Hayffie Week

by EllanaSan

Summary

For the hayffie week hosted on tumblr, this is a collection of one-shot following different themes.

Notes

Day 1 is : Inspired by a song.
I chose Talk to me by Yodelice and covered by Maxim Nucci. I hope you enjoy it!
Talk To Me

Something just changed in your soul
Tell me baby what’s wrong
What’s going on?
Have you been crying?

He doesn’t notice at once. Her eyes are reddish but it could be a trick of the light due to her make-up. This year is different and, somehow, he supposes they both feel it. They’ve grown attached to Katniss and Peeta like they haven’t let themselves grow close to tributes in a while.

Still, she’s usually bright and bubbly on launching day regardless of her personal feelings. This year, she clutches his hand in hers and chews on her lips waiting to see if the kids will do the smart thing and run away from the Cornucopia.

It feels different.

Something just flaked in your eyes
There’s a crack in your gaze
Like those broken days
Am I seeing things…

He reads the fear in her eyes when Katniss takes the berries out of her pocket, he sees the terrified spark of recognition when the Gamemakers declare them both winners. Almost as if she knew what is in store for making the Capitol look ridiculous. But she can’t. She doesn’t.

She’s the perfect Capitol doll, the perfect Capitol drone and she’s not so good an actress as to fool him.

He hates her. Or he used to. At some point, hating her required too much energy and maybe he started liking her a little.

But he knows her.

Doesn’t he?

Talk to me,

Baby, talk, it’s me.

Talk to me

Victory Tour is a brand new kind of hell. She flinches at every loud noise, gives wary glances to Peacekeepers and remains close to him or the kids when they’re not on the train. She still acts like nothing’s out of the ordinary, like she’s oblivious and dim-witted. The kids are fooled by the performance.
He isn’t.

He doesn’t dare ask what she knows and how. He doesn’t dare ask if she’s been playing fool all along. He doesn’t know what’s worse: pretending to be unaware or being that naïve.

He wishes she would come to him.

She doesn’t.

*Something got hold of your soul*

*You’re like never before*

*Is there something more*

*Have I missed anything?*

She’s angry like he has never seen her and bad at hiding it. The Quell has her sprouting nonsense about team, matching tokens and harsh words behind closed doors that make his hair rise on the back of his neck. *Defiance.* Not a word he would have associated with Effie Trinket.

He wonders what has changed her and he thinks maybe she has not changed at all. Maybe she wasn’t the blind one, maybe *he* was. Maybe he has missed what has been right under his eyes all along. An ally, a friend and not an enemy or a spy.

*Seems like the sun is shining*

*On everyone but me*

*Won’t you talk to me?*

*This is getting scary*

He watches Finnick being reunited with Annie in the Thirteen’s hospital and his heart aches. The memory of her, her absence, tug on heartstrings that haven’t been played in too long. He didn’t know. It sounds stupid but he didn’t know and now he misses her something fierce.

He would give anything to hear her annoying voice.

The silence is his undoing. The silence has him punching walls in the privacy of his compartment, terrified at the thought he will never find her again, terrified at the thought he will never *hear* her again. He even misses the constant nagging.

*Baby, talk to me*

*Please, talk to me*

*Baby, talk, it’s me*

*Talk to me*

When he steps in her hospital room, three days after the official surrender, she doesn’t open her mouth. It’s not him she’s ignoring, it’s the rest of the world. She doesn’t talk, she doesn’t eat, she doesn’t cry, she doesn’t scream… She curls up on her side and stares at the wall.

At some point he gives up, lies down next to her, ignores the glares of the nurses and doctors… He
stares at the same wall she does and he waits.

It’s only when she turns around, buries her face in his neck and starts sobbing that he breathes.

*Something just changed in my world*

*And it’s killing me.*

She is broken. In so many places, in so many ways. He can’t help her. He tries, he tries every day, but every day he fails.

It is barely a comfort that she trusts him enough to let him see her hurting when she pretends for the rest of the world. They all see the smiles when he sees the cracks in her mask.

She resents him for it.

He thinks she loves him a little bit for it too.

The world is different and so are they.

He’s not sure it’s for the best.

He knows pain never fades.
“I’m ready, I’m on time and sober, sweetheart!” he barked as soon as he had stepped a foot in the girl’s house. “I hope you’re ready to get the show on the road ‘cause I need a drink.”

“I’m coming!” was the terse response from upstairs and Haymitch busied himself by being nosy and the various pots on the kitchen counter, fumbling with his tie every few seconds. He had done the best job he could with the tie but he wasn’t great at knotting them and the tremors weren’t making the job any easier. Katniss would be rubbish at it too but he could ask Peeta when they’d reach the Justice Building. It was the kids’ wedding and it was one of the few occasions he would mind looking disheveled.

He heard the footsteps coming closer and turned around, a gibe already on his lips. It died there. He had expected to be rendered speechless at least once or twice that day. He hadn’t expected to find Effie Trinket on the threshold. His eyes roamed from her endless legs to the golden dress – underweight, he couldn’t help but noticed – and ended up on the familiar face – less make-up, more natural, prettier.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

She pursed her lips and tilted her head, narrowing her eyes at him in that familiar way of hers. For a second, despite the absence of heavy-make up and wig, it was as if they had whirled back in time.

“I was early and Katniss asked for help with her hair.” she answered. “Hello to you too, Haymitch. Yes, I am well, you are too kind to ask.”

“No…” he frowned, ignoring the sarcasms. “What are you doing here?”

“To the children’s wedding?” she scowled. “Did you think they wouldn’t invite me?”

“I thought it was a private thing. Family only.” he retorted. She took a step back, obviously hurt by that and he lifted his hands in the air. “I meant they didn’t say you were coming and I wasn’t expecting to see you, that’s all.”

“Yes, I think you made your point about what you meant very clearly.” she hissed.

He hadn’t seen her in years, since the end of the war, and they hadn’t parted on the best of terms.

“I’m not sure about that, sweetheart, but we never could understand each other anyway.” he shrugged.

“That’s funny, I used to think we understood each other a little too well.” she chuckled darkly. “Your tie is crooked.”

“Couldn’t get it right.” he mumbled.
And just like that, she was stepping closer and undoing the clumsy knot only to tie it up again with ease, then she smoothed the creases off his suit, and fussed over the tie once more, always so bent on everything being perfect. He didn’t know why he covered her hands with his. He told himself it was because her fake nails, still sharp and potentially deadly, were too close to his throat. The truth was, he wanted to touch her. She glanced up but focused her gaze back on the tie quickly enough.

He didn’t say anything. He never had in the past.

“I missed you a little.” she hummed.

“Just a little?” he snorted.

Her eyes darted up again, always so blue, always taking his breath away. He would have lied if he had claimed he hadn’t missed the banter and the flirting because he had. They had always danced on the edge, always stayed on the safe side of the line, but he had always wondered what it would have been like to kiss her, to pin her against the wall and find other ways to get mad at each other… Never finding out was a regret but one he had reconciled himself with in the knowledge that he would probably never see her again. And there she was, clad in gold, older but just as beautiful, still damn tempting…

She cleared her throat but didn’t take her hands away. “I’m escorting Peeta today.”

“I’m giving Katniss away.” he offered.

“I know, she told me on the phone.” she confessed. “Do you… Do you have a date for the rest of the wedding or…”

“You’re always my date at this kind of things.” he pointed out. Every party he had gone over the years, he had gone with her.

“Things have changed.” she argued.

“Not for me.” he replied.

He wasn’t sure what they were talking about. The thing they were discussing in covert words, the thing they had refused to acknowledge for years…

An amused smile played on her red painted lips. “You should really think about learning some manners, Haymitch. Are you asking me to be your date for the rest of the day?”

“No.” he scoffed. “Just saying. You’re always my date at this kind of things. That’s fact, sweetheart.”

“Silly man.” she whispered with fond annoyance.

She was close and he wanted to lean in, wanted to finally experience what it would be like to kiss her properly, but of course Katniss had to make her great entrance at that moment. They sprung apart but the girl didn’t even noticed, struggling against the white dress that was a little too long and muttering curses under her breath.

The dress was simple: white silk that hugged her upper body but flowed down freely to the floor, covering her feet and pooling in a small train at the back. Her long dark hair was pulled up in an intricate fancy bun laced with pearls and white ribbons that had Effie’s name stamped on it and the make-up was natural and elegant – he would have bet the make-up part was Effie’s idea.
She was stunning.

“Not bad.” he smirked.

It earned him a whack on the arm from his former escort.

“Really, Haymitch!” she hissed. “Katniss is beautiful. Tell her so.”

“You’re beautiful.” he dutifully complied, rolling his eyes at the Capitol woman.

“I thought I had as much charm as a dead slug?” Katniss joked.

He shrugged. “You grew up good. Now…” He frowned a little, getting serious again. “I already threatened to cut Peeta’s balls off if he ever hurt you. So that’s your turn. Don’t hurt the boy or I will hurt you, sweetheart.”

Effie was shaking her head either appalled or amused but Katniss nodded with graveness.

It all went quickly after that. Effie excused herself to go join Peeta, saying she would see them at the Justice Building, and they started the slow hike to town. It was slow mostly because Katniss had to fling her dress over her arm not to have it covered in mud and because she realized halfway there that she had forgotten her bouquet, forcing him to go back and get it.

They were the last to arrive, everyone else was already inside. It was a small wedding and, thanks to Plutarch, a rather private one. Security was keeping journalists and cameras well away from the District which was good because there were a lot of key players of the rebellion attending. Not only Plutarch himself but Fulvia, Johanna, Annie and little Finn, Cressida… He could see them all in the little room where marriages were celebrated but it was Effie’s his eyes sought. She was standing next to Peeta and he figured she was to be his witness like he was Katniss’.

The music started and the girl clung to his arm but didn’t make a move to step forward.

“I think that’s our cue.” he snorted.

Katniss had her best panicked look on her face though. It would be just his luck if she was getting cold feet now. It wasn’t his role to convince her she wasn’t making a mistake, it was the mother’s role or the bridesmaid… Katniss’ mother wasn’t there though, she had sent her good wishes but hadn’t found the strength to come back to Twelve. And there was no bridesmaid because that would have been Prim’s place and no one could ever replace her even if Delly had been helping her with the wedding plans like a bridesmaid should.

“Want to make a run for it?” he winced.

“I still don’t deserve him.” she whispered, looking from Peeta, who looked a little nervous, to him. “I never will.”

“Yeah…” he agreed, not to be mean but because it was the truth. His eyes found Effie’s again and she lifted a perfectly shaped eyebrow, silently asking him what was going on. “But we’re selfish people and we will take what life throws at us.”

“We?” she chuckled.

“You, me… whoever.” he grumbled. “Are we going in or are we running away?”

“Going in.” she answered without the slightest hesitation.
And they did.

Wedding in Twelve were a simple affair but Effie still found a reason to cry when they exchanged rings. Haymitch rolled his eyes and patted her back and somehow ended up not leaving her side.

The reception took place in the kids’ backyard and, despite or maybe because of the few number of guests, it was a success. There was a band who was playing traditional Districts’ songs and Haymitch got forced on the makeshift dance floor by Annie and then Katniss and then the music changed, became slower and he found himself in front of Effie who was watching him with an expectant look. She had been talking with Plutarch and Fulvia and she was waiting for him to ask but that wasn’t his style. He took her hand and tugged, relieved when she followed without complaining about his manners.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and rested her head on his shoulder as they swayed to the music.

“They’re beautiful.” she whispered, her eyes on the kids who were doing their own kind of dancing a few feet away.

Haymitch took a glance and groaned when he saw that Peeta had his tongue so far down Katniss’ throat it was a miracle she wasn’t gagging. “Do they have to do that in public?”

“They’re young and in love…” she sighed. “Have you never kissed someone in public because you couldn’t refrain yourself?”

“That’s an invitation?” he retorted.

“Ruffian.” she chuckled. He wasn’t joking but she didn’t seem to understand that. “I’m so proud of them.”

“They’re good kids.” he agreed.

“They’re ours.” she hummed and he couldn’t dispute the truth of that statement. “They bring us together again and again.”

“They and the sexual tension.” he snickered. What was the point denying they had an attraction now? The war had been over for years, they were at peace… He still had nightmares, he was still broken and he would never forget, but he was less scared. “There’s something I want to show you.”

She followed him without asking any question. They sneaked out of the kids’ property without anyone noticing and he led her to the geese pen in his own backyard. He didn’t know at which point her hand had slipped in his but he didn’t let go.

“You wanted to show me… your birds.” she said when they stopped next to the pen. She sounded disappointed and a little surprised.

“No.” He rolled his eyes. “I just knew nobody would bother us here.”

“Oh.” A soft smile graced her lips. “So what it is you wanted to show me?”

She wasn’t surprised when he kissed her and he wasn’t surprised when the kiss grew heated. He was surprised they managed to make it to the couch in his living-room at all and utterly unsurprised when they crashed on the floor halfway through. He took the blunt of the fall and had the air knocked out of his lungs. After making sure he wouldn’t die just yet, she laughed so hard and so long tears rolled down her cheeks. He kissed each of them away, chuckling too. He wondered if that was what
euphoria felt like: happiness and clumsy sex.

As he helped her back in her dress and pulled the zipper up, peppering her spine with kisses despite her complaints that his stubble was going to leave burn marks – she would have stubble burn marks all over her body anyway – it occurred to him that never knowing what it felt like to be with her would have really been a regret.

They reappeared at the party in time for the goodbyes and dodged the knowing looks and pointed comments of some of their friends. Peeta asked them to stay for the toasting – which was the real wedding ceremony anyway – and they settled on the couch while the kids got everything ready.

Katniss and Peeta were quite oblivious to them as they told each other the vows they had prepared for the occasion and didn’t even notice when Effie’s cheek ended up on Haymitch’s shoulder at some point, their hands entwined on his knee.

She was right, he mused, the kids always brought them back together.

He would always be eternally grateful for that.
“Come on, Trinket ! You’re going to crack so soon?”

Johanna’s goading had close to none effect on her. Effie couldn’t see anything in the penthouse living-room aside for the row of shot glasses on the coffee table Chaff was filling to the brim again with tequila, the salt and the bowl of limes. Oh, and Haymitch. Haymitch sitting on the floor on the other side of the table, watching her with a victorious smirk that made her want to slap it right out off his face – or kiss it but she never acknowledged those weird impulses of hers.

Capitol versus Twelve, they had named that game.

It had started innocently enough. She had come back to the penthouse a little tipsy to find the usual victors sharing a drink – or a bottle rather – and she had let Finnick coax her in joining them. Then Johanna had been her charming self, it had escalated into an argument and she had ended up having to prove she could hold her liquor as well as any District person and that was how she had found herself having to outdrink Haymitch. A feat if there ever was one.

Three rows of five tequila shots later, the idea didn’t sound as funny and her sight was blurry.

“Effie, you’re alright?” Finnick asked, always the gentleman.

It was obvious she wasn’t. For one thing, she was sitting cross-legged on the plushy carpet instead of sitting properly on the couch, for another she was swaying lightly.

“I am perfectly fine.” she slurred. Her perfectly came out as “ferpectly”.

“Maybe you should quit while you’re still standing, Princess.” Haymitch snorted, still sounded incredibly collected for the amount of liquor he had swallowed. “You won’t like alcohol poisoning.”

She slapped her hand on the table, making some of the tequila spill.

“I’m winning!” she argued.

“Sure, you are.” he humored her.

She wasn’t. She really wasn’t.

Johanna’s and Chaff’s cackles were attesting to that.

“Oh, you’re ready?” Eleven’s victor asked. “Round four.”

Four row of five shots... What had gone through her mind when she had accepted? She watched him salt his wrist before handing her the saltshaker but she couldn’t be bothered. She grabbed his hand instead and licked the salt directly from his skin before swallowing her shot down and biting on a lime.
There was silence.

For a second she wondered if she had passed out.

“Alright…” Haymitch cleared his throat. “That was hot, sweetheart. But I think you’ve had enough.”

She was far too gone to understand what he was saying.

“Did I win?” she stuttered. “You didn’t drink… Did I win?”

“Yeah.” he snorted. “You won.”

“Capitol victory!” she squealed in delight, lifting her arms in the air in triumph. Clearly, she had overestimated her balance because she fell on the back and instead of being mortified, she started laughing.

“I can’t decide if it’s funny or pathetic.” Johanna chuckled.

“Hey, Haymitch… She’s used to licking things off your skin or what?” Chaff mocked.

“Oh, shut up.” her victor grumbled.

“I think we should call it a night.” Finnick suggested while Effie kept on laughing, on her back without an ounce of self-consciousness. “Leave her and Haymitch to their licking.”

“I said shut up, boy.” Haymitch snapped. “Ain’t gonna be any licking with the state she’s in.”

“But there would be otherwise?” Chaff insisted.


“Fuck off.” Haymitch ordered.

Effie listened to the sound of the victors departing, hoping Haymitch would have enough manners to walk them back to the elevator but not really caring about it either way. She spread her arms and legs like a starfish and started waving them.

“Look! I’m making a snow angel!” she called out when Haymitch loomed right over her head.

“You’re wasted.” he taunted. “And you’re flashing me. Nice shade of lilac.”

She frowned and stopped waving her limbs, trying to figure out what he meant. She thought she had only two lilac piece of clothing on her… She had to bundle her puffy skirts around her waist to check.

“Effie!” he protested as she craned her neck to check her panties.

“It is lilac! You are finally learning! You didn’t say purple!” she giggled.

“Yeah, I take it back. You’re not wasted, you’re drunk out of your mind.” he snorted. “You realize you’re showing me your knickers, right?”

She looked up at him with a slow grin. “Do you want to see what’s underneath?”

He blinked and then sighed. “Bed.”

“Bed is probably a good idea for that, yes.” she agreed wholeheartedly.
“No, sweetheart. Bedtime for you.” he countered.

“But I want to show you…” she pouted. “Oh! Take the salt and the tequila, I know a game!”

“I’m sure you do.” he mumbled.

Before she could try to explain the game – he would love the game – he picked her up from the floor and she shrieked, the act all at once startling and uncomfortable. She wrapped her arms around his neck in a death grip. She didn’t like being carried. She was always scared she would be dropped.

“How are you still sober?” she whined against his neck. “It’s not fair.”

“I’m not sober.” he chuckled.

“But you’re less drunk than me.” she complained.

“Practice.” he shrugged, making her jolt and she tightened her grip on him.


“Yeah, sweetheart, you win.” he snickered.

“I think I may have a liiiiiittle bit of motion sickness.” she muttered, pressing her face in his shoulder.

“I think you may have a liiiiiittle bit of too much to drink.” he mocked, imitating her accent. “Don’t barf on me.”

“You are sick on me all the time.” she pointed out.

“And you rip me a new one every time.” he retorted.

Soon enough, she was carefully placed down on a bed, her bed as a glance around told her. She fisted the fabric of his shirt in her hand though, refusing to let go. “I won, I want my prize.”

He rolled his eyes, obviously fed up with her antics. “What do you want?”

“You.” she breathed out.

He froze and then he snorted. “You’re a real flirt when you’re drunk.”

“I’m not flirting.” she denied. “I want you.” He shook his head and pushed on her shoulder so she would lie down, an amused smirk on his lips. She complied but didn’t let go of his shirt. Sensing she wouldn’t get what she wanted, she pouted. “A kiss, then.” she amended. “I want a kiss.”

“Tell you what, sweetheart…” he drawled out. “Tomorrow I’ll kiss you. And you better not slap me.”

Satisfied with that, she let him take off her shoes and tuck under the covers. The last thing she felt before she closed her eyes was the brush of lips and stubble against her forehead.

She woke up in the middle of the night, a lot less drunk and a lot less amused by the world. She barely had time to reach the bathroom before she was sick. It was like her body was trying to get rid of all the tequila and by the time she crawled back to her bed, she had sworn an oath to never again touch that vile stuff. There were a glass of water and a bottle of pills waiting on her nightstand. She took both with a surge of gratefulness for Haymitch and fell back asleep.
She didn’t wake up before noon and she didn’t find the energy to get out of bed before three a.m. which annoyed her to great lengths because she hated losing time by being lazy.

She made her way to the kitchen, craving something greasy. The Avoxes dispersed like a clutter of frightened chickens when she appeared. Perhaps she was scary. She grabbed a metallic plate and checked her reflection and told herself that maybe she should have bothered with a wig and some make-up. But her head hurt, so she had let her hair loose on her shoulders and she hadn’t bothered with make-up because she was still wearing her emergency comfort pajamas: sweat pants and a lose tee-shirt, something she wouldn’t be caught dead in by anyone other than mute people.

Since there was no one to order around, she tossed some bacon on a pan and did her best not to burn it to crisp— not an easy job for her, there was a reason she lived out of take out and nearby restaurants.

“I’m trying to decide if you’re a new Avox or if you’re you.”

She jumped so high, she knocked the pan and owned it only to Haymitch’s quick reflexes not to get splashed by burning grease. He settled the pan back on the stove and lifted a mocking eyebrow at her. “Trying to burn down the Training Center, sweetheart?”

“What are you doing here?” she frowned.

“Looking for you.” he shrugged. “I was starting to wonder if you had keeled over.” He reached out and coiled a strand of her hair around his finger. “Never pegged you for a redhead.”

“Strawberry blonde.” she corrected in a hiss. Then her eyes widened when she realized just exactly how she was looking and she shrieked and turned her back on him. “Don’t look at me!”

She could hear his chuckles.

“Not what you said last night.” he teased.

She frowned but refused to take the bait and turn around. She folded her arms over her chest instead. “What do you mean?”

“I mean you were very set on getting into my pants, sweetheart.” he taunted.

“Liar.” she accused immediately.

“Now, who’s the liar?” he snorted, placing his hands on her shoulders. He brushed her hair aside and pressed a kiss against her neck.

“Stop it.” she breathed out without any real conviction. “What are you doing?”

“Giving you your prize.” he shrugged. “You wanted it so badly yesterday…”

She turned her head to look at him but she didn’t have time to argue. His mouth crashed on hers. The angle was awkward and the arm he wrapped around her waist was a little too tight as if he was afraid she would run away.

Running away was far from her mind though.

Capitol versus Twelve…

She definitely won that round.
Haymitch knows every bar in town.

He’s been ejected from them all at closing time at least once.

He’s a drunk by choice.

To make it all even more cliché, he’s a vet. He went into the army fresh out of eighteen, eager to make a living for himself and help his family. His brother and his mother died in a car crash during his first tour, not long after that the incident happened. Collateral damages, their superior called it. Forty-eight dead kids, that’s what Haymitch called it. There were a lot of discharges handed around, lot of money and perks tossed at everyone to keep their mouth shut… There was a lot of guilt too. Too much for Haymitch to bear. So he started drinking.

And now he can’t stop, it’s as simple as that.

He’s happy to nurse a bottle at home but sometimes, once in a while, he feels the need for company. Not that he ever talks to anyone. He’s happy to sit at the bar and watch the rest of the world keep on turning. It amazes him how he can be stuck in a limbo while the rest of the Earth goes about its business as if nothing has happened at all.

He knows every bar in town because there aren’t many. It’s a small town, rural, the kind where everyone knows everyone.

Which is why the woman seems so out of place.

The Capitol used to be a classy place, expensive, the club everyone wanted in. Then came the economic crisis that brushed upon their town and tycoon Coin took over tycoon Snow. One’s just as bad as the other as far as Haymitch’s concerned but no one ever asked his opinion on the matter so he keeps to himself and watches the stupidity of some people. The collapsing of The Capitol into a shady little bar nobody ever visited aside from drunk frat girls and a few regulars brings him some joy if only for the fact he and his brother tried to enter many times during their teenage years only to be rejected every time. The Capitol didn’t accept street rats at the time. Now they were only too happy to take his money.

He sits at the bar because it is his usual place and watches with some curiosity the bubbly thing behind the wooden counter. She’s not from around here. She doesn’t look from around here. She’s wearing a blue crop top and a high waist pair of black shorts with a lot of sparkling bangles and her hair is piled on top of her head in a fancy hairdo with curls escaping everywhere and framing her face. She wears make-up too. A lot of it.

She finishes attending to the two men at the other side of the bar, flashing them a smile and bursting in a laugh that sounds extremely fake at something one of them says to her. She pockets the tip but avoids the grabby hand.
She’s in front of him before he can blink.

“Hello, there.” she chirped. “What can I get you?”

He’s used to reading people. Her smile is bright but seems somehow forced, she looks cheerful but there’s a sadness and a tired spark in her eyes. Blue eyes. Oh, so, so blue. The eyes take him aback for a second. It reminds him of clear sky and better days.

“You’re new.” he says. “Where’s Portia?”

Portia usually minds the bar and handles the waitressing – business isn’t so good that they need several people for that. Portia also has his order ready as soon as she spots him and knows to leave him to drink alone. He likes Portia.

“She left to work with her boyfriend.” the woman answers. “She’s a stylist, I think? Anyway, here I am now so… What can I get you?”

“Whiskey.” he mumbles.

“Whiskey.” she repeats with one of her dazzling smile. “It’s coming right up.”

Her accent is fancy. Like the rest of her, really. Everything screams fancy about her, from the manicured faked nails to the graceful way she moves. How does a girl that fancy ends up in a dump like this?

She places his requested glass on a coaster in front of him. The glass is not a whiskey glass, it’s too tall and too wide. He thinks it’s one of those they use for mojitos.

“Forgot the ice.” he points out.

The smile falters for a second. “Oh, my apologies.”

She takes the glass and brings it back with so much ice the whiskey will be watered down in five minutes. He studies his order and then he studies her. She’s watching him with acute attention, chewing on her bottom lip.

“You suck at bartending.” he comments.

It’s not really an accusation, more like a statement, but annoyance flashes in her eyes all the same. “That is not a very polite thing to say.”

“But it’s true, sweetheart.” he snorts.

“Effie.” she says and it takes him longer than it ought to understand it’s her name. She’s gone by the time he figures it out, attending another client who’s clearly complaining about his own order.

He watches her the rest of the night, asking for regular refills and avoiding her attempts at making conversation. At some point he asks her for the bottle and she declares he has had enough. It’s earlier than usual for him to get kicked out and with all the ice she has been pouring in his glass, he’s hardly drunk. He tries to argue his point for a while but she’s adamant about not serving him again.

He leaves angry and hauls his ass to the next closest bar.

He’s disappointed that the barmaid doesn’t have blue eyes but swears he will never put a foot back in The Capitol.
He’s back the next night, unable to explain to himself why. He doesn’t like the bar and the barmaid
is annoying.

She’s glaring at a guy twice her size when he comes in. The man is shouting about customer service
and the cocktail she has gotten wrong, she’s shouting back about rudeness and unsolicited groping
and sexual harassment. She’s wearing a red sequin dress and high heels and she looks so tiny in front
of the man, Haymitch inches closer. He tells himself it’s been a while since his last bar brawl and he
can use the excuse to punch someone. The way she stomps her heeled foot has him stopping dead in
his track. Next thing he knows, she’s pointing at the door with such authority the guy’s anger seems
to disappear.

Fiery.

“You’re banned.” she declares.

The guy leaves but not without a few colorful epithets tossed her way. Satisfied that she isn’t going
to be beaten to a pulp, Haymitch makes his way to the bar unnoticed. She gathers the glasses from an
empty tables and comes back behind the counter. No one in the bar has batted an eyelash at the
scene. No one would have helped either. The Capitol is not the kind of place where anyone would
risk anything for someone else.

She spots him and makes her way over.

“Two days in a row… Either you’re an alcoholic or you like the view.” she jokes. She aims for light
but her voice cracks a little and her hands are shaking.

“I’m an alcoholic.” he replies because it should as well be tossed out there.

Her eyes widen and she gapes a little, obviously flustered about this new blunder. “I…”

“Don’t get your knickers in a twist.” he shrugs, a smirk on his lips. “The view’s not bad either. Try
not to drown my whiskey tonight, sweetheart.”

She hesitates for a second and then outstretches a hand over the counter. “Effie.”

He grabs the hand but doesn’t really shake it.

“Effie.” he repeats, testing the name. It rolls easily on his tongue.

She waits and he doesn’t understand why until she rolls her eyes. “That’s the point where you’re
supposed to introduce yourself. Don’t you have any sort of manners at all?”

There are a thousand retorts on the tip of his tongue but her eyes are sparkling in irritation again and
he finds he likes it.

“Haymitch.” he offers, finally letting go of her hand.

She smiles and it’s genuine this time.

She makes an effort not to drown his whiskey, in return he helps out when someone asks for a sex
on the beach and her hand wavers between the tequila and the vodka. After that, she comes to him
for every new order and he sputters out cocktail recipes. He doesn’t talk much aside for instructing
her how to do her job – which is more amusing than he thinks it should be because she keeps
arguing and it’s been some times since he has met someone who would care enough to meet his wits
with their own – but she talks a lot. In a single night, he learns more about her than he knows about
his closest neighbors.

She’s a model-slash-actress or a would-be one at least. Life has taken care of that dream pretty fast but she has refused to be deterred, struggling to make ends meet until someone realizes she was the next hit girl. That someone has never come and she is more used to dancing in clubs in various state of undress than to tending the bar. She isn’t so young anymore though – she adds that part with a little laugh, clearly expecting him to disagree but she’s obviously in her mid-thirties and he doesn’t see the point – and people are less inclined to hire her for her pretty face. He argues that she must have been hired on her pretty face and not on her bartending abilities. She looks pleased he thinks she has a pretty face.

He supposes that night is his first mistake.

He comes back.

Every night finds him with his butt on the very same stool and every night his heart misses a beat when she spots him and flashes him that smile of hers.

It’s cliché but that smile could stop an army in its track.

With his help, she starts getting a hand on cocktails, she improves her bartending skills. She still asks him for advices every ten minutes and she still drowns his whiskey – he suspects that’s on purpose because when he’s drunk he tends to watch her with glassy eyes while she talks and talks and she doesn’t like that. She’s chatty and he sulks all the time, they make a great pair.

Sometimes in their third week of acquaintance, she manages to get his story out of him. She purses her lips, tilts her head and doesn’t say anything. People usually offer their sympathies at that point but she simply places her hand on his wrist and squeezes meaningfully before going to take care of another customer. He doesn’t know what the squeeze means. He only knows that after that she doesn’t only drown his whiskey, she waters it down. He would have been annoyed if it hadn’t been so cute. She thinks she’s helping him cut down. She doesn’t know about the bottles he keeps at home.

She starts kissing him on the cheek when he leaves too. Every night, he’s tempted to turn his head and “accidentally” kiss her. Every night, he chickens out. Every night, she looks disappointed.

One night, there’s a guy a little too insistent, with hands that wander all over her body. She’s usually good at handling herself but the man is drunk and doesn’t seem to get what no means. She slaps him which is a mistake because he lifts his own hand right back. He doesn’t have time to strike, Haymitch punches him first. Unfortunately, he is not as fit as he used to during his army days and his reflexes are sluggish at best. And the guy has friends, something Haymitch lacks completely. It doesn’t stop him from throwing punches, chairs and knocking down the man who has been hitting on Effie too much for his liking.

When the police shows up and takes people away, he only owes it to her heartfelt – and very fake – outburst of tears not to be cuffed with the rest of them. She describes him in such a heroic light the officer in charge even shakes his hand and congratulates him for helping a defenseless girl. Effie is far from defenseless, she has dug her heel in more than one foot during the brawl.

He ends up sitting on a stool in the now closed bar trying to remain stoic while she dabs at the cut over his eyebrow with a liquor soaked piece of cloth.

“Waste of booze.” he mumbles, wincing because it stings. “Ouch. Watch it, sweetheart!”
“Don’t be a baby.” she retorts.

She’s standing between his parted legs, so close he can smell the strawberry scent of her shampoo. His hands are shaking when he places them on her hips, the fabric of her pink dress is soft and light and it’s no hardship to imagine how the skin underneath would feel. Her breath catches in her throat and he wonders if this, whatever it is, is something she wants or something he has made up out of loneliness and too much whiskey. It has been an eternity since he has been with a woman. It has been an eternity since he has wanted one.

“Would you…” she hesitates, chewing on her bottom lip. “Would you walk me home? I would feel safer.”

“Yeah.” he shrugs. He takes his hands away because he is not sure if it’s an invitation or a reminder that she trusts him to be his friend. He doesn’t know. It has been too long.

“Haymitch?” she insists, tossing the cloth on the bar behind him.

He looks up and sinks in the blue of her eyes.

She’s too beautiful for him, too pure, but fuck it he wants her, he wants her so bad it hurts.

She covers his hands with hers and slowly brings them back to her waist and then moves to bury her fingers in his hair. He slides his hands to the small of her back and presses gently until she takes the final step that obliterates all concept of space left between them.

There is nothing tentative to her kiss.

It’s demanding.

Their lips move effortlessly together though. It’s as if they’ve done this a thousand times before.

It’s cliché, he thinks, the failed barmaid and the drunk.

It’s cliché but it works.
It was pouring.

Haymitch was drenched by the time he sought refuge in his kitchen.

“You always have the best ideas, don’t you, sweetheart?!” he called out, irritated because she was the one who had sent him out in the first place. “The boy was doing fine by himself!” That wasn’t strictly true, Peeta had appreciated the unexpected help at the bakery and it had been nice to spend some time with him. If it hadn’t been for the customers insisting on chatting with him that was. “I’m soaked to the skin!”

If he expected any kind words or comfort from his former escort, he was quickly put to right. He knew she was in though. Even the roar of the thunder wasn’t enough to cover the sound of the TV. He dragged his feet to the living-room, leaving puddles of water behind him he knew he would get scolded for later.

“You’ve gone deaf or what?” he scowled.

She barely looked at him. “I beg your pardon?”

“The TV, sweetheart.” he frowned. “I could hear it from outside. You’re okay?”

She obviously wasn’t. She was in her pajamas – and not the frilly kind of pajamas, the sweat pants that she had stolen from his wardrobe when she had first come to Twelve and a long-sleeves tee-shirt that belonged to him too – lying on her side on the couch, a woolen blanket tossed on her legs, her hair was wild and her eyes were puffy and red. She had cried.

His irritation melted into worry.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Nothing.” she breathed out without conviction. She felt around on the floor for the remote and turned the volume down.

“Effie.” he insisted gently, perching himself on the armrest on the couch and placing a hand on her blanket covered foot.

“I’m fine.” she snapped, her blue eyes giving him a passing glance. “You’re soaked. Go change before you put water everywhere. And don’t bother me, I’m watching something.”

It wasn’t terribly unlike her to berate him for making a mess and telling him to leave her alone while she watched something but the way she said it… The way she was watching the screen gave her away too. He would have bet she had no idea what she was even looking at. Her eyes were lost in the distance, glassy.
“I’m coming back in a minute.” he told her.

He didn’t think she heard him. She was locked in her inner world. One that he never had access too. One that resulted from months spent in prison.

He had shed his wet shirt and undershirt by the time he reached their bedroom. He dropped the wet clothes in the bathtub to let them dry and grabbed a towel from under the sink. He noticed they were low on clean towels around the same time he noticed the smell. *Bleach.*

Effie was peculiar on her cleaning. She liked the house spotless but she bought fancy products that cost a lot and smelt like flowery stuff – he would know, she had forced him to help her clean more than once – she never used bleach unless there were recalcitrant stains. Right now though, it smelt as if she had scrubbed the whole floor with it. Their bathroom smelt as bad as a hospital.

Something was *off.*

He put on dry clothes and went back downstairs albeit a little cautiously. He leaned against the living-room doorframe but she didn’t notice him. She didn’t even notice when he turned the TV off or built a fire. She stared straight ahead of her, curled up on her side. She was worrying him.

He brushed the strand of hair stuck to her cheek away from her face and crouched next to the couch. Her blue eyes focused on him but she didn’t say anything. He could almost see the cogs turning in her head, the effort she would have to make to ask about his day with Peeta. He tucked the blanket around her and pressed a kiss to her forehead, wishing he knew magic ways to help her. He didn’t have magic ways. He couldn’t help her, he couldn’t help Katniss and he couldn’t help Peeta. Most days he couldn’t even help himself.

“You want some tea?” he asked.

She nodded so he brushed his fingers against her cheek one last time and stood up to go prepare her tea. The Haymitch from three years earlier would have laughed at what he had become, he mused. He had been less on edge since the war, it hadn’t happened overnight but he had gradually settled in this new mostly peaceful world. The kids helped, having Effie around helped… Their relationship had changed too. It was less volatile. They still fought on an everyday basis but it was rarely great fights that left them hating each other anymore. It was more about why he hadn’t yet taken out the trash bag.

And, speaking of trash, he had taken the trash out the day before – he was certain because she had nagged for two hours before he had decided that hearing her ranting was less rewarding than winning this particular battle of wits – so why was there a new bag ready to be taken out next to the door?

He put the kettle to boil, poured himself a glass of liquor after glancing over his shoulder to make sure she wouldn’t appear to berate him about his drinking habits, and then frowned at the mysterious trash bag.

Everyone had their flaws.

Haymitch was curious.

Of course, it was entirely possible she had simply been cleaning the house. That was something of a hobby for her but he didn’t think so. He couldn’t get the vacant look in her eyes and the smell of bleach out of his mind.

His damn problem was that he had always opened every Pandora boxes that fate had placed on his
So naturally, he took a sip of whiskey and then opened the trash bag.

He didn’t know what he had been expecting, but it wasn’t *blood*.

It seemed like he had found the missing towels.

The smell of clotted blood was enough to make his stomach churn. The towels were covered with it. His first thought was that she had killed someone. That would explain the blood and the bleach. But then he found the dress at the bottom, the dress she had been wearing that morning when he had left and the place where it was stained with blood… Well, it didn’t scream *murder*. It screamed period accident – and, yeah, he had been living long enough with her to know it happened and it was best to *not* mention it – except there was *too much* blood. And she wouldn’t throw away one of her favorite dresses because of that, there was the smell of bleach upstairs too, as if she had scrubbed something clean, and her aloofness and her puffy red eyes…

*Miscarriage.*

The word was a whisper at the back of his mind. He hadn’t finished thinking it that he was already rejecting the thought while knowing it was the most plausible explanation. It linked other dots like her being nauseous in the morning these past few days or her sudden aversion to chicken, things he had been only too happy to ignore.

The whistle of the kettle brought him out of his daze. He tossed everything back in the trash bag and poured the water in a mug with a bag of her favorite tea.

She hadn’t moved from her curled up position on the couch. He placed the mug on the floor, in easy reach, and sat on the coffee table, unsure as to how to ask what he wanted to ask. A part of him was surprised he hadn’t yet gotten angry, another wasn’t. He felt detached. He was in shock, probably. He hadn’t had the chance of freaking out over her being pregnant and now there was nothing to freak out over, as simple as that. Or it should be. It really wasn’t.

“Do you need a doctor?”

That was the emergency, he mused. There had been a *lot* of blood. Too much. More than he ever wanted her to lose.

She studied his face before locking eyes with him for a second and then she looked away. “I didn’t want you to know. Why did you have to be nosy…”

“Didn’t want me to…” he repeated, scoffing the end of that sentence away. “It concerns me too, right? It was mine.”

“Do you need to ask?” she spat and then rubbed her face. “No, don’t answer that. I’m not in the mood for that sort of fight.”

“I don’t want to fight.” he replied calmly, more calmly than he ought to be probably. “Do you need me to call a doctor? I think you should see someone…”

She sat up and reached for her tea, wrapping the mug between her shaky hands. “I’m fine. I know what to look for. It’s not my first time.”

It seemed it was a day for awful discoveries.
He barely knew what to answer to that. “Was it…”

“I don’t know.” she cut him off. “It was around the time we started sleeping together. We weren’t exclusive. I don’t know.”

“Figures my kids would…” he started but she didn’t let him finish.

“It’s not about you. Don’t make this about you.” she snapped. “It’s me who has a problem. I can’t carry to term. Ever.” Her lips wobbled but she jutted her chin in the air. “I’m a child killer, Haymitch, even my body knows it.”

“Don’t be stupid.” he scowled.

“I reaped the children. I sent them to their death. Does it matter that I didn’t kill them myself? You can’t tell me it does. You were certainly never shy about telling me the truth before. Don’t spare me now.” she snarled.

“This one isn’t on you, sweetheart.” he countered.

She hid behind her mug, taking long sips of tea. “I thought you would be angry.”

“I don’t know how I feel.” he confessed with more honesty than usual. He didn’t have time to process sit yet.

“Lucky you.” she whispered.

“How long have you know?” he frowned. That was something he could potentially be angry about.

“I didn’t.” she shrugged. “I was starting to wonder but….” She shrugged again. “I didn’t know until the cramps started.”

It sounded painful – of course, it was painful, he scoffed at himself – and there had been so much blood…

“Are you sure you don’t need a doctor?” he insisted.

She shook her head, taking another mouthful of tea. Her hands were shaking so much she had troubles keeping the mug straight. “The bleeding stopped. It should be fine as long as it doesn’t start again. I will go to the hospital tomorrow. I can’t deal with a routine check today.”

“That’s anything but routine.” he mumbled, rubbing his face.

“Maybe not for you but I know how it goes.” she laughed bitterly. “The doctor will be all sympathetic, they will offer grief counseling and they will tell me it’s not my fault.”

‘Cause it’s not.” he frowned.

“My own body knows I would be a terrible mother.” she retorted. “How is that not my fault?”

And the tears finally spilled.

All he could do was take the mug away from her and move to the couch. She crawled on his lap and buried her face in his neck, trying to muffle the sound of her sobbing. He held her tight, at a loss for what to do. He didn’t know what to do, he didn’t even know what he was feeling. He didn’t feel like he had lost something. It was all happening too quickly for him to register any of this. He figured when it would hit him, though, it would hit him hard.
“You’re already a mother and you’re a great one.” he argued, slowly petting her hair. “You’re certainly better than Katniss’ and Peeta’s real ones. At least you stuck with the kids when it counted.”

It only made her cry harder.

“Come on, sweetheart…” he breathed out, pressing a kiss on her head. “I hate it when you cry. It’s killing me.”

“I don’t even know why I’m crying.” she sobbed. “It was just a clutter of cells. It wasn’t even really a baby yet. I know that. And you wouldn’t have wanted him in the first place…”

That was another mess he didn’t want to go into.

“Yeah, well… I would have learned to be okay with it.” he offered, trying to calm her down.

“Don’t say you’ve changed your mind about children when I tell you I can’t have them!” she screeched. “That’s cruel, Haymitch!”

“I didn’t change my mind.” he grumbled. “I don’t want kids. I’m just saying. What do you think I would have done? Kick you out when you’re pregnant with my child?”

“I will never be pregnant with your child because I will always end up losing them.” she retorted, her voice breaking in the middle of the sentence.

He tightened his hold on her, rocking her gently in a desperate attempt at calming her. She was in such a state… And she didn’t want to tell him? Was she planning on suffering on her own? Why? To spare him pain? Out of fear for his reaction?

“We’ll be more careful.” he promised. “We got sloppy. ‘Thought I was shooting blank to be honest.”

They certainly hadn’t been careful with contraceptive measures lately. They had been together for what felt like forever, they were starting to get old and he had really thought years of liquor abuse would have made him useless on that front. His body wasn’t in prime shape.

“It’s so not the problem.” she snapped.

And it wasn’t.

The problem was she was hurting and he didn’t know how to help. He hadn’t gone through a miscarriage. He had come home to find the whole thing already over. He had trouble even relating, as if he wasn’t concerned at all aside for the fact the woman he shared his life with was in pain.

“It’s not fair.” she complained.

Usually, he would have scoffed and told her to grow up because, of course, life wasn’t fair and only a spoiled little Capitol brat would think it was…

Usually.

“No, it’s not.” he agreed softly and pressed another kiss to her forehead.
He was dying.

Or maybe he was dead already.

He didn’t know.

He wasn’t sure.

He was running down Thirteen’s corridors and people were giving him weird looks. He supposed they weren’t used to seeing a guy running in his underwear at two A.M. like he was being chased by the devil.

He didn’t care.

He was chased by the devil.

The devil wasn’t a big old red billy goat with horns, a tail and a scepter. It was ghosts.

An army of ghosts.

After him.

And they would hurt him and they would hurt her and he needed to protect her and that was why he was running.

They were taunting him. The ghosts, not the people. The people would probably call security and he would find himself in a drunk tank again, while he rode off the last effects of withdrawal. Maybe it was withdrawal. Maybe he had finally snapped and gone completely mad. But he couldn’t take the risk not when the ghosts were taunting him, screaming they would kill her and she would join them.

They were tributes. His path was lined with tributes. All forty-eight of them on a loop plus the ones he had killed with his bare hands. Not that it made any difference. They were all dead and they were all dead because of him.

He finally reached her door and tried to slide it open but it resisted so he hammered on it with all his brute strength, trying to knock it down. Was he imagining her screaming or was it real?

“What’s going on?” someone asked.

People were walking out of the surrounding compartments but Haymitch didn’t pay them any attention. There was a child’s laughter and then a blood curling scream and he answered by a scream of his own.

“Effie!”
He took a few steps back, prepared to running into the door at full speed in the hope it would be enough to break it down when it slid open. She looked confused and a little scared, her blond hair was tumbling down her shoulders, her blue eyes were wide, her shirt was half buttoned over the standard grey tank top as if she had gotten dressed in a hurry.

“Haymitch?” she frowned when she saw him.

“You betrayed us…” a familiar voice hissed and, surely enough, he saw her. Right behind Effie, a knife ready to strike.

“No!” he shouted, jumping in between Effie and his girlfriend, wrapping her in his arms to bodily protect her from further harm. She shrieked in surprise and went down with him, his brutal hug and their weight making them topple to the floor.

“Call security!” someone shouted in the corridor.

“Haymitch, what’s going on?” Effie snapped, trying to get away from him but he held her tighter, closer, trying to mold his body around hers so they couldn’t reach her.

They were all there now.

Taunting him with what they would do her, sentencing him to pay for his crimes… And his girl… his girl was still there, still holding her old hunting knife, accusing him of having betrayed her, \textit{them} with a Capitol.

“They’re after you. They want to kill you.” he mumbled in Effie’s neck, breathing in the smell of her skin. But she didn’t smell like the Effie he remembered, no fancy perfume, no make-up powder, no fruity shampoo. No comfort.

“The rebels?” she asked. Suddenly she stopped struggling.

\textit{Them.} he whispered urgently, pointing at their lost tributes. She didn’t know \textit{all} of them, she had only been there for thirteen years. “Don’t you see them? The ghosts! Don’t you see them?”

She relaxed only to tense in the following second.

“Haymitch, there’s no one here.” she said softly, turning in his arms and embracing him. “They’re nothing but hallucinations. They’re not real.”

“I’m going to kill her like they killed me.” his girlfriend sing-sang.

“You will have to kill me first.” he growled.

“Oh, no, Haymitch, no…” his girlfriend laughed “I died because of you. And you betrayed me with this Capitol slut? No. She’s dying first and you’re going to watch.”

“Nobody is killing anyone.” Effie shushed him. “You’re burning up, Haymitch! You have a fever.”

“What’s going on, here?” a soldier asked from the threshold, momentarily disrupting the ghosts. All Haymitch saw was his hand casually resting on the butt of the gun. He twisted them around, shielding her with his body.

“Nothing!” she answered quickly, struggling to get free of him. “He is just sick. He has a fever, he doesn’t know what he’s doing. I’m \textit{so} sorry for disrupting everyone’s rest. It won’t happen again.”

“If he’s sick, take him to the hospital.” the soldier answered before seizing up Effie and comparing
her small frame to Haymitch’s bulky one. “I will help.”

“No,” he groaned, pressing his forehead against her shoulder. “Not the hospital. Sweetheart, please, please, not the hospital.”

If there was one thing he wanted even less than an army of ghosts on his trail, it was going back there. They would throw him in that cell again and there would be no escaping from the memories. He would be alone and time would seem to stop. Last time, he had curled up on the floor and wished he could die, he had prayed every divinity he could think of to just let him die, but the doctors wouldn’t let him. Every time, they had pumped him with drugs and every time he found himself back where he had started, staring at the grey wall of his withdrawal cell and trying to ignore the ghosts mocking him.

He was clutching her arms so hard, he knew he must have been hurting her but he couldn’t help himself. He hated himself for the bruises it would leave on her delicate skin.

“It’s alright. I will care for him.” she finally answered, wrapping her arms around his shoulders again in an embrace that felt just as instinctive as protective. “We will be quiet.”

They must have been quite the sight, the two of them, slumped on the floor and hugging each other for dear life.

“He doesn’t look good, Miss.” the soldier insisted.

“He will be just fine in a few hours.” she promised. “There won’t be any more problems, I swear.”

The man didn’t look convinced but he left, sliding the door shut behind him. He immediately felt imprisoned.

“I want fresh air.” he mumbled. He needed fresh air. He was used to going to the porch at night if the nightmares were too vivid. Fresh air helped.

“You and me both.” she sighed. “Come on, let’s get you to bed. The state you’re in, Haymitch! And running around in your underwear, really!”

She huffed in disapprobation and hoisted him up to his feet with some difficulties. He was dizzy, the room was spinning but the ghosts remained steady, still threatening. Getting him on her bed was a feat. He wasn’t much help and she cursed those bunk beds a lot with adjectives he was certain no proper lady should know. A faint smirk appeared on his lips. She was so much more than she pretended to be, she was so much more than the pretty but dumb escort persona she had adopted for herself. He brushed his shaking hand against her cheek while she bundled him up in all the blankets at her disposal in the room, all the white muttering that he would catch his death if he hadn’t already walking around wearing nothing in that freezer of a District. She distractedly leaned in the caress.

“I will fetch a wet cloth.” she told him.

“No.” he said immediately, glancing in terror at the ghosts still surrounding them. “No, they’re going to hurt you.”

“Nobody will hurt me.” she frowned. “They’re only hallucinations, Haymitch. They aren’t real.”

“They look real.” he argued. “They want to kill you. They want to take you away from me. That’s my punishment, sweetheart, don’t you get it?”

“Taking me away from you is your punishment?” She sounded dubious. “I would have thought it
would be a reward.”

He pulled her on top of him, wrapping his arms around her again and burying his face in her neck. It couldn’t be comfortable for her but she didn’t try to move away.

“Don’t joke about that.” he whispered. “I can’t lose you. I can’t…”

This time when she talked, her voice sounded tight with emotions he didn’t want to linger on or analyze. “You won’t lose me. You know me, I am a very stubborn woman and right now, I have decided nothing will take me away from you, not even ghosts. See? I am not afraid of them. They can’t hurt me and so they can’t punish you.”

“I deserve it.” he mumbled. “Punishment. I deserve it.”

“No, you don’t.” she scowled, propping herself on an elbow to peck his mouth. He was too slow to kiss her back. “I will be back in a minute.”

“No.” He tried to stop her but she was stubborn and she was cunning too and that kiss had distracted him enough that she slipped through his arms.

“I will skin her like a rabbit…” his girlfriend promised before sauntering after her.

He moved as it to get up but Effie’s head popped out of the small bathroom.

“Don’t you dare.” she warned. “I am perfectly fine. I will be back in a second. If you move from that bed I will kill you myself.”

The glaring was enough to convince him she was scarier than the ghosts.

He only relaxed when she was back next to him with a glass of water and a wet cloth. She placed the cloth on his forehead and forced him to drink the water. He lied back down when she pushed on his shoulder and he let her fuss with the covers.

“Close your eyes and try to sleep, now.” she ordered.

Even if he had wanted to…

She tenderly brushed his dirty hair away from his face.

“There’s only me here, Haymitch.” she whispered. “They’re not real.”

“They look real.” he argued tiredly. She chewed on her bottom lip until he delicately pried it free from her teeth. “I don’t want to lose you.” He would blame the fever the next morning, he decided. “That’s why I brought you here with me. I can’t lose you.”

“Then you won’t.” she retorted. “I will stay as long as you want me and, I suspect, even long after you are bored with me. I can’t bear the thought of losing you either, you stupid man.”

“Traitor.” his girlfriend hissed.

He did close his eyes then, tired of his conflicted feelings, tired of feeling guilty about maybe having feelings for her when she had proved time and time again that she wasn’t like the rest of them – except she was exactly like the rest of them, her eyes were simply open to the atrocious nature of the Games, that was it.

“I’m sorry.” he breathed out.
“It’s alright.” she hummed. “You have a fever, it’s not your fault.”

“I’m not talking to you.” he mumbled, daring a peek at his girlfriend. The knife was gone but the murderous glint in her eyes was still there.

“Of course, you’re not.” Effie scoffed. “I am the only one here so why would you be talking to me, I wonder? How silly of me.”

He ignored her, drinking in the sight of a girl he had long lost the ability to perfectly recall in his lucid moments. Her face was never as clear as when he was completely drunk or in the throes of a nightmare. He could never remember her features clearly when he was sober. That was punishment too, he figured.


Effie suddenly looked away, her jaw clenched.

“Should I pretend to be her?” she asked. “Would that help?”

His grey eyes darted from his girlfriend to her. She sounded bitter but he knew that he said yes, please, do that, she would do it anyway. That was how stupidly brave she was, how stupidly selfless when it came down to emotions.

“But you don’t anymore.” his girl sneered. “You replaced me with…”

“I didn’t replace you.” he cut her off. “You died. She’s alive.”

“Haymitch…” Effie sighed. “Haymitch, there’s no one here…”

“There are the ghosts.” he snapped.

She sighed again and took the now almost dry cloth from his forehead before disappearing in the bathroom again. His eyes tracked her every move, ready to bolt if any of the ghosts tried anything. They were fading though, leaving only his girl.

“You love her.” she accused with enough venom to make him close his eyes again.

When he opened them, Effie was pressing the wet cloth to his forehead again. He watched her for a while, her eyes briefly darted up to his but she kept them averted from the most part. Her lips were pursed with annoyance. He didn’t think she was annoyed at him, she had made her views on the way Thirteen had handled his withdrawal very clear in the past few weeks. She had nothing good to say about the rebels’ doctors.

Without the make-up to hide her imperfections, she looked older. She looked her age. There were lines at the corners of her eyes and he liked each one of them. Her lips were chapped, not soft and glossy looking anymore, and he found he didn’t mind that either. There wasn’t a lot he minded when she was concerned. Yes, most days, she annoyed the hell out of him. Some days, he hated her. And yet he would never have chosen a life where she wasn’t there to harass him with schedules and manners.

A life without her would be dull.

“Yes.” he rasped out, tucking her hair behind her ear. He didn’t look in the direction of his girlfriend, he didn’t want to see the betrayal and the devastation on her face. He couldn’t bear it.
“Yes to what?” Effie frowned.

“I do.” he answered.

She shook her head. “What do you do? You are not making any sense at all, Haymitch.”

“I know.” he admitted. “Lie down with me.”

Those beds were narrow but she wriggled between him and the wall and settled down with her head on his shoulder.

“You will feel better once the fever breaks.” she promised. “No more hallucinations.”

“Liar.” he accused. The hallucinations or ghosts or whatever they were would still come because he wouldn’t have alcohol to drive them away. He rolled on his side, turning his back on his girlfriend’s ghost, wrapped his arm around Effie, slipped the other under her head so she could use it as a pillow, and pushed one of his legs between hers. He only breathed more easily when he was flushed tight against her. At least, like that, he was certain she was safe.

“I wish I could take your pain away.” she confessed in a whisper.

“Can’t do that, sweetheart.” he snorted. “But sometimes you help me forget. That’s nice.”

He would deny that in the morning too.

She pressed a kiss on his forehead.

“Sleep now.” she ordered. “I will keep the ghosts at bay.”
“I’m exhausted.” Effie confessed, tickling Oria’s tummy to make her laugh. She was sitting on the new plushy carpet, next to the fireplace, her six months daughter next to her in her baby carrier seat.

Haymitch glanced from the fire, turning the piece of bread he was busy roasting on the poker.

“Thought you were enjoying yourself out there, sweetheart.” he scoffed.

“I did.” she hummed, waving a rattle in front of Oria. The baby had learned how to grab objects a few weeks ago and, surely enough, she tried to snatch the toy away from Effie. “It was a lovely day. Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me. I did nothing except showing up.” he mumbled.

She ducked her head so he wouldn’t see her fond smile, knowing it would only make him even more grumpy. She abandoned the rattle to Oria and turned the brand new wedding ring on her finger. It was odd to think she wasn’t Effie Trinket anymore but Effie Abernathy.

They had kept it small. Only the children, Johanna, Annie, little Finn, and Beetee had known to show up at the Justice Building that morning and the gathering that had followed had been equally small. Peeta had baked them an amazing cake and it certainly hadn’t been the most glamorous party she had thrown but it had been just what she wanted and needed. Family.

Katniss and Peeta – mostly Peeta – had offered to watch after Oria that night but both she and Haymitch had refused, still anxious about being separated from their daughter. She had left her with the children a few times but she hated being parted from her baby.

“Here.” he said. “It’s toasted.”

He blew on the piece of bread a few times and then pointed the poker at her so she would take it and eat it. She simply lifted an eyebrow and tickled Oria’s tummy once more.

“Daddy thinks Mommy is an idiot.” she cooed at their daughter who made a hiccup sound in answer. “Yes, he does. Daddy doesn’t think Mommy would ask Uncle Peeta how a toasting works…”

Haymitch rolled his eyes. “ Seriously? I’m going to kill that kid.”

“No, you won’t.” she replied. “Now, I do believe it’s time for your vows.”

The ceremony at the Justice Building was purely an exchange of signatures and rings. It lacked emotions.

“I don’t have vows.” he grumbled. “I have bread. Take it or leave it.”
“So romantic.” she teased. “What do you think, sweetie?” Oria made her opinion known by drooling all over her chin. “Your daughter doesn’t like those vows, Haymitch. Do better.”

“Eat the damn bread.” he insisted. “That’s the important part. It’s symbolic and shit.”

“Language.” She clicked her tongue, picking up the rattle when Oria dropped it. “Tell me why you are marrying me.”

“Cause your kid has my name.” he shrugged.

“Haymitch!” she hissed. “Tell me why you want to marry me.”


“I do.” she confirmed. “But as far as love declarations go, it’s now or never. Do you best. Tell me I am the most beautiful woman you’ve ever seen.”

“I’m marrying you because you’re the humblest woman I’ve ever seen.” he mocked but his face softened. “And the prettiest one.”

“Good.” she grinned, placing a hand on her daughter’s tummy to get her attention. “See, Daddy, is getting better at this…”

“It doesn’t mean anything to me, you know.” he shrugged. “The rings and all that shit. We’ve got a kid, getting married is the right thing to do for her but… It’s just a piece of paper.” Effie turned her head away, instinctively trying to hide the sudden pain at those words but he went on, completely unaware. “I don’t need it to know what you mean to me. Maybe Oria was your miracle, sweetheart, but you were mine.”

She had to swallow back tears at that comment. She cleared her throat, staring at their daughter rather than at him. “See, sometimes Daddy says the sweetest things in the worst way possible.”

“Eat your damn bread.” he grumbled. “We already know I will suck at being your husband and I will suck at being her dad.”

“I think you will be amazing at both and I won’t hear otherwise.” she argued. “You already are.”

She popped the now cooler bread from the end of the poker and took a large bite. Oria tried to grab it away from her hand but she held it out of reach.

“Your turn now.” he snorted, handing her the poker and another piece of bread. “Try not to burn the house.”

“You think you are funny but you really are not.” she chided him, switching places with him so she could be near the fire and he could keep an eye on Oria. Not surprisingly, he picked her up from the carrier – always eager to snuggle her close now that he had worked through his fear of carrying her – and she made delighted sounds as he rocked her the way she liked best.

“I’m hilarious, right, baby girl?” he chuckled.

Effie focused on not burning the bread, occasionally smiling at her brand new husband and their daughter playing together. She had a feeling that when she would be older, he and Oria would team up against her.
Her bread was much more darker than the one he had prepared for her but given her cooking abilities, it wasn’t that odd. She blew on it like he had done for hers.

“I had a big speech prepared.” she said.

“I bet.” he snorted. “Well, let’s hear it then. Maybe it will put Oria to sleep.”

“Still not funny.” she sighed. “You are not one for speeches so I suppose I should go straight to the point.”

“Miracles do happen, baby girl.” he snorted at the baby, dabbing away the drool on her chin.

“I love you.” she answered, not letting herself be distracted by his sarcasms. “I’ve loved you for years. I wouldn’t do this with anyone else. This life… I wouldn’t want to share it with anyone else.”

“Never thought I could have this life.” he shrugged. “But… It figures it would be with you. Anyone else… I would have freaked out and run away a long while ago.”

The discussion was becoming a little too heavy for her tastes. She knew all this. There wasn’t a lot of secrets left between them. They had known each other too long and were too familiar with each other’s flaws for it to be otherwise.

“Now, we both know you would never be able to leave Oria behind so you wouldn’t run far.” she teased. “You are wrapped around her little finger. You’re whipped for that baby.”

“That’s ‘cause she’s going to be even prettier than her mommy.” he snorted, snatching the bread from the end of the poker. He took a large bite, brushing the crumbs down and away from Oria’s pretty pink dress. “Now we’re married, sweetheart.”

“For better and for worse.” she grinned. “I think we already lived through the worse part so hopefully now we only have the better part to look forward to.”

“Kiss the groom.” he requested, a smirk on his lips.

She leaned closer and then switched target to pepper kisses on the baby’s face. “I think I will kiss the bridesmaid first.”

He chuckled and wrapped his free arm around her shoulders, bringing her in an odd group hug that would later turn out to a habit for the three of them.

“We are going to be so happy everyone else will be jealous.” she declared. “I am determined.”

“Good.” he commented, pressing a kiss on her temple. “I’m ready for some happiness.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m posting early because I won’t be here all day. I didn’t have time to correct Sail and, like I said, I won’t be here which means there unfortunately won’t be pirate update today.

I chose to make this an Oria story because of fluff reasons (and I will also seize the occasion to remind that my OCs (be they Theo, Hayden, Iris, Lyssa, Elindra or Tadius)
aren't up for grabbing and if I see another hayffie baby named Oria out there with a similar story, I might flip tables. I worked hard on those characters and I don't think it's very complicated to create your own characters with their own names. The names I chose for them are distinctive enough and hard to find enough. I spent hours on this and seeing characters with similar relationships and the same names popping around makes me want to not write at all anymore. Of course, it's totally alright to have people have sisters and parents and friends and frenemies, all the more so when they’re canonically mentioned, but not with the same names, background story and personality as someone else’s OC.

And I say that for me but I know some of Aidah’s OCs were "borrowed" too. We choose to think of it as a coincidence but I would rather warn that I am not always the nicest person when it comes to that and what I forgive once I won't forgive twice

I also appreciate the support some have showed me but, please, don’t ask who and where because it might be a coincidence and I don’t want to start shit over that. I am just taking the opportunity to remind people that OCs aren’t canonical characters you can just borrow and play with at your leisure.

Sorry for the rant but I sat on it all night and felt it needed to be said.

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