said…” he paused long enough to shove the socks back under the bed, “…he’s not coming back.” He took Katniss’ face in both his hands and left a chaste kiss on her lips. “Don’t go,” he pleaded.

Katniss’ grey eyes still flashed with anger, the fear of discovery by his father having been too close for her comfort, but Peeta always knew how to get the best of her, ever since they were kids. She’d known him long enough that she was accustomed to his tricks but she let herself be persuaded every single time.

“Okay,” she said, “but just for a little. Mom said she needed help getting ready for tonight.”
“I know, I know,” he said soothingly, leaving another kiss on the corner of her lips. Katniss gave a half-smile, her heart thrumming in her chest. “She seems happier lately,” he commented offhandedly as he peppered her with kisses. They’d grown up together but this, this thing between them, was so new that she still couldn’t get her mind around it. Yet when he kissed her like he was doing at that moment, leaving playful pecks along her mouth like a bird nipping at a flower, Katniss stopped trying to figure things out because she was with Peeta and that made everything that came afterwards alright.

She turned her head towards his mouth and captured his lips, all her playfulness consumed when her tongue probed in search of his. She was impatient, not because time was getting away from her but because it was her nature to be quick and impetuous, and it warred with his slower, gentler one, her kisses prodding him wordlessly to catch up with her. She buried her fingers in his thick hair, tugging him towards her and swallowing up his trepidation. She ignored the existence of everything as she pushed him down onto the carpet, fumbling with his clothes.

“You locked the door?” she asked again, pausing to give Peeta a chance to pull off his remaining clothes.

“Yes!” he said, as she resumed kissing him, small moans of pleasure escaping her as his hands slid over her breasts, hanging like swollen, ripening fruit over him.

“Shhh!” he laughed, covering each dusky, hard nipple in his mouth. In response, she bit down on his shoulder, prompting him to yelp in pain.

“You, shhhhh!” she said wickedly, sliding out of her underwear, which had become soft and wet with her need, and ground down onto his erection so he could feel the unmistakable evidence of her readiness for him. Grasping for his discarded jeans, he pulled out the tell-tale foil packet and quickly unwrapped it. Katniss took it from him and unrolled it over his thick member, running her hands over him until he was rock hard and involuntarily bucking his hips upwards.

Satisfied with her work, she crawled up his body and kissed him, holding his head in place as she sank down over him. It was this that she loved the most, the shock of their joining. They hadn’t been doing this very long, so it always felt like the first time, and Katniss closed her eyes to savor it, concentrating on the feel of him inside of her. When Peeta tried to move, she clenched her thighs together to keep him still another moment longer before lifting her hips and sliding back down. Their hips collided like the prows of two small ships bumping clumsily against each other until they found their rhythm and moved in unison. Soon, they were both climbing wildly, in enforced silence, with the abandon that comes from inexperience and enthusiasm and the impatience to get to that place where they would dissolve completely into each other.

Peeta’s face was flushed with his exertion as he rose to meet her, his hand reaching down between
them. He fumbled with his thick fingers, searching for the place that would make her climax, still so unsure of both himself and her. When she took his hand and moved it just so, her body became a taut wire, winding itself around him, the heat and tension building in her belly and spine until the wire snapped and she was flying. He pulled her down to bury her shouts into his chest as he lunged into her, emptying himself into the condom as her own fluttering walls drew out the last of him until they both lay spent and sprawled out on the carpeted floor.

Katniss suppressed an uncontrollable urge to laugh, the feeling of utter giddiness momentarily robbing her of her burdens, the tethered heaviness that always seemed to bind her to her world around her - the care of her younger sister after her father’s death, her mother’s subsequent depression, the ruthless travails of adolescence. But there was Peeta, always Peeta, who’d borne his own misfortunes with a persistent optimism, first his mother’s abuse and arrest, then her subsequent disappearance from their lives. All these things were forgotten when they wrapped themselves around each other, first in the innocent sincerity of childhood friendship, then with the consuming heat of young desire. She laughed infrequently and giggled even less, but now it threatened to bubble up out of her chest, and she had to bite her lip to keep from being overwhelmed by that rare and strange feeling of joy.

Peeta turned his head down to look at her radiant face, which poorly masked her happiness from him. He chuckled for them both as he helped her dress and got her home before she earned a scolding from her mother.

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It was not a formal dinner - after all, the Mellarks and the Everdeens had been neighbors for almost twenty years, the families having known each other even before. The children had been knocking around each other’s yards since they were young, especially after Sybil was arrested and then never came back home again. Dinner was finally served and everyone sat down, but it was with the casual chaos that comes from a group of people who had spent a lifetime becoming immune to each other. With some exceptions, of course.

Katniss did not sit next to Peeta. Prim had taken the spot she’d been surreptitiously reserving for him and though Katniss loved her sister above everyone else, she felt a murderous resentment towards her the moment she plopped down onto the hard wooden seat. Rye was his usual annoying self, and Bannock was filled with the imperious self-importance of being the oldest son, though he was no better than a frat boy when his father’s back was turned.

As her mother took her place at the table, Katniss vaguely noticed Mr. Mellark settle in next to her, leaning in to whisper something in her ear that made her laugh. Katniss studied their interaction, and thought back to Peeta’s comment earlier. She did look happier than usual. Her hair was loose and
hung straight down her back, gleaming blond with the lights of the Christmas tree flashing behind her. Her eyes were not the dull dusty blue of her grieving self but had a vibrant cast as if they were a pair of bulbs strung on the evergreen branches.

But it wasn’t just her mother. Mr. Mellark was tidier than usual, his hair, still abundantly blond though receding somewhat on the sides, trimmed and brushed back, his very new sweater complimenting eyes that looked uncannily like those of his youngest son. But she was unable to pursue her thought because she was interrupted by the excited chattering of her sister.

“Marvel Brown is the lead singer of Tainted Love, and we could win free backstage passes signed by him! You think mom would let me go?” Prim said as she served herself potatoes from the dish before her.

“Probably not,” Katniss responded with a scowl, only half listening to her sister go on and on about the concert and how very much she needed to go.

“I’ll die, I’ll just die, especially if Cassidy gets to go and I can’t!” Prim practically wailed. Katniss nodded distractedly, her grey eyes darted to where Peeta was forced to sit across from her, deepening her sense of annoyance.

“But if you chaperoned us, I bet Mom would let me go,” Prim continued, her blond hair bobbing with her excitement.

“They sound like a bunch of dying pigs,” groused Rye, who sat next to Prim, triggering an argument that Katniss only half-paid attention to as she felt the gentle press of Peeta’s foot against her leg. Suppressing a smirk, she set her foot on his chair and wriggled her toes into his crotch, prompting him to sputter and blush from the unexpected assault as the dishes made their way around the table.

“Stop it!” Peeta hissed as he tried to serve himself.

“Stop what?” asked Prim, which only made Katniss chuckle with mirth, especially as Peeta’s face became a brighter pink than before.

Between the various tortures, dishes, and banter, Mr. Mellark cleared his throat and called for everyone’s attention.
“Well, you know, it’s been a long time since I’ve asked Santa for a Christmas gift,” he said in a strong voice that wasn’t loud but carried over across the table. Katniss wasn’t sure why, but she felt a premonition in the way he stood, almost too formally given the occasion. “But I did this year and I got my wish. Before we tell anyone else, though…” he reached down and took her mother’s hand, a gesture that made Katniss’ eyes go wide with shock, “I asked Elise to marry me and she’s said yes.”

“What?” interjected Katniss, scrambling to understand what she was hearing. “Have you guys been dating?”

“Where have you been?” drawled Bannock as he ripped a piece of turkey meat and popped it into his mouth.

“I’ve been here! Don’t tell me you knew they were dating, and you’re all the way at Panem University and I’m right here and no one said anything to me?” she spat in disbelief.

“Katniss…” pleaded Mrs. Everdeen, trying to pacify her daughter.

“It’s okay, Elise,” interjected Mr. Mellark before turning to Katniss. “I understand that you might be shocked. We didn’t want to be disrespectful and carry on in front of you.”

Katniss sat in stunned silence as everyone looked at each other in various stages of confusion, except for Bannock, who clearly knew everything about everything and was too smart to be shocked. Surprisingly, it was Prim who was the first to rise from her seat and give Mr. Mellark and her mother a hug of congratulations, prompting the boys to follow suit. Peeta watched Katniss’ scowl, trying to catch her eye as he offered his father his good wishes. But she continued to stare petulantly down at the table with her arms crossed. Without warning, she tossed her napkin onto the table and got up, bypassing the happy couple as she walked to the corridor.

“Katniss, wait!” exclaimed Mrs. Everdeen.

“It’s okay. I got this,” Peeta said as he followed her into the corridor where she was already putting on her coat and boots.

“Where are you going?” he said, as she furiously dressed herself.

“I’m getting out of here,” she mumbled, tying up the laces of her heavy boots.

“Katniss, it’s below zero outside. Let’s just go upstairs so we can talk, okay?” Peeta pleaded but she ignored him as she finished tying the other boot and made her way to the door.

“Stop it, will you?” Peeta said in exasperation as Katniss turned towards him. “What are you so upset about? Dad’s divorced, your mom has been alone for six years. It’s not like they don’t have a right to go on with their lives, if that’s what they want.”

“But…it’s…they should have at least told me they were, I don’t know, dating…” Katniss said in exasperation. “Why is it that everyone knows about them except for me?”
“Because...” he said as he removed her scarf and hat. “You don’t pay attention.”

Katniss continued to stare dourly at him, though her face softened a little, a change that was not lost on him. He slowly unzipped her jacket as he spoke.

“What are you protesting, anyway? My dad’s not such a bad catch, you know. He can cook, he does the laundry, and he owns his own business…” Peeta said playfully as he hung Katniss’ coat back on the hook.

“But that would make you...my step-brother!” Katniss said, wrinkling her nose.

“It also means we would be living in the same house,” Peeta suggested wickedly. Resting his hands on her jean-clad hips, he brought his lips down to her ear. “Think about it…”

Katniss’s eyes narrowed before they widened, her face brightening with understanding. “Oh...Oh!” She gave him a bright smile before flinging her arms around his neck. “You’re absolutely right!”

Turning towards the dining room, Katniss strode with positive glee, her demeanor in complete contrast to earlier and awarded both her mother and Mr. Mellark an uncharacteristically warm hug.

“Congratulations, you two silly kids!” she laughed almost maniacally. Mrs. Everdeen was so taken aback, she gave Peeta a questioning look over Katniss’ shoulder, to which he responded with an exaggerated shrug of innocence.

As Katniss carried on about when and where the wedding would take place, Rye grimaced at Prim, who muttered in wonder to herself at Katniss’ rare display of euphoria, “What’s that all about?”

“She’s like the Grinch who stole Christmas,” whispered Rye. “Maybe she’s going to carve us all up and eat us and then store the leftover bodies in the basement,” he said almost gleefully. Prim turned her head towards him with a look of perfect disgust.

Meanwhile, Bannock looked from Katniss to Peeta, sniggering knowingly to himself as he snuck a bite of Prim’s sweet potato casserole from her plate and wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

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