Cattle Show

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Summary

The District 12 fair provides the perfect setting to become acquainted with 4-H members from other areas of Panem when the grounds close for the evening. Peeta Mellark meets the very private Katniss Everdeen when they're both fifteen, but it's a full year before she shows him her softer side.

In memory of Brett, a real life Peeta (1971-2014)

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Peeta inhaled deeply and wrinkled his nose as the scent of fresh hay and straw mingled with the stench of cattle and manure. It was only a few minutes past sunrise, but the barn was full of activity as stalls were in the process of being cleared and filled with fresh straw. Most of the cattle were tethered to the wash racks behind the barn and in various states of cleanliness.

“Peeta!” his oldest brother Rye called from outside, “hurry up and get the stall mucked out. Leven and I are almost done with the steers.”

Peeta waved in acknowledgement and thrust the pitchfork into the bedding from the night before. As he tossed the forkful of soiled straw into the wheelbarrow in the aisle, he glanced across the barn and
sucked in a lungful of air before coughing at the pungent smell.

The dark braid fell down her back, and the curve of her neck caused a stirring inside him that he hadn’t felt since last year when he watched her in the passenger seat of her rundown farm truck as it drove away. Now, her gray t-shirt hugged her back, and when she turned, Peeta choked at the sight of the wet cloth clinging to her breasts. She’d tied her freshly washed steer to the boards against the wall and swept her silver eyes through the barn. When she spied him, she froze before allowing her mouth to curve into a tentative smile.

Leven, his elder brother by a year, bumped him from behind. “Peeta, come on! Rye and I are almost done washing the steers, and you haven’t even gotten half the stall cleaned out.”

Peeta ripped his gaze from the girl across the way and mumbled an apology to his brother. “Sorry, I’ll get it done right now.” He twisted his baseball cap backward over his disheveled blond hair and turned his attention again to the task at hand. It didn’t take long, however, before his thoughts wandered to the previous year and his last interaction with the dark-haired beauty who’d smiled at him so shyly across the barn.

He’d discovered her name over halfway through last year’s fair and interacted with her at the parties that were common after the gates closed for the night. The 4-H participants with livestock often slept at the fairgrounds in order to be able to monitor the animals’ behavior as well as be on site early in the morning to take care of them before visitors streamed through the barns.

The District 12 fair housed barns with chickens, roosters, rabbits, sheep, horses, and cattle, but the Mellark brothers were only involved with the steer project—and that’s how Peeta Mellark met Katniss Everdeen.

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“Peeta, get over here with the hose. I’m trying to get this damn thing washed and back in the barn. I need to go help Dad before the day’s over,” Rye snapped from a few feet away.

“Hold your horses. I’m finishing up,” Peeta barked while rinsing the hindquarter of his steer and swiveling to pass the hose to his oldest brother. He gasped in horror when he realized someone had tied her animal in between the two Mellark men, and Peeta had just soaked her with the hose.

“Shit! That’s cold!” she gasped as he struggled to cinch the rubber and stop the stream of water that
had drenched her clothes.

“I’m so sorry!” he sputtered as he fumbled with the hose. His voice hitched when he realized her shirt was stuck to her skin. The water was cold enough that her nipples peaked under the wet fabric, which seemed to be the best thing he’d ever seen.

“Hey! Eyes up!” the girl ordered, and he blushed when he realized he’d been caught gaping.

“Oh, god, I’m sorry,” he mumbled with red cheeks. His mortification grew when Rye whistled and catcalled.

“The hose, lover boy! You can mack on the ladies later. I need to wash the steer.” Peeta smiled apologetically at the girl he’d doused and extended the hose to his brother.

“So, I…uh… Like I said, I’m really sorry for soaking you.” When she remained silent with her steely gaze leveled at him, he stammered, “I’m, uh…Peeta. Peeta Mellark.”

Her eyes flicked back and forth across his face before she nodded and responded, “Katniss Everdeen.”

“Katniss…” Peeta tasted her name on his lips and realized it was one of the most beautiful things he’d ever said. It took him several seconds to comprehend that he was staring at her before he snapped his jaw shut and dropped his head in embarrassment.

Katniss worked the brush through the lather on her steer’s back and said pointedly, “It was nice to meet you, Peeta. Maybe I’ll see you around.”

Rightly recognizing her words as a dismissal, he nodded and led his own animal back to the barn, but his eyes strayed towards Katniss the remainder of the day. When he joined his brothers and the rest of their friends after the gates had closed for the night, he was pleasantly surprised to see Katniss sitting on a bale of straw next to one of the female members of his 4-H Club. He raised a bottleneck of Budweiser in her direction and tipped it in a small salute from the edge of his baseball cap. When she only nodded in response, he settled down among his friends and decided to unwind and enjoy the few hours of relaxation he’d get before waking at daybreak the next morning.

He’d consumed a few beers by midnight, and it was with a fuzzy brain that he noticed Katniss stand
and quietly slip from the gathering. Disappointment flooded him as he watched the dark braid bounce softly against her back above the slight sway of her slim hips and her lean bare legs. Something about her made his stomach clutch with longing, and he wondered if he’d have time over the next few days to break her out of her shell so that he could see her less serious side.

“Does she even have one?” he wondered as he took another long drag from the bottle.

As it turned out, she did. The next night Katniss returned with the same girl and hung out with his crowd again. This time, instead of only sitting quietly and observing the others, she grabbed a beer and joined in the discussion.

Peeta found her funny. Her sense of humor was thoughtful and though-provoking, subtle with a twist of irony that he found irresistible. She observed more than she spoke, and that made every word she said weigh heavier than the incessant babble Delly, Clove, and the other girls emitted as they drank. He grinned when his friend Finnick hit on her and earned a steely stare that could have frozen boiling water. Peeta knew many considered him the best looking of the Mellark brothers, but Finnick was the supermodel of their hometown and used to dating as many women as he wanted. Katniss’ pragmatic attitude and ability to see through his friend’s charm made her even more attractive to him.

Peeta knew how most people viewed him and his brothers. Rye, the oldest, had the reputation of a player, partier, and slacker. He drank too much and got by on his smile and ability to schmooze others into doing what he wanted them to do. He wasn’t cruel or manipulative, but he wasn’t above using his looks to get out of work.

The second Mellark, Leven, was the comedian of the trio. His haircut was a little goofy, his jokes made people laugh because they were over-the-top silly, and his limbs seemed a little too gangly and long for his body. He often lamented that girls saw him as a friend instead of a potential romantic interest, but his happy-go-lucky attitude endeared him to a wide range of friends.

Only Peeta seemed to enjoy a larger circle of people who appreciated him. Peeta knew his blue eyes and blond curls turned the heads of a number of his female acquaintances. His infectious grin and calm, steady demeanor appealed to many, and his ability to weave words into colors and emotions made him popular with his peers and adults. He genuinely admired a number of people, and he knew his respect for others radiated from him. Altogether, he’d been esteemed in return. He wondered if his steady demeanor was the reason Katniss finally struck up a conversation with him just past midnight.

““You seem awfully popular,” she observed from the bale of straw next to his.
“You seem awfully smart if that’s your conclusion.” He winked at her as he took a drag on his beer and grinned when she rolled her eyes.

“Mmm… arrogant, too. Nice. Just what I’m looking for in a guy.”

He gave a lazy shake of his head and quipped, “Sardonic. The ideal personality trait of a female.”

She chuckled and took a drink before nodding her head at him. “Touché. Truce?” She waited with raised eyebrows until he agreed and then rose to move alongside him.

“So what else do you look for in a guy?” Peeta teased through his buzz. His brain was a little muddled, which frustrated him since he wanted to remember every second of conversation with this girl.

She deadpanned, “One who knows how to turn a hose on a girl.”

Peeta choked on his beer and coughed until she pounded him on the back to help clear his air passageway. When he finally regained his breath and cleared the water from his eyes, he glanced up to see her cheeks flaming red.

“I meant the other morning. Not—I mean, I didn’t mean… You know, your… Oh shit. Just kill me now,” she stuttered.

He barked with laughter and reassured her, “I know what you meant, and I’m sorry for soaking you the other day.” When she lowered her eyes in embarrassment, he teased, “Although I’m happy to know you’re interested in my hose.”

“I— I have to go. God, I’m sorry,” she mumbled and bolted between the trailers.

“Hey! Wait! Katniss!” Peeta stumbled after her and caught her hand before she slipped away. “Don’t be embarrassed. I was just joking with you.” She struggled to free her arm from his grasp but only managed to wiggle her body closer to his in the confined space between a trailer and the cab of a pickup.
Peeta froze as her hip grazed the front of his jeans, and he thickened against his will. “Katniss,” he said softly, and she fixed her eyes on his mouth.

Before he registered his actions, he’d cupped her face and lowered his lips to hers in a soft graze. Warmth exploded between them, and she slumped into him slightly as his mouth slanted over hers. The taste of beer flavored their kiss, and he recognized the scent of fresh straw and the shampoo most 4-Hers used to cleanse their livestock.

When her tongue rubbed against his, he pressed her back against the pickup and moaned into her mouth. His breath came in gasps as he delved into her, and his hands slid from her face to the curves of her back. She whimpered when his hands cupped her buttocks and pulled her tighter against his groin.

“Katniss,” he grunted as his cock strained under his jeans. She stiffened then and pulled away. He opened his eyes, and the vision of her swollen lips and flushed cheeks almost brought him to his knees.

“I have to go. I’m sorry,” she blurted and fled. Peeta huffed in frustration as the humid air of the July night replaced the warmth of her body against his. He adjusted his bulge in hopes of easing it but realized he was too far gone to relax without some help. With a sigh, he unzipped and wrapped his palm around his cock to jerk it.

“Fuck,” he cursed as his hand slid along his shaft. Moisture from the tip slickened his fingers to provide some lubrication, but it wasn’t really enough. His skin chaffed against itself as he jacked off. He fought to keep quiet, but he choked on a moan as warmth rushed to his thighs. He pressed his forehead to the side of the truck and groaned when he ejaculated. He struggled to aim the stream at the ground, but he feared he’d marked his dad’s pickup with his arousal. He’d have to wash it clean in the morning before anyone noticed. Zipping himself back into his jeans, he decided his buzz and climax couldn’t be topped, so he turned to climb into the cattle trailer, stripped to his boxers, and succumbed to sleep.

The next morning came much too early, and he groaned when sunlight slanted into the trailer to wake him. It didn’t help that Rye kicked the bales of hay on which his sleeping bag lay and hollered, “Get up, Peeta. Today’s show day.”

The next few hours passed in a blur as Peeta and his brothers rushed to ready their steers for show. The sounds of blow dryers filled the barn following the morning baths. Peeta breathed in more adhesive than he wanted as he rattled his steer’s tail and formed it into a ball. He brushed the hair along the hipbones forward and shined the hooves before touching up the shaved hair around the stubbed horns.
“Peet! Help me get the halter on. My weight class is up next.”

“Coming,” he called over his shoulder to Leven. He dropped his curry comb on a bale of straw and moved over to his brother. As he slipped the loop over the steer’s nose, he caught a glimpse of Katniss across the barn. She looked cool and collected in a deep green button down and tight blue jeans that slid over shiny brown cowboy boots. Clearly, she’d just finished in the show ring since she was in the process of brushing the adhesive from her animal’s coat.

“Snap out of it! I need to get in line,” his brother growled, and Peeta returned his attention back to the task at hand.

“Sorry,” he mumbled.

A few seconds later, Leven had pulled his steer into the ring, and Peeta needed every second to get his own animal ready since he was in the next class. His brother landed firmly in the fourth spot for his weight group, and Peeta grabbed his show stick before moving into line. His eyes flitted to the bleachers, and he caught sight of Katniss in the top row watching with a look of concentration on her face.

He led his steer around the circle and then focused on setting up the steer’s correct stance so the judge could observe muscle tone. Much to his surprise and happiness, he ended up first in the class, which meant he’d have to show again for the championship round. It also meant he’d have to keep his steer upright through another two weight groups so straw wouldn’t stick in the adhesive on his calf’s tail and hips. He curried his steer and rubbed its belly with the show stick as he waited.

“Congratulations. You’ve got yourself a nice animal there.”

Peeta stiffened at her voice but struggled to stay steady so as not to upset his steer. “Thanks,” he murmured softly without turning.

“Maybe I’ll see you tonight?” He grinned softly at the offer in her voice and nodded before untying his steer and heading back to the ring.

“Sure. Looking forward to it,” he called over his shoulder and struggled to keep his expression neutral. Adrenaline coursed through his veins, which only heightened as the champion was chosen. Peeta’s face broke into a full-fledged smile when his steer was named reserve champion, and he
accepted the lavender ribbon. His two brothers clapped him on the shoulder as he exited the ring and helped tie the steer back in their stall. Peeta knotted his ribbon on the sign that marked the Mellark space and grinned at the piece of silk blowing in the breeze.

He caught Katniss’ eye as he secured the threads and winked when she mouthed, “Good job!”

With the show out of the way, Peeta spent the afternoon with his friends on the midway and dinner at a hamburger place before they made their way back to the barns at dusk. When the fair buildings closed for the day, he slipped back to the trailers where coolers full of iced beer waited.

Cheers from his friends greeted him for his success earlier in the day, and he tried to quell his disappointment that Katniss was nowhere to be found. He’d just started his fourth beer when he noticed her slip into the group and pull a bottle from the cooler. She popped the cap and sipped the liquid as she sauntered over to him.

“Hi,” he greeted her with a goofy grin. His head spun from the alcohol he’d ingested and her nearness.

“Hi there, champ. You're looking good.”

“Same to you,” he drawled in appreciation as he raked his eyes down her torso to her exposed legs. He flicked his tongue across his bottom lip in appreciation.

“How good?”

He grabbed her hand and pulled her from the crowd into the space they’d occupied the night before when he’d kissed her. His mouth found hers before she could protest, and her arms slipped around his neck to pull him closer to her. Her whimper sent a shudder of longing through him, and he tugged her body tightly against him.

“So fucking good,” he breathed against her jaw. “You are so beautiful, Katniss.”

He caught his breath when he felt her fingers graze his bare stomach, and his eyes popped open in shock when her hand slipped into his waistband.
“Touch me, Peeta,” she begged as her palm closed over his rapidly growing erection.

“Katniss,” he moaned and then palmed her breast and squeezed.

“Lower,” Katniss murmured against his lips.

He plunged his tongue deeper into her mouth to mimic how his cock filled her hand. “Shit. This is so fucking hot. Oh, damn…” His fingers found her slit, and he jerked into her hand as the wet warmth coated his digits.

She ground her hips against his hand, and he flicked this thumb over her clit and plunged his middle finger into her heat. Katniss’ head fell back, and she released a prolonged groan that shot straight to his dick.

“Keep going,” she gasped in a throaty whimper.

“Oh, fuck. Katniss, fuck!” She tightened her grip and tugged him quicker in response to the pace of his finger in and out of her pussy. He tightened and moaned into her shoulder while pulsing into her palm. She stroked him harder, and he pressed his thumb into her nub until she mewled his name in incoherent yelps. Her walls tightened around his finger, and he bit her collarbone until his hips stopped bucking and she stopped riding his hand.

He pressed them against the cab of the pickup until his ragged breaths slowed slightly, but he didn’t have time to enjoy the euphoria of their climaxes. She kissed him softly and whispered, “I have to go,” before slipping into the maze of trailers. He stood in shock and watched her back disappear into the darkness. He considered trailing her, but his legs still shook with aftershocks from his orgasm. It was all he could do to crawl into his sleeping bag in the trailer and collapse. He sucked his middle finger into his mouth and tasted her tanginess before drifting into a restless sleep.

He woke late the next morning—so late that he almost missed her departure completely. As he stumbled to the barn, he noticed her steer was missing. Frantically, he searched for her but didn’t find her until he caught a glimpse of her through the open window of a beaten down farm truck. She lifted her hand in a half-hearted wave and disappeared through the fairground’s gates, leaving him with an empty heart and regret that he hadn’t asked for her number.

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Peeta finished mucking out his and his brother’s stalls as he mused about his encounters with Katniss the previous year. At fifteen, he’d been enamored by her looks and her humor. It was only after he’d tried to track her down through Madge, her friend in his 4-H club, that he realized he didn’t really know anything about her.

Madge refused to give him Katniss’ phone number, which frustrated him more than he could explain. He prodded and pushed for several weeks, but Madge remained adamant that Katniss had insisted she didn’t want contact with anyone from the fair in her real life. He’d spent the school year irritated and despondent and only forgave Madge when she finally revealed that Katniss lived almost two hours away from their home town. Peeta, who didn’t turn 16 until the next July, couldn’t have traveled to see her anyway without revealing his desperation to his brothers. Texting and email wouldn’t have worked either if Katniss really was as private as Madge made her out to be.

Her voice nudged him out of his inner turmoil as he revisited the despair he’d felt over the past year.

“You still seem very popular,” she said softly from behind him, and he turned to face her.

“And you’re still beautiful,” he returned. She blushed and opened her mouth to speak, but Rye and Leven chose that moment to lead all three steers back to their stalls. Peeta muttered urgently, “Can we talk later? Alone?”

She nodded and whispered, “I’ll be in my truck. Come find me when you’re free.”

Over an hour passed before Peeta could slip away, but he rushed to the sea of trailers and vehicles behind the barns as soon as he could. He wove through two rows before he spotted the battered farm truck from last year. He knocked softly on the back to announce his arrival. It took only seconds for her to open the gate and allow him into the enclosed bed of the truck.

His eyes swept the space, and he observed the neatly arranged sleeping bags and straightened bales of hay. When he raised an eyebrow in question, she said quietly, “My younger sister Prim,” as an explanation for the second sleeping pallet. “I’m sorry I ran out on you last year with no explanation,” she said and motioned for him to take a seat near her.

“Why did you? I tried to convince Madge to give me your contact information, but she refused to budge. A year’s a long time to wait to see you, Katniss.”

“I was embarrassed,” she whispered hoarsely.
“Why? What’s there to be embarrassed about? I wanted to touch you last year. I didn’t want to wait another year to do it again. Why—?”

“It wasn’t that, Peeta. Of course I wanted you to touch me. That wasn’t the embarrassing part.”

“I… I don’t understand,” he admitted.

She waved her arm around at the inside of the truck and explained, “Look at this, Peeta. This is a farm truck, not a cattle trailer. My family hauls crops to market in this and our livestock to the fair. We don’t have the fancy equipment you and all the others do. We have vehicles that barely make it here and make us look like trash compared to the rest of you. Your family’s farm is registered and trademarked with a fancy gate, I’m sure; mine is a few acres with less than a dozen animals and a rundown shed. We don’t come from the same place.”

The wistfulness in her voice made his heart clutch in pain. He moved closer to her and lifted her chin with his index finger.

“Look at me, Katniss,” he murmured and smiled encouragingly at her when she did. “I don’t care about any of that. Do you understand me? None of that matters to me. You are kind and thoughtful, funny and smart, and I know all that from two conversations with you over a year ago. I barely know you, but I want to know you better, and I don’t care how poor you are or how rich you think I am. We’re still both farm kids, Katniss, and no one who farms is that wealthy.”

“But—” she protested, but he stopped her.

“But nothing,” he insisted.

“Peeta, I—”

“Shh,” he shushed before kissing her into silence.

He’d forgotten how good she tasted over the past year, but when her mouth opened under his, he delved into her like a starving man with his favorite dish. The hunger between them combusted into a roaring fire in his veins. Before he could stop himself, he’d pulled her into his lap and palmed her
breast in his left hand. He dipped his tongue deeper as his thumb flicked back and forth across her nipple until it peaked under his touch. He felt his dick harden as the swell of her ass pressed into his crotch.

“Katniss, do you have— Oh, excuse me! I’m so sorry!”

Katniss jerked away from him so hard, she almost fell off the straw bale. Peeta attempted to dispel the haze surrounding him and focused on the interruption.

“What do you need, Prim?”

Peeta marveled at the softness in her voice as Katniss addressed her little sister. The adoration and affection between the two of them was evident in the soft words they spoke to each other and the way Katniss smoothed Prim’s hair before sending her on her way.

“Sorry,” Katniss mumbled when they were alone again.

“For what? You adore her. That’s pretty clear,” he said warmly. The sisterly relationship they enjoyed differed tremendously from the one he shared with his two brothers.

“I’m all she has. My dad died a few years ago, and my mom… Well, she might as well have joined him. My dad’s best friend drove us to the fair last year, but I got my license a couple of months ago, so I got us here this year. Prim wanted to show her goat Lady, and I had to make sure that happened.”

Peeta watched her wring her hands for several seconds and wondered how he’d been lucky enough to meet someone so special.

“Why steers for you? Why not sheep or a goat like your sister?”

“Money,” she stated bluntly. “Steers raise a lot more money when you sell them, and we have the corn and hay to feed them. I’m never going to win grand champion or reserve champion like you, but I can still make a couple of thousand bucks a year to make sure we don’t starve and to save some money for Prim’s college fund.” The silence stretched between them for several minutes before she blurted, “It’s okay if you want to run off right now. You don’t have to stay here out of pity.”
When he snorted, she snapped her glare at him and demanded, “What’s so damn funny?”

“You are,” he answered simply. “You’re so pure.”

“Feel free to show yourself out,” she said coldly and turned her back to him.

He brushed her braid aside and pressed his lips against the nape of her neck. When she gasped, he asked, “Why would I want to do that when I can stay here with you? I have no intention of leaving you, Katniss. You’re perfect for me.”

She tried to protest, but he trailed the tip of his tongue along the contour of her ear and slid his hand down the front of her shirt to caress her. With a soft moan, she shifted to face him and kissed him back with ferocity. In minutes, they lay together on her sleeping bag while tearing at each other’s clothes and grunting when straw poked them through the fabric.

Katniss rocked her hips into his, and Peeta managed to find the strength to restrain himself. It was mid-afternoon, the busiest time of day on the fairgrounds; the last thing he wanted was to try to get a woman he’d pined over for a year naked while strangers and acquaintances alike milled only a dozen or so feet from her truck.

“Katniss… Katniss, we need to stop.”

“I don’t want to stop,” she breathed, but he held her from him.

“Shit, I don’t want to either, but this isn’t the right time or place for this. There are people all over out there. Do you want them to hear us?”

She swore softly under her breath but seemed to realize he was right. She rolled off him and straightened her clothes and hair before stating, “I have to go check on Prim in the sheep barn. Will you be at the party tonight?”

He nodded and sat upright before offering, “I could go with you to check on her.”
“No,” she said shortly before explaining, “No, I think I should probably talk to my sister alone. You know, after she walked in on us.”

“Oh…” He swallowed hard in frustration but shrugged his shoulders. “Yeah, I’ll be at the party tonight, but we could—”

“I’ll see you then.” The firmness in her voice made it clear she wasn’t interested in seeing him before that, so he kissed her quickly on the cheek and returned to the cattle barn in disappointment. The hours dragged by, but eventually the sun set and the buildings closed for the night. He made his way to the party filled with the anticipation of seeing Katniss again.

She wasn’t there when he arrived, so he opened a beer and turned his attention to his friends in order to remain calm. As the minutes ticked by and she didn’t appear, he drank beer after beer in frustration. By midnight, he was drunk and close to belligerent. When she finally appeared, he stumbled to her and pulled her down on the nearest bale before she could talk to anyone else. He shoved a beer in her hand and watched as she took a long swallow that made her throat bob.

“S’it’s ’bout fuckin’ time.”

“Sorry. I had shit to do.”

“You were ’voiding me,” he accused and pointed at her.

She grabbed his hand, lowered it, and shook her head. “I was getting my sister to bed. And besides, I wanted to make sure you’d had enough to drink so that I could take advantage of you when I finally got here.” She grinned at him and bumped his shoulder with hers. “I missed you this evening.”

Her words and his buzz eased any tension he might have felt had he been faced with the reality of Katniss in front of him without any liquid courage. When she slipped her hand into his, he intertwined his fingers with hers and squeezed.

“I’m out of beer,” Katniss murmured close to his ear. “Come with me to get another one?”

“The cooler’s right over there,” he said as he nodded his head to the right before noticing the look on her face. “Oh… Yeah, I’ll go with you.”
She rose quickly and practically pulled him around the end of the trailer and through a maze of trucks and other vehicles to a secluded area near the tree line that surrounded the fairgrounds.

His lips found hers in a sloppy kiss that shot electricity through his veins. His mouth slid across hers until they adjusted to each other and settled into a timid rhythm that grew steadily more confident. He wrapped her braid around his hand and lifted it to cup the back of her head so he could slant her head for easier access to her lips.

With a soft groan, she pulled away and whispered over the sounds of laughter and the midway closing, “Are you drunk?”

“No. Buzzed. A lot buzzed, but not drunk.” His forehead rested gently against hers, and he pulled her mouth toward his again. He might have been lying, but there was no way he was letting her escape him another time.

Her lips opened slightly under his guidance, and he ran the tip of his tongue along her bottom lip. She tasted like Budweiser and desire when she moaned softly under his touch.

In seconds, their kissing turned feral—hot mouths smashed against each other in desperation, warm tongues caressing as they panted and groaned in longing. Her small hands grasped at his shoulders and then twined around his neck as he slanted her head under his and almost bent her backward to get closer to her.

“Fuck, Katniss,” he breathed against her mouth. He forced himself to rip away from her, but he surrendered with a growl when the palm of her hand connected with the bare skin of his stomach. Her fingers grazed his torso as their tongues intertwined, and he willed his body not to respond the way it typically did as a 16-year-old male and certainly not as quickly as it had when she did the same thing to him the year before. His arms pulled her closer before pushing her back against the hard metal of a sleek black horse trailer. Her left hand twisted in the blond waves at the back of his neck. He felt her trail from his abdomen to his waistband, but he almost howled in frustration when she didn’t move any lower.

“Oh, shit,” escaped him in a strangled whisper.

“Peeta,” she cried in a soft grunt as her head fell back to allow for his mouth to trace the contours of her elegant neck. His hands traveled progressively lower until they cupped her ass and pulled her tighter against the front of her jeans. She rocked into him gently, and he groaned as flashes of heat
streaked through his body.

“Maybe we should—”

“Touch me, Peeta,” she interrupted with a frantic plea. “Please touch me.”

His teeth nipped at her neck. He wanted to leave some kind of mark so she wouldn’t forget who had turned her into a shivering mess, but he also worried about pushing her too far. Clearly impatient, she grabbed his right hand and brought it to the juncture of her thighs before opening the button on her jeans and pressing into him again.

“Are you sure?” he asked with a bit of trepidation. “Did you drink—?”

“No, not enough to worry about. What you should be worried about is how I’m going to react if you don’t get your hand in my pants right now!” she insisted, which turned into a yelp when his palm cupped her and he trailed his middle finger along her slit.

She hissed, but he withdrew before slowly sliding in between her lips again and dipping into the moisture there. Just when her body began to tremble with unrelieved tension, he teased her entrance and slipped in slowly. Her sharp intake of breath reassured him that she wanted this invasion, and it wasn’t long before she was grinding hard against his hand.

He moaned against the warm skin of her neck before tracing the path of her collar bone with the tip of his tongue. Her fingers pulled at his waistband and zipper until she could fit her small hand inside his pants and fumble with his underwear in an attempt to free him. Her hips undulated against his hand, and he wondered what kind of pressure he should apply in an attempt to both prolong their time together and drive her to completion.

“Oh holy fuck,” he whimpered as her palm closed around his rapidly stiffening cock. He squeezed and caressed him, her fist pumping him gently as he shook his head to clear the cobwebs.

Like the year before, he pushed into her with his middle finger and pressed against her clit with his thumb. When she pleaded for more, he dipped another finger in and was astonished when her body quaked. She released him long enough to lick her palm and grasp him again. The fluid on her hand mixed with the year’s wait and her reaction to him was too much to handle, and he shouted his surrender as he spilled into her hand. She rode his fingers and keened into his ear as shudders shook through her.
“Fucking hell,” he gasped as his brain swirled. Katniss raised her eyes to his, and he felt his heart crack. He’d never seen anything so beautiful as her face after her climax. Her eyes sparkled and her face was flushed with warmth and relief. The tip of her tongue peeked between her full lips, and he couldn’t resist covering them with his.

When they finally broke apart, she whispered, “I wish we could get out of here.”

Cupping her jaw, he trailed his mouth along her cheeks and murmured, “My brothers are both gone tonight. They went home to help Dad tomorrow morning. My trailer’s empty.”

“How long do you think the party will last?”

“It doesn’t matter. We made sure someone else was in charge this year. Nobody will hear us because we won’t be near it.”

A grin spread across her face, and she demanded eagerly, “Let’s go then.”

They slipped through the darkness until he located his family’s trailer. The sounds from the party echoed across the three rows of parked vehicles, and they slipped inside without being seen. He led her to his sleeping bag and sat down with her next to him.

He cupped her chin and looked at her steadily. “I missed you this year. Don’t do that to me again, Katniss.”

“Peeta…” His lips grazed hers, and she sighed softly. “Peeta, I’ve never done this.”

“Never left a guy without a phone number?” he teased. When she didn’t crack a smile, he realized what she meant. “You’re a, uh, you’ve never been with someone?”

She shook her head and exhaled noisily. “I don’t know what it is about you that makes me trust you. I don’t know why I should because I barely know you, but I want you. You’ve been nothing but kind and understanding to me, and I can’t stop thinking about us together. This may be stupid, but I want this with you.”
His mind raced at her words. Losing her virginity to him in a cattle trailer filled with straw bales seemed like a horrible idea, but she appeared sure. His dick throbbed for her, and he knew he didn’t want to say no, no matter how noble it might be to wait for a more opportune time. He warred with his conscience, but she leaned forward to kiss him and said softly, “Don’t be a martyr. I don’t need a fancy bed, music, and candles. I just need you.”

He swallowed thickly as she raised her shirt and pulled it over her head. After dropping it next to them on the floor, she reached behind her to release her bra. Peeta gulped as it fell to expose her small breasts with perky, dark nipples that were illuminated by streaks of light from outside. He licked his lips and cupped one in his hand before leaning forward and tugging it into his mouth.

“Oh, god,” she whimpered as he flicked back and forth across her peak and nipped at it softly. Her hands sought his skin, and her fingers tugged at the buttons on his thin flannel shirt. He trailed his hands up and down her back and grunted when she pushed the cloth over his shoulders and caressed the small thatch of dark blond chest hair.

“Katniss, sweetheart, I don’t think I can last very long, and I want to make sure you’re happy,” he panted. “Do you trust me?”

She nodded, her eyes wide and shining with lust. He stood and pulled her up with him before stripping her of her shorts and shoving his jeans down over his hips. Grabbing his pillow, he leaned it against the side of the trailer and settled her down on his sleeping bag with her back against the wall. Kneeling down in front of her, he spread her legs and kissed her inner thigh before looking up at her.

“You okay?”

She nodded and grasped at him to indicate her impatience, but he moved deliberately. He shifted her heels to perch on the edge of the bale and pulled her hips toward him slightly before nudging her knees further apart and spreading her open with his fingers. He groaned at the moisture between her legs and remembered her climax when he fingered her against the horse trailer. He pressed her swollen clit with his thumb and watched her eyes darken and her face relax in bliss in the dimness. There was just enough light to see her lids droop closed. Her mouth parted slightly as he caressed her slowly.

He fumbled for his wallet with his other hand and managed to pull out a foil packet in preparation. He set it carefully next to her before lowering his head and sliding his tongue along her slit. The noise she made shot straight through him to his cock. It was a combination of a scream, moan, and whimper, and it was the sexiest thing he’d ever heard.
She pulsed her hips against his face and opened wider as he slanted his head and wiggled his tongue into her. Her warmth surrounded him as fluid from her earlier orgasm and his mouth smeared across his mouth and chin. His name fell from her lips repeatedly, and her fingers twined in his hair and pulled so hard it hurt. Her hips moved erratically, and she choked and gasped for air as he plundered her. She tasted tangy and milky which drove him wild. When he flicked his tongue rapidly against her nub, she stiffened and yelped his name so loudly, he reached up to cover her mouth with his hand. Her muffled words and moans of pleasure continued against his hand, and he knew he was nearing his breaking point.

He wracked his brain to think of the best position to prolong his stamina and not hurt her the first time. He knew the time to ponder was over when Katniss clamped her legs against his head and screamed against his hand. Her orgasm pulsed from her into his mouth, and he ripped his face from her to grab the condom.

“Don’t go,” she pled as she shook.

“It’s okay, Katniss,” he assured her. “I’m here.”

He turned to sit on the straw bale and pulled her over on top of him to straddle his lap. She wrapped her arms around his neck and gasped when he lined himself up and helped her slide onto him. Her eyes widened as he stretched her and flashed with a hint of pain when she enveloped him. She squeezed her eyes shut and dropped her forehead on his shoulder as she fought against the ache between her legs. He wrapped his arms around her and grabbed his discarded shirt to wipe the moisture from his face. He knew he smelled like her, but he didn’t want to scare her with the amount of fluid she’d released onto his face. He nudged her with his nose, and she lifted her gaze to look at him.

“Put your legs against the outsides of mine. It’s going to be okay. A little scratchy, but okay.”

She shifted and grimaced as his dick stretched her further. “Shit, you feel big,” she complained, but he stopped her with a shallow thrust of his hips. “Oh…” And then another. “Oh! Oh, yeah, that feels better.” Her words trailed into a soft moan as he pulsed against her again. When she rocked into him tentatively, he knew her discomfort had mostly passed, and she was ready for him.

“Katniss,” he grunted through clenched teeth, “listen to me. I’m so close, but you get to set the pace this way. Go as slow or fast as you want. I won’t last much longer either way. Just do what feels good to you.”
She nodded and rocked forward. An awed look swept her face when he groaned softly at her movement. She moved forward again and grinned when he cursed under his breath. He knew it didn’t take more than a few seconds for her to realize the control she had over his pleasure because she quickened and slowed her pace every few seconds. He tried to stay quiet, but his yelps grew louder as he neared his climax.

Her head fell back as she found a steady rhythm, and he spurted into the condom with a groan of surrender after only a few more seconds. She bucked against him as his thighs clenched with his release. Soft cries of happiness fell from her and bounced off the metal walls until he caught her mouth with his. He reached down to stroke her as she rode him, and it wasn’t long before she stiffened again and moaned into his mouth.

They collapsed in a heap onto the length of his sleeping bag, both breathing raggedly and gasping for air. He cradled her against him with one arm and attempted to remove the condom with his other hand. He slipped it off and tossed it into the loose straw at the bottom of the trailer before finding her lips and kissing her deeply.

He marveled at the ease with which he and Katniss had coupled. He hadn’t had a lot of experiences before her, but they’d been awkward and filled with fumbling hands and tangled limbs. After the initial uncertainty of what to do, he and Katniss had shared something much more intimate than anything during his other sexual encounters.

“You alright?” he murmured. The darkness of the trailer didn’t allow him to see much now that they were lying down. He felt her nod against him, and he chuckled. “The last thing I want to do is ask how it was or if you liked it or anything like that, but I want to make sure you’re…uh, okay.”


He settled his head against her shoulder and yawned. Her fingers threaded through his hair, and her breath skimmed along his forehead. When she sighed in happiness, he did too. His eyes drooped and his body relaxed until he mumbled, “I’m so tired, Katniss.”

“Sleep then,” she answered softly.

His eyes sagged closed again, and he melted into a sated slumber with the sound of her breath and laughter from the party that was winding down ringing in his ears.
A few hours later, the rising sun glinted through the trailer and woke him, and he stretched his stiff limbs. As he sat up, he noticed the discarded condom and realized he was alone in the trailer. Katniss must have slipped away sometime during the night. Dread filled him as he dressed and made his way to the barn. He didn’t see her, and he couldn’t shake the fear that she’d run off like she had the previous year.

He opened the box that held his tools and supplies so he could grab shampoo and brushes to bathe the steers and froze when he spied a square piece of paper taped inside the lid. Opening it, his face relaxed into a relieved smile.

Peeta didn’t know her handwriting, but there was no doubt the note was from Katniss. The words, “Meet me at the wash racks,” were scrawled over a phone number. Carefully placing the paper inside his wallet, he untied his steer and led it outside. There in the early morning sun, Katniss stood soaping her steer, wearing another wet gray t-shirt that clung to her breasts.

“I thought maybe you could go with me to check on Prim today,” she suggested without looking at him. “The goats show today, and I want to be there to watch. You interested?”

Peeta hesitated for only a few seconds—not because he wasn’t sure but because he was desperately positive. He wanted nothing more than to spend every second of the rest of his life with her.

With a conviction so deep it resounded in his bones, he answered, “Always.”

End Notes

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