Summary

I know it’s our little dark haired beauty; well she’s not so little anymore. She’s just turned 4 and is weeks away from becoming a big sister.

“Am I getting my paintbox today?” She asks in the softest of whispers.

I smile at her, “You are. You very own paintbox.”

Calla receives her very own paintbox and chooses the colours to fill it, with the help of her Papa.

Tiny footsteps sound across the hallway; our bedroom door opens slowly and creaks on the tired old hinges. Bess’ paws sound on the wooden floor, following the tiny footsteps.

I know it’s our little dark haired beauty; well she’s not so little anymore. She’s just turned 4 and is weeks away from becoming a big sister.

Katniss stirs beside me, her hand coming to rub the rotund stomach before she curls into the pillow, falling back into her slumber. She’s so exhausted and despite going to bed right after our daughter, she’s still not getting a full night sleep. She’s restless and up multiple times during the night, using the bathroom or having been woken by our growing baby who has run out of room. The baby’s kicks and punches are much more powerful than our daughter had been in utero.
I smile at my beautiful wife, early morning sun starting to bathe her olive skin and I roll over, catching my daughter as she appears at my bedside. She hides her face behind the teddy her Uncle Haymitch and Aunt Effie bought her when she was just a newborn. The cream teddy has never left her side and has been everywhere with her. It caused for a lot of sleepless nights when the teddy went missing or when Katniss had managed to sneak it into the wash, trying to bring its colour back to life.

I make room for my daughter, scooting back just a little to allow her some space to crawl into the warmth of the bed to have our morning embraces before the day begins.

Today was a rare day, one where I didn’t work and had the pleasure of sleeping in, despite still waking at 4 like every other morning. I liked to bask and lay in bed beside Katniss, watching her sleep and milking those few hours of peacefulness and warmth, listening to the birds sing their morning songs and watch the sun rise through the window.

And on these mornings I get to share cuddles with my daughter and gaze into her beautiful blue eyes and talk about our day’s plan or the wonderful dreams she had. But some mornings I have the pleasure of waking to her in between Katniss and me when she had bad dreams and watch my two favourite people sleep peacefully, watching their chests rise and fall in sync and admire the way Katniss embraced my daughter, letting her little body mould against her own curves. It was these moments that made me feel so lucky to be alive.

“Am I getting my paintbox today?” She asks in the softest whisper, it wouldn’t even frighten a mouse.

I smile at her, “You are. The train is coming today. Aster said the box would be there first thing.”

“And then I can pick out my paints to go into it?”

“Yes, you can choose any colour you want.”

She smiles, most likely pondering the colours she’ll pick out, filling the large wooden paintbox she had picked out a couple of weeks ago in the catalogue Aster had on her shop counter.

“Do you know what colours you’re going to pick?”

“How many can I choose?”

“As many as you want.”

She bites her lip and I watch the lines of concentration appear on her brow. She’s much like her mother in every way and makes me feel incredibly lucky.

“Papa?”

“Yes Princes?”

“When are we going to paint Chick’s room?”

“I was going to do it tomorrow afternoon.”

“What colour will it be?”

“What colour do you think Chick will like?”

“Hmm… green. I think Chick will like green.”
“Yeah, I think Chick will too. We’ll have to ask Mama when she wakes.” I tell her. “But I’m sure she’ll love green in Chick’s room.”

“It is her favourite colour.” She reminds me.

“It is and I think it’s only fair she gets her favourite colour painted in Chick’s room. I got mine in your room.”

“You did. Sunset orange.”

I startle myself awake, I’ve worked up a sweat. My fingers are twitching and my body is shaking uncontrollably.

I know what this means.

I look beside me, the bed is empty and my wife’s side of the bed is cold. She’s been gone from the comfort of our bed for hours now. And Bess, our golden furred dog is most likely curled around her body, guarding her with her head resting on Katniss’ baby bump.

These moments were rare and starting to lessen as the years went on. And I had experienced such a good run of luck. I hadn’t one for almost 5 months, the last one I had was when Katniss had told me we would become parents.

I spent that night rocking backwards and forwards in our basement as I had a terrible dream and was too frightened to be near Katniss, scared I’d hurt her and our little dandelion that was on it’s way. It had taken 14 years for us to collectively come to the decision and not even two months after Katniss telling me yes, we were expecting.

But she had calmed me down, found me curled in a ball and held me as my body softened against her hold and I felt the soft kisses on my face and the voice inside my head disappearing, hopefully buried for a long while. I didn’t want her to see me like this, scared of becoming a parent. I didn’t want her to see me as a threat to her and our child.

But she reassured me I wasn’t a threat. She loved me more than anything else in the entire world and we’d get through this together because she was terrified too. I didn’t realise too how terrified I was but I knew we’d go into this one together.

But this morning, 5 months after my last episode and Katniss hitting the 7 month mark of her pregnancy, I was experiencing another one. One that I didn’t want her to witness or one that gripping the back of a chair wouldn’t help end the terrible nightmare and voice.

I sit up in bed, attach my prosthetic hastily and run for my life as the voice fills my head.

‘Kill the mutts. She’s carrying a mutt. Her baby is a mutt. They’ll destroy you.’

I place my hands over my ears and run out of the bedroom and down the stairs. I slip my feet into my shoes, not bothering to tie my laces and grab my winter coat. I catch her stir. I hear Bess’ whimpers. But I don’t stop.

‘Get the mutt. Kill the mutt. Do it. Kill her and her baby.’

“Shut up. Shut up!” I mutter as I run, tripping on the ground, as I don’t watch where I step.

I fall on my knees, breaking my fall with my hands on the foot of snow that covers the ground but the voice still nags.
‘Kill the mutt.’

I get back up, running as fast as I can and to the snow covered meadow. And until I can run no further, I collapse on the snow-covered ground.

‘Kill them. Kill them. Kill them. Kill them.’

“Shut up. Shut up. Shut up!” I scream, covering my ears and sobbing.

I don’t feel the snow seeping into my pyjama pants or the cold on my bare ears and nose. I’m in too deep. The terror has caught me off guard and I’m unable to pull myself back like I had gotten so good at doing in the last 14 years.

“Peeta?”

I wince at her voice. I knew she’d had followed me.

I run. She follows.

She runs. I follow.

We made that promise to each other and have stuck by it, ever since we said real.

I hear her trudge closer, crunching the newly fallen snow under her boots as she nears me. I can sense Bess is close beside her.

The terror is still gripping, still trying to crack me into a million pieces and I don’t want Katniss near me in case I snap.

“Peeta.”

She touches my shoulder and I tense at her touch and she seems to notice but it doesn’t scare her away. She grips my shoulder with her hand and kneels beside me as the hot tears roll down my face.

“Don’t let them take you from me.” She whispers.

I squeeze my eyes closed at her voice and try to beat the fading voice that’s trying to get me to kill her and our baby.

“Stay with me.”

Bess nudges my elbow and forces me to open my eyes.

“Stay with me. Say it.” She demands.

“Always.” I reply, so softly I’m scared she misheard me.

She grabs my hand, squeezing it with her hand. The touch of her skin brings more life into my body and I bring myself to look into her eyes. They are comforting. They are home. She is worth living for. They are both worth living for.

“I love you Peeta.”

“I love you too Katniss.” I reply. “I’m sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry about Peeta.” She tells me softly and places our hands on her round
And I know in this moment she’s scared because our baby is moving. These movements make her freeze in terror.

So I hold her hand and together we touch her stomach silently while we wait for the movements to subside.

Bess sits on guard beside us, never moving as we come back to earth.

And in the corner of my eye I catch something the meadow is known for doing.

It’s beautiful sunrises and sunsets.

“Look up Katniss.”

She tears her eyes from my own. Tears slowly sliding down her cheeks. She comes back to me like she promised and we watch the sun rise over us as we silently fight our way from the terrors that are stronger than ever before.

But I know what we’ll do today. I’m already exhausted and I can see it in her eyes.

“Come on let’s go back to the house and warm up.”

Our wet clothes are stripped from our bodies and we stand under the warm water of the shower, bringing warmth back into our bodies as we embrace under the spray of the water.

I make us a cup of tea and ring the bakery, letting them know I won’t be in today and crawl into bed beside my wife and Bess. After a nightmare we sleep the day away, unable to face the world outside as we fight our own demons on the inside. We did it step-by-step, breath-by-breath.

It was the only way we survived.

“Katniss, wake up.” I whisper in her ear.

She mumbles, cuddling the blankets tighter to her body.

“Come on. I want to show you something. You can sleep after.”

I watch her silver eyes open and help her out of bed. She wraps her gown around her body and I take her hand, leading her to the room across the hall from us. It’s early morning, the sun still rising but I was too excited to show her.

I let her step into the middle of the room and watch her. I smile from ear to ear.

“It’s beautiful.” She finally says after a long silence.

I step beside her, wrapping my arm around her shoulders and kissing her temple.

“I’d thought you’d like it.”

I look ahead at the wall and see the sunset I had spent the whole night creating. A soft orange had been painted on the other three walls and a sunset created as a feature wall.

A sunset for our dandelion.
“I was thinking maybe the crib could go on that wall.” I tell her, pointing to the feature wall.

“No. It’s too beautiful to cover up.” She tells me and turns us to the wall that is directly facing the sunset. “This wall, so then our baby can see the sunset all the time. He or she can wake and fall asleep staring at the sunset.”

Katniss appears downstairs, with a soft smile on her face. Breakfast is ready. Cheese buns as our usual routine on my day off, hot out of the oven. This seems to be little Chick’s food of choice to which makes Katniss thrilled.

Katniss kisses the top of our daughter’s head, inhaling the sweet smell of her shampoo and running her fingers through her bed hair.

“Morning Princess.” She murmurs.

“Morning Mama.”

“Sleep well?”

Our daughter nods and looks up at her mother smiling. “I’m getting my paintbox today.”

“You are. Picked out the colours you’re going to choose?”

“Mostly.” She responds. “And we’ve decided on Chick’s bedroom colour.”

“What’d you two decide on?” Katniss asks, sitting down beside our daughter, touching her belly softly.

“Green.”

“Green? Why green?”

“Well, I have orange in my room. I think Chick will like green in his or her’s.” She replies. “But only if you like the idea.”

“I love the idea.” Katniss smiles. “I think Chick loves it.”

“Really?”

Katniss nods and grabs Calla’s hand, guiding it to her belly. “Chick’s kicking, Chick loves the idea.”

Calla smiles feeling her baby brother or sister and leans down to press a soft kiss to her mother’s belly so gently. “You’re going to love it Chick. Daddy is going to make it wonderful, you’ll never want to leave.”

“Eat up Cal, we’ve got your paintbox to get.” I tell her, slipping Katniss’ mug of tea across the counter.

Bess walks beside our daughter as we head into town. Our daughter sits in her shiny red wagon and I pull her along. Kids play on the street, enjoying the summer’s day. The square is buzzing with activity and I’ve never been more proud of being a District 12 resident. Our town that was reduced to ashes 18 years ago has re-established itself with the horror of the past way behind us. A simple memorial sits in the square but nothing else.

I squeeze Katniss’ hand and we continue along towards the hobby store, our daughter waving and greeting people as she is pulled along.
She doesn’t know who her parents are. Doesn’t know that they were the ones who fought for her freedom, for her ability to live the life she is living now, free from hunger and pain. To never have her name in the reaping bowl or be forced to fight to the death.

But we know she’ll know in a few years. She start asking questions when she gets to school and they teach her all about the revolution and how her parents played a role in it.

But we’ll survive it. We always survive it.

“Come on Mama and Papa.” Calla calls to us, getting us to hurry along.

We tie Bess up outside on the post and we wheel the wagon inside, Calla already having run ahead of us. Her hands are on the counter, peaking over the edge on her tippy toes at Aster. Aster loves our little girl, just like everyone else. She brings sunshine and happiness to the townspeople.

Just like the happiness and sunshine she’s brought to our own lives.

“Morning Aster.” I greet her. Aster looks up smiling and Calla turns to look up at us.

“Is my paintbox here?” Calla asks with a hopeful smile.

Aster bends down behind the counter and sets the wooden rectangle paintbox on the counter. I lift Calla up onto my hip for her to examine her gift. Calla’s Paintbox has been inscribed on the top and Aster opens it for our daughter to inspect the inside of the box.

“Just like yours Papa.” She beams.

“It is princess.”

“Mama, do you see it?”

“I do. Just like Daddy’s.” Katniss says, kissing her cheek. “Now, you just have to pick out your paints.”

“Can you help me Papa?”

I set her on her feet and she leads me to the display of paints. There are oil paints, acrylic and watercolours. There are thousands of colours and I can see how overwhelmed she is.

“I don’t know which one Papa.” She whispers.

I smile at her. “It’s okay sweetheart, I’ll help you.”

Katniss sits on a stool near the easels watching us with a proud smile on her face. Watching our daughter grow has brought her such joy.

“Now, I think the first colour we need is white.” I tell her, reaching for the tube of white acrylic. “White is one of the most useful colours you could ever need. White is best used to lighten colours, giving you a light blue or green. It can give you a muted orange and can help you create a beautiful sunset.”

“What does white represent?” She asks.

“Simplicity, purity and hope.” I tell her. She smiles as she sets the tube into the wagon. “What else?”

“Black. Power, mystery and sophistication. A little bit of black can make your colour darker, it can
elect night time or create shadow and depth to your artwork.”

“Red. Red is one of our primary colours. The use of red can make any other colour you may wish. Purple, pink or orange. Red is physical and can represent fire and blood, energy and passion. It can bring your artwork to life.”

“You’ll need some blue. Another primary colour. Blue is the colour of the mind, it’s the colour of peace, communication, confidence and trust. Strong blues will stimulate clear thought and light, soft blues will calm the mind. You can use blue to create the sky and create a sense of serenity.”

“Now yellow. Yellow is our last primary colour. It's the colour of friendliness and warmth. It’s a colour of emotion. Yellow can create a dandelion in the meadow or the other bright colours of spring. Yellow is gentle. It lifts our spirits and self-esteem. It will make your art look confident and optimistic.”

“It’s the colour of spring.” She says smiling.

“It surely is.”

I watch her set the paint down and grab the next colour.

“Mama’s favourite colour.” She says.

I smile. “Now green. It can be made by using blue and yellow but I think it’s an important colour to have in your paintbox. Green balances things. When the world around us contains the colour green we are reassured. It symbolises universal love, harmony, restoration and peace.” I explain. “It’s also the colour of life, growth and nature. We use this colour to bring to life to our paintings and our own lives. That’s why it’s your Mama’s favourite colour.”

I catch Katniss wiping the space under her eye but most importantly she is smiling.

“Now violet is an interesting colour. It’s a spiritual colour and brings awareness. It signifies luxury, quality and truth. But it also is a colour signifying wisdom and dignity. It brings an interesting element to art when used.

“What about orange Papa?”

“We can’t forget orange.” I say, grabbing the tube. “Orange is also a beautiful colour. It can be created using red and yellow. It can create a sunset or be added to create fire. Orange can bring physical comfort, endurance, warmth, fun and security. It can symbolise creativity and quick thinking. It focuses our minds and stimulates our body and soul to its physical and emotional feeling. It can strengthen your art work.”

“Is this why you painted my bedroom this colour?”

“Exactly that reason. I wanted you to feel safe and comforted while you slept soundly.” I kiss her temple and grab a couple more colours before setting them in the basket.

We treat her to some water paints, paintbrushes and lots of paper for creating her masterpieces. A set of charcoals and pencils are slipped in for her colouring and drawing. Katniss insists on another smock as she’s quickly growing out of the one Johanna had sent for third birthday.

Her little wagon is loaded up with art supplies and she has a wide smile on her face, eager to get home and start using the paints out for her own paintbox.
We farewell Aster and let Calla lead us home with her shiny red wagon.

“Papa, can we paint when we get home?”

“I’m sure we can do a little bit of painting before lunch.” I tell her.

“Will you paint with me?”

“Of course I can and I’m sure Mama will like to join us too.”

She skips as she pulls her wagon along, her excitement bubbling the closure we get to home.

Haymitch and Effie are out the front with their youngest that has drawn up a game of hopscotch and is engaged in a game with the neighbour kids.

“Uncle Haymitch! Aunt Effie!” Calla calls out to them.

Both of the adults turn their attention to our daughter who moves quickly towards them. Their eyes light up as they see her approaching and smile at her running towards them with her wagon.

“I got it! I got it!”

They knew she had a paintbox on the way. She hadn’t stopped talking about it since she picked it out of the catalogue at the store. And for weeks it’s all she’s spoken to them about.

She reaches for her paintbox and makes a run for Effie and Haymitch.

“See! See!”

Haymitch and Effie kneel to view her new gift.

“Wow, it’s beautiful.”

“And I got lots of paints and brushes too.”

We appear at her side and watch her showing off her paints and explaining all the colours to her Aunt and Uncle.

“Well, we request the first painting of Calla Mellark.” Effie tells our daughter.

“What would you like?”

“Anything Princess.”

Calla smiles and looks up at Katniss and I. “Can we go and paint now?”

“Of course. Let’s go.” Katniss tells her.

Haymitch helps her pack up her red wagon. “I’ll have the painting done by the time it’s time to feed the geese.” Calla tells them both. She also helped her Uncle Haymitch feed the geese in the afternoon and took pride in undertaking the task.

“We can’t wait.”

“Come on, let’s go and get you set up.” I tell her reaching for the wagon handle.

Katniss gets her into her smock and we set up the table out on the back porch for our morning of
Calla has been painting since she could hold a paintbrush, mostly with just water paints and sometimes acrylics when she started to get bigger.

But she was more of a drawer than a painter. I hated to admit it but she was clumsy, just like her mother. She still liked painting, it was one of her favourite things to do but she wasn’t a painter.

She produces her paintings to Effie and Haymitch that afternoon as she goes to help Haymitch feed the geese.

Her other paintings hang up on the clothesline I had strung up years before. They are colourful and an arrangement of things.

I stand behind Katniss, my arms wrapped around her very pregnant stomach, feeling our little Chick moving about and we admire our paintings, created from the paintbox. Calla is next door with her Uncle Haymitch, having left us alone to admire our art.

Our hands are covered in dried paint but we are content and happy.

It’s been a good day today.

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Calla, she’s our dancing girl. She has been since she could walk. She has much preferred to dance than walk or run. And now, I watch her dancing in our yard. The August sun beats down on her as she twirls on the green grass and watches her purple tutu fly as she twirls.

She falls to the ground, obviously dizzy from all the twirling. She giggles as Bess gives her a kiss before she lies down besides her, keeping a careful eye on the four year old. That same careful eye she’s had since Calla came into our lives.

My daughter is radiant. She’s been radiant since the first dandelion of the year. The ones we go hunting for on her birthdays. The moment we go dandelion hunting, the smile grows wider on her face. She’s our spring baby and when the sun is out, it’s when she’s her happiest. And during these warm months I make sure we spend every day outside, picking bright coloured flowers and picnicking in the garden or in the meadow. She likes to lay her sleepy head in my lap and I play with her beautiful hair while she plays with the dandelions we have picked, trying her best to create flower crowns.

I also like to sing to her. The Meadow song was still her favourite song and now she liked to join me when we sang, letting the birds carry our song long into the afternoon.

Today has been a good day. No nightmares woke me. Peeta woke happy. Calla woke happy. Our 8-day-old son woke happy. Peeta had left for his half day at work and I woke to Calla cuddled with me in bed. Her head snuggled into my chest, listening to my heartbeat and sucking her thumb. A habit she hadn’t seemed to break at four years old. But if it brought her comfort, I wasn’t in any hurry to stop the thumb sucking. The two of us snoozed for a couple more hours like most mornings and her new baby brother slept soundly for those couple of hours we remained in bed, curled in the warmth and safety of our bed.

Baby Isaac makes a tiny peep from inside of his Moses basket that sits beside me. His nickname we found to be very fitting once he was born. He hardly cried and had peeped like a baby bird. He slept for hours on end and was a very content boy. He was also a very loved baby boy. I smile down at him as he snoozes in the mid-morning warmth. The two of us are tucked up under the shade of the
porch, watching Calla play in the yard.

Peeta would be home in an hour for our backyard picnic under the tree that offered the most shade. He was doing only a couple of half days a week until Isaac was 6 weeks old. He didn’t want to miss out on spending time with or son or our daughter.

But today he had an activity planned for our dancing girl. Our time had been spent trying to entertain Calla, reminding her how much we still loved her despite her baby brother. But she loved her baby brother and didn’t feel an ounce of jealousy at his arrival. And since he was such a good baby, it didn’t bother her.

The dancing girl rose from the grass and continued on twirling around and around again, laughing as she watched the clouds instead of the grass. Her two braids whipped as she twirled and Bess watched with her tongue lolling from her mouth with her tail wagging.

Bess seemed to feed off of our dancing girl’s happiness. Calla was her favourite person and had demoted me but I didn’t mind. I loved seeing the relationship the two of them had. But Bess still came looking for me time to time for pats and cuddles when the dancing girl slept or was out for the day with her Aunt, Uncle or her Papa. Bess still loved my baby bump and on those cold nights when we sat on the couch, she curled around my belly and I petted Bess while rubbing the spot where Isaac grew. And even those trips into the woods, Bess was right beside me.

Calla falls to the ground again and my breath catches in my throat. I was sure she had hurt herself this time. I’m about to rise from my chair to run for her but her infectious laugh sounds and I’m relieved that she was unhurt.

She rises from the grass and dances towards me with Bess close to her side. I offer her my open arms as she clambers up the steps to where I sit and she falls into my embrace giggling.

“Did you see me Mama? I fell over.” She tells me, giggling with a wide smile.

I lift her to my lap, kissing her forehead and embracing her. “I did. You scared me.”

“Sorry Mama.” She apologises, resting her head on my chest, right where my heart beats. “Did I scare Chick?” She asks me, peeking at her baby brother in the chair beside me.

“No, he is fine.” I reassure her, kissing her head. “You ready to go inside?”

She nods her head and I stand up, lifting her to my hip to carry her inside. I grab the handles of the Moses Basket and carry my two babies inside. Peeta would scold me for carrying both of them. My body was still tender and sore from Isaac’s birth. He had been nearly a pound and a half bigger than his sister and had left me with triple the amount of stitches than Calla’s birth.

Calla settles in her playroom, the formal living room we had converted when we slowly started to accumulate toys for her. Peeta had made it a happy place to come to. It lost its cold and dark feeling. He had created the meadow on the biggest wall; there was a field of dandelions covering the green meadow and a beautiful sunset. The remaining walls were painted a soft green and it soon became a welcoming haven.

We checked Calla’s height on the doorframe and we’d do the same for Isaac once he could stand. The big window overlooked the garden the three of us had planted together when Calla was just two years old. A table and chair set sat in the centre of the room. Shelves had been constructed and placed around the room at various heights and shapes. They were filled with many books, toys, dress ups, arts and crafts materials as well as blankets and pillows used to create pillow forts on those
nights we liked to sleep in the Happy Room. It was a bright and cheery room and I never felt dark inside the room. I mostly found myself smiling in here. That’s why we called it the Happy Room.

My sunshine played in here.

She moved to her big dolls house in the corner of the room and Bess settled down beside her.

“Which doll would you like Bess?” She asks Bess, offering her a few choices.

“I’m just going to leave Isaac in here Calla while I do the laundry.” I tell her.

“Okay Mama.”

I smile at my source of happiness and duck out of the room to put on a load of washing. Most of it is newborn clothing and I catch myself admiring the sleep suits, socks and singlets he sleeps in.

I forgot how tiny they are when they are this age.

But I don’t forget how quickly he’ll be out of these clothes.

And I make a promise, much like the one I did when Calla was born. Make the most of every moment, even if I’m exhausted and covered in spit up and at my wits end. It’ll be over so sooner than I’d rather.

I was still in such awe the second Isaac was placed on my chest and he didn’t move from my chest for the first hour as I studied him, just like I did with Calla. And I’m making use of the newborn snuggles now.

But I’ve found family of four embraces much more fulfilling and wonderful than just newborn snuggles. Having my whole family with me is truly a blessing.

Peeta walks through the door just as I come up from the basement. I know he hates being away from us, especially when he’s cooped up in the bakery during summer. He wants to be around to lighten the load and has been ever since we found out we were expecting again. He didn’t want me stressed or run off my feet as I took care of Calla. And he made that decision when I was pregnant again to cut back his hours and be there for us. He took Calla some days, giving me some time alone and when days were tough. He wanted to spend as much time with Calla before she went to school and now with Isaac he wanted to be with us more than anything.

He sets the bag down on the kitchen and kisses me softly.

“You’re cheerful.”

“I have a lot to be cheerful about.” He tells me. “How are you feeling today?”

“Good. Real good. Maybe even great if you have a certain something in that bag.”

He smirks and reaches inside, producing a package of warm cheese buns. “Here you go my love.”


He disappears and leaves me to sneak a cheese bun. I can hear Calla’s excitement sound down the hallway and I catch myself smiling before tiptoeing down the hallway to linger outside of the playroom.

“Are you happy Papa?” Calla asks, resting her hands on Peeta’s cheeks.
“I’ve very happy Calla.” He replies. “Are you happy?”

“I’m always happy.”

I smile. It’s true. There’s never a moment when she’s upset or sad. She’s always happy.

And even on bad mornings or moments, she was always there to cheer us up. She hugs us tightly, showers us with kisses and gives us lots of affection and attention. Soothing attention that always makes the bad mornings pass. She’s starting to ask questions about why we have our bad days but we sidestep the questions for now. We don’t want to frighten her or take away the dancing girl who makes our life shiny.

“Come on, we have a picnic date scheduled.” He tells our daughter.

“Don’t forget Isaac.”

“I won’t forget him.”

I’ve pull the big picnic rug from the cupboard and have our lunch in my other hand. We meet in the hallway and I see the happiness on their faces. Peeta must have had a good day. I can see it in his bright eyes.

He carries Calla on his side and the Moses basket in his hands.

We spread the rug under the shade of the biggest tree in our yard and begin our picnic lunch. Bess lays out in the sun bathing her fur in sunlight and we fill our stomachs with cheese buns, fruit and snacks.

Isaac rests in my arms nursing while we eat. Peeta sits up against the trunk of the tree with me between his legs, leaning up against his chest. He works his fingers through the tension in my neck and I press myself closer to his body as our newborn nurses quietly in my arms. Calla lies on the rug, Bess now beside her and they watch the clouds in the bright blue sky.

“Why don’t the three of you lay down, have an after lunch nap? I’ve got a little bit to do.” He tells me.

“Why don’t you join us?”

“I’ll be too restless. Besides, I’ve got Izzie’s birthday present to finish.”

“I can help.”

“You rest.” He tells me, kissing the back of my neck, sending shivers down my spine.

I yawn instinctively. I hadn’t realised how tired I was until he suggested a snooze. Despite Isaac being such a good baby, my routine is all out. I’m sleeping lightly and terribly, I’m on mother mode waiting for him to cry or wake up for a feed, a diaper change or just for a cuddle.

I catch Calla’s yawn and see she is ready for our afternoon lunch snooze. She hardly had afternoon naps but since my pregnancy with Isaac she’s joined me for a snooze, we’ve mostly spent the time curled on the couch or up in bed. Some days we never slept, we just cuddled and talked. I played with her hair. I tickled her back. I watched her sleep. She watched me sleep and listened to my beating heart and felt her brother moving inside of me. It had become our thing and I wasn’t looking forward to her going off to school or outgrowing our after lunch snoozes.
“Come on Cal, let’s go and swing.” I tell her.

Isaac is burped and in Peeta’s arms. Calla and I climb into the hammock on the back porch. Calla lies on one side, Isaac lies on the other side. He curls into my side and the gentle rocking settles him into another snooze. Peeta leaves us with a kiss placed on each of our foreheads and Bess lies on guard, watching her family.

“Sing Mama.”

I smile at her and peak down at Isaac quickly. I rub Calla’s back. She’s firmly pressed to my side with her arm wrapped around my still swollen middle. Her head rests on my shoulder and she plays with my braid. This was where she was the safest.

I only sing for her, Isaac, and Peeta when nightmares terrorise him and only my voice can bring him back.

I sing the Meadow Song because it’s her favourite and also Isaac’s. Isaac always stopped to listen when he was rumbling inside my womb.

_Deep in the meadow, under the willow_
A bed of grass, a soft green pillow
Lay down your head, and close your sleep eyes
and when again they open, the sun will rise

Peeta wakes us. I had grown used to his familiar tread and I loved hearing him on mornings when he left for work or when he crossed the hall to our daughter’s bedroom. I loved hearing his familiar gait when I was in the basement doing the washing. It was comforting just knowing he was around.

Calla stirs beside me. She had inherited my hunter’s instincts and woke to anything. She had also inherited the quietness of my own tread, which contributed to her dancing and twirling. There was a chance our daughter would become a ballerina rather than a hunter or an artist.

But we didn’t care.

She’d have the opportunity to become anything she imagined.

She smiles up at me and I kiss her forehead with a soft butterfly kiss. Butterfly kisses were still her favourite kisses in the entire world. They were soft and precious and she always imagined they carried secrets and happiness.

She looked over my chest to her baby brother and softly ran her hand over the top of his crown that was covered in the lightest dusting of blond hair. He looked to be dreaming a wonderful dream most likely filled with cuddles, kisses and his mother’s milk.

“Do babies dream?” Calla asks me in a soft whisper, scared to wake her brother.

“Yeah they do.”

“Do you think they have good dreams?”

“Most of the time.” I reply.

“I hope they have only good dreams Mama.”

“Me too.”
I gently lift Isaac to my chest and he curls into my warmth. Calla and I press soft butterfly kisses to his face and admire how peaceful he looks.


He lifts Calla from the hammock and helps me out. Isaac is laid in his Moses Basket and Calla and I stand beside Peeta’s activity. He’s laid out an old sheet on the grass with her name outlined in a black marker.

He fumbles with the crate he had carried out and pulls out the bottles of paint.

“Now Calla, we know how neat we tell you to be with your painting. Today, you can get as messy as you like.” He tells our daughter. “How much of a mess do you think she can make?” He asks me.

She was still four and despite her owning her paintbox and our years of painting, she still was clumsy when it came to painting.

“You really want me to answer that? You remember what she did when she got into your studio. We had a toddler streaked with blues and greens for almost a week.”

“Well she was only young then. She didn’t understand. And I learnt my lesson, not to leave the paint unattended. Besides we’re outside today. She can be as messy as she likes.”

“So what exactly is she doing?” I ask.

“Expressing her creativity.” He replies. “It’s a lovely summer’s afternoon and she’s a kid. We’re letting her be messy and creative.” He explains, pouring out some paint into a container. “Maybe we can decorate her bedroom with it or something.”

“She’s like me in the painting department.” I tell him with a smirk.

“She’s still young. She’s got years to shine.” He replies. “And I thought it’d be nice to have a memento.”

I smile. We’ve already got a million memento’s of our daughter and fast collecting some for our son. But he’s right, she’ll be grown before we know it and we won’t have the opportunity for moments like this.

“We’re ready.” Peeta announces. “Do you want to get into your painting clothes?”

She shakes her head with a smile.

Her tutu and singlet is stripped in a heap by her feet and she stands in just her underwear. Her braids are coming undone but I don’t bother to fix them.

I pull up a couple of chairs for Peeta and I and move Isaac between us.

“Okay Calla. Paint your life away.”

She grabs one of the paintbrushes from the stack and dips it into the yellow paint. Peeta sits down beside me and we watch her. She’s careful, her little tongue poking out of her mouth in concentration as she focuses on the C of her name. She sings to herself and paints the yellow onto her C.

“How are you going sweetie?”

“Good Papa.”
She’s trying her hardest to be neat and tidy. She tries to remain inside the lines and takes her time.

The bit of afternoon sun that peaks through feels nice on my skin. I notice Peeta basking in the mid-afternoon sun and I reach for his hand, squeezing it.

As we grew back together, we loved spending afternoons in the sun. They were usually spent lazing and snoozing. But it was comforting. We shared stolen kisses and gradually felt each other’s skin beneath our own fingers and hands. Late spring and summer we spent out in the yards of our house and in the meadow when it turned green. It became tradition, as the years went on and we grew back together. I still went out to the woods but traded the woods for afternoons spent with Peeta. And when Calla eventually arrived, we always lay under the shade and wasted summer afternoons admiring our daughter and spending time together as a new family.

Summer became my favourite season after Spring.

Calla soon abandons her paintbrush in favour for her fingers and hands.

And I knew when I saw her happy, I was thankful for the fight to secure her future. To allow her to be a kid and to dream of a wonderful life and laugh under the summer sun. I was glad she was allowed to be silly and a child.

“Do you think this is how this would end up?” I ask him after Calla has grabbed the bottle of paint and has squirted it onto the sheet.

“I knew it’d get messy but I never imagined her to paint like that.” He admits and I catch Calla lay on her belly, spreading the orange onto the sheet.

I smile at her painting style and our paint covered dancing girl. She was a mess but she was ecstatic.

Effie and Haymitch watch her from their fence with Floyd and Izzie who are delighted at their adoptive cousin. Calla providing entertainment for the family of four who bask in Calla’s energy.

Peeta pulls out a charcoal and paper to sketch our daughter and I happily watch her from my spot on the chair.

I watch him create the scene so beautifully and kiss him for a long while when he finishes.

We pull apart, our gaze lingering a little longer than usual.

“Thank you for this.”

He smiles at me and kisses me quickly.

I pull away and turn back to our painting girl who I notice has disappeared.

“He.” I say, tilting my head in the direction of the bright yellow handprint left on the banister. A trail of mix coloured footprints lead up the wooden steps and fade, as they get closer to the door. Another handprint is pressed to the glass of the open backdoor.

“I better go and get her.” He says running after her.

Peeta emerges with our giggling girl held out in front of him. I had seen this many times before when she had covered herself in flour or cake mixture.

But this doesn’t bother either of them. Calla giggles wildly and Peeta smiles. It’s that same smile that fills my body with happiness.
And our dancing girl brings me even more joy even when I’m terrorised by nightmares. And now I know her baby brother will do exactly the same thing. He already is making each day greater.

We record the day in our book. A day to take pleasure in when our days are tough. Our dancing girl was paint free and tucked up in her bed sound asleep. Our little boy, he was due to wake for his night feed before we tucked him inside the comfort of his bassinet.

I watch her sleep from the doorway of her room. She’s sprawled across her bed, exhausted after our day today. But I notice the smile she has on her face. She remained joyful for the remainder of the afternoon and during dinner. She recalled the way she painted, giggling as she retold us about it at dinner.

I tiptoe across her bedroom floor, picking up her teddy that has fallen to the ground during her sleep and tuck it under her arm. I kneel down beside her bed and kiss the top of her head.

“Thank you for today Calla.” I whisper to her. “You don’t understand how much joy you bring me.” I hear her gentle breathing and smile. “I love you so much. And I’m so glad you are mine.” I add. “Sleep pleasant dreams little one.”

I kiss her once more and stand up, moving back to the door. I can hear Isaac’s fussing from across the hall and Peeta’s gentle voice trying to soothe him.

I look up above where my daughter sleeps and smile.

Above her bed her afternoon art project has been hung up.

And in a rainbow of colours our daughter’s name has been coloured and brought to life. I smile at the beautiful mix of colours.

And I remember.

She’s our dandelion in the spring. She’s rebirth. She’s strength.

And mostly importantly she’s love.

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