Katniss and the Rebels

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Summary

A story of music, high school friendships and hidden crushes.

Katniss Everdeen is 17 years old. She is in a band called the Rebels with her best friends Gale, Thom and Darius and she has a secret crush on the boy who saved her life.

Katniss and Peeta are paired up on a project and grow closer and while this is everything they both want, they both have troubles in their own lives to cope with. Through family feuds, golden opportunities and fragile friendships can the star crossed lovers be together and survive high school?
Monday Mornings

Prologue
Katniss Everdeen POV

My name is Katniss Everdeen.

I am 17 years old.

I am a senior in high school.

I live in the Seam in District Twelve.

I have a younger sister called Prim who is 13. My father died in a mining accident when I was 12. When he died my mother went into depression. She wouldn't move, eat, sleep or do anything.

She has more moments of acting like her old self now. They last about five or ten minutes where she talks and walks and sometimes you can even see a glimpse of happiness on her face. But then I think she remembers my father's death and she either falls silent or leaves the room.

I do love my mother, I really do but I can't forgive her for what she has done to Prim and I. I have tried to forgive her but I was never the forgiving type so I didn't try too hard.

I love to sing and play guitar. quite cliché I know.

I am in a band called the Rebels with my best friends Gale, Thom and Darius.

Every week we sing at a restaurant in the Seam called the Hob. I work there as a waitress also. Unlike most people my age I really enjoy my work. I won't be waitressing my entire life but I enjoy it all the same. The pay is good and the staff and customers are nice.

Gale Hawthorne has been my friend with each other for years. But when our dads died we became much closer and now we are inseparable. He has three younger siblings, Rory, Vick and Posy and we all ways joke saying how they and Prim are our kids. I think a few townies actually believe that they are really our children even though Rory and Prim are only 4 years younger than us and Vick is only 6 years younger.

Rory and Prim dislike people thinking that (probably has something to do with the massive crushes they are both hiding from each other but you didn't hear that from me) but Gale and I think it is absolutely hilarious (you would too if you see some of the older women's reactions when we are in town).

When Gale and I went into High School we became friends with Thom and Darius and well it developed from there.

When I leave high school I wish to go to college in California. I know it is unrealistic but hey everyone has dreams.

Most of the people in the district think that I am going out with Gale but I'm not. I actually have a secret crush on the youngest baker's son, Peeta Mellark.
He is from the town and if Gale or Darius find out they would probably stage an immediate intervention.

Here I will explain, District Twelve is basically divided into two parts. The town and the Seam. The town is where is richer off live you know all the pre-teens and teenagers there have the latest iPhone and their parents have the fanciest cars. While the Seam is for the people who are well poorer. We live in small houses, my house was kept in the family for generations so it is one of the best houses around here. It isn't official or anything that the town is the rich part and the Seam is the poor part, there is no thick red line stating this side is where the rich live and this side is where the poor live. But apparently the Seam used to be it's own town years and years ago but now its all just District Twelve.

Anyway so that is why I've never properly spoken to Peeta. He probably doesn't even know i exist (again cliche I swear I have to stop watching them stupid romantic movies with Prim they are getting to my head). This crush hasn't just appeared overnight, trust me I am not the type of girl who likes every guy she meets. I have liked Peeta Mellark since I was 12 years old. Since he saved my life.

It had been a month and a half after my father had died. I had sold everything we owned that was valuable except for the few sentimental things but it wasn't enough.

The house of course had been inherited like I said before but there was still bills to pay, school fees to pay for and food to put of the table.

My mother had been sitting frozen for weeks and there was no sign of life whatsoever in her. She hadn't worked since the day of the accident.

We were starving, all of us. I had tried to give whatever food I could get to Prim and my mother but even that was nowhere near enough.

I had tried searching through the bins outside the bakery while it was lashing rain. I wasn't going to resort to stealing even though I knew several people who had lost their fathers who were stealing. The baker's wife soon yelled at me and I walked away. I didn't get far, I collapsed across the street under a tree.

I was conscious and positive I was going to die.

That's when Peeta came out of the bakery holding the back of his head where his mother had clearly just hit him, his mother yelling at him from inside probably didn't want to get wet, ruin her perfect blonde hair. He was carrying two loaves of burnt bread.

I had watched with blurred vision as his mother left and as soon as she did he turned to face me. As fast as lightning looked behind him to check if his mother was there, turned back and threw both loaves of bread in front of me.

Our eyes locked and he looked apologetic before he turned and walked slowly back inside. I sat in shock before standing up shakily and staggering over to the loaves of bread.

I gathered them into my arms quickly and ran home as fast as I could hoping that Peeta wouldn't change his mind and chase after me.

I will never ever forget that day or the day that followed.

Peeta had arrived at school with a black eye. I remember clearly how he told people he had got it in a wrestling accident but I didn't believe him, not many people did.
I wanted to thank him so badly but he had refused to meet my eyes so I assumed he was ashamed of what he had done and was hoping that I would not approach him.

We saw each other after school that day though I was watching him as he picked up a dandelion and his eyes caught me. But he quickly lowered his head and walked away.

Peeta and I never had an incident after that but I know that I will always owe him for what he did for me and my family.

Even if he does regret it.

Chapter 1: Monday Mornings

Katniss POV

I wake up by something jumping on me. Due to my hunting reflexes I jump up from the bed.

I hear Prim giggle and I smile at her.

"Katniss! Katniss! Come on we have to go to school! We can't be late!" Prim says excitedly.

What 13 year old girl is excited about going to school?

Something must be wrong with the child.

"All right! I am getting up! Relax little duck," I tell her getting out of bed "Why are you excited for school anyway?"

"History project they are picking the partners today"

I roll my eyes, "I wonder who you want to be paired with."

Prim glares at me, "Rory is the best in the class at History!"

"When did I say it was Rory?" She stays glaring at me, "Well Gale said that Rory wants to be paired with you as well. Now I have to get dressed so why don't you go get breakfast while I change, ok?"

"Fine." Prim says before leaving my room, slamming the door behind her and I roll my eyes.

Ugh school, great.

I get ready for the day and follow Prim downstairs.

After I got my breakfast ready I sat opposite Prim.

"So other than the fact that you may be working with Rory why else are you so interested in this project?"

"It is fascinating Katniss. We are currently learning about what Panem used to be like before District Thirteen rebelled against the Capital."

The Capital ruled Panem for years until District Thirteen rebelled against it and they won. The Capital is still there but now the government is made up of people from each district.

Gale is always talking about what could have happened if District Thirteen didn't win and how the
Capital should have received a more dire punishment.

We just tune out whenever he does this.

*bang, bang, bang*

Prim grins and runs to answer the door.

I make my way to the door carrying our bags with me.

"Katniss! It's Gale!" Prim yells

"Well who else would it be?" I ask

I hand Prim her bag but she barely notices me as she is in deep conversation with Rory.

"Hey Catnip" Gale greets as he gives me a knowing look, glancing at the two love birds.

"Hey Galey you ready for hell?"

"As ready as I'll ever be I suppose right you lot let's get going."

On the way to school (or hell you know whichever name you prefer) Vick tells me all about a new dance move he learnt over the weekend. He is obsessed with dancing. He's not bad at it either unlike myself.

"It's the coolest thing ever apparently." Gale says mockingly and I glare at him slapping his arm lightly

"Shut up you, I'm sure its great Vick, you'll have to teach me it after school.

"Leave me alone Gale! Yeah it is Kit Kat don't listen to him"

"I'm sure it is Vick, you'll have to teach me later but now we have to go to school." I smile at him and we continue walking talking about complete and utter nonsense to pass the time.

First class is Home Economics taught by Ms. Trinket.

When I walk into the class Ms. Trinket is sitting in her chair, on her phone.

Unlike the other teachers Ms. Trinket is always early she is quite passionate about punctuality and manners.

The rest of the teacher arrive the class late to delay their time with us (I have no idea why we are such delightful students)

I wish her a 'Good morning miss' as I pass her and sit in my seat which is beside my friend Madge.

Madge Undersee is my close friend that is a girl. She is the mayor's daughter and not many people wish to associate with her because of that despite her being a lovely person. That is how we became friends as she didn't have any other friends and I am not exactly an approachable person apparently people are frightened of me)and I the only person I would talk to and hang out with in middle school was Gale so we kind of stuck together.
"Good morning Katniss." Madge says brightly and I groan

"How can you be so chirpy on a Monday morning?"

"Ah I am not sure have you finished your maths assignment?"

"Yeah I finished it last week and handed it in."

"Katniss Everdeen? Finish and hand up homework before it is due? I am in shock"

"Yeah yeah yeah no need to act so surprised. I just have a lot of work this week, I needed to get it out of the way."

"Yeah especially with these Home Ec projects." Madge says groaning

I raise my eyebrows, "Home- home ec. project?"

"Ms. Trinket told us last week. We are going to be working on some big project for the next few weeks. She is choosing the partners today." She said hesitantly.

Ah that project. I vaguely remember it now.

I think we are being paired into twos and then we both have to make a three course meal or something along those lines.

Hopefully my partner will let us do something easy because I am hopeless at cooking. Of course I hope even more that I am not paired up with Cato or one of the other Careers.

The Careers are townies obviously. Popular, rich, stuck up bullies who make the lives of anybody they dislike hell.

Thankfully they have never given me much heat as I'm sure they are aware Gale and Darius would do something about it if they did.

The Careers are the popular, rich, stuck up townies. Let's just say they don't get on very well with people from the Seam but they have never given me that much trouble other than then the occasional comment when they pass me in the halls. Or the even less occasional shove into a locker.

The bell rings and Ms. Trinket stands as the last few students take their seats and she shuts the door.

"Good Morning class"

"Good Morning Ms. Trinket" We all learned after our first class to always answer her politely.

"Now as all of you know, I am choosing pairing you all up for your projects today. You are all aware of what it is about because you were all present last week and if you have forgotten what this project entails well that is your own fault and you should be paying more attention during my class. It is only polite students. Manners cost nothing ladies and gentlemen it is proper etiquette something you all need to learn and yes Mr. Role I am talking to you."

Everyone turns around to look at Marvel Role who is sitting in the back row asleep.

I roll my eyes, Marvel Role is coincidently one of the Careers but he is too stupid to do much. His friend, (or girlfriend or friend with benefits, I have no idea what they are to be honest and I don't really care) Glimmer who is sitting beside him shoves his arm and he nearly falls off his chair.
"Ms. Skyer we do not shove people in this classroom, if I catch you doing that again I shall be giving you a note. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes Ms. Trinket" Glimmer said in a sickly sweet voice.

"Good and Mr. Role please try to sleep at home instead of in my classroom I will speak to you after class about this."

Marvel grunts and folds his arms at her not saying a word.

"Right now let's choose your partners! And may the odds be ever in your favour children."

She says that a lot, 'May the odds be ever in your favour' so does the principal, it is quite annoying but we are all used to it now.

Ms. Trinket has two bowls on her desk. One is labelled 'Boys' the other is labelled 'Girls'

Why she thought it would be a good idea for girls and boys to be partnered together I have no idea.

"Now ladies first" she says grinning I place my hand under my chin and will myself to not fall asleep.

"Glimmer Skyer is partnered with Cato Hunter" I look back to see Glimmer looking ecstatic and Cato looking like he wants to die. Ah well what a shame.

"Gloss and Cashmere Kale" They are twins and they are also careers, you will never see one without the other.

"Enobaria Jacobs and Brutes Brakes" Ok so all the careers are being chosen first? Enobaria and Brutes smirk at each other showing off Enobaria's crazy fang teeth. She says she was born with them but it's clear she got work done on them. She thinks they make her look more dangerous personally I think they make her look just plain weird and freaky.

"Madge Undersee and Finnick Odair" I look over at Madge and see the colour drain from her face. Finnick Odair isn't a bad guy but there is no way he will do any work on this project.

"Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark and Leevy Forest and Brian Greens, that is the last of it class. You will all have to work outside of class as well as inside it for this project. I want your very best work now you can sit with your partner and discuss the project for the duration of the class. Do not be loud."

Peeta Mellark

I am paired with...Peeta Mellark.

Peeta Mellark

As in as in Peeta...Mellark.

As in the boy I have had a crush on for years.

As in the boy who saved my life and has avoided me ever since.

Why him? Why do I have to be paired with him of all people?

Why not Madge? Or Leevy? Or even Finnick Odair!
Nope I get Peeta Mellark.

Well this is not going to end well.

I cast my eyes over my shoulder to look at him to find him already looking at me. I turn away quickly, my cheeks bright red.

Ten minutes into the first class on a Monday morning and I'm already filled with horror and dread.

This should be fun.
My name is Peeta Mellark.

I am 17 years old.

I live in the centre of District Twelve which is a small town in the state of Panem.

I am a baker well you know my father owns a bakery and I work there.

My father has told me that he wants me to take over the business when he retires (no pressure there!)

I have two older brothers, Bran and Rye.

Bran is the eldest and he is going out with his long-term girlfriend, Gwen.

Rye is in college but he doesn't really care about it or anything really. I just try to ignore him most of the time.

I am a senior in high school. I hope to go to college and study business and hopefully art on the side.

I love to paint and I am pretty good at it.

Decorating the cakes, cupcakes, biscuits and things at the bakery has been helpful.

I get paid for it so all the teasing I get for it isn't that bad if I focus on the money bit.

Finnick thinks that it is the 'girlist' thing he can think of but I know he just says it to annoy me.

Finnick Odair is my best friend. He has been since he moved here from District Four when we were 12.

He is funny, a great friend and a complete and utter flirt probably due to his true District Four brown hair and sea green eyes (well that is what I overhear the girls in our school saying anyway its not like I stare into his eyes or anything).

We are also best friends with Thresh and Delly. I hadn't known Thresh until high school but I have known Delly all my life.

My parents don't get along.

My mother is well...a bitch excuse the language but she is.

My father is kind but he can't stand up for himself at all so my mother walks all over him.

Bran, Rye and I all know that it is only a matter of time before one of them files for a divorce.

I'm pretty sure the only reason my dad hasn't filed for one all ready is because they are expensive and mother would take all he has including the business even though she doesn't care about it anyway.
We live in town not in the Seam.

My mother says that people who live there are poor, worthless people who will never amount to anything.

That is one reason why I have never told her that I am in love with a girl from the Seam.

Her name is Katniss Everdeen.

She is amazing.

She has long brown hair, which she all ways ties into a braid, and grey eyes.

She has had a rough life. Her father died when she was 12 years old and from what I know her mother went into depression straight after.

So Katniss had to take care of her little sister, Primrose (Prim) on her own.

I have never properly talked to Katniss and I presume she isn't aware of my existence.

The only time she would have noticed me was when I gave her two loaves of bread a month after her father's death.

She had looked starved and on the brink of death, I had to help her. I have been in love with her since I was five years old. I know there was more I could have done and I should have tried to help her more. But at the time I had no idea what to do. So when I say her out the window, frail and broken I purposely burnt the outside of the bread so the inside was still good for eating. I knew my mother would be furious with me and make me go outside with it and so I did but I gave it to Katniss instead of the pigs

I know I should have gone over to her and given it to her but like the stupid boy I was I threw it to her in the rain. I was scared my mother would catch me and that is why I didn't go over to her.

Anyway that is the only time we ever acknowledged each other and the following day as well. I just hope that the bread helped her and her sister.

I'm sure she has forgotten it now and I don't blame her it was years ago.

I haven't exactly been open and welcoming towards her anyway, especially after that day. We had caught eyes the day after I gave her the bread but I had a bruise on my face from my mother which I was so ashamed by and I could not bare her to see it and think of me weak so I quickly looked down and walked away.

She has Hawthorne anyway.

Gale Hawthorne.

He has never done anything to me. Well not that he knows of.

We have never even spoken apart from when he comes in for trade.

He is Katniss' best friend or her boyfriend.

Everybody says that they are together. I mean she does have other guy friends and its not like they ever kiss or anything (although many people say they have seen them kissing by the slag heap) but she just acts differently around Gale.
I probably sound like a stalker but I'm not everyone can see it. District Twelve is like I said a small town. Everyone knows everybody else or knows of them.

Hopefully some day I will be able to talk to Katniss. Problem is I have been saying that for 12 years. Maybe it will happen soon, I'm not getting my hopes up though.

Chapter 2: Finnick's 'Brilliant' Plan

Peeta POV

I wake up on a dreary September Monday morning to my older brother shaking me awake.

"Peeta! Come on! Get up!" Rye yells at me

"What the hell do you want Rye?" I ask

"I need a ride to college and you have to take me."

I roll my eyes, Rye had a car then he crashed it. Then Dad paid to have it fixed but then Rye crashed it again.

Yeah he's a terrible driver. His friends (I can't believe he actually has any of them) are meant to give him rides to college (I don't even know how he managed to get in there in the first place) but it's usually me that gives him a ride when I go to school even though the college is on the outskirts of town and is a good fifteen minutes from my school.

"Rye no, I have to get ready and go to school if you leave now you can walk there it's not far away from here"

"Come on Peety it is on your way to school."

"Rye it is fifteen minutes from my school and I can't be late for Ms. Trinket's class or she will kill me."

"Pleeeeeeease Peeta! Come on, help your favourite brother out." He begs attempting to give me puppy dog eyes. He fails miserably

"You are not my favourite brother. I don't have a favourite brother but if I did it definitely would not be you. Now get out of my room!"

"That hurts little bro...right here." He exclaims pointing dramatically to his heart. I shake my head and push him out of my room shutting the door.

I really want to punch him but I am too tired.

"You'll pay for this Peeta!"

"I have to live with you don't I? That's punishment in itself!"

I hear him storm off and sigh.

This is going to be a long day.
"Peeta! I have decided what I am going to do with my life!"

I have just arrived at school and opened my locker when Finnick decides to yell at me from half way down the hall causing several students to turn and look at us.

Finnick changes his mind all the time about what he wants to do with his life. Everyone knows he will eventually do something involved with water.

District Four is by the sea so Finnick grew up on the beach and he is an excellent swimmer. Finnick is very firm on stating that pool water is far different from sea water I have never been to the seaside so I just take his word for it.

"That is great, Finnick so what is your future plan then?" Finnick has finally reached me and takes a deep breath,

"Wait for it... I am going to be... a detective!" I raise my eyebrows at him and I am going to say something but Thresh get there first.

"A detective? You sure about that Finnick?" Thresh has a good point, Finnick isn't exactly great at being sneaky and he is rubbish at lying and as for finding stuff well he loses his phone ever other day that'll tell you.

Finnick grins and points his finger at us, "Ah I knew you too wouldn't support me. Because I use my superb detective skills on you two all the time."

Thresh and I glance at each other attempting to hide our smirks.

"Go on then" I say "Tell us why you think you'd make a good detective."

"Well you know me Peet I can always tell when someone is lying and I'm great at reading people like you know what they are thinking and stuff. Sure remember when I first moved here! I was here two minutes and could all ready tell by the way you looked at Everdeen that you were mad about her!"

I raise my eyebrow, he may have known that but I wasn't exactly subtle about it back then.

Then again I'm not really subtle about it now. I try to be...doesn't work

Finnick came up to me the day after we first met and asked if I had a liked 'that girl who wears her hair in a braid'. Being the nervous, love-sick 12 year old I was I had blushed and nodded. Finnick then swore to me that he would help me try and go out with her. If only that day would hurry up.

"AND! I knew all the times Thresh forgot his homework or didn't do it. Then when Peeta told us that he had a surprise I said 'I bet it is a car' and I was right." Well that wasn't too hard of a guess I mean I had been twirling my car keys around my fingers right in front of him.

So I think I should put my skills to the test and I know of the perfect way to do so." I frown at Finnick's out of control smile. This can't be good.

"Well what is it?" Thresh asks, Finnick's grin grew impossibly wider and says to me slyly.

"You are going to talk to Katniss Everdeen"

I stare at him in shock, "How the hell is me talking to Katniss Everdeen going to prove that you would be a good detective?"
Finnick just smirks, "It just will! It's about time you talk to her anyway now come along lover boy we have a Home Ec. class to attend."

It was a bad idea. No scratch that it was a terrible idea. I have never spoken to her. Not once, well yeah I helped her that one time but I never tried to talk to her after that. I never even talked to her then. Not even a 'I'm sorry for you loss' or 'If there is anything I can do to help' nope neither of them.

Finnick always comes up with the worst ideas. There is no way I am going along with it. Absolutely no way.

I am sitting in the Home Economics room, doodling and waiting for the class to start. Ms Trinket is here as usual, she is used to see me come early to classes by now.

I do like Home Ec. I mean I have had plenty of practice over the years at baking so I'm good at that. But there are some right idiots in my class unfortunately I got almost all of the Careers in my class.

The Careers and I aren't enemies, thankfully, but we don't talk much. The guys in it are jerks and all the girls care about is their appearance.

Back to Finnick's plan anyway. I flat out told him on the way here that there is no way I am doing it. I am not bringing Katniss into his game of Sherlock Holmes.

I will talk to her when I am ready. I have the whole year left. I have plenty of time to talk to her.

Well maybe not.. ugh damn Finnick for getting these thoughts in my head.

I hear the door open and Katniss walks in. She is so beautiful.

Her bright silver eyes are miles away and her brown hair is tied in her signature side braid. She is wearing a simple green t-shirt and black jeans with her father's old jacket and boots.

She scans the room and her eyes land on Ms. Trinket who she nods to and says, "Good morning Miss" and I can feel my lips tug up into a smile and it wasn't even me she was talking to.

Right...okay I think Finnick may be right, I am turning into a 12 year old girl. I shake my head and stare at my drawings.

Soon after Katniss arrives the bell rings. I remember that Ms. Trinket is picking our partners for the project today. I hope to get Katniss or if not her maybe her friend Madge she's nice though I don't talk to her that often. I just don't want to get one of the Careers.

"Good Morning class"

"Good Morning Ms. Trinket" Miss Trinkel is very strict about manners and ever since the first class a few years back we all know to answer her politely.

"Now as all of you know, I am choosing pairing you all up for your projects today. You are all aware of what it is about because you were all present last week and if you have forgotten what this project entails well that is your own fault and you should be paying more attention during my class. It
is only polite students. Manners cost nothing ladies and gentlemen it is proper etiquette something you all need to learn and yes Mr. Role I am talking to you."

Every one turns to look at Marvel who has fallen asleep as usual. We all just roll our eyes and Glimmer shoves him and he nearly falls off his chair.

"Ms. Skyer we do not shove people in this classroom, if I catch you doing that again I shall be giving you a note. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes Ms. Trinket" Glimmer says

"Good and Mr. Role please try to sleep at home instead of in my classroom I will speak to you after class about this.

Right now let's choose your partners! And may the odds be ever in your favour children."

Yeah for some reason her and the principal say that a lot. Finnick always makes fun of it.

She has put two bowls on her desk. One of the bowls has all the boys names in it and the other has all the girls names in it.

I don't think it is a good idea to pair the guys with the girls but sure Ms. Trinket is not a person I would describe as 'sane'.

"Glimmer Skyer is partnered with Cato Hunter"

"Gloss and Cashmere Kale"

"Enobaria Jacobs and Brutes Brakes"

"Madge Undersee and Finnick Odair"

"Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark and Leevy Forest and Brian Greens, that is the last of it class. You will all have to work outside of class as well as inside it for this project. I want your very best work now you can sit with your partner and discuss the project for the duration of the class. Do not be loud."

I sit, staring into space for a moment.

I am partnered with Katniss.

I am going to be working with Katniss Everdeen for several weeks.

I am going to be working with her inside and outside school.

Katniss, the girl I have admired from afar for years that I have never spoken to.

This can only end one of three ways:

1. During and after this project she will hate me and never speak to me after this project (and barely speak to me during it)

2. She will fall in love with me slowly but surely

or 3. We will get along well and then we will stay as friends because I would never be able to tell her how I feel because I wouldn't want to jeopardise our friendship yada yada yada.
I don't realise I am staring at her until she turns and her eyes catch mine I quickly look away. Great now she thinks I am a creep who starts at her.

I turn to look at Finnick who is grinning brightly at me and he gives me a big thumbs up.

Oh yeah that plan of his no wonder he seems so ecstatic. I look over at Katniss again and seconds after she turns and our eyes meet again.

Oh dear god yes I think the first outcome of what could happen over the next few weeks is definitely the most possible.

I see Marvel stand up from the corner of my eye and realise he was given no partner.

Ah well I have more important things to be thinking about like what the hell am I going to say to Katniss?
Conversations

Katniss POV

Several people raise their hands to request a change of partner but Ms. Trinket soon shushes them, telling them she is not switching partners for anyone.

I hesitantly glance back to look at my partner again.

Peeta has his eyes trained on the desk and is rubbing circles on the sides of his head like he has a headache.

Though he looks more in deep thought than in pain.

He probably is just tired or is dreading spending time with me even though we have never properly spoken before.

But like I said before, people seem to find me difficult to talk too. I realise that I have been staring at him and turn back to face to front of the room.

As soon as I do that I feel a tap on my shoulder.

I turn around again to see Finnick Odair, Madge's partner and Peeta's best friend. Well I wish Madge all the luck in the world she is going to need it working with Finnick Odair but then again she could have been paired with a Career.

"Hiya Katniss, do you mind if I sit here? Its just there's no other seat beside Madge and Blondie has decided that my seat is now hers so she can flirt with Hunter." Finnick asks kindly which surprises me greatly. I nod and pack my things.

"Yeah sure, sorry I am supposed to move anyway."

"See ya Katniss" they say as Finnick takes my seat and begins flirting with Madge. Finnick Odair doesn't talk to girls he just flirts with them even though he is going out with Annie Cresta.

I walk over to Peeta's table and stand in front of him.

He is still staring down at his desk and hasn't noticed me.

"Erm hi" I say it comes out more of a question than a greeting though.

Peeta looks up, startled at my voice. I stand there awkwardly in front of him while he looks at me like a deer in headlights.

"Hi Katniss." His voice, god his voice and the way he- oh for gods sake Katniss grow up stop acting like some 13 year old townie.

So my name sounds amazing from him so what?

"Miss said that we have to work on the project for the rest of class and...we are partners." I don't want to assume that he was paying attention while Ms. Trinket was speaking wonder if he was paying attention when Ms. Trinket said that so I add in the part about us being partners just in case he
didn't hear it.

"Right yes of course we are! Sorry I must have spaced out after she said who the partners were- not because I was upset or didn't want you to be my partner just cause...well I don't know. Well em s-sit down you know if you want to like eh yeah." I smile he is quite cute when he stutters.

This is the first time I have ever heard him stutter. Peeta Mellark is known for his way with words and perfect speech but then again not everything people say is true.

"Thanks you" I say as I take a seat beside him. I love the tables and chairs in the Home Ec. rooms because the tables are high so we get to sit on the high chairs and I am not exactly the tallest person...at all.

Peeta smiles and I say nervously, "So just so you know I can't really bake or cook."

He laughs and asks, "Well have you ever tried?"

"Well I cook for my sister and I and my friends siblings but I'm not great at it but then again they haven't been poisoned or killed by the food I made yet so I mustn't be completely terrible."

He laughs and says, "It will be fine, If need be I will tell you some of my family's amazing cooking and baking secrets but only as a last resort." I laugh as well

"What can you cook?" he asks me

"Well em I can cook stews and whatever I get from the woods I can turn into edible food. Oh and I must say I am an expert at cooking toast." I say fake- impressively

"Wow you can cook toast? That is incredible! I don't know anybody who can make that, it must be extremely difficult" He says sarcastically

"Oh its not a big deal" I say grinning back at him, "I suppose I could tell you, I may even give you my family's secret recipe."

He laughs, "Why thank you Ms. Everdeen it would be an honour to learn from the master herself"

"You are very welcome Mr. Mellark."

There is silence between us for a few minutes before he says,

"So would you like to come over to my house one of the days to work on the project?" He asks nervously,

"Yeah sure, that sounds good. What day is suitable for you?"

"Well would today be all right? after school?" He asks, concerned, "It's just I don't have to work in the bakery today but I do tomorrow and I am not sure about the rest of the week. I can all ways work something out if you have plans for this evening it is no problem"

I smile reassuringly at him, "Yeah that sounds good."

"Great, I will em meet you by your locker after school then." Just as he says that the bell rings and we grab our bags and make our way to the door when I turn around and ask him,

"Hey Mellark?"
He looks up at me and nods, "Yeah Katniss?"

"How do you know where my locker is?" I ask inquisitively

His eyes widen, cheeks flush dark pink and he stutters out,

"I-erm well I just em, it's not like I-" I cut him off laughing and shaking my head

"See you later Peeta!"

I hear him shout, "Bye Katniss" as I head out the door.

Well first class of the day wasn't too bad all things considered.

Maybe working with Peeta Mellark mightn't be such a bad thing after all.

I check my time-table to see what I have next.

-9:40 History

I mentally shrug. I don't like History that much but thankfully Thom is in my class so we just talk most of the time.

Our teacher doesn't really care what we do once we pass our tests.

When I get to the classroom the teacher isn't there so everybody is sitting on desks and talking with one another.

Thom is talking to Delly Cartwright when I arrive.

Its not that I dont like Delly Cartwright because I do she is a lovely person, friendly and nice but she is all ways happy.

She is Peeta's best friend since primary school and I do admit I used to be a bit (I do stress the word bit) jealous of her when I was younger but I've gotten over it now.

It is clear that they are like brother and sister just like Gale and I.

Thom notices my appearance in the room and grins.

"Kat-star!"

Another weird nickname. My friends apparently think the name 'Katniss' is too plain as they all try to jazz it up.

Thom says I am going to be a star some day so he mixed it into my name.

I smile, "Hey Thom!" I hug him and we both sit down.

I smile at Delly.

I never used to smile when I was younger. Especially after my father died.

But when I became friends with Thom and Darius and Madge and grew closer to Gale, I opened up more and now I seem to smile a lot more.

I never noticed at first until Gale pointed it out to me
"Good morning Delly" I say brightly...well as brightly as anyone (except maybe Madge Undersee) can on a Monday morning.

"Good morning Katniss, you look really well today" Delly says smiling at me.

Delly gives a lot of compliments to people but unfortunately I think people think she doesn't mean them and is being fake when she gives them.

"Thank you Delly so do you." Delly blushes and nods in thanks before sitting next to another girl from town named Annie Cresta.

She is Finnick Odair's girlfriend I think. I'm not sure though you can never tell with him.

"So Thom I came up with a new song" His eyes light up, "Great when can we hear it?"

"It'll have to be tonight at the Hob. I have to work on a project for Home Ec after school."

"A project in Home Ec.? Sounds like great fun who is your partner?" Thom asks sarcastically.

"Peeta Mellark."

Thom's eyebrows shoot up to his hairline.

Teachers rarely make people from the town and Seam work together because it never really ends well but Ms. Trinket thrives on being different (Once she dyed her hair gold. I am not joking. Gold. She would match her clothes with her hair and everything. It was horrible)

"Mellark? As in the baker's son?"

"No! As in the coal miner's son! Of course the baker's son Thom! Have you been living under a rock or something?"

"No" Thom says smirking and I smack him on the arm.

"Hey! I didn't say anything!" Thom says grinning.

Thom has caught me looking at Peeta once or twice (no matter what he says I was not staring. I was...admiring) and so now he is positive that I like him.

I have neither confirmed nor denied this.

"So you talked to him then?" He says excitedly.

Despite him being annoying as hell about this sometimes I am grateful to have him to talk about this with. I mean I love Gale and Darius but I could never talk to them about relationships and crushes and stuff. They are way too over-protective.

"Yeah I have talked to him. He is not that bad you know...for a townie that is. I am going over to his house after school to work on the project."

Thom's face grows grave for a split second before he plasters a fake smile onto his face.

"What?" I ask worriedly, "Thom what is it?"

"Its nothing really its just...well you know how is mother can be and-"
"Yeah I do know and I promise that I will stay clear of her as much as possible. She will most likely be working in the bakery this evening anyway. Thom I will be fine."

Thom nods and smiles at me and that's when our teacher comes in telling the class the quiet down and return to our seats.
Finally! After what seems like forever the bell signalling that it is finally lunch rings loud throughout
the hallways and everybody quickly packs away their belongings and rushes out the door.

Gale is outside the door of my classroom when I walk out. We haven't been back to school a month
yet and he all ready knows my timetable off by heart.

"Hey Galey what are you doing here?" I ask him.

I am not objecting to speaking with him but he rarely ever meets me straight after class we usually
meet up in the cafeteria or outside.

"Nice to see you too Catnip, I'm just here to say that I have to go to talk to Mr. Crane at lunch so I
was going to ask if you want to come round after school, learn Vick's new dance move." Gale says,
winking at me as we walk to my locker.

I grow nervous, I have a fair idea how Gale will react when I inform him who my project partner is
and it isn't a good reaction.

"Oh sorry Gale I can't come over please apologize to Vick for me. I have to do this project for Home
Ec. and I need to work on it after school today with my partner."

"Oh right, ok." Gale is never very interested in anything to do with school stuff and Home
Economics isn't exactly Gale's thing.

"So..." Dammit "Who is your partner?"

"A person, nobody important." I say quickly.

Yes ok I'm being stupid you don't need to tell me!

Gale laughs, "Well I didn't think you were partnered with an alien Catnip but then again in Ms.
Trinket's class anything is possible. So come on who is it? Its not one of the Careers is it?"

I silently pray that Gale won't over-react,

"My partner is Peeta Mellark."

Gale freezes and stops in his tracks.

I stop walking and turn to look at him.

"Gale?" I ask gently, "You all right?"

Gale remains silent and continues staring at me, his face expressionless.

"So you are grand with me working with him then? Great! well I am going to go to my locker now!
You have an enjoyable conversation with Mr. Crane and I shall speak to you soon. Bye!"
I sprint to my locker, opening it and getting my books until suddenly my locker is slammed shut.

I jump in shock and unsurprisingly Gale is standing over me, his hand placed on my locker door and he is looking down at me with hardened eyes.

I sigh and attempt to think of something to say

"Look...Gale it is no big deal. It is a dumb school project that will be over with in a few weeks."

"Yeah a project that you will be working on with Peeta Mellark. Not just any old townie, a Mellark!" Gale yells at me, a group of freshmen stare at us but Gale's glare quickly has them running for their lives.

"Gale please calm down. Peeta isn't that bad! I can handle him! We both know that I have dealt with far worse than Peeta Mellark."

I zip up my bag and walk away from him as fast as I can but I soon hear the sound of him follow me.

It doesn't take long until he is right behind me.

"Look Catnip, I'm sorry." I hear him say.

I turn around to face him.

Gale doesn't apologize often so I hear him out.

I fold my arms and look up at him (he is too damn tall)

"I know I went a little overboard, I know you can take care of yourself. Its just...I worry about you, you know so just please be careful."

"Gale relax please! Its not like I am going on a date with him or anything! I am just doing a project with him where we cook which I am rubbish at. Just please tell Prim I won't be home until dinner time and apologize to Vick for me."

"Yeah course I will. Anyway I think everyone knows that you're a terrible cook-hey!"

His outburst may or may have been a result of me shoving him...he deserved it!

"Oh shut up Gale it's not like you can cook." He just shrugs.

"So...you and Mellark are going to be working together? That should be interesting. Just don't get too close to him yeah? You know full well what his brothers are like."

Peeta's elder brothers are known for being massive players and jerks. I think the eldest has calmed down now but the other one is still a player and a jerk.

"Oh come off it Gale, you're no better than them, you're never away from the Slag Heap!"

The Slag Heap is basically where guys take girls to make out with him.

Darius nicknamed him 'The King of the Slag Heap after he went there with some blonde, popular senior in freshman year.

I usually try to ignore the fact that my best friend takes random girls there as often as he does.
"Oi! You know I stopped doing that summer before last year!" Ok yeah that is true.

Eventually Gale and I both calm down and as soon as he leaves, I make my way to the cafeteria to eat with Thom, Darius and Madge.

Peeta Mellark is leaning against my locker when I reach it at the end of the school day.

He looks up and his eyes catch mine and he smiles lazily as I walk over to him.

"Hi" he says when I reach him.

He slides over to the locker beside mine so I can open my locker.

"Hi well aren't you punctual, are you ready?" I ask him while sorting out my books.

"Aren't I just? Yeah I am ready. Do you have much homework?"

"Yeah of course though it's mostly study what about you?"

"Same"

"Thanks for your help with the project" I say as I close my locker "I never would have survived on my own, would have burnt the house down"

"What do you mean?" Peeta asks confused, "We are partners right? I mean we are supposed to work together.

I guess he wouldn't understand being a popular townie and all.

Whenever I got partnered with a townie for a project they made me do all the work.

"Well most of the partners I've had usually just made me do all the work."

"Well I'm not like that. I promise to do my fair share." Peeta says sincerely

"Thank you."

"Don't mention it. I kind of want a good grade anyway and if anything you told me about your cooking is true…"

I want to elbow him like I did to Gale this morning...and Thom but I can't bring myself to do it so I just shove him and tell him to shut up instead.

By now we have exited the school building and are making way towards the bakery.

I remember my conversation with Thom, and decide to ask Peeta before we get there about his mother.

"So will your family be home?" That sounded really wrong didn't it? Dammit ok floor swallow me up now please.

"Shouldn't think so, my dad will be working in the bakery, my mother has gone to District Six for a couple of days. She should have left around lunch I think, my brother Rye will still be at college and my eldest brother Bran might come around but he hasn't made any plans of coming over known to
us.

The way he says 'mother' makes me think that him and his mum don't get on well.

I don't think anybody does get on well with Mrs. Mellark she is just pure evil...you didn't hear that from me though.

I smile at him and he grins back.

"So tell me a bit about yourself Katniss." He says, turning to walk backwards in front of me (I am sure he is going to trip but I bite my lip to keep from saying anything)

I laugh "Well Peeta just how much do you know about me?" I ask half jokingly and half curiously.

"Well I know that your name is Katniss Everdeen.

You are the eldest in your family and you have one younger sister called Primrose or more commonly known as her nickname Prim.

You are 17 years of age and your birthday is May 8th.

Your best friends are Gale Hawthorne, Thom Carlson, Madge Undersee and Darius Homesway.

You love the woods and used to go there with your father who you were very close to.

You are excellent at archery.

You don't like cooking and aren't exactly great at it and you are an amazing singer."

I look at him in shock how does he know so much about me?

Peeta looks at me nervously like he has only just realised what he has said.

Peeta turns around quickly, walking alongside me in silence again.

Peeta looks as if he is about to apologize but I intervene.

"Well if I didn't know better I would say you stalked me" I say slightly warily

"So your name is Peeta Mellark. You have two older brothers, Rye and Brma.

Your birthday is December...16th? And you are 17 years old.

Your best friends are Finnick Odair, Delly Cartright and Thresh Simmons.

You are an excellent artist and exceed in painting especially.

You wish to take over the bakery when you finish college.

Like me you aren't close with your mother and you are often told that you are like your father."

Peeta seems as surprised as I was and I look down at my feet nervously.

By now we have reached Mellark's bakery.

Peeta hold the door open for me and I walk inside grinning at him,
"Why thank you Mr. Mellark." I say in a posh voice

"You are very welcome Ms. Everdeen." I take a quick glance behind me and am forced to hide a smile when I see him blushing.

Mr. Mellark is behind the counter when we enter the bakery. He seems to be in deep concentration sorting through some books.

He looks up though when the bell above the door chimes once it opens.

"Peeta! Hello, listen I know that today is your day off but do you think you could-? oh hello Katniss sorry I didn't see you there" Mr. Mellark says nervously

In my honest opinion Mr. Mellark seems exhausted.

I do hope he is all right.

I briefly wonder if this has anything to do with his wife leaving for a few days.

But I quickly cast that thought aside as it is none of my business.

"Hi Mr. Mellark" I say, waving shyly

"Dad, Katniss and I were going to work on a project for school upstairs but I mean if you need me to work-" Peeta is clearly conflicted.

I can tell he wants to help is dad who to be honest looks as if he hasn't slept in days.

But Peeta's dad is quick to intervene, "No of course not, I can do all this later. You two go on upstairs, Katniss you can stay as long as you want its lovely to see you." Mr. Mellark says closing his book and smiling at me.

"Thank you" I say smiling back at him

Peeta nods to his father and then leads me through one of the doors behind the counter and we walk upstairs into his sitting room.

His house is not large like Madge's house but it is a lot bigger and nicer than mine.

Peeta and his father unlike most townies don't seem to care about money or status.

But it is no secret that the Mellarks have more money than I could ever dream of having.

We sit down on the couch and Peeta takes out a sheet of paper from his bag to write plans on.

"So how about we do you simple food? Like for starters we do something simple and traditional. For main course we can cook chicken curry or something and then well desert will be my specialty of course" Peeta says grinning at me "So we can make anything really for that or just take something from the shop. Does that sound ok?"

I nod, "Yeah that sounds great. So lets come up with a few options of what we can make for each course and then afterwards we can narrow it down to one or two."

"Yeah perfect."
I leave Peeta's house at six o clock.

On my way out I wave goodbye to Mr. Mellark who grins brightly at me when he says goodbye but I can still see the tiredness in his eyes.

I think about everything that happened today on my way home and when I reach my house I see Prim outside feeding Lady.

Lady is our goat.

Yes. We have a goat.

As if you didn’t think our family was odd enough all ready.

She is Prim's...well pet I suppose as well as Buttercup

Buttercup is Prim's old cat.

Buttercup and I do not get along well.

At all.

Anyway back to Lady. I found her a few years ago on Prim's birthday so I brought her home and gave her to Prim as a birthday present.

Unlike Buttercup, Lady does help us out as we use the cheese for trade.

So I don't complain about her...that much.

I shut the gate, Prim looks up hearing the sound and she runs towards me.

"Katniss! Hi! How was your day?" Prim asks excitedly as she hugs me.

I smile, somehow Prim can always make me smile.

I don't know a lot of people who can say that about their siblings.

"Hi Little Duck. My day was good thanks and yours?"

"My day was great!" She says grinning

"That's good, look I am sorry that I couldn't walk you home with Gale today but I had to work on a project for school."

Prim grins wickedly when I say this. Oh no…

"Yes I know. Gale told me that you were paired with Peeta for a Home Economics project."

Prim seems really really excited about this.

Oh god.

"Since when do you know the baker's son?" I ask her.

We don't know many people from the town expect for Made and a few of Prim's friends.

Prim looks like a townie (our mum is from town and Prim looks exactly like her) so she doesn't have
as big a problem making friends with them.

Prim sighs in despair at me while I just raise my eyebrows in confusion.

"God Katniss do you ever pay attention? I see him all the time when we are in town! He is ALL WAYS staring at you when you aren't looking. And you do the same thing when Peeta isn't looking. I don't know how you two don't notice it. It's ridiculous. I am surprised that nobody else has realised that you two are obsessed with each other. Its about time you two finally talk. I was beginning to think he would never work up the courage to talk to you because lets face it you wouldn't have done it."

I refuse to let her see that I'm offended by her statement

"And plus I see him whenever we go into the bakery. Or when you or Gale send me there. He isn't bad looking at all-"

"Prim! Come on get inside" I push her inside as I look around making sure nobody heard her rant and I follow her shutting the door after me.

"Prim! Number One: Peeta Mellark does not stare at me. Number Two: I do NOT stare at Peeta Mellark. Number Three: We are not obsessed with each other as you put it. Number Four: Looks aren't everything Little Duck."

Prim gives me a long bored look.

"Katniss." She says seriously, folding her arms

"I see what Peeta is like when we enter the bakery. His face all ways lights up when he sees you and he can never take his eyes off of you. He definitely has a crush on you. I am sure of it. I doubt he knows you like him back though." Prim says, frowning

Well I never realised that my younger sister was so observant but then again I could just be really obvious.

"Sure Little Duck. Whatever you say. Now how about we get some dinner?"

Prim gives me a knowing look before rolling her eyes and walking ahead of me into the kitchen.

As I make our dinner I try and shake off what Prim said about Peeta and I but I can't.

I take a deep breath and attempt to focus on cooking. Trying to ignore Prim's voice in my head telling me over and over again that Peeta Mellark likes me.

Which he doesn't

Well at least I am pretty sure he doesn't.
"Everdeen! Its about time! You are late!" I roll my eyes and drop my over the shoulder bag and coat in the staff closet and shut the door.

"Actually Abernathy, I am early."

Haymitch Abernathy takes a gulp from his bottle of lager and glares at me before he yells over his shoulder,

"Sae! Sweetheart's here and she's givin' me lip again would ya do somethin' 'bout it!"

I frown, grab my apron and am tying it around my waist when Sae comes out from the kitchens.

"Haymitch Abernathy! You will give the poor girl a break! We both know that without her we would be out of business years ago! Now be quiet or I shall order Ripper to stop you supply of alcohol for a month!"

Sae yells, pointing her finger at Haymitch who slumps and mumbles an apology before walking away, sulking.

Sae turns to me, smiling, "Hello Katniss. Your early! Are you and the guys still on for playing tonight?"

I nod and smile back at her.

I have always felt close to Sae.

She has all ways been more of a mum to me than my own mother ever has been.

"Yeah we wrote this one years ago. It isn't our best but eh we decided to play it for the fun of it. The guys will be coming in later but I had already dropped Prim and Gale's so I thought I might as well come here. Is that all right?"

"Of course it is dear! Cray left a little while ago so you came just in time. Would you clean those tables over there by the windows for me please?"

"Yeah of course no problem Sae."

I quickly clean the tables and am soon taking orders and chatting to the regulars.

It is busy today then again the Hob is busy every day.

The Hob is the main place to eat in the Seam. It is quite handy as it is in the centre of the Seam and is easy to find.
"Hey Katniss" I look up and smile

"Oh hi Leevy!" I say standing up. Leevy is a girl from my year at school and she started working in the Hob last year.

We get along well as we usually have the same shifts so we talk often.

"So how was your day Katniss?" Leevy asks as she opens the staff closet and grabs her apron

"Ah it was ok, Tuesdays are rather boring for me...well every school day is usually" I say truthfully and Leevy laughs, "How about you?"

"Ah it was all right. I didn't fall asleep in geography so I am extremely proud of that." Leevy says grinning as she ties her apron and I laugh.

"Hey at least you don't have Ms. Trinket for anything." I tell her as I finish up cleaning the bar.

"You have her again this year? God, what for?" She looks at me with pity.

"Home Economics, though most of the it is more like, 'Manners 101' but I think that having her for senior year us just cruel. I don't know how none of us have shouted at her 'Nobody cares!' over the past few years." I sigh

"Yeah well she is nothing compared to Principal Snow. I have no idea how that man was aloud to become a teacher, let alone a principal he is so cruel." Leevy says wrinkling her nose in disgust.

"I know, sure remember the first day of freshman year? He went on a big, long, ridiculous rant about drugs, murder, rape and how it is extremely likely that all of us are going to be murdered before we turn twenty! That man has no right teaching in a school. He made poor Annie Cresta burst into tears and run from the room. Finnick Odair looked ready to murder Snow himself." I remind her

That was the angriest I have ever seen Finnick Odair been, I remember how furious he was after Annie ran from the room. He stood, pointed his finger at Snow and...well...words were said...on both parts. Finnick received detention for the semester but he didn't care and ran out after Annie. Coming to think of it I think that was when they started dating. But then again I'm not an expert on Finnick Odair's love-life.

"Oh God yeah, poor Annie, I still can't believe what Snow said to Finnick. I mean he is the adult, Finnick was saying choice words to him but he shouldn't have reciprocated. Anyway are you and the guys playing here tonight then?"

"Yeah we are. We wrote this one years ago though. So if it is a bit childish blame Darius, he begged us to play it. He has wanted to for years."

Leevy laughs, "I am sure it will be great, what was the origin of this song?"

"Thom and I had to write an essay about what the world would be like in 3000 years time for History class."

"Sounds interesting."

I laugh, "Well we shall see what you think after you hear it."

Not long after that, Darius arrives, twirling his drumsticks in the air as he all ways does.

I asked him one why he does it and he wiggled his eyebrows at me and said, "It starts conversation
with the ladies Katstar"

So I knew I was right, he was doing it to get attention.

Don't get me wrong Darius is a great guy he just flirts and jokes around 97% of the time.

"Hey good lookin'" Darius says winking at me as he sits on a stool in front of me.

"The others are on their way and requested that I tell you, 'We are starving, can you please make us and the amazing Darius some dinner.'"

I raise my eyebrows at him, "Yeah I'm sure that is exactly what they said Darie"

"Great! Hob to it then!"

I glare at him, "I am NOT your slave Homesway! You can order like everybody else and show respect.

"Well not slave per say, damsel in distress or servant maybe, my servant yes that sounds- ow! all right! all right there is no need for violence!" I smirk and take away my notepad that I hit him with.

Yeah so I think you have figured out by now that I can be...quite violent.

But only to those who deserve it.

"Good and don't forget it now so what will it be? Burgers and chips as usual?" I ask as Thom and Gale appear behind Darius

"God are we that predictable?" Thom asks groaning as he takes a seat beside Darius.

"Yeah we are" Gale answers "And yes thank you Catnip" and he takes the seat on the other side of Darius.

I make my way to the kitchens but not before glaring at Darius and hearing Gale hit him on the back of the head and asking,

"What the hell did you do now?"

I shake my head, grinning and enter the kitchen.

I quickly give Sae the orders then I tell Haymitch that I am going to take my break now while he just grunts in reply.

I take that as an acceptance and I head out to eat with the Rebels.

An hour later, Sae gets up on stage.

Well when I say stage, it is nothing big or fancy. It is pretty small and it fits perfecting with the Hob.

Sae taps the microphone twice and the room falls silent before speaking into it gently.

"Hello everyone, I hope you are all having an enjoyable evening now please enjoy a song by the Rebels."

Everyone cheers loudly and I blush bright red.

I don't think I will ever get used to this.
We grab our instruments and I go up to the microphone.

"Hi everyone so this is a song that we wrote a good few years ago and we hope you enjoy it. This song is called Year 3000."

I stand back and we start playing:

Gale: One day when I came home at lunchtime,
I heard a funny noise.
Went out to the back yard to find out if it was,
One of those rowdy boys.
Stood there with my neighbour called Peter,
And a Flux Capacitor.

Thom: He told me he built a time machine.
Like one in a film I've seen,
Yeah... he said...

The Rebels: I've been to the year 3000
Not much has changed but they lived under water.
And your great, great great grand-daughter,
Is doing fine (doing fine).

Darius: He took me to the future in the flux thing, and I saw everything.
Boy bands, and another one and another one ... and another one!
Girls there with round hair like Star Wars float above the floor
We drove around in a time machine,
Like the one in the film I've seen..
Yeah... he said...

The Rebels: He said, I've been to the year 3000.
Not much has changed but they lived under water,
And your great, great great grand-daughter,
Is doing fine (doing fine).

Me: I took a trip to the year 3000.
This song had gone multi-platinum.
Everybody bought our 7th album.
It had outsold Kelly Clarkson.
I took a trip to the year 3000.
This song had gone multi-platinum.
Everybody bought our 7th album, 7th album, 7th album.

He told me he built a time machine.
Like the one in a film I've seen,
Yeah...

I've been to the year 3000.
Not much has changed but they lived under water.
And your great, great great grand-daughter,
Is doing fine (doing fine).

All together: He said, I've been to the year 3000.
Not much has changed but they lived under water.
And your great, great great grand-daughter,
Is doing fine (doing fine).

He said, I've been to the year 3000.
Not much has changed but they lived under water.
And your great, great great grand-daughter,
Is doing fine (doing fine).

He said, I've been to the year 3000.
Not much has changed but they lived under water.
And your great, great great grand-daughter,
Is doing fine (doing fine).

We finish the song and everyone is on their feet, clapping and cheering.
The Rebels and I blush and bow slightly and thank everyone.
A while after we sang the song I am talking with Darius when I see Leevy smirking at me.
I excuse myself from Thom and walk over to her.
"Wow Katniss you never told me you could predict the future!"
I laugh, "Ah sorry must have slipped my mind"
"It was a great song by the way" Leevy praises "The audience loved it."
"Thanks Leevy" I don't get the opportunity to say anything else because Darius yells over,
"Katniss! We are going home now are you coming or not!?"
"Right! I'll be there in a second!" I shout over my shoulder at him before turning back to Leevy,
"Sorry about him I better go, I'll see you tomorrow."
I grab my guitar and sling it over my shoulder
"You can bring your pretty friend Katstar, she can come home with me!" Darius shouts, winking at Leevy.
Leevy looks completely shocked, she isn't used to Darius hitting on her and I try my best not to laugh while patting her shoulder.
"Yeah you wish Darius! I tell him, "See ya Leevy" I say, she mumbles a 'Bye Katniss." while I head out with Darius, Gale and Thom.
Prim is only falling asleep when I look in on her.
I sit down gently beside her,
"Hey Little Duck, shouldn't you be asleep?" I ask and Prim tries to sit up, yawning

"I wanted to em wait up for you," She says, her eyes shutting sleepily

"Oh Prim you know you don't need to. You go to sleep now ok? I'll be here in the morning."

Prim mumbles something before turning over and I smile before leaving the room, quietly.
"Well I think that is the ingredients sorted" Peeta says smiling as he closes his red folder which contains our project notes.

"Great!" I exclaim a bit too excitedly. I do enjoy working with Peeta but if I hear one more type of flour or decoration or whatever he was talking about I might hit him.

"Hey! It wasn't that bad!" Peeta exclaims looking at me.

We are sitting on the couch in his sitting room again.

It is Wednesday afternoon and Peeta doesn't have to work in the bakery until later and it is the same with me and the Hob.

"Sorry it was just A LOT of ingredients, most of which I never knew existed and I do Home Economics!"

"Yeah there was a lot of them, I guess I am just used to it. Do u ever pay attention in Home Ec.?" He asks jokingly

"Nah I zone out most of the time, but you should see me in math I am ten times worse! It's a miracle that I know how to multiply and divide."

Peeta laughs, "Yeah I am the same when it comes to geography, if you ask me to name all the states in America I probably wouldn't be able to do that."

We laugh before settling into a comfortable silence as we pack up our stuff.

"So..." Peeta asks nervously, "You do realise we have to cook these meals right? Because you will need to pay attention when we are cooking or you'll burn yourself."

I groan, "Can't you just cook them" I ask pouting, "I can even write them up and I may even present all of the presentation if you'd like!"

I hate public speaking but hey if it gets me out of cooking and ruining this project.

Peeta laughs softly, "Sorry Katniss I would go for that idea but Ms. Trinket said that she will be quizzing us on how we made the food. And you know Ms. Trinket and her promises. So we should probably do everything equally." I smile at him, "But don't worry I am a fantastic teacher you will be an expert in no time!"

I pretend to think about what he said, "Well I guess I could give it a try, don't say I never warned you though." I point my finger 'threateningly' at him.

"I won't, I promise" Peeta gets out, struggling not to laugh.

I stand up and fling my bag over my shoulder and Peeta stands too.

"Thanks for coming over on such short notice. My brother bombarded me this morning, begging me
to swap shifts so I thought we could try find out what to make.” Peeta says cautiously

"Oh no problem, it was a relief to get away from Prim and the others. I mean I love them but are a nightmare when they are hyper."

Peeta laughs, "Yeah I can imagine," he rubs his hand along the back of his neck, "Em I was wondering could I get your number? To you know sort out times, days and stuff for the project."

Peeta's face is as red as a tomato and I'm sure mine is going to same way,

I nod frantically, "Yeah, sure, here I will get yours too."

Peeta and I swap phones and enter our numbers."

I double check that I put in the right number, type in my name, save it in his phone before handing it back to him.

When he gives me mine I see he has done to same.

I can't help but see how fancy and noticeably expensive Peeta's phone is.

It isn't an iPhone but I'm positive it is almost the same thing.

My phone is nothing compared to his, its old, has buttons which is apparently a rare thing for phones nowadays and can barely take a photo never mind download music.

I immediately shake these thoughts away and thank Peeta for giving me back my phone.

We are (awkwardly) saying our goodbyes when the door to the sitting room opens and we both freeze.

Clearly we are both hoping it isn't his mother unexpectedly arriving home from her trip away.

But thankfully as the door opens wider we see a man and woman who both look like they are in their early twenties.

The male has blonde hair and green eyes, an odd combination for a townie which I am guessing he is from his pale skin. He is holding hands with the women who has dark blonde almost brown hair and blue eyes. I assume that this is Peeta's eldest brother, Bran and his partner.

Peeta smiles again though not as brightly as he did earlier.

"Hi Bran, Gwen, what are you two doing here? Dad never mentioned you were coming"

I have never met Bran before, well he has sold me goods at the bakery and traded with me once or twice but that's it.

Peeta was telling me he has been going out with a girl named Gwen for around 4 years and that they moved in together last month.

I assume Gwen is the woman he is holding hand with now.

Since they entered, Bran and Gwen's eyes haven't strayed from me. Clearly wondering what I am doing here.

I hold eye contact with them for a moment before breaking it awkwardly.
I am not a people person okay!?

Still from the corner of my eye I catch Gwen elbow Bran lightly.

"Hi Peeta. We were just coming to talk to your Dad and Rye said he could be upstairs. So em who is your..friend?" Gwen asks eyes switching between looking at Peeta then at me.

I can tell she is trying to figure out who I am and why a Seam girl is in Peeta's house. And by the look on her boyfriend's face I can tell he is contemplating the same thing.

I look at Peeta from the corner of my eye.

His face has turned extremely red and he seems to be struggling with an answer so I attempt to help him out by introducing myself.

"Em hello." All eyes are focused on me now and I remind myself to breathe, "I'm Katniss...em Katniss Everdeen. It's nice to meet you both." I say awkwardly,

The second I say my name Bran's eyes light up and he grins brightly.

I look at him confused before turning to Peeta who has turned a darker shade of red and is suddenly fascinated in the floor.

I soon decide that I shouldn't have spoken at all I look back at Bran and Gwen. Bran is still grinning like a maniac but Gwen seems to be as confused as me.

"Oh so this is the famous Katniss Everdeen!? " Bran asks looking at me, his eyes shining with excitement, "Oh yes I know all about you! Peeta never stops talking about, ever, it's been going on years! Over a decade definitely! Anyway! Katniss it is delightful to finally meet you!"

Bran tells me sticking his hand out for me, from the corner of my eye I see Peeta look up and give him a death glare.

I look back at Bran and cautiously shake his hand.

"So were you leaving?" He asks spotting my bag "Don't leave! Stay lets have food and talk! Get to know you better!"

I stand there in shock while Peeta and Gwen both glare at him.

This is getting more uncomfortable by the second as I am clearly missing something.

I have no idea what Bran means by 'Peeta never stops talking about you' never mind the 'it's been going on years' bit and decade bit.

Does he mean that Peeta never stops talking about how poor I am? Or how stupid, annoying or ridiculous I am?

Or was he talking about something else?

I make my mind up to just ignore it, I'm sure he was only trying to embarrass Peeta.

"We were working on a school project." Peeta tells them through gritted teeth, "Katniss needs to get home to her sister, I mean" Peeta quickly drops his fury and looks at me with worry, "You are more than welcome to stay for longer but just with Prim and everything..."
When Peeta says this, Bran's smirk grows even wider (I though Bran was supposed to be the nice brother?)

"Oh no, thank you for the offer it is very generous of you both but I have work." Bran looks crestfallen while Peeta looks a mix between relieved and sad.

"Aw no! Well you have to come over another day!" Bran demands brightly and Gwen gives him a warning look,

"Yes I'm sure Mr. Mellark would love to have you over Katniss." Gwen says smiling genuinely at me, "What subject is your project for?"

"Home Economics" I answer

"Aw lovely." Bran says dreamily

I've only met the man and I all ready worrying about his mental state.

"Em not really I'm can't cook or bake." I say shrugging and Gwen laughs.

"Oh I'm sure that's not true."

I raise my eyebrows at her, "Trust me the only thing I can make well is toast and somehow I even manage to burn that"

"Sure Peeta can teach you!" Bran says excitedly I think he is seconds away from jumping up and down with joy.

Peeta and I stand there uncomfortably neither knowing how to answer.

I look at the clock and realise it is five o clock.

"Em maybe, sorry I have to go now and get ready for work. I'll see you tomorrow Peeta and it was lovely to meet you two."

"It was a pleasure Katniss!" Bran grins, shaking my hand again "I am positive we will see you here soon."

"Goodbye Katniss, it was great meeting you as well." Gwen says brightly

"I'll walk you out" Peeta says and we make our way downstairs.

"I can try and make the starter tonight if you want" Peeta suggests "You can come over tomorrow and try it out."

"You could come over to mine after school tomorrow either and we could both try and make it?"

Peeta smiles brightly, "I'd love that."

We walk through the bakery and Rye is too occupied with a customer to say anything to us just as he was when we arrived which Peeta seems gratefully for.

"I am really sorry about my brother by the way." Peeta says once we are outside, "He is an idiot."

I laugh, "Ah no just a normal brother I guess don't worry about it. They seem nice."
Peeta laughs, "They can be sometimes, back there was not one of them times."

I rub his shoulder, "Ah relax Peeta, they weren't too bad. I better go home to Prim."

We smile at each other, "I suppose and oh of course you go on sorry for keeping you. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Bye" I say and I walk away resisting the urge to turn around.

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"Hi Prim? You home?" I shout into the house as I shut my front door. I take off my dad's jacket and hang it in the cupboard and throw my bag into the cupboard after it.

"Katniss" Prim runs down the stairs and she hugs me.

"Hey Little Duck how was your day?"

"My day was great Rory asked me to be his partner in P.E and we were playing Badminton. How was your day?"

"My day was good, I went over to the bakery again after school to work on my project with Peeta. I met his brother and his brother's girlfriend"

Prim looks at me as if I had grown two heads, "Rye has a girlfriend?"

"No not Rye. Peeta's eldest brother, Bran. I doubt that Rye is going to enter a long term relationship with anybody any time soon. Come on I have to put dinner on"

Prim and I go into the kitchen and Prim sits on the table while I start dinner.

"So how was Peeta?" Prim asks smirking, swinging her feet back and forth

"He is fine... why?" Prim has been asking me non-stop questions about Peeta Mellark since Monday.

"I'm just asking Katniss! Can I not ask how your boyfriend is?"

"He is not my boyfriend Prim." I say sternly.

I am beginning to think that is her new name for Peeta she has been calling him my boyfriend that much.

"Why not?" she asks innocently

"It's complicated Prim." I sigh. I am not going to tell my sister that I doubt Peeta likes me and even if he did it would be too difficult because he lives in town and I don't.

"How is it complicated?" Prim seems genuinely confused

"It just is Little Duck"

"But how?"

"Because guys like him don't like girls like me Prim" Prim frowns at me in deep thought.

"Why can't he like you? I have seen the way he looks at you it is the same way you look at him. He definitely likes you"
"And what makes you think that Prim?" I try not to sound too curious. I try and keep a level head but I can't help thinking about what Bran said earlier about how Peeta never stops talking about me.

"It's sooo obvious Katniss. He always blushes when you are around or when someone talks about you."

I look at her suspiciously "How would you know that he blushes when someone talks about me?"

She looks down at her feet.

"Well...there have been a few times that I noticed it. But I do remember a few weeks ago. When you gave me money to buy a cupcake from the bakery? Well Peeta was working that day and I was talking to him for a bit and I mentioned that you had given me the money for the cupcake then he started blushing. He even asked me how you were and everything. I said you were good and he said that was very good."

I smile slightly, "He was probably only being polite Prim."

"No he wasn't Katniss and you know it."

We look at each other and I realise how mature she is becoming.

Even though she still doesn't understand that there is no hope of Peeta and I getting together.

"You are very clever you know that?" I tell her and she smiles

"Yes I do know that, thank you Katniss. But I am also very hungry so could you please make us dinner. If you do I promise I will shut up about you and Peeta being in love"

I shake my head and tell her to do her homework.

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When I'm finished making dinner, I give it to Prim then prepare my mother's on a tray and bring it up to her.

Then I come down and eat with Prim.

"Are you working later?" she asks me

"I was supposed to but Sae rang on the way home and said she didn't need me. I am glad to be honest I have a ton of homework and study to do."

"Oh right. If you get time, could you please help me with my maths homework? It's algebra and I don't really understand it."

"Sure Little Duck it took me ages to understand algebra when I was your age."

We then proceed to partake in a lengthy discussion in our mutual hatred for maths.

Prim and I may be very different but our dislike for that subject is one thing we've got in common.
"Hello ladies! Isn't it a lovely, gorgeous, fantastic day?"

Madge and I look at each other and each raise an eyebrow then we look up at Finnick Odair (aka the most popular guy in our school) puts his lunch tray down beside me and sits himself onto the chair next to me.

Madge and I look at Finnick silently asking him

'What the hell are you doing here Odair?'

But we don't ask him that because that would be rude. No townies ever sit with us…well ok Madge 'technically' is a townie but she is cool and none of the townies talk to her because she is the mayor's daughter. We were just waiting for Gale, Darius and Thom when Finnick comes along armed with his 'group'

"It's raining Odair" I point out to him answering his question that he asked before he rudely decided to join us as if he owns the place.

"My dear dear Katniss why do you always have to look upon the negative sides of life? Because darling without rain there would be no water and without water we would all die of dehydration. In conclusion today is a beautiful day because it is the reason that we are alive"

Yeah Finnick usually acts like this and I don't even know him that well. Another reason why he shouldn't be sitting beside me is that Madge and I barley know him.

"Finnick stop annoying people!" Annie Cresta says crossly and I am surprised when she hits him on the head then sits beside him. I think Annie is his girlfriend they act like it anyway you never see one without the other except for the classes in which they are not together for.

I look at Madge again who is sitting across from me and her face is showing the same shock that I'm sure my face is wearing as well. But Finnick and Annie apparently aren't the only ones that will be joining us today.

"Finnick you have a girlfriend why do you insist on flirting with every girl you see?" asked Thresh.

"Hey that's unfair Thresh I haven't flirted with Undersee yet!" Finnick said in mock astonishment then faces Madge, "Which remind me, hi" The way he says it reminds me of Flynn Ryder from Tangled (which Prim and her friend Rue forced me to watch with them). Madge just blinks and her cheeks flush and Finnick grins. I frown at him and again wonder why they are here.

That's when, from the corner of my eye, I see Peeta with his tray of food looking around the cafeteria for his friends who are coincidently sitting with me. I'm not surprised that he is confused Finnick and them always sit over in the middle but Madge and I like to sit in the corner by the windows near the other people from the Seam. Madge and I are the only exception in our school of Town and Seam folk sitting together. And that's only because I have been told that I don't have the friendliest attitude and like I said Madge is the mayor's daughter so they feel intimidated by her for whatever reason.
"Peeta! Over here" Finnick yells across the room.

Most of the school had been staring at our table before but after that everybody is staring at us. I try to slide down in my chair. I hate attention, I don't mind it when I am on stage in the Hob because I know everybody there. But in school I am 100% fine with staying under the radar. I can feel the glare that the Careers are giving me right now. I am silently begging that none of the Rebels come in while the townies are here.

I don't realise that Peeta has been making his way over here until he sits beside me. It is obvious from the look he is giving Finnick and Thresh that he had no idea they would be sitting with Madge and I today even though I suspect the rest of them knew from the way they are grinning at Peeta.

"Hi guys, hi Madge, hey Katniss" Peeta frowns when he looks at the guys but his face quickly brightens when talking to Madge and I.

I smile back at him and reply with a, "Hey"

We all sit there in an awkward silence before Finnick (who else?) breaks it,

"Oh Peeta you are probably wondering why we are sitting over here today with Madge and Katniss. Well here I shall explain. We were all talking this morning before you arrived and we decided that we didn't know anything about your girlfriend Katniss here. So we came up with this genius idea to sit with her and her lovely friend Madge here and get to know them." Peeta tries to say something but Finnick interrupts him.

"No no Peeta ad your best friend I insist that I get to know her. Now Katniss tell me about yourself. Your name is Katniss Everdeen obviously. We are aware that Madge is one of your best friends and my best friend Peeta is your boyfriend. Oh and we also know that you cannot cook at all Peeta may have let that slip to us. Now tell us all about you. What is going on in your life right now?"

Finnick takes out an imaginary notebook and pretends to write in it while looking at me intensely. I look at him in shock and I hear Madge and Thresh laughing. Annie is just shaking her head in despair.

I look at Peeta and we make eye contact. He is rubbing his head and looks like he is trying extremely hard not to kill Finnick. I decide to mess with him so I glare at him and whisper,

"You told them I can't cook?"

Peeta grins softly and shrugs. The nerve of him! He hasn't even seen my cooking and is already judging me. Well ok I have told him that I was rubbish but he doesn't have to believe it. If I poison him it is his own fault.

"Katniss! You never told me that you were dating Peeta now I feel so left out." Exclaims Madge. I glare at her and kick her under the table.

She cringes and glares back at me but she shuts up.

"It's alright Magde. Peety never told us that they were dating either" says Delly Cartright who comes and sits beside Madge.

Peeta glares at Delly and asks her

"So do tell us why do you lot think that we are dating? If neither of us told any of you that we are."
That seems to be the breaking point for them and they all burst out laughing (Peeta and I are still glaring at them). Thresh is the one who calms down first

"It is kind of obvious Peet you just have to look at ye"

"Yes it's the way you two look at each other." Annie says wistfully as her and Delly sigh happily.

Peeta and I blush and try our hardest to avoid each other's eyes which of course none of the others fail to miss. This oh so happens to be the moment that Finnick Odair decides to sing,

"When I look into your eyes it's like watching the night sky or a beautiful sunrise there's so much they hold. And just like them old stars I see that you've come so far to be right where you are how old is your soul?"

I roll my eyes at him and thankfully the bell rings just as he finishes. I look around at everyone else at the table and I realise that somehow everyone has managed to finish their lunch except for Peeta and I. Great I am going to be so hungry at the end of the day.

We all get up and make our way out. Finnick places one arm around my shoulder and the other around Peeta's shoulder.

"By the way we all know that either you two are dating or you two want to date. And it has to be one of them because neither of you denied it but I shall figure of this quest because I am the great Finnick Odair!" He marches ahead of us with Annie by his side. Peeta and I have English together next class so we walk there together.

"I am so sorry about all of that. I had no idea they were planning of sitting with you." I smile

"It's fine really I just don't know how you can stand being friends with the 'great' Finnick Odair. I mean it seems like he means…well?" Peeta laughs

"To be honest I don't know how I stand him. I mean yeah he is annoying 99% of the time but he is a good friend as well. What about you? How are you friends with Darius Homesway?" I shrug. Most people do question my friendship with Darius but Peeta asks it in a friendlier way unlike others who just ask, "What is he doing with her?"

"Like you I'm not sure surprisingly we have a lot in common" I answer him "Like Finnick he is annoying most of the time, he flirts just as much as Finnick but again like Finnick he is a good friend and he has helped me through some really tough times and of course the most important thing is that he is brilliant at playing the drums."

We are walking into the English room when I finish talking. The teacher isn't here yet so we sit beside each other. Well he sits down but I sit on the table because well I have this weird thing that I like to sit on tables, I'm not very tall so I guess I like the height. Prim does the same thing

"Darius can plays the drums? Do you play any instrument?" I nod,

"Yes I play guitar and the piano. My dad played them and he thought me how to play them when I was very young. I like playing both but I prefer guitar as I'm probably better at it." I look at the ground great he probably thinks I'm weird now because I learned from my dad but as always he surprises me.

"That's really cool."

I look at him and he's smiling, "Really?"
"Totally all I learned from my dad is baking and cooking. I love painting but he paints worse than you cook." I shove him, hopefully hard

"You haven't even seen my cooking yet! I could be just modest. I might be the best cook in the world for all you know." I tell him grinning

"That is true but you already used up your secret talent of playing guitar so I'm guessing you are not the best cook in Panem."

"I could have more than one secret skill you know!"

"Yes but I would bet cooking isn't one of them." I glare at him before sighing

"Yeah you're probably right." That's when our English teacher Miss Longwood comes in but she asks us to call her Portia. She's nice and rumour is she's dating Mr Flame, our Art teacher who also asks us to just call him Cinna who is also really nice (but you didn't hear that rumour from me)

The class is half over and I am writing an essay about Romeo and Juliet (don't get me started on them two) when Peeta slides a folded up piece of paper over to me. I look up and see that the teacher to distracted correcting tests so I carefully open the note.

"Is it still ok that I come over to yours to try out your 'awesome' cooking?"

I try not smile but as usual I fail so I glare at him. But unfortunately he is carefully focusing on his essay but I can see that he is grinning.

I roll my eyes and write underneath

"Are you want to come? You may get poisoned you know by accident or not by accident…"

"I am willing to take that risk but I'm a baker so I have very good cooking senses."

"Cooking senses?" What the hell are cooking senses?

"Yeah you like to hunt right? So I am guessing that you have very good hearing to sense the animals and their movements."

"Yes I do have good hearing and you are extremely loud by the way."

"What? No I'm not!"

"Yes you are Mellark! I have accepted the fact that I can't cook so you have to accept you are very very loud."

"Fine then I will accept it so when can I come over?"

"Are you free after school? I do have to work later but it isn't a long shift I am just filling in for somebody it is only from five o’ clock to six. You could come over after school and practise at mine and then you could come to work with me and we could organize the folder there. If that's alright with you. I will get you free food"

"Are you trying to bribe me Everdeen?"

"Maybe..."

"Well it worked"
"Yes! I knew I would win! So we can cook the starter before we have to go and then fix up the folder in The Hob. You can help me cook for Prim and I if you want? You can stay for dinner too of course I mean you might as well cook for yourself as well as us. If you don't have other plans"

I pass the note back to him but refuse to look at him. Ok I am acting ridiculous why am I nervous. I shouldn't be nervous. I doesn't matter if he eats with me or not. Right Katniss focus on your essay

God he is taking a long time

No don't look at him back to the essay

Romeo's character is... Ok I can't concentrate he probably thinks I'm a freak who is obsessed with him now.

Katniss breathe no he doesn't think that you are a freak. Stop over reacting! You only asked him if he would eat dinner with you and your little sister. It's not like it is a date or anything. Relax!

Finally Peeta slides a note back to me it takes me awhile to get the courage to actually read it. When I do I am glad I did

"I'd love to thanks Katniss and of course I'll help but now I have to get back to "O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo" Seriously couldn't they speak normally back then? I'll meet you at your locker after school I can't wait"

"I think that was normal for them they were pretty odd during the Renaissance time thingy. Hey you're the artist not me so you should know more than me. I'll see you then and me too."

I pass the note back to him and while he is reading it the bell rings we quickly put our stuff in our bags and as Peeta and I leave the room we have big smiles on our faces.
Notes

Peeta POV

It is not even nine o' clock on a Thursday morning and I am already annoyed.

And why am I annoyed?

I am annoyed at my older brother. Who else?

"Rye" I yell down the stairs as I run down the stairs and I nearly trip over my undo shoelaces as I hurry into the kitchen to see my evil older brother sitting at the table eating toast with a smirk on his face.

"Yes oh dear baby brother of mine?" This is when Dad comes in, he always as good timing but in this case it might be bad because I just want to rip Ryes head off. Ah that is a beautiful picture

"Peeta why aren't you in school yet?"

"Because Rye decided to turn off my alarm so I would lie in and then he hid my school bag!" I hate my brother I really do. He acts like a 3 year old but no that isn't fair to 3 year olds. I know some may think I'm overreacting but the amount of times he's done this is not funny.

"Rye how many times have I told you to leave your brother alone?" Dad asks while I double knot my shoelaces.

"What? It was a joke! Come on it is funny! He'll be grand he will make it in time he always does. The goody two shoes" I raise an eyebrow at him while he just laughs

"Rye when are you going to grow up?" I ask him before grabbing a cheese bun and when I was about to run out the door Dad calls me.

"Peeta your mother is coming home tonight from District Six so try and be good." I frown at him. He shouldn't be telling me that he should be telling that to Rye

"And by that younger brother our father means could you not mention that you are now spending every waking moment you have with Katniss Evergreen? Or whatever your girlfriends last name is because Peeta you never shut up about her, ever and-" I launch at him and get a punch or two in but Dad stops me.

"Rye stop it" My dad says sternly but my idiot brother ignores him and carries on smirking at me.

Dad glares at him before softening and turning to me

"Peeta I hate to say this but your brother has a point just don't say anything about Katniss and this project alright? For all our sakes." I nod I know he is right. I wouldn't dare tell my mother that I have even talked to somebody from the Seam outside of work let alone work with Katniss Everdeen. I did talk about Katniss when I was younger as I didn't know any better but I soon learned that my mother would hit me even if I so much as looked as somebody from the Seam.

I glare at Rye then I grab a bun from the table, my keys and my school bag and run outside, get in the car and drive to school as fast as the speed limit will allow.
I am not imagining this.

Finnick, Annie, Thresh and Delly have been acting weird around me all day. It is freaking me out.

They have barely talked to me all day and the only one who did talk to me was Thresh and he just asked me if I was going to talk to Cinna at the start of lunch even though I have been telling them all week I was doing that.

After about 10 minutes of talking with Cinna about my portfolio and after going to my locker I head to the cafeteria. When I get there I don't see Finnick and Annie (who are always together), Thresh or Delly at our usual table.

Right now I am defiantly wondering if something is up. Maybe they are pulling a prank on me or something. They might be mad that I have been working with Katniss so much and that whenever I am with them I either am talking about Katniss or thinking about her so perhaps they are avoiding me now.

I shake my head trying to get rid of my thoughts and I go and get food. After I pay and thank the lunch lady I scan the cafeteria for my so called friends. After a bit I see Finnick, Annie and Thresh sitting with...oh no...Katniss and her friend Madge Undersee. This cannot be good.

"Peeta! Over here" Finnick yells across the room.

I notice for the first time that everyone in the cafeteria is looking at them. I am not surprised though it is an unwritten rule to not hang out with anyone from the other part of the District. I don't know why but that's it. So why my friends decided to break this sacred unwritten rule and sit with the girl I have the biggest crush on (which they know!) and her friend I have no idea but I have a bad feeling about this.

As I make my way through the tables I silently yell and curse at Finnick because this was obviously all his idea. Where are Katniss's other friends, Gale, Thom and Darius? They should be here to tell my idiotic friends to leave Katniss alone. Though I wouldn't be surprised if Finnick knocked them all unconscious and stored them in a closet or something. Maybe that is where Delly is, keeping look out for him. I see Katniss try to slide down in her seat to avoid everybody's gaze and I want to kill Finnick for embarrassing her.

I reach the table and I put my tray down before sitting down beside Katniss. I glare at Finnick and Thresh silently asking them what the hell they were playing at but they just smirk at me.

"Hi guys, hi Madge, hey Katniss" I smile at Madge and Katniss but frown at the others.

Katniss smiles back at me and says "Hey" (I try not to seem too excited even though I grinning like the mad hatter on the inside)

We sit in silence with the odd sound of someone eating but nobody in the room is talking they are all just staring at us.

I guess Finnick decided that he should explain what was going on because unfortunately for me he starts talking.

"Oh Peeta you are probably wondering why we are sitting over here today with Madge and Katniss. Well here I shall explain. We were all talking this morning before you arrived and we decided that we didn't know anything about your girlfriend Katniss here. So we came up with this genius idea to sit with her and her lovely friend Madge here and get to know them." I clench my fists and my face burns red as I try to stop him but of course Finnick interrupts me.
"No no Peeta as your best friend I insist that I get to know her. Now Katniss tell me about yourself. Your name is Katniss Everdeen obviously. We are aware that Madge is one of your best friends and my best friend Peeta is your boyfriend. Oh and we also know that you cannot cook at all Peeta may have let that slip to us. Now tell us all about you. What is going on in your life right now?"

Finnick does this thing where pretends to write in an imaginary…notebook? Or something like that. I have never been good at charades but that is a different story. He starts looking at Katniss seriously. It will be a miracle if Katniss Everdeen ever speaks to me again and if she doesn't I wouldn't blame her I would just kill my ex friends here. Madge and Thresh have now started laughing and I glare at them as well. Annie is shaking her head in despair.

I swear this is the last time I ever tell Finnick anything actually never mind that I am never speaking to him again after this. I start the rub the sides of my head to calm me down while praying that the ground would open up and swallow me but it doesn't. Katniss and I make eye contact and she glares at me then she whispers.

"You told them I can't cook?" I can't help but grin

I only told Finnick that Katniss wasn't that good at cooking yesterday evening. Even then it was because I wouldn't shut up about how amazing she is and so Finnick challenged me saying that I couldn't name something bad about her or that she can't do. Obviously there is nothing bad about her (well nothing that I find bad about her) so I said that she had told me that she couldn't cook.

I shrug because I am not sure how to respond to that. I realise after that I probably shouldn't have done that as Katniss looks furious. But before I can apologize Madge decides to join in the teasing

"Katniss! You never told me that you were dating Peeta now I feel so left out." Katniss moves her glare over to Madge.

I look at Thresh and Annie who are both avoiding me but when Thresh looks up our eyes meet and I glare at him. I can't believe they have the nerve to make Katniss uncomfortable by saying that we are dating. Katniss as far as I am aware is a reserved girl and doesn't share things with many people or let people in and these guys are ruining any chances I may have had with her.

I am about to apologize to Katniss but again something interrupts me as I see Delly enter from the door that leads to the yard. Just when I think it couldn't get any worse it does. Well no that's not true Rye could show up and give Katniss my life story of how I have loved her since I was a kid.

"It's alright Magde. Peety never told us that they were dating either" says Delly when she reaches us and she sits beside Madge.

I glare at Delly partly for implying Katniss and I were dating and partly for calling me Peety. I do not like that nickname. At all.

"So do tell us why do you lot think that we are dating? If neither of us told any of you that we are." I ask them trying to find something that would shut them up. But no that doesn't work because they all just start laughing except for Katniss who glares at Madge as I glare at the others.

Thresh seems to be the one who calms down first and speaks while the rest are still laughing

"It is kind of obvious Peet you just have to look at ye"

"Yes it's the way you two look at each other." Annie says wistfully and she and Delly sigh happily. I just raise my eyebrows at them but I still blush and avoid Katniss' eyes and she does the same. None of them miss this and they grin. Then the worst possible thing happens. Finnick starts to sing,
"When I look into your eyes it's like watching the night sky or a beautiful sunrise there's so much they hold. And just like them old stars I see that you've come so far to be right where you are how old is your soul?"

I shake my head and Katniss rolls her eyes. Thankfully after what seemed like forever the bell rings. I look down at my tray and realise that I had none of my lunch and I also had no breakfast except for that one cheese bun. I am going to murder Finnick and Rye. Painfully

I take a quick few bites of my apple before leaving with the rest of them. Finnick comes up behind Katniss and I and puts an arm around our shoulders and pushes his way in between us and says

"By the way we all know that either you two are dating or you two want to date. And it has to be one of them because neither of you denied it but I shall figure of this quest because I am the great Finnick Odair!" And with that he marches ahead of us with Annie following him who Finnick eventually remembers and waits for and then they walk to their next class together.

Katniss and I have English next so we walk there together. I look at Katniss nervously I really hope she isn't mad at me or thinks that was some kind of set up to make fun of her. So I decide I should finally apologize as I have been meaning to do all lunch.

"I am so sorry about all of that. I had no idea they were planning of sitting with you." She smiles which I hope is a good sign

"It is fine really. I just don't know how you can stand being friends with the 'great' Finnick Odair. I mean it seems like he means…well?" I laugh yeah I am contemplating why I ever became friends with him in the first place

"To be honest I don't know how I stand him. I mean yeah he is annoying 99% of the time but he is a good friend as well. What about you? How are you friends with Darius Homesway?" I hope I don't seem rude when I ask her this but I am curious. Darius and Katniss don't seem that alike. She is shy where is he is outgoing and flirty and basically the District Twelve, Seam version of Finnick. Katniss shrugs

"Like you I'm not sure. Surprisingly we have a lot in common" she answers "Like Finnick he is annoying most of the time, he flirts just as much as Finnick but again like Finnick he is a good friend and he has helped me through some really tough times and of course the most important thing is that he is brilliant at playing the drums."

We are in the English classroom now but Miss Portia isn't here yet so we sit beside each other. Well I sit down and she sits on the table beside me.

I never knew Darius plays the drums so I ask her about it.

"Darius can plays the drums? Do you play any instrument?" She nods

"Yes I play guitar and the piano. My dad played them and he thought me how to play them when I was very young. I like playing both but I prefer guitar as I'm probably better at it." She looks at the ground. Wow I would love to play an instrument I bet she is great at playing them. She seems musical and she don't get me started on how well she can sing.

"That's really cool." She looks at me and I smile at her

"Totally all I learned from my dad is baking and cooking. I love painting but he paints worse than you cook." I joke and she shoves me hard but not hard enough to hurt me.
"You haven't even seen my cooking yet! I could be just modest. I might be the best cook in the world for all you know." She tells me grinning

"That is true but you already used up your secret talent of playing guitar so I'm guessing you are not the best cook in Panem." I say logically

"I could have more than one secret skill you know!"

"Yes but I would bet cooking isn't one of them." She glares at me for a bit but then she sighs in defeat.

"Yeah you're probably right." Then Miss. Portia comes in. Her last name is Longwood but she asked us all on the first day to call her Portia just like Mr Flame asked us to call him Cinna. There is a rumour around school that they are dating but I try not to believe the rumours that go around this town.

We have to write an essay on Romeo and Juliet which has never been one of my favourite plays. I glance over at Katniss and she looks just as bored as I am. I look up at the teacher who is correcting tests so I find a piece of paper and I write on it:

"Is it still ok that I come over to yours to try out your 'awesome' cooking?"

I slide it over to her before quickly looking down at my essay grinning. From the corner of my eye I can see her smiling but at the same time she tries to glare at me before she writes back

"Are you want to come? You may get poisoned you know by accident or not by accident…" Is she threatening to poison me?

"I am willing to take that risk but I'm a baker so I have very good cooking senses."

"Cooking senses?" Is she questioning my methods? Ok yeah maybe cooking senses aren't a real thing but you know they could be.

"Yeah you like to hunt right? So I am guessing that you have very good hearing to sense the animals and their movements."

"Yes I do have good hearing and you are extremely loud by the way."

"What? No I'm not!" I glare at her I am not loud! Fine I will admit that I am not the quietest person in the world but I grew up with Rye! In my house you have to be loud to even have a chance of being heard

"Yes you are Mellark! I have accepted the fact that I can't cook so you have to accept you are very very loud."

"Fine then I will accept it so when can I come over?"

"Are you free after school? I do have to work later but it isn't a long shift I am just filling in for somebody it is only from five o’ clock to six. You could come over after school and practisate at mine and then you could come to work with me and we could organize the folder there. If that's alright with you. I will get you free food"

I have never been to The Hob before actually I have never been to the Seam before. But Katniss has told me that The Hob is great and that they have good food there. Well I guess she does work there so she kind of has to say that but sure what the hell I would never turn down free food or give up
time that I could spend with Katniss.

"Are you trying to bribe me Everdeen?"

"Maybe..." Oh she is good

"Well it worked"

When Katniss passes me the next note she immediately looks down after. I look at her confused but open the note anyway

"Yes! I knew I would win! So we can cook the starter before we have to go and then fix up the folder in The Hob. You can help me cook for Prim and I if you want? You can stay for dinner too of course I mean you might as well cook for yourself as well as us. If you don't have other plans"

I have to re-read Katniss's note several times just to make sure that I am not seeing things. That I am not misreading that Katniss has invited me to make and have dinner with her and her younger sister at their house. Right I have to calm down it is not like this is a date or anything. She is just being polite by asking me to join them. I realise that I have taken way too long thinking this over. Damn it now I have to think of what to write back. You two are friends so don't screw this up Mellark. I write back to her,

"I'd love to thanks Katniss and of course I'll help but now I have to get back to "O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo" Seriously couldn't they speak normally back then? I'll meet you at your locker after school I can't wait"

"I think that was normal for them they were pretty odd during the Renaissance time thingy. Hey you're the artist not me so you should know more than me. I'll see you then and me too." I smile at the fact that she remembers how I paint and that she can't wait for later. I am just finished reading when the bell rings. I look down at my not even half finished essay that I will have to finish for homework. Ah well it was well worth it.

Katniss and I pack quickly and when we leave I see that she is smiling and that just makes my grin even bigger.
Peeta shuts the oven door quickly and stands up straight again.

"Now we just have to wait for this to finish and then we can eat our starter"

Peeta has been acting like one of them fancy cooks that you would see on the TV ever seen we came to my house after school. At the beginning I thought that it would be annoying but it is kind of funny.

"Grand now all we have to do is make sure that we don't burn this because then all our hard work would have been for nothing." I tell him grinning.

"We are not going to burn the starter you have Chef Mellark and our hard work? What exactly did you do?" Peeta asks teasingly.

"I helped! I got plates and trays and stuff. And you are a baker not a cook Peeta"

"Details, details why did we decide on garlic bread anyway? It makes your breath smell."

"Hey you chose garlic bread not me. I wanted us to make crisp sandwiches for our starter but no you said that it wasn't a 'proper' starter. You told me that garlic bread tastes nicer and that it is one of the most well-known starters other than soup or something like that"

"Then why didn't we make soup?" He asks sitting down at the table opposite me

"Because it is boring."

"So is garlic bread" he mutters under his breath. I glare at him and gently kick him under to table. Which Peeta just ignores.

"So where were your other friends at lunch today?" He asks and I shrug.

"Thom texted me after school telling me that he had a dentist appointment. I don't know where Gale was. Darius was probably flirting with some sophomore." Peeta and I laugh because I am probably right about Darius because well it's Darius.

We sit in a comfortable silence for a while before Peeta speaks.

"I am sorry about Finnick. He just really enjoys embarrassing others"

"Yeah I noticed. It's fine really I am just glad that Darius wasn't there he would have made it ten times worse"

We both start laughing again so much that we don't hear the front door open. So we are surprised when the kitchen door opens to reveal Prim and Rory.

"Hey Katniss! Oh hi Peeta, Rory and I are going up to study in my room is that ok? I will say hi to mum first" Prim asks excitedly she keeps glancing at Peeta and then at me with a massive grin on her face.
"Yeah sure that's grand Prim. Hey Rory what are you two studying for?"

"Hi Kit Kat, we have this big geography test tomorrow"

"Well good look on studying and tell mum I said hi as well"

"Thanks Katniss" They both say before they shut the door and run upstairs.

"Your sister is lovely and so is her friend" Peeta says kindly

"Thanks yeah they both are, Rory is Gale's younger brother. It really is only a matter of time before him and Prim get together. How do you know Prim anyway?" Prim has told me that she and Peeta talked at the bakery last week but I don't know that they had spoken previous to that.

"I talk to her whenever she comes into the bakery she is always very polite" He tells me smiling

"Yes she is. I wonder who she got that from" I joke and Peeta laughs nervously before he asks

"So…where is your mum?"

I freeze for a second. I had forgotten that Peeta doesn't know about my mother. Well not in detail what is wrong with her.

"She is upstairs. She isn't feel- she isn't well" I stutter and look at my hands on the table.

I see him nod out of the corner of my eye. I assume he wants to ask more questions about her, like everyone else but thankfully he doesn't and instead says

"I think it's ready" Peeta takes the tray out of the oven and nods

"Looks good you have talent," I raise my eyebrows at him "Ok maybe you'll never be a chef or a baker like me but you might be able to cook things on your own in future without burning it… completely."

I hit him lightly and he gasps and then he grabs my sides and starts tickling me.

"Peeta! Please, Peeta stop! This is unfair!"

He's grinning now, "I will stop when you admit that I am the best baker in the world"

Somehow I manage to think of a somewhat witty remark under all of this torture

"Ah you see I would say that but you aren't the best baker and I don't lie so- Peeta!" Peeta increases the tickling and I think how insane this is as we are both 17 years old.

"Say it Katniss!"

"Fine, fine Peeta you are the best baker in the whole wide world now please stop torturing me!" He stops and I move away from him but we both move in the same direction and I slip and fall dragging him down with me.

We end up, me on the floor with a pounding head and him above me trying to catch his breath. Peeta soon realises the position that we are in. He looks at me in shock then he quickly gets up stumbling and apologizing continuously. He then helps me up while still apologizing even though none of this was his fault.
"I am so sorry Katniss. Are you alright? I swear I didn't mean to make you slip or for me to end up like…that."

I almost laugh but then I see him looking at me with his eyes full of worry and my heart melts for him. How can he feel so bad for this?

We look at each other for a moment but then I place a hand on the back of my head to try and calm the pain and Peeta goes into worry mode again.

"Oh God your head. Here I'll get you some painkillers. You're not allergic to them or anything right? Come on sit down." I almost roll my eyes at Peeta but I still sit in the chair that he offers me. I have fallen plenty of times especially in the woods but my head is killing me so maybe sitting down might be a good idea.

Peeta sits beside me and covers his face with his hands. I shake my head at him and try not to call him a drama queen because I know that he is only worried about me which is sweet.

"Peeta relax I am fine. This is not your fault I just tripped and by accident brought you down with me." I take his hands away from his face and hold his hands in mine.

He finally looks at me again "Are you sure you're all right?"

"Yes Peeta thanks for asking. I am fine and if I am not I have you to call for help. Now can you please try some of this garlic bread and tell me if it sucks or not"

He nods and smiles, takes a piece from the tray and tries it.

"Well?" I ask nervously

"It's edible" He answers and I glare at him to which he raises his hands in an act of surrender.

"Joke Katniss, it was just a joke. This is great actually. Maybe there is hope for you after all now. Another joke calm down please and try some of this."

He holds out the tray and I take one and taste it and even I have to admit it tastes good, way better than I thought it would taste anyway.

"Well?"

"It's good" Peeta looks at me for a moment before he punches the air with his fist.

"Yes!" He shouts.

I must be looking at him like he's insane (the fact that I may or may not be thinking that he is insane is beside the point) because he calms down and looks sheepish but he still wears a broad grin on his face

"Sorry but I just accomplished the impossible. To help Katniss Everdeen cook a good meal and not have it burn."

"It was just garlic bread and it was a starter. Peeta don't over exaggerate it."

"No seriously I think you show amazing promise."

I smile and slide the garlic bread onto a large plate, leave the tray for cleaning before I call Prim and Rory to come downstairs.
"Well I am sorry Peeta but unfortunately I am not going to become a cook so you can forget you ever thought of me as that because that is never going to happen. It leaves too much cleaning up to do and if I was a baker, also another no, I would be your competition.

"True maybe leave it to the experts eh Everdeen?"

"Oh no I know I'd be way better than you it's just I'm not bothered to wake up early and I couldn't put your family out of business, Rye or Bran might never speak to me again." Peeta fakes hurt and replies

"But what about me?" I can hear Rory and Prim running down stairs so just before they enter I walk up to him and whisper in his ear

"What about you?" and then Prim and Rory come running into the room

"Yeah Katniss?"

"Peeta and I made garlic bread but I have to go to work so do you want to finish it?"

"Yes please" Rory says smiling and they run back upstairs with the plate of garlic bread yelling, "Thanks Katniss, thanks Peeta."

"God I am sorry I completely forgot that you have to go to work" Peeta says concerned

I shake my head this has to be the millionth time that Peeta Mellark has apologized to me over something that wasn't his fault

"Peeta please stop apologizing to me. You don't have to I have been keeping watch of the time. Now let's get a move on because I don't want Sae to yell at you because I am never late for work so she will think that you are a bad influence on me."

"Ah yes when we both know that you are the bad influence on me." We walk into the hall, Peeta opens the front door while retrieve my coat from the closet and I put in on.

"Exactly and don't you forget it. Prim, Rory we are leaving now I'll be back later. Prim if I am late back please ring Gale and ask him to bring you and Rory to their house for dinner" We close the door to the sounds of Prim and Rory saying goodbye to us.

I lead Peeta in the direction of the Hob. He looks around at the dark dreary village in fascination as we stroll through it.

"So how are you allowed to work in the Hob anyway because isn't that like a bar?" I laugh it's not the first time that somebody has been confused about my job but hey it's America anything can happen.

"I am just a waitress there. I don't go anywhere near the alcohol, Haymitch would thing that I was hogging it from him. The only time that I have ever poured a drink was when we were really busy and there was nobody other than Sae, Haymitch and I there and Sae was watching me the whole time anyway. Darius's dad is a peacekeeper and so he and the others that work around here just ignore that I am not 18 or even 21 yet." In Panem we call the police peacekeepers.

"God my brother would kill for your job" Peeta says grinning and I grin back.

"Rye?"
"Yep, have you ever met him? If you have I feel sorry for you." I laugh

"No, well I have talked to him a bit I guess. When he went to our school and by talked I mean he flirted with me and I tried not to punch him in the face."

"Yeah he does have that effect on people. You are a very strong person to not punch him, I want to punch him all the time."

"I can see how you would want to do that. Well I will probably meet him if we continue working at your house"

"I must warn you that Rye is...Rye is something that is beyond words. And not in a good way" I frown

"I can take care of myself you know." Peeta looks me in the eyes and shakes his head frantically

"No I didn't mean it like that. I know that you can take care of yourself and Rye is harmless but I am just saying that he can be really, really annoying that's all." I smile

"How are you so nice when you live with him?" Peeta's cheeks flush bright pinch and I have the urge to kiss his cheek but I quickly shake it off. I am not going to turn into a soppy teenage girl.

"I have no idea." He answers

We fall into a comfortable silence again when we reach the Hob. Peeta looks nervous and I can understand why so I take his hand in mine and give him a reassuring smile and we walk in together. We do get a few looks, scratch that we don't get a few looks we get the whole bar staring at us. I can tell that Peeta feels uncomfortable so I pull him further into the bar ignoring the whispers and stares. We sit on the high stools at the bar with our backs to most of the people.

Haymitch is behind the bar and looks at Peeta with narrowed eyes as if he was looking into Peeta's soul. He then glances at me before turning back to look at Peeta again.

"Hi Haymitch, could you please tell Sae that I'm here?" I ask him trying to get him to lay off Peeta but he continues to look at him as if he is surveying him. I look around subtly and notice that everybody else in the bar is doing the same thing. Many are looking at me wondering what I, of all people, am doing with a townie. I turn back to Haymitch quickly.

"Sure Sweetheart."

Haymitch goes into the kitchen and there is now complete silence and Peeta looks as if he would give anything for the ground to swallow him whole. Which he probably does want and I don't blame him as I kind of feel the same way. I reach down and take out the folder with our project in it that I gave to him earlier from his schoolbag. Just when I am about to start talking, Haymitch comes back and after again looking at Peeta he looks at me."

"She'll be out here in a minute sweetheart" Haymitch slurs and he starts cleaning a glass while watching Peeta curiously.

"Thanks" I say nodding, I get up from my chair and retrieve my apron and put it around my waist.

"Peeta?" He looks up from the table and smiles hesitantly

"Yeah Katniss?"
"Could you tie this for me please?"

I turn around so my back is facing him. He doesn't speak for a moment before coughing slightly and I hear him stumble off his chair and walk towards me (He is seriously loud)

"S-Sure" I feel him tie my apron. "Done" He says shakily

"Thanks Peeta" I turn and hug him quickly then I go into the kitchen and as I walk in I see that now everyone's eyes including Peeta's and Haymitch's are on me.

As fast as I can I push the kitchen door open and run inside. Sae must notice the look on my face because she asks another cook to take over for her.

"Katniss what's wrong child?" I shake my head trying to get rid of the thoughts and worries swirling around in my mind. I am over reacting. I don't care what people think. I never care what other people think and I defiantly don't care about what a bunch of strangers think and gossip about but I do care what Gale, Thom and Darius think. And Peeta and even Haymitch and of course Sae. And what about them others out there? The people I grew up with? What do they think of me? That I am some sort of Seam slut like what the townies think of me?

I put my face in my hands as Sae sits me down on a chair. She finds one for herself and turns it to face me.

"It is nothing Sae. Thank you I just don't know what I was thinking"

"It's all right dear just take a deep breath and tell me what happened." I nod my head and drop my hands into my lap

"Well do you remember that I told you I was working on a project for school with Peeta Mellark?"

"Yes I remember. The baker's youngest son? What about him Katniss?" I nod answering her first two questions.

"Well you see I brought him here so we could talk about the project and organise it. He didn't mind and neither did I, I guess I just didn't think! But when we came here everybody out there started staring at us especially him and Haymitch was practically glaring at him which obviously made Peeta even more nervous than he was with all these strangers staring at him. Then me being me just before I leave I go and do the stupidest thing that I could do in that situation I go and hug him. Then I came in here and I saw everybody staring at me like I was insane and now somebody is going to tell Gale, Thom and Darius and they are going to freak out and Sae I just don't know what to do!" I take a deep breath and Sae smiles at me gently while patting my back softly

"It's all right Katniss. You calm down its ok. Now I know you and you don't care about what other people think right? You never have" I nod

"Well then I am sure that Peeta doesn't either. If he is anything like his father then he is probably worried sick about you. As for Haymitch you just let me deal with him. Now Gale, Thom and Darius, well you just ignore them and if they keep going on about it then you simply tell them the truth. That you and him were just here working on this project.

I nod and smile slightly. I know that she is right, to tell you the truth she always is right.

"Katniss dear, I know what gossip in this district is like and everyone will know by nightfall but you walk with your head held high. You are doing nothing wrong here if you want to be friends with that
boy then be friends with him. If you want to date him then go ahead. Forget about what everybody else in this district thinks they don't matter in this situation. I remember your father was in the same position as you when he first started dating your mother. Nobody in the town like him because your mother had been somebody else before she fell in love with your father. All of your father's friends tried to talk him out of it and warn him away from your mother. Even Mr. Hawthorne was wary about them but he soon came around. But your father and mother didn't care because they loved each other. And if anything like that happens between you and Peeta or with you and somebody else that others disapprove of. You will get through it because you are your father's daughter."

I smile brightly, I love when people who knew my father compare me to him. I don't remember much about him but thankfully I have a few amazing memories and I know deep down that he would tell me the exact same thing to forget what everybody else thinks and be myself.

"Thank-You Sae" She smiles and fixes up my hair and she hands me a plate of chips and a burger. Then she pushes me gently towards the door telling me,

"For table 6. Tell the young lad's parents that they will have their food soon" I laugh and I push the door open.

Everybody is talking when I come through the door. I know that it is about me but I hold my head high, smile bright and ignore their talking. I go to table six and place the plate

"Table 6 and tell his parents there that they will have their food soon." I laugh and push the door open. Everyone is talking fast when I come through and it is obvious what they are chatting about but I hold my head high and ignore them I go to table six and put the plate of chips and a burger in front of a young boy named Alex and I tell his parents that their food is on its way. Alex grins and thanks me. I smile and walk back to Peeta. He is still sitting at the bar and is flicking through the folder with his head down trying to be invisible and failing miserably so I decide to sneak up on him. I walk up to him quietly until I am standing behind him and grab both his sides he yelps and I burst out laughing. He glares at me and I take my seat next to him.

"That wasn't very nice Katniss."

"Well I never said I was nice Peeta now how are you getting on without me?" He rolls his eyes and slides the folder over so it's between us.

"Good actually. I was thinking that maybe we should do each page in a different colour paper or something because you know as well as I do Ms. Trinket loves that sort of thing and pink too." I groan I don't want it to seem like a 10 year old girl did this project but I know he is right. Ms. Tinket really should have done primary school teaching.

"Yeah you are probably right so what colours should these pages be?" "I was thinking maybe orange, green and pink" I raise my eyebrows confused "That's a...weird combination?" "Well it's your favourite colour, my favourite colour and Ms. Trinket's favourite colour." "Ah yes that its true well we can buy the paper tomorrow if you want I have no work on and I don't have practice until the evening." He looks up smirking

"Practice? For what?" Damn it. I forgot that people from the town wouldn't know about The Rebels. "Yeah er me and the guys made this band a few years ago. Nothing special or great about us though we aren't going to be the next big thing or anything" I try to play it down so I don't bore him with the details. Which I will do if he gets me started talking about it. But to carry on the tradition on Peeta Mellark surprising me he looks quite interested.

"You're in a band" That's cool. What is the name of the band?" I blush and say quietly
"The Rebels, me and Gale came up with it and Darius thought it fit us all perfectly and so did Thom so we chose that. We started a year or two ago." The Rebels is a weird name and we know that but we are all weird so that's why we chose it and Gale is the perfect definition of a rebel.

"Are you any good?" I shrug

"I don't know. We are defiantly better than some of the supposedly good bands that are famous now. But people around here think that we are good. We play here once or twice a week. We write our own songs as well but we do covers also. People clap and cheer and don't boo us so I guess we are all right"

"That's great, I am sure that The Rebels are amazing."

"They are." Agrees a gruff voice. We both turn and look at Haymitch who is cleaning another glass or most likely the same one.

"Thank you Haymitch" I say back smiling. Haymitch nods stiffly and goes back to cleaning his glass and watching Peeta.

I turn back to Peeta, "There you go then. If Haymitch Abernathy says that we are amazing then we must be really amazing." We both laugh and I look at the clock and get up from my seat telling him,

"Here I better go back to Sae and get some work down. I will talk to you soon"

"Oh sorry I kept you" I give him a look and he shrinks slightly before mumbling

"Fine, fine I won't apologize any more" I smile and go back into the kitchen hoping that somebody else brought Alex's parents their dinner.
Katniss POV

I am not, I repeat not, cheesy at all.

Just because I have been smiling non-stop ever since I came home last night doesn't mean that it has anything to do with Peeta Mellark.

So therefore I am not cheesy.

No matter what my 14 year old sister says.

It is just a weird coincidence that I have been happy since then.

I shake my head trying to clear my thoughts of Peeta as I try to sort out my books for this morning. Thankfully it is Friday! Yay Happiness and all that.

I am now wondering where Gale is because it is like he just disappeared. Rory and Vick told me this morning that they hadn't seen him. Rory had to ring me this morning asking if I could come to their house to bring them to school because Gale had left before they woke up.

"He was the same yesterday." Rory told me this morning, "He woke up at 6, we never saw him after school then he came back for his dinner and the left again and didn't come home until after 11. I did try to tell mum that he hasn't gone to school and that he probably wouldn't go today but all she did was smile and told me that Gale would never miss school and that he loves school. Gale has never loved school."

When speaking of his mother Rory looks disgusted and disappointed. He is beginning to understand what is wrong with our mothers now and he hates it just as much as Gale and I do.

I am not surprised at Hazel though and that sickens me. She still thinks that her children are the same age as they were when her husband died and refuses to think otherwise. But I am surprised at Gale.

If there is one thing that I know about Gale Hawthorne it is that he hates getting up early. He hates it even more than Darius (and that is saying something) but obviously not as much as Haymitch because that would be impossible.

So what is Gale doing then?

I am snapped out of my thoughts by a loud bang.

I jump and I see that my locker has been shut by a hand that still lies on it.

I look up to see Gale.

Well this should be fun.

I fold my arms, move his hand off my locker and I lean against it. I then study his face.

Gale looks angry, furious even. Why is he angry? I am the one who should be angry at him I have every right to after what he did to his siblings this morning and yesterday.
"What were you thinking? He growls at me. Yes growls now I defiantly know that something is wrong with him.

"Well I was wondering what class I have next and what books I will need from my locker for it but then somebody rudely slammed my locker shut so I couldn't finish getting my books"

Gale glares at me so I glare right back at him.

"Don't play dumb Katniss, you know what I am talking about." Great and now he is calling me Katniss which he only does when he is really mad or frustrated with me which isn't often.

"No I don't know what you are talking about Gale." I see something flash in his eyes before they harden again.

You know you could have told me! Or at least suggested that something was going on. I mean yeah I wouldn't have like it sure but I would have preferred you being honest with me than finding out through other people because apparently the whole district knows about it except for me. People we don't know and have never spoken to and who never knew us are talking about you. Townies are talking about this Katniss!

"Gale for God's sake I have no clue what you are talking about. If I did know what you were on about and I wanted to tell you whatever it is you are mad at me for how was I meant to tell you? You have been MIA since yesterday. Rory and Vick are worried sick about you and so am I. You know that you forgot about them yesterday and this morning. Rory had to ring me and ask if I could take them to school. We always tell each other or somebody at least if we aren't going to be around especially when you miss school and forget about the kids!"

Gale eyes soften when I tell him about Rory, Vick and I feeling worried about him.

But he soon remembers his argument and finally answers me.

"You and Mellark. Together"

Damn it! I hoped that wasn't what he was on about.

Wait did he say that I was going out with Peeta?

"What? Gale I am not dating Peeta" Gale scoffs and I frown at him

""Then why would you bring him to the Hob? The only reason townies would ever come into the Hob. Or even enter the Seam was if they were seeing someone from the Seam."

I roll my eyes. Why does Gale have to over-react over everything that he hears?

"That isn't all ways the reason Gale and you know it. I told you we are just working on a project together"

"Yeah you're right it isn't always the reason but the only other reason is if there was an emergency. Townies just don't go into the Seam and there is a reason for that"

"And what is that reason Gale?" Gale and I glare fiercely at each other.

The reason Gale and I are such good friends is because we are so alike. This can be good at times but on other occasions like this it is a recipe for disaster.

I know perfectly well what Gale is talking about but I want to hear him say it.
Gale sighs and he rubs a hand over his eyes.

"I'm sorry Catnip. I didn't mean to act like that and I defiantly didn't mean to forget about the kids or you I have just been really busy. It's just you know what his brother Rye was like when he was our age. What he is still like now and his older brother wasn't much better. I just don't want to see you get hurt"

I smile slightly because I do know that Gale is just trying to protect me even if he doesn't have the best way of showing it.

"Gale I know that you mean well but I can take care of myself. I know exactly what Rye Mellark is like and I also know that Peeta isn't like that. Even if he was like that it wouldn't even matter because I am not dating him. I can protect myself if he does hurt me which I highly doubt and anyway I have you, Thom and Darius to protect me if he even thinks of harming me don't I?"

He nods, "Yes of course we will. I know you can protect yourself. I'm sorry Catnip just-"

"Yeah, yeah I know. You just thought that you were doing the right thing. Now I have to get my books and I expect you to tell me where on earth you have been all of yesterday at lunch."

Gale nods sheepishly and just when I have retrieved all of my books the bell rings and we both head off to our first class.

Peeta POV

I groan as I open my locker.

Yesterday with Katniss was great. The starter that we both made turned out perfect. Prim and Rory had told us when I walked Katniss home that they had loved the garlic bread. I had stayed talking with her for ages until I was late going home and she had to bring Rory home. On the way home I had realised that I forgot that my mum had returned home at lunchtime. The minute I returned home she started quizzing me on where I had been. I told her that

Yesterday with Katniss was great, the starter turned out perfect and Prim and Rory loved it. I stayed talking to her for ages so I was late going home and of course I forgot my mother had come home yesterday. She started quizzing me on where I was. I said that I was working on a project for school and that I was sorry that I was late.

When she asked me who I was working with. I froze for a moment before quickly replying with Finnick.

She seemed to buy it as she just slapped me round the head and ordered me never to be late again. I shared a look with Bran and he smiled sadly at me. He is really the only one who knows just what my mother does to me though she has gotten easier on me as I have gotten older. I know that the only reason she didn't give me a proper beating tonight was because she was tired from her trip from District Six. I think that Finnick suspects what happens. I think my Dad and Rye know but they are trying to pretend it doesn't happen.

I managed to escape the house early this morning so I didn't have to face her. Luckily Rye was at some big party at his friend's house last night and he crashed there so I didn't have to drive him to college or listen to him beg me to drive him to college.
I am nearly finished at my locker when I hear somebody slide up behind my locker door.

"Alright Mellark?"

I sigh, grab the last book that I need, put that in my bag which I sling over my shoulder and I shut my locker to see Cato Hunter standing in front of me, smirking as usual.

"What do you want Hunter?" I ask him and he just smiles cruelly

"Can I not have a talk with my friend now? Do I have to want something to be able to start a conversation with the great Peeta Mellark?" He asks sarcastically and I just raise my eyebrows at him.

Cato Hunter used to be alright when we were younger. We were kind of friends, he thought that I spent too much time worrying over Katniss and that I should have got over her. I remember telling him that I couldn't get over her and him scoffing in disbelief. We stopped talking to each other altogether when he became friends with Clove, Marvel and Glimmer and when I became friends with Finnick.

"We are not friends Cato now what do you want?"

"Of course we are Peet. Don't know what you are on about. I just came over to ask you about all these rumours about you and Everdeen. The lads and I were just wondering if they were true. Actually the whole school is wondering that but they are assuming they are. I thought I would be a good friend and come up and ask you about it." Cato laughs while I frown in confusion.

Rumours? What rumours is he talking about? Rumours about Katniss and I? I haven't heard any rumours so far today but then again I wasn't talking to anybody since I came into school. I am not that surprised that there are rumours about us after the Hob yesterday. I hope that Katniss knows that I didn't start them and that I wouldn't start them.

"What type of rumours?" I ask him suspiciously. Cato smirks

"Oh you don't know about them? God I am sorry! I just thought that you would know because the whole town and seam are talking about you. People are even calling you two the 'Star Crossed Lovers of District Twelve'. How sad is that?" Cato doesn't sound sorry at all though and I doubt that he ever is sorry about anything.

"So anyway, there are tons of different rumours going around. Some are saying that you and Finny Boy have a bet on that you have to sleep with her in the next three months or you have to buy him a new car and don't worry Peet nobody would blame you if you that was true. Others are saying that you announced that she was knocked up in the Hobbit? The Hip? Yesterday, others are saying the usual using you for your money which I think we all know is pointless if you know what I mean? Then of course that she is dating you but cheating on you with Hawthorne and the other way around."

I laugh at him I'm not naïve I know why he has come over here. To try and push my buttons and find out the truth. I am wondering what he thought would get me angry though. Acting like we are friends? Openly making fun of me? And of Katniss? Maybe it was mocking my family's money problems? Or the rumour that she was cheating on me with Gale Hawthorne?

Cato frowns, he is clearly annoyed as he thought I would be upset or angry.

"Seriously Hunter? If you think any of them dumb rumours are true then you must be even crazier than I thought." He glares at me before storming off. I smile and then I see Finnick making his way
"What did Hunter want?" He asks when he reaches me. Cato and Finnick have never gotten along. Ever since Finnick beat Cato in a swimming competition when we were 13. Cato has held a grudge against him ever since then.

"He just wanted to inform me on all the rumours about me and Katniss because apparently he and I are friends."

"Wanted to tell me some rumours about me and Katniss because apparently he and I are friends?"

Finnick scoffs and asks, "What did you say to that?"

"I just said that if he believed any of them rumours then he is even crazier than I thought. I also told him that we weren't friends"

Finnick laughs, "Good on ya. So yes I did hear that you took a little de-tour into the Seam yesterday"

"Yeah I was there. We were just working on the project. We went to the Hob because she had to work and everyone there was staring at me the whole time especially that drunk guy who works there, Haymitch."

"You got Abernathy's attention? Wow you must be really special Peet." The bell rings telling us that we have got to go to our first class on a Friday morning so we head off.
"Somebody needs to tell them teachers to lay off and I may be the one to do it"

Thom and I look up from our lunches and see Darius sit down beside me.

"Well off you go then" Thom says smirking

"I will you know, one of these days I will tell them evil teachers to stop giving us so much homework and tests. I have found out why they give us so much and I don't like it!"

"Interesting," I say sarcastically "And what is the reason?"

"To punish us! Teachers went through hell when they were in school back in the Stone Age or something so they have unanimously decided to inflict the same pain onto us!" I raise my eyebrows.

Thom and I have tried to stop Gale and Darius complaining about school and work as it could be a lot worse but even though they agree they still complain, so Thom and I just gave up.

"We just had double with Snow and then Trinkie and we have her again after lunch. That mean countless hours of homework and studying over the weekend. Just brilliant." Gale says sarcastically as he takes a seat beside Thom.

"A double with Snow? And then a class with Trinket? That would drive anyone insane" Thom says understandingly

"You, cannot say that. You do not have Ms. Trinket for anything. You do not understand the pain and torture that we go through. Every. Day" I tell him, pointing my fork at him.

"Yeah I know and I do feel for you. But I wouldn't trade places with you and anyway I still have Snow"

"True anyway more importantly," I turn to Darius and Gale "Where were you two at lunch yesterday?"

"You know Katniss, I don't have to let you know where I am every second of the day." Darius says, lifting half of his lips in a smirk, again.

"Darius you can just tell us that you were with a girl. You always are with a girl anyway" Thom shrugs and Darius looks at him annoyed,

"I wasn't with a girl actually Thom"

"Darius it's ok. You can tell us where you were. What's wrong?" I ask worriedly

"Nothing's wrong Kat…thanks though. Look my geography teacher called me back after class and I had to… talk with her"

We all stare at him in astonishment.
"No! God no, not like that! Right fine I am failing geography. I have been failing for years and she just wanted to talk to me about it. That's all"

We relax, well except for Darius who just looks uncomfortable.

"Why did she want to talk about that though? It is only September. We have ages to worry about exams and all that" As you can see Gale obviously cares about education (not).

"Gale, shush! Dare I am pretty good at geography. I'll help you with it if you want" Thom offers.

"Thanks Thom. Now onto more important conversation. Where were you yesterday Gale?" Darius asks suggestively raising his eyebrows

Gale sighs, "All right before I tell you guys, I just want to let you know that nothing in set in stone. But anyway Vick told me last week that his dance teacher's older brother was visiting her for a while and they met him at the class. She told the class that her brother worked at a record company."

"What?" Thom, Darius and I yell.

Most of the cafeteria turn and stare at us but we don't even notice because we are staring in shock at Gale.

"Seriously?" Darius asks

"Yeah seriously. So apparently Vick's dance teacher had casually told James, that's the record company guy that I am in a band during class and had said that we are really good. So James asked Vick if I could meet him yesterday morning as that was the only available time he had.

So I went to see him yesterday and I showed him a few videos. He said that he was very impressed and that he would love to see us play. I told him that we sing almost every week in the Hob. We talked for ages and agreed that he is going to come later this week to see us perform and to talk to us afterwards. I went to see him again this morning to give him the directions to the Hob."

Thom, Darius and I look at Gale in shock. We must be staring at him for some time as he begins to get nervous under our gaze.

Then we all say simultaneously,

"Oh my God,"

Peeta POV

"You should just tell her you know" Finnick tells me, settling into a seat. I glare at him

"Finn I have told you before, it isn't that simple" I put my tray down on the table and I sit opposite him.

"How hard can it be Peet?" He asks while he leans across the table. "Hi Katniss! So do you want to go on a date with me on Saturday? See it is simple."

"No it's not, I have told you before Katniss isn't like that. I need to be friends with her before I ask her out. I don't want her thinking that I am a jerk."
"Well you better hurry up, you don't want to be stuck in the 'friend zone'" I roll my eyes

"Don't worry I won't"

We eat in silence for a while listening to the every day running and chatting of our peers.

"And anyway if you did ask her out you wouldn't sound like a jerk. Sure I asked Annie out and we had never been friends...or talked to each other really."

I smile, "Exactly my point. Annie turned you down the first time you asked her. And anyway Finnick you are a jerk so your point is invalid."

"Hey! That hurts me you know. I won her round in the end"

"Finnick you know it's true and you enjoy it. I have no clue why Annie said yes after. Or why in the world she puts up with you and your antics. Actually never mind her why do I put up with you?"

"Because you loooove me Peety" Finnick says adoringly.

Something every person should know about Finnick is that when Finnick is hyper. He gets soppy. Very soppy.

I scoff, "Sure I do" I take a bite of my sandwich while he looks at me pretending to look devastated.

"Yeah well it is a fair trade. You put up with me and my…jerkiness and I put up with you and your rants about the great Katniss Everdeen."

And again with the teasing about Katniss. I should really be used to it by now.

"I don't rant about her Finn. I just happen to…talk about her, often. Anyway it's not like you don't talk about Annie as much as you can"

"I don't talk about her nearly as much as you talk about Katniss Peet and she's not even your girlfriend."

I am about to contradict him by saying, yes he most certainly does, when we hear several shouts from across the room.

I turn around to find that the noise had come from Katniss and her friends.

Her, Thom and Darius seemed to be staring at Gale in shock?

Finnick and I aren't the only ones who notice their sudden outburst. The whole cafeteria is staring at them though they don't seem to notice us. Their mouths are open yet they all look slightly pleased by whatever Gale said to make them shout like they did.

I realise that it is none of my business and I turn back to my lunch with the second most annoying person in the world. Finnick comes second after Rye of course.

In an effort to find a new topic of conversation I question Finnick on his love life instead of him always asking me about mine.

"How are you and Annie anyway?" Finnick looks at me confused

"What do you mean?"
"Nothing I guess I was just wondering. You used to be all over each other but now you barely kiss in public. And we are talking about you here Finnick. So did she finally realise what you are truly like and go running? That's probably why she isn't here with us now." I tease him

"Oh ha, ha," Finnick says sarcastically. "No she didn't Peeta. You know full well that her and Delly are gone doing some girly thing."

I raise my eyebrows at him and he sighs

"Well I don't know what they are doing when they explained it to me I just zoned out. You know me! When they started talking about anything girly I'm miles away. I think Annie is annoyed with me anyway but she won't tell me what is wrong with her!" I look at him for a moment in despair.

"Finnick perhaps the reason she is annoyed at you is because you don't pay attention to her when she speaks."

"Yes I do! I always pay attention to her"

"Oh really?" I ask folding my arms. "So where have her and Delly gone for lunch today?"

Finnick opens his mouth to answer before shutting it.

"That and you are always flirting with other girls in front of her-. No don't deny it Finnick you do! Remember the cinema incident. You were lucky Annie even stayed with you after that." Finnick grimaces because he knows that I am right.

"Did you even make it up to her after that?" I ask him, "You know buy her flowers or chocolates or something that she would like to apologize."

Finnick starts fidgeting "Erm..."

"Finnick!"

"Yes I know. I am a rubbish boyfriend, you don't have to tell me!" Finnick puts his face in his hand and I struggle not to roll my eyes.

Finnick Odair forever a dramatic.

"No Finnick you're not. You are just overreacting as usual. It's not like Annie broke up with you for God's sake! She is just annoyed at you. I am always annoyed at you! It isn't a big deal"

"Isn't it?" He questions, his voice is muffled by his hands.

"No it isn't look you just need to pay more attention to your girlfriend and stop flirting with other girls."

"I know"

"You have no idea how to do that do you?"

He shakes his head in his hands before looking up at me and asking,

"How do you know so much about girls Peet? I mean you what went out on one date when you were 14? And even that was because your mother forced you into it."

My mother had set me up with the daughter of one of her friends when I was about 14. Needless to
say we both knew that we were forced to be there and we didn't like each other at all. Thankfully my mother hasn't tried to set me up with anyone else since.

"I guess I learn it from my brothers. I just do the complete opposite of whatever Rye does when he is in a relationship. Which is almost never."

That and the fact that I have imagined going out with Katniss since I was seven.

"So, oh Mater of Love, Who Still Can't Get a Date with the Girl That He Has Been in Love with Forever, what do I do now?"

I smirk at him, ignoring his new nickname for me as he comes up with a new one almost every day.

"Well that answer is simple Finnick"

He raises his eyebrows at me and I shake my head with laughter before looking at him again.

"Stop being a jerk."

I have finished explaining how not to mess up his romantic gestures as we enter the Home Ec. Room. I never did understand why he chose Home Ec, I think that it was between him choosing Home Ec. or Art as a subject and well Finnick isn't the best at Art. Ok he is useless at it but don't tell him that. Finnick likes to think that he is the best at everything which of course he isn't.

I take a quick sweep of the room and spot Katniss standing beside Madge in deep conversation with her. She seems excited. I smile, I don't think I have ever seen Katniss this happy. Well seeing her with Prim yesterday was close enough to this.

Finnick and I make our way over to them. I wonder why Finnick is going over to them too but then I remember that he is Madge's partner for this project.

Finnick and I go over to them well I go over to them and Finnick annoyingly fallows me though I can't really blame him, he is Madge's partner.

"Good Afternoon ladies." Finnick says smirking. I turn to him and shake my head.

Why do I even bother? He apparently doesn't listen to a thing that I say.

By the look on his face I guess he realises what he has done.

"Damn it!" Finnick shouts

Madge and Katniss look startled and I, well I begin to panic. Just a bit. But yes I start to panic. Real attractive right?

"Excuse him, he is insane and has random bursts of anger that comes at any time. Just ignore him, I do, everyone does." I glare at Finnick.

How dare he swear in front of Katniss? She didn't do anything wrong and neither did Madge. But no Finnick just thinks of himself as usual.

"Yes! Peeta here is right. I am insane and just don't mind me. Thankfully I have Peeta here to shut me up most of the time anyway." Finnick stomps off to his seat where he proceeds to sit and stare at the desk, pouting. I sigh wondering how my life came to this and look at the girls who are both
trying their best not to laugh.

"Madge, do you think you could shut him up for a while, please? He has been annoying me all lunch and he is driving me mad"

Madge laughs, "I'll try." Madge walks over and sits beside him.

"Katniss and I walk to our seats and sit down.

"So what is Finnick annoying you about today then?" Katniss asks

"I can't even remember he was making a big deal over nothing if I remember correctly something about him being a rubbish boyfriend and never paying attention to Annie and always flirting with other girls. He was trying to get me to fix his relationship for him anyway." She laughs

"Sounds like you had a pretty boring lunch. Do you often have to help out in his love life? He seems to think you are an expert." She asks, blushing slightly.

I smile, "Yeah I help him out a bit. I wouldn't call myself an expert and I am sure Finnick wouldn't ask but he just keeps messing up. So yeah maybe giving advice is a gift of mine but then again maybe I just pay attention unlike him. I am also not an idiot which is a bonus."

"Yeah you are not an idiot. Trust me, I spend every day with a bunch of idiots and you are defiantly not one."

It is my turn to blush this time and I pray to God that she doesn't notice. We sit in a comfortable silence for a bit and I try desperately try to think of something funny to say. But thankfully Katniss soon breaks it.

"So what did you think of our amazing, super complicated and really rare starter?"

"Oh it was one of the best things I have ever tasted. I could tell that you made it."

I wink at her reminding myself of Finnick.

"Why thank you but you have to take at least some credit as you made half of it if not most of it." She says grinning.

"Don't be so modest. All I did was supervise. Soon you will be taking over my job and leave me broke."

Katniss laughs and I smile, I will never get over how beautiful her laugh is.

"Thank you but I doubt that baking will be my future. Your future maybe but not mine."

"What will be your future then? Music?" I ask curiously

"Hopefully, Gale has just told us that a guy who works in a music company is interested in seeing us preform next week."

"Wow that's amazing Katniss!" And I mean it Katniss is an amazing singer I only heard her sing when we were but even then her voice was stunning and I bet she's even better now.

"Thanks I don't want to get my hopes up or anything but I am looking forward to it. So back to this project, do you want to come over after school to work on the dinner?" She asks and as much as I would love to say yes I know that my mother would kill me if I stayed out again.
"I'm sorry I can't tonight, but how about tomorrow?" I ask hopefully.

"Sure I have practice with the lads later anyway tomorrow sounds great. So what are you doing today anyway?" she asks curiously. My eyes widen and start stuttering.

"Erm nothing really I just got home late and my mother didn't like it so I don't want to make her mad-I mean upset again. I will probably have to work anyway so yeah."

Damn it Mellark shut up! I can't have Katniss finding out about my mother. She would think I was a weak loser. She looks at me weirdly for a moment before nodding.

"Oh I am sorry that I kept you out so late. I should have known that your family would be worried." My dad might have been worried and maybe Bran but defiantly not Rye or my mother but I decide to not mention this to Katniss.

"Hey don't worry about it. It isn't your fault I should have texted my dad to tell him where I was. Don't apologize I had a great time yesterday." I smile and I can feel my face going red again.

"Really? You had a great time? I mean don't get me wrong I did too. But you had half the Seam staring at you for two hours."

"Yeah I am sure. I'm not the centre of attention much so it was unusual. I'm sure you get it all the time thought. You being a big star and that and all them fans screaming your name. Let's not get started on all the boys that try to get you to notice them. Remind me again why you are sitting here talking to me?"

I don't mention that one of them boys is me.

"Ah sure that answer is easy. Finnick is too busy to talk to me now. So I am stuck with you." She sighs before her eyes catch mine and we both burst out laughing.

Even though everyone in the class turn to look at us in confusion we ignore them even Finnick who has a smirk so wide that it's threatening to break his face.
I sigh as I open the door to the bakery. Thank God school is over for the week.

I mean don't get me wrong Finnick is a great friend but he is useless when it comes to Annie Cresta. Though when I said that to him he burst out laughing and said I was the same except 10 times worse with Katniss. He may have been right but I wasn't going to tell him that.

Dad is working behind the counter today. He looks tired and the look on his face is one I recognize as I see it so often. He and mum have fought again. Or most likely my mother yelling about something and my dad just agreeing to it. He looks up when the bell goes off as I enter. I shut the door and he smiles at me.

"Hi Peeta, how was your day?" I can tell that he is exhausted but he still smiles at me.

I shrug and push my bag under the table near the entrance.

"It was ok kind of boring. Finnick has messed up with Annie again so he was asking me to help him. I don't know why he asked me though but I gave it a try any way." I tell him leaning against the table.

He smiles tiredly "You are a good friend Peeta."

"Em, thanks." I say narrowing my eyes. Something doesn't seem right. Dad seems on edge and I can't help but think that it has something to do with my mother, something bad.

So being the idiot I am I ask him about her.

"Is mum home?" His smile vanishes immediately. He tries to resurrect it but fails miserably.

"Peeta, your mother-"

"Peeta Jonathan Mellark! Well it is about time you got home. Wait until I get my hands on you!"

I shut my eyes tightly. I can hear her thundering down the stairs with somebody chasing her and by the time she has reached the bottom and come through the door I have opened them.

Her face reads of anger, disgust and pure hatred. A sight I have gotten used to over the years. She glares at me, her hands in fists, nails digging into her skin I'm sure. But she doesn't seem to care her gaze is fixed on me.

Bran rushes through the door and almost crashes into her. I guess that he was the one chasing her. I take my eyes off my mother for a second and take in his appearance. He looks terrified and worried. Not for himself though but for me. I can tell he wants to tell her, or me I'm not sure, something but thinks better of it and he looks down at his feet ashamed.

What is going on?

After what seems like an hour she finally speaks.
"Is it true?" She asks me with a deadly tone. Again I look at my dad who looks away and then to Bran who lifts his head and meets my eyes. He looks nervous, apologetic and even guilty.

"Don't you look away from me young man! Now you answer me at once. Is. It. True!"

I dare myself to look at her and answer.

"Is what true mother?"

"Oh don't you play the innocent act with me! You know what you have done! Put shame on our family just like you have all ways done! Going behind my back and bringing a common Seam slut into our home, my home, while I was away! I bet you think that I would never find out well guess what you are going to pay for it."

I close my eyes because I refuse to let her know how this makes me feel.

Though I know she knows all ready. It is obvious what she is referring to. Me bringing Katniss over to work on our project though I doubt she knows about the project bit. All she probably heard was Katniss being in 'her' house and she must have exploded.

I open my eyes but look straight at Bran whose head his hung but I can tell that his eyes are shut. I realised he must have told her. Why? I don't know. Hurt, anger and betrayal surface in me as I look at him. I thought I could trust him. I would never even think of Rye doing something like this though he has threatened too many a time but told me afterwards that he never would.

I turn back to my mother's deadly strong gaze that is still fixed on me and I gulp.

"I-I can explain-" I don't get a chance to finish as she has stomped over and slapped me across the face.

"Laura!" My dad shouts at her with shock and disappointment clear in his voice. I have no idea why he does. It's not like she has never done it before. Well maybe not when he was there but I know he was always aware of what my mother does to me.

I close my eyes I am not surprised that she slapped me it isn't the first time she has hit me and it probably won't be the last.

"Don't you tell me that you can explain what you have done! How could any respectable person explain sleeping with that-that girl! How many times have I told you Peeta! All that girl is, is no good rubbish. Just like her parents and everyone else that lives in that dump! I have always known that you were exactly like your father but I had hoped by now that you would have inherited my brains! Well you clearly haven't if you are going out with that good for nothing-"

"That is enough Laura!" Dad yells, interrupting her again. This doesn't do much good for him as she is quick to turn on him.

"Oh no. Don't you dare! Avery Mellark! Don't you dare! How could you let that girl into our home after everything 'that' family has put us through! Even if she wasn't from 'that' family you should never have let a girl from the Seam into our house. You knew how I would feel about it!"

"Laura! They were working on a project! They did nothing else but work when she was here. And don't even think of bringing all of that up again! Everything that happened between us and the Everdeens was all your fault and you know it! They have done nothing wrong Laura and they never have!"

"That is enough Laura!" Dad yells, interrupting her again. This doesn't do much good for him as she is quick to turn on him.

"Oh no. Don't you dare! Avery Mellark! Don't you dare! How could you let that girl into our home after everything 'that' family has put us through! Even if she wasn't from 'that' family you should never have let a girl from the Seam into our house. You knew how I would feel about it!"

"Laura! They were working on a project! They did nothing else but work when she was here. And don't even think of bringing all of that up again! Everything that happened between us and the Everdeens was all your fault and you know it! They have done nothing wrong Laura and they never have!"
"That is what you can't handle. That they are good, kind people and they never hurt any of our family. Or anybody in this town! You have made everything difficult for our family for years. I thought finally we had gotten past all that and moved on. But no of course not. Peeta and Katniss were working on a project. Yeah that is her name, Katniss! Not 'the Seam slut'! Not 'that girl'! No Katniss! Yes she came over when I was here and I had no problem with it! Bran was here when she was here so was Gwen and they didn't care! This is just yoi are your stupid childish prejudices! Even if they were more than friends I would have let her come over the same as I did when Bran and Gwen started dating! Because Katniss is a lovely, polite girl which is amazing after all that she has been through. Everything that happened between us and the Everdeens happened years ago! Move on and get over it!"

Bran, my mother and I both look at him in shock. Never, no matter what my mother has done has dad ever raised his voice to her. Well not since I have been born anyway. It seems that he has finally reached his breaking point after all these years.

We all stand there frozen. My parents with locked eyes and are having a silent conversation of their own with them. Then my mother turns to me sharply and looks at me with no emotion on her face whatsoever.

"So you are not going out with….that girl?" It seems she still can't say her name but I choose to just answer her question.

I shake my head

"No I'm not going out with her. Like dad said we are just working on a Home Ec. Project together that we were assigned partners for." She looks at me as if she can see straight through me before she moves aside.

"Get upstairs and do your homework boy, before I give you jobs to do." She turns away from me, not looking at anybody but grabs her coat and says, "I am going out" She then storms out of the front door, leaving us alone.

We stand there in silence for a moment then I retrieve my bag from underneath the table and straighten it on my shoulders. I make my way towards the door that my mother exited from an hour ago when Bran stops me by placing a hand on my shoulder.

"Peeta I-" I shrug his hand off me.

"Don't Bran. Just, don't." I shove past him and make my way quickly upstairs. I want to act cold and stay mad at Bran but I am just hurt more than anything. How could he tell my mother that Katniss had been here? He knew she would go ballistic, which she did. After all the secrets I kept about him and Gwen and not just her his past girlfriends too, he does this to me.

I climb the extra stairs that leads to my attic bedroom and when I get there I shut the door and throw my bag on the other side of the room. I sit on my desk chair and put my face in my hands re-living the past hour in my head over and over again. About five minutes later I feel my phone vibrate in my pocket. I groan and hope that it isn't a text from Finnick but when I take out my phone I am pleasantly surprised at the message I have received.

'Hey Peeta, Its Katniss here.

I just thought that I would say hi and make sure that I had the right number that you gave me the
other day.

-Katniss

PS: Mellark this better be you because if you gave me the wrong number on purpose you are dead.’

Ah Katniss and her death threats. I grin widely before quickly typing a reply.

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Katniss POV

All the way home Gale and I cannot stop talking about James. I am really excited (again don't want to get too excited in case something happens. Which is very likely) when I get home which doesn't happen often. I shut the front door and hang up my coat. I go into the kitchen and am shocked to see my mum at the table. She looks up at me and I can see the tiniest hint of a smile on her face though I remain expressionless.

After a bit she realises that I am not going to speak so she does.

"Where's Prim?" she asks, her voice is strained, as it always is on the rare occasion that she speaks.

"At Roar's" I answer moving across the kitchen to get a snack.

"What?" she asks confused

"Rory, she's with Rory Hawthorne at his house."

She stares blankly at me. Clearly she has no idea who I am talking about.

"Gale's little brother, Rory, she's at their house for the evening they have some project to do."

"Oh that is nice" I shrug

"Would you like some tea?" I ask awkwardly. I never have tea I have always preferred water but I know that she likes it. Well I guess she does I make it for her almost every day and she drinks half of it which is more than she eats.

"Thank you but I have one" I raise an eyebrow. True she does have a cup of tea in front of her but it has gone cold and none of it has been drank. It has obviously been sitting there for a long time.

"Ok then"

"Who was that boy?" mum asks while stirring her tea with a spoon "That was here the other day?"

"Rory?" I offer her as I sit down opposite her.

"No, no that-that wasn't his name. He was about yo-your age."

"Gale?" I ask her hopefully. I don't know the exact details between our family and the Mellarks but I do know that my parents and Peeta's parents didn't get along when they were younger. Then again I can't think of anybody who gets along with Mrs. Mellark.

"No I think he was from the town. I-I saw him on my way to the…bathroom" Her voice is shaky. This is the most I have heard her speak in years. I can tell this is a struggle for her though as she takes deep breaths.
"Oh yeah. You must mean my partner for my Home Ec. project Peeta."

"Peeta?" she asks absentmindedly

"Er yes Peeta, Peeta Mellark." That catches her attention and her head flies up and her tea flies everywhere. I gulp and take a deep breath

"Mellark?" she asks with no emotion in her voice

"Yes but it was assigned the teacher told us all who our partners were" I say quickly not mentioning the fact that I am glad Ms. Trinket chose him.

I notice she can't remember a boy that has been coming over to our house even since he was born yet she can remember if a boy is a townie and she can remember the Mellarks.

We don't speak for a minute. I stand up and grab some kitchen towel and wipe up the mess from the spilt tea. Once I have finished I throw it in the bin and sit back down.

"Is he-is he…nice?" She asks me cautiously and I look at her in shock.

She has barely spoken in years and now suddenly a Mellark appears and she is all talk and questioning me about him. I fight the urge to scream or roll my eyes.

"Wh-What?" I ask cluelessly.

"Well-Is he, well like his-, his father? Would you say? Or his-his mother?" she asks and I just stare at her still in shock.

My eyes widen slightly, I wasn't expecting that or any of this conversation to be honest

"Well his father I guess. He is nothing like his mother anyway." I say and her face relaxes and again shows a hint of a smile

"Good for you he is a nice boy then." I stare at her in shock and suspicion. She stands up shakily and slowly leaves and goes up to her room. I close my eyes and go over the last couple of minutes which is the first proper conversation I have had with my mother since I was eleven.

I sit there in shock for around ten minutes before I take my biscuit and head up to my room. I lie down on my bed with my eyes shut and when I get up five minutes later to start my homework I spot a small, folded piece of paper on my bedside table. I frown in confusion and look at it. Its Peeta's phone number. Wow I had completely forgotten that we had exchanged numbers.

Subconsciously I retrieve my phone from my bag and open it. I type in his number quickly.

Should I text him?

Should I call him? No defiantly not

I'll text him.

Yes.

I must spend about ten minutes going back and forth over whether to text him or not. And for what seems like the millionth time this week I am thinking like a pre-teen townie girl.

I am not one of them girls so I suck it up and start typing.
As I type I pray that he is not playing a joke on me and has given me the wrong number. If he has he probably gave me Finnick or Thresh's number so they could have a good laugh about it later.

My finger hovers over the send button but I send it and breathe out.

I sit on my bed and lean against the headboard. I go into 'sent' in my messages and enter the message I have just sent to Peeta.

'Hey Peeta, Its Katniss here.

I just thought that I would say hi and make sure that I had the right number that you gave me the other day.

-Katniss :)

PS: Mellark this better be you because if you gave me the wrong number on purpose you are dead.'

Ugh why can I not sound cool like Madge or even Delly Cartwright and say something simple or even cool? Like…well I am that unlike Madge and Delly that I don't even know what I would have said if I was like him.

Ok that made absolutely no sense.

If Peeta did in fact give me his right number then we probably thinks that I am some weirdo. I am getting nervous though whether or not he will text me back.

He is probably busy so-

'Beeb'

I rush to check my inbox and open the message.

'Hi Katniss, yeah don't worry it's me. How was your day? :)

PS: Yeah it is me, Peeta that is. Proof: we were passing notes when we were meant to be doing our English essay in class today.'

I smile brightly and text him back.

'Ha that's good. I am glad that its you that I am texting. My day was grand thanks pretty boring you know. I did have a strange conversation with my mother though. Wbu? :)

He texts back quickly,

'Ha yeah I feel the same. I would much rather be talking to you than someone else especially after my day. I mean don't get me wrong Finnick is a great friend but its nice to just get a break from him for a while. The others as well. My day was ok. I also had an odd conversation (If odd is the right word to describe it) with my parents and Bran. What was your weird conversation with your mum about? If you want to tell me I mean you don't have to or anything em yeah…. :)'

Finnick and Peeta's friendship is just hilarious. I laugh at Peeta's ending he is even babbling in his text messages.

'Yeah I am the same with Darius. It is nice to get away from him flirting with any girl in this District. Well my mum was down from her room which is an improvement. She talked quite a bit. She doesn't remember who Rory is and I don't think she remembers Gale either (I don't know how she doesn't
know Rory, Prim never shuts up about him). She asked who the boy was from the other day and she was talking about you. She seemed very…surprised? I guess is the word. She started asking what you were like and stuff :)'

'I am glad your mum is doing a bit better. I am sorry to hear that she doesn't remember Rory and Gale. What did you say to your mother? :)'

I smile sadly at what he says about Rory and Gale. Even after all this time it is a shock for me to believe that she can't remember them.

'Oh she was asking me if you were nice I think and I was in shock and just said what? Then she asked if you were like your father and I said yeah you were. And that was about it I didn't really know what to say and well you and your father seem kind of a like. She seemed happy about what I said though she said you must be nice then. :)'

'Oh yeah its fine thanks :)' 

Well that's good I was worried I had offended him by telling him and my mum he is like his dad.

"So what about your odd conversation with your family? :)")"

I wonder if Rye has messed up again or if his mum did something to upset him now that she is back.

'Bran told my mother that you came over while she was away. I don't know how he told her I just know it was him. She went insane anyway and she also thought that we were…sleeping together.'

God that can't be good.

'Oh god what happened then?'

'What I would expect. She started to yell and scream the house down. My dad tried to tell her to stop but she started on him then. She asked how he could allow you to come over and then my dad, for the first time ever, started fighting back and he told her that he let us work on the project together and that you were a lovely girl. He told her that she needed to grow up and move on from the past. When he finished we were all just in shock then my mother told me to go up to my room.'

I have a feeling that Peeta isn't telling me something. But I don't say anything, I mean we have only started talking properly since we started the project.

I don't expect him to use me as his personal diary. I have only met Mrs. Mellark a few times, all being in the bakery, and she was never very polite towards me…well towards anyone really.

I do know that she hates my parents for some reason. I have never gotten the impression from Peeta that he and his mother were close either. Much like myself and my mother.

'Why would Bran tell her that I was over if he knew she would go mad and get the wrong idea? I don't mean to slag off your brother but I thought you two got along it just seems really spiteful for him to do something like that. I mean I wouldn't even suspect Rye of doing something like that.'

I hope I don't sound nosy for wondering about his brother. When I met him he seemed like a nice guy and I thought that he and Peeta got along well.

'No its fine I thought the same thing. It is just so unlike him to do something like this. I know he probably has an explanation for it and he did try to talk to me after my mother stormed out. But I couldn't handle him telling me so I just asked him to stop and went upstairs. I will probably hear him
out later but I don't think I want to now. I mean if Rye were to do something like that he would just tease me about you. He wouldn't say your name. I don't mean that in a bad or offensive way but well you know what my mother's like about well girls from the Seam. I don't know though if Bran told her if me and you were dating and/or sleeping together or if she just assumed it.'

'Yeah I think it would be good if you heard him out. He is your brother after all. Yeah well Gale presumed the same thing. Well not the exact same thing. But he did think that we were together because we went to the Hob together and apparently according to Gale, only people who are from the Seam who are in a relationship with someone from the town brings them to the Hob. Why are people so presumptuous?'

'Ha I don't know. I can see where Gale was coming from. I got that too, all day people asking us if we were together. We are the talk of the district apparently. I am sorry about that.'

I feel sorry for him when he says that. It seems that no matter what happens Peeta seems to just blame himself and apologize for things that aren't his fault.

'Hey don't blame yourself! Sure I brought you there didn't I? And I don't regret it. So we should just ignore what people say :)'

'Thank you. I don't regret it either. Yeah we should just do that. I mean it isn't any of their business what we do or…don't do :)'

'Great well sorry but I have to go. I want to get my homework done before band practise and I can never concentrate on it when I am texting. I also want to try and get it out of the way before the weekend starts. I might talk to you later? :)'

'Yeah no problem. I should get my homework done too. Yeah great I will talk to you later see you later :)'

I blush and start doing my homework with a massive grin on my face.
"We can't sing that Katniss it is too girly and stupid."

"Oi just because I wrote it doesn't mean that it's girly Darius! Since when would anyone describe me as girly?"

"I could think of a few who would-"

"Shut up the both of you" Gale yells at us and we fall silent. "Now we need to choose two songs to sing for James how many have we narrowed them down to?"

"Here I wrote down the ones we have to choose from while them two were bickering," Thom says glancing at Darius and I but we ignore him and continue to glare at each other. "We have six and we need to choose two from them."

"Good, finally somebody other than me that is listening," Gales says and Thom passes him the paper and Gale quickly looks over it.

"All right so there is six songs here and we need to pick two of them"

"Well done Caption Obvious." Darius says sarcastically

"Darius." Thom say sternly

"What?"

"Oh that's it" I shout over the two and tear out a page from Thom's notepad and start tearing it into six pieces

"Catnip what are you-?"

"Shush Hawthorne" Seriously these guys never stop talking. I grab the pen that Darius has been clicking (rather annoyingly I might add) all morning and I write down each song on each of the papers so we have six papers with the six songs on them. I fold them up and then stand up and get one of Vick's hats from the banister and put the papers in it, I copy a different song onto each scrap of paper.

I walk back into the room and give the hat to Gale.

"Right you pick one piece of paper and then Thom you pick the other one."

"Hey why can't I choose one?" moans Darius (what is with him today?)

"Because you cheat at everything Dar" Thom answers for me

Before Darius can snap back at him Gale picks his piece of paper and then passes the hat to Thom who also picks one. They look at us for a second before opening them.
Peeta POV

My mother isn't speaking to me since the argument which I am completely fine with. What I am not fine with though is my eldest brother knocking on my door for two hours and asking me to talk to him yesterday while I tried to do my homework and tried to get my mind of Katniss and also off my mother.

I woke up early this morning in an attempt to avoid Bran. I texted Finnick asking if I could have breakfast at his which isn't an irregular occurrence for one of us to go to the others for breakfast to escape our family members. He texts back 'Sure' and I quickly got ready and left for his house. I could hear Bran yell after me on my way out but again I ignored him and walked to Finnick's house.

After we eat he of course questioned me on everything and even after two hours. It seems he isn't out of questions yet.

"So let me get this straight Peet, your mother found out from Bran that Katniss was over in your house and thought you were seeing her and sleeping with her." Finnick asks with wide eyes.

"Yes and she through a fit." I tell him for the tenth time, rolling my eyes which I seem to do often when I am around him.

Finnick looks at me in shock, "And you survived?"

I laugh and nod

"Wow" he mutters in a daze

"Yeah I know"

"Are you sure it was Bran who told her? I mean it does sound like something Rye would do and if it was Rye once if he was really mad at you and I don't even think that Rye could be that cruel. I mean we all know what she could have done to you especially if Bran and your father wasn't there."

"No I am sure it was Bran. Rye was never home when Katniss was over and he has never mentioned her coming over to me so I am not sure if he knew or not. Plus Bran has been trying to apologize since the whole thing happened. He banged on my door for two hours yesterday and he tried to talk to me this morning when I left. I don't know why he did it though."

"You don't think-?"

"What" I ask

"Well that maybe he could be protecting Rye?" Truth is I had thought of that but I heard him plead with me to open the door several times last night. Telling me how sorry he was.

"Yeah I have but no he defiantly told her. It was written all over his face"

"She could have guessed it and asked him." He says doubtfully

I give him a look.

"Yeah I know that's a rather strange thing to ask if she wasn't given any hints. It doesn't make sense why he would tell her. He knows how much you like Katniss sure we all do. Also you said that your dad tried to warm you when you came home so he knew why didn't he stop Bran from telling her?"

I answer him by shrugging because I honestly don't know either but hopefully knowing Bran he has
a good reason for telling her.

"So anyway how far along are you and Everdeen in this Home Ec. project thingy? Madge and I have barely done anything. Well no that's not really fair it's me that does nothing so she yells at me to help her and I ignore her so yeah we don't get a lot done." I laugh

"Yep that sounds like you. We have planned out what we are making and we cooked the starter the other day. We nearly have our folder done we just need the pictures of the food."

"Well Madge and I defiantly need to catch up then"

"Yes I think you two do. How are you plans with Annie going?"

"Good, I think she is catching on that I am up to something though."

"Of course she is, Annie Cresta knows you more than you know yourself."

"No she doesn't!" Finnick exclaims

"Yes she does"

We sit in silence for a while. Well technically I am sitting in a chair and he is lying on his bed, leaning against the wall but whatever.

"So are you bringing Annie to the game?" I ask him.

The school's first football game this year is in three weeks. Thresh is on the team and Finnick and I used to be on the team but we quit after last year's season to focus on studying this year. I also couldn't handle both wrestling and football any longer.

Now that I think about it that was how Finnick first asked Annie out. He asked her if she wanted to go and stare at him at the game that Friday. She smiled and then poured her smoothie over his head in front of the whole school. He smelt like strawberries and apples for the rest of the week no matter how many showers he took.

But then again that is how he fell in love with her (I never said that Finnick was right in the head!) Finnick is not normal at all but then again I'm not either so no wonder we are friends.

"Yeah I think so. I will ask her anyway. I don't think she understands the concept of football even after the games she came to over the past few years."

Yep even after she poured a smoothie all over Finnick's head, Annie still went to that match. She claimed that it was because Delly forced her to go with her which knowing Delly could be true.

"Do you think you will ask Katniss?" he asks me and I look at him startled.

"Ask her what?" I ask dumbly

"If she would go to the game with you."

"Nah I doubt that I will. I don't think she likes sports anyway."

"If she doesn't like or understand sports then you can explain them to her at the game. Great conversation topic."

"Oh yes because we would be able to talk over all the cheers and screaming most of them made by
you probably."

"Of course you two will and don't worry I'm sure Annie will find a way to shut me up."

I raise my eyebrows at him but he doesn't give up.

"Come on Peeta this has been going on for ages you have to ask her out soon."

"Ages? It has been a week!"

"I asked Annie out within two hours of knowing her."

"Yeah and look how long it took her to agree to go out with her! I told you she doesn't like sports
and I think I heard her say once that she hated football so if I asked her she would say no." Of course
I never heard her say that but I tell Finnick that anyway but by the look he gives me he doesn't
believe me.

"So neither does Annie or Delly but they still go" He points out.

"Still Katniss isn't like Annie or Delly look I better go lunch will be ready soon and I don't want to
make mother mad if she shows up."

"Right see you later Peet but don't think I am finished with you yet."

Once I get home I make my way up to my room. But I can't enter my room as my eldest brother is
sitting on the ground and leaning against the door

He looks up as soon as he hears my footsteps and I raise an eyebrow at him. He is just being
dramatic now. I am glad that he didn't go into my room though. After Rye went into my room and
accidentally ruined half of my paintings a year or two ago I made it a strict rule that nobody comes
into my room without me being there and without knocking first.

I unwillingly realise that he won't let me into my room without talking to her and I decide to just get
this conversation out of the way now.

"Hello Bran what can I do for you?" I ask him. I try to sound sarcastic but it comes out with no
emotion in my voice.

Bran scrambles to get up from the floor, he looks me straight in the eyes and says, "I just want to talk
to you."

Bran gets up off the floor and looks into my eyes and says, "I just wanted to talk to you"

"You could have just waited for me down stairs you know," I say raising an eyebrow "In a chair
instead of sitting on the floor outside my room. I thought being dramatic was Rye's thing."

Bran shuffles his feet and I fold my arms.

"I just thought we could talk privately in your room. I don't think either of us want…her to hear us."

I stare blankly at him before pushing him out of the way slightly and opening the door to my room. I
leave it open and sit on my bed. Hesitantly Bran follows me through and closes the door behind him.
He sits down on my desk chair and after a minute or two he starts speaking.

"I know you are mad at me and you have every right to be. I just want you to know that I never
intended to tell her." He stops for a minute as if expecting me to react but I remain emotionless.
"It was about an hour before you were meant to come home. I had gone upstairs to try and find Dad when she came out of their room and just started attacking me with questions about yesterday. I told her again that you were with Finnick. But she said that she had talked to his parents and they told her that you weren't over yesterday. I figure now that she just made that up but that didn't occur to me at the time.

I told her that you must have said you were at Thresh's but she didn't believe me. She said that if I was going to that much trouble to cover for you then you must have been with a girl. I tried to lie I swear I did but Peeta you know I am a rubbish liar and she saw straight through me."

Of course I knew what a bad liar Bran was. That was why I had to cover for him all the time because he couldn't lie to anyone, well not anyone in our family anyway. Bran is known as the sensible in our family but he just can't lie to save his life especially to our mother.

"Why would you tell her that I was with Katniss though? Why didn't you say Delly or Annie or Madge Undersee? Any other girl in the district except Katniss. Any other girl other than the one girl that our mother would kill me for dating! And so what if you told her that how did she know that she came over to our house?"

"I'm sorry but she kept pressuring me and I couldn't do anything to make her stop. She ordered me not to lie and that since I had lied so far she would be able to tell if I lied again. She said that since nobody told her it must have been someone she didn't like.

And then before I knew what I was saying I had told her. I was trying to defend Katniss though. She said that the girl must be up to no good and I told her that actually Katniss was a lovely and quiet girl.

I know it was stupid and I definitely shouldn't have said it and please believe me I regretted it the minute that I said it.

She didn't speak for about five minutes then she asked how long it had been going on. I asked her what she meant. She seemed to think you two were dating but when I tried to contradict her she just asked if she ever came over to our house. I was frozen and well I guess she took that as an affirmative. That's when you arrived home.

I really am sorry Peeta"

This whole time he has never broken eye contact with me which is admirable. His eyes look at me pleadingly even though I know there is no need. I knew that I could never stay mad at him for long.

"It's ok Bran." I tell him and he looks at me surprised.

"But-"

"No it's fine. Mum didn't do anything too bad yesterday thanks to Dad. I just have to be careful around her and hopefully she will let this go. I know that you didn't mean to tell her and I know that I probably made a big deal about it. Just make sure you or Rye or Gwen even don't mention Katniss when she is around or it will be hell for all of us.

"You didn't overreact Peeta. If something like that happened to me I would have reacted far worse than you did and God only knows what Rye would have done if it happened to him. And she shouldn't have said and done what she did to you. I know it's not the first time which makes it even worse. Even if she wasn't like she is I still shouldn't have broken your trust and told her. I know you never would have done that to me and you have covered for me loads of times over the years. If you
"Thanks Bran. If you feel this bad maybe you can do my morning shift in the bakery tomorrow and maybe take Rye to school instead of him coming with me and making me late."

"Yeah sure no problem for as long as you want." I grin I could get used to this

"Right now what is for lunch? I am starving."

Katniss POV

A while after dinner Gale walks me home from his house. It is only about a ten minute walk but he still insisted, saying that it was late and he didn't want anything to happen to me. Even though he knows full well that I can take care of myself.

"How is your mum doing?" He asks me once we leave the house.

I sigh and honestly am not sure how to respond, "She's…all right I guess. To be honest I don't know if she is getting better or worse." Gale looks at me confused and I don't blame him. I know I must not be making a lot of sense."

"When I came home from school yesterday she was up and downstairs. She was weak but talking, Which is good I know but she couldn't remember who Rory is and she was even confused about who you are." I glance at Gale's expression from the corner of my eye and he looks mildly shocked. But I know that like me he isn't all that surprised. We are used to this from our mothers but my mother has never forgotten one of the Hawthornes completely, sometimes Posy confuses her but she would talk about her later. Hazelle is the same she has never forgotten Prim and I.

"Any other signs that she is getting better?" He asks

"I wouldn't count this as getting better but I told you Peeta was over the other day. She started asking questions about him. She remembered him and his father but not Rory that just makes no sense."

"Well you know her and Mr. Mellark have known each other since they were kids. But still she has known my parents since your parents got together and your mum has known me and the kids since we were born. And has for how she remembers Peeta I don't know. Maybe ask her doctor the next time you see him. Anyway she is speaking and moving around again that's good."

"Yeah I guess and I'll do that thanks. What about Hazelle how is she doing?"

Gale shrugs, "We barely ever see her. She asked Vick where dad was the other day. He just stared at her sadly before telling me that he was going to finish his homework in his room. Mum looked quite confused for a good while after but then I think she remembered and she went back to washing. She is still doing all of the chores. I try to help her even Rory and Vick try and help too but she just smiles and ignores us. I figure that she just keeps busy all the time to keep her mind off dad. She doesn't speak that much. I was really worried about her that day she hasn't mentioned dad in ages."

I nod and we walk in silence for a while both lost in our own thoughts.

Mum has forgotten about dad a good few times, more so when I was younger. Gale and I did think of getting them help when we were younger. But they started to get better so we decided that nobody
would take us seriously and that we wouldn't be able to afford it anyway.

I do take mum to a doctor for a check-up every few months though. But even that's a struggle to pay for.

"How is it coming along anyway? The project? I mean we all know what you're like when it comes to cooking God help Mellar-Ow! Katniss!"

"What?" I ask innocently as if I hadn't just elbowed him in the stomach.

"I was only joking Catnip! Seriously though how is it going? I haven't gotten a project so far this year and I want to be prepared for it."

"It's going fine. Peeta is a great baker and cook so he does most of the practical work and I do the written work."

"I never understood why you took Home Ec. anyway." Gale laughs and I smile

"Don't really know there wasn't any other one I liked more than it and you get to learn how to cook and then eat the food afterwards so it's grand. Plus who else would cook the kids dinner? You would poison them for sure."

"Not true! And why do you never share anything you bake with me?" He asks putting on his pout face.

""Well you could have done Home Ec you know" I say teasing him

"Ugh no, not my thing" he shivers

"Why? Is it too girly for you?" I ask trying to challenge him it doesn't work though. He knows me too well.

"Nah I'll just get you to make me everything and pray I don't get poisoned" I smirk and elbow him again then run off into my house.

"Hey!" he yells after me but all I do is laugh and shut the door.
Peeta POV

I finish packing all my wrestling gear into my gym bag and zip it shut. I am about to head home and get some lunch when my couch stops me.

"Well done Mellark you did great today." Couch never usually gives out compliments so I am a bit sceptical as to why he is giving me one today

"Thanks Couch." I tell him shutting my locker.

"I was wondering if you would be interested in competing in the championship this year. Nobody else on the team has any interest never mind the talent for it. You would be an excellent candidate if put forward you haven't been beaten since you started."

This isn't the first year that couch wanted me to enter the wrestling championship he has asked me ever since I was 15. I had all ways denied as I had football and school as well and just would never have the time for it. Anyways I never have liked competitions I've never been that interested in them.

"Sorry couch I'll need to study for exams I just don't think that I will have the time."

"I understand Mellark but it would look excellent on your college application form. Especially if you came in the top 3 or even 5. And we both know that you could come in first place. There will also be scouts from colleges there looking to give out scholarships. I know that you don't want to be a professional wrestler but you could save a good bit of money if you got a scholarship. Look I know you need to study for your exams and of course its your senior year and you will want to have fun. I am just asking you to think about it and if you show any interest I can fill you in on the details and you can decide then. Sound good?"

I nod. It would take up a lot of time but what he said about a scholarship and entering (and possibly winning or at least doing well) looking good on my application sounds enticing.

"Can I think about it?" I ask, "I'll get back to you as soon as I know what I'm doing."

"Sure don't waste too much time though or you'll have less time to train for it. Now run along Mellark I wouldn't want to waste any more of your time."

I nod and leave with a, "Goodbye Couch," and I leave.

I know that it would be a good opportunity and I probably will do it but I'll look it up on the internet tonight to find out more about it.

I know that I won't mention it to my mother as she would make sure I went for it and would make millions of comments on how I don't deserve to even enter it. Even if I do go for it I will most likely put off telling her until the last possible moment.

Once I get home I drop my gym bag under the table and go into the back to look for something to eat, greeting Bran who was working on the counter on the way.

Once I get home I greet Bran who is working on the counter today. He must still be working after
my shift that he covered for me. I then drop my bag under the table and head into the back room so I can find something to eat. We all ways have more food down here. Usually ingredients etc. but on the rare occasion someone may have brought food down here that is not needed. It is all ways good to check here first as there might be some things that we cannot sell but are edible and not life threatening yet still taste very good.

It seems to be my lucky day as I find a cupcake by the fridge literally with my name on it. I am guessing Bran has something to do with this but when I exit the back he is deep in conversation with a costumer so I leave him to it and go upstairs.

I have made a ham sandwich and am about to eat it followed by my cupcake when Rye comes in.

"Hey Peeta! How are you-?"

"What do you want Rye? I'm busy" I mutter. Hey I am a 17 year old boy who is extremely hungry. Never interrupt me when I am hungry and about to eat.

"I heard all about the fighting that happened yesterday. God it's a shame I missed it. What happened?"

"If you heard about it Rye then you obviously know what happened."

"No I honestly don't know anything Peet. Mum has been in a foul mood since so I asked Gwen about it as she was the only one with me and she just said that Bran told her that you, dad and mum had a fight yesterday. She wouldn't tell me any more than that."

"It's none of your business Rye." I tell him sternly trying to move my way around him while still maintaining control of my plate and bottle of water.

"Please! Come on its unfair that everyone else knows except me! If you don't tell me I'll ask mum."

"No you won't"

"I might! Come on just give me a hint. It was about Katniss wasn't it?"

"No it wasn't now please move Rye I am hungry."

"Oooh so it was about her. I knew it! So come on tell me all the details."

I raise my eyebrows, apparently I am not the only one who acts like a teenager girl sometimes.

"Rye it was just mum being her usual self now please can you move I need to eat."

"Eat here." He challenged, I was not in the mood for this.

"I don't want to eat here."

"Why not?" I groan

"Fine look she found out that I was working on a project with Katniss and assumed we were together. Which we aren't, there you have it now can I leave?" I ask rhetorically

I finally manage to push past him yet he still calls after me,

"But you do want to go out with her right?" I turn my head slightly as I walk to the door that leads up to my room so I can glare at him to which Rye just smiles even wider at.
Katniss POV

LUNCH!

I head out the door as fast as I can and breathe a sigh of relief. I cannot remember a time when I was this happy to go to work.

I was looking after the kids today while Gale was at work at the hardware store. Don't get me wrong I love them kids but when it is Sunday morning and an extremely hyper five year old begs wakes you up and begs you to play with her at half seven in the morning! It kind of sets you up for a bad day.

I did eventually get her to relax by giving her a Toy Story 3 colouring book that I had gotten a while back and hidden. She seemed satisfied with that.

Then when I thought I finally had some peace Rory and Vick decided that it would be the perfect time for an argument.

Rory apparently wanted to play Mario Kart with Prim on the Wii but Vick wanted to play Super Mario Bros on it. I should have known getting a Wii would be a bad idea but Rory and Prim begged Gale and me for one. I remember we had to save up for months to be able to afford it. They do use it I'll give them that and it usually stops them fighting but not today.

Gale arrived home from his half day just as I sorted out their argument. I quickly left him to it murmuring a "Good luck" to him on the way out.

I open the door of the Hob and am met with the usual bunch of Sunday regulars. There are loads of people in on Sundays as it is the only day that the miners have off work. Lunch times on Sundays in the Hob are full most weeks and today is no exception.

"Oh Katniss darling thank god we are snowed under in here." Leevy says when she sees me. She looks rushed off her feet.

"Well I am here to work hard, what do you need done first?"

"Can you please go in to the kitchens and ask Sae if table's 2 and 4's foods are ready they have been waiting a good while. Then could you let me know and help me out here. You know what Sunday lunches are like, they're worse than some Friday nights." I laugh and hurry into the kitchen.

"Hi Sae Leevy is just wondering on tables 2 and 4's orders."

"Yeah both just finished" She hands both plates to me "But your apron on girl before you bring them out!"

I run to put my apron on then bring the plates out and give them to the customers, apologizing for their wait.

About an hour later Gale rings me. I frown in annoyance, he knows I am at work. I answer him just because I am on a break.
"Hello?"

"Catnip I need your help." He sounds stressed

I sigh, "Gale I am at work and am really busy what's wrong."

"The kids they ate a whole load of sweets-"

"Gale!"

"I'm sorry! I was feeding your mum and told Rory to watch them but he ignored me and played the Wii and now Posy is scarpering around the house. Vick is upstairs listening to music so loud that your neighbours are going to complain soon. And I swear to God Rory and Prim are going to start making out any second now."

"All right, all right calm down. Look I'm sorry I really can't leave right now.-"

"Please I can't handle them on my own!" He whines.

Can somebody please remind me why I am friends with this idiot?

"Gale, you've looked after them for years, would you cop on all ready!?"

"But please Catn-"

"No Gale I cannot just leave I am in the middle of a shift right now. Look Gale if you are that bad at looking after our siblings then ring Madge or something for 'help'."

"I can't do that! I barely know her!"

"Gale we eat lunch with her almost every day." I tell him pointedly

"That doesn't mean I know her that well!"

"Perfect excuse to get to know her then. She's a nice girl Gale."

"She is a townie Catnip and the Mayor's daughter. His daughter that's like the townies that townies can be."

I frown even though I know he can't see me

"Gale that makes absolutely no sense."

"You know what I mean!"

"Gale she mightn't even come anyway."

"Why wouldn't she?"

"Gale you are a coal miner's son who says he has four kids with his best friend you work in a tool shop. I hate to break it to you Galey but you are not all that!"

Gale's silent for a moment before he mutters, "Shut up Catnip."

"Well I can't leave Gale so either call Madge or Hazel, NOT Darius and/or Thom--"

"Why not?"
"Because you guys will be playing music or will leave and go to Darius's house to play video games."

"Not true."

"Suuuure Galey. Look I really have to go back to work now ok. Good luck! Bye."

"Catnip-"

I hang up on him before he can continue and I sigh in annoyance.

"Gale?"

"Yep, begging me to help him out with the siblings."

"If he really needs help I can cove-"

"No way Leevy. Thanks really but he can survive on his own for a bit….hopefully."

"You two really do act like an old married couple" She laughs as she wipes down the table

Gale and I have been compared to an old married couple a lot over the past few years, especially by Darius. I can't blame them really I mean we do say that we have four children, we fight most of the time and we have even pretended that we were going out or even engaged or married more times than I can count.

Even with all that though we both know that there is no way we would ever date or anything like that. We are way to alike for that.

"Yeah I know."

Gale POV

Ugh! She hung up on me!

"Galey! Galey I wanna play!" Posy exclaims jumping up and down.

I sigh in frustration and tiredness.

"Posy how about we watch a movie, yeah?"

"NO! I wanna play!"

"Ok, ok we can play. Just please give me a minute. Vick!"

Vick comes downstairs looking very annoyed with his earphones still in his ears and music blasting from them so loud I can hear all of the lyrics of the song clearly.

"What do you want Gale? I'm busy."

"Can you-?"

"No." Vick says shortly and turns away from me and walks upstairs.

"Vick!"
"Sort it out yourself Gale!"

That boy takes after Katniss and I way too much.

I look over into the sitting room and see Rory and Prim who are both flirting with each other on the couch and I roll my eyes. They aren't going to be any help.

"Right Posy, what do you want to play?" I ask turning back to my five year old sister who is bouncing up and down like a kangaroo.

"Dress up! Dress up!" I narrow my eyes and I immediately regret asking.

Why did I have to have a sister!? Why not another brother!?
What Seam child likes 'dress up' anyway? God knows Katniss didn't!

"Posey I-"

"Pleeeeeeese"

Not that I would ever, EVER consider playing 'dress up' with my five year old sister but iwe don't have any clothes to 'dress up' in if we (her) were to play it. I presume other girls her age dress up as faries or princesses and stuff like that. But Katniss never did that and neither did Prim so there is none in her house.

"Look Pose I'm really sorry but we don't have any 'dress up' clothes at the moment so we can't play."

"Madge does."

I frown at her

"What?"

"I heard Katniss say on the phone for you to get Madge. Madge will have dress up clothes! Please ask her Gale! Pleeeeeeese."

"All right!" I groan and pick up my phone.

I find Madge Undersee's number and dial it. God help me.

"Hello?" Madge says answering the call.

"Hi Madge. It's Gale, Gale Hawthorne…"

She laughs, "I do know who you are Gale. Hi what's up?"

"Em..well I was wondering if you would come over for a bit? If your not busy or anything or you know have anything better to do. It's just well Posy is quiet hyper today and is dying to play 'dress up' or something to do with clothes.

Anyway Catnip is really busy at work and I was hoping you could help me out. I'm not exactly knowledgeable when it comes to girl's games. If your busy completely understand I just thought I'd ask you."

"Yeah sure I can come over. I was only watching rubbish TV anyway. I would be happy to come over it's no problem. Would you like me to bring anything? You know 'dress up' clothes for us?"
The teasing tone is evident in her voice and I smile.

"Thanks for the offer but I'm grand I don't know about you. You don't have to bring anything at all we don't have any 'dress up' clothes for Posy anyway. I would just appreciate if you kept her company I tried to distract her with a movie but she rarely listens to me. Could you just talk to her about girly, five year old stuff. Prim is occupied staring at my younger brother. I would be really grateful."

She laughs a little again, "Ha sure it's really no problem I'll be over there soon. Try to keep Rory and Prim off each other until then."

"I'll do my best. We are in Katniss' house by the way. Thanks so much for this Madge."

"Your welcome Gale I will see you there soon, bye."

"Bye."

I put my phone back into my pocket and look up to see Prim and Rory looking up at me with narrowed eyes. Well Rory mostly.

"What?" I ask them angrily.

"Who is coming over?" Rory asks accusingly

"Well aren't you nosy." I counter

"You can't bring strangers into our home Gale!" Rory shouts.

I am seriously going to become deaf after today with all this noise.

"This is Katniss' house Roar and she is not a stranger you know full well who is coming over. I'm not blind I saw you two looking over at me while I was on the phone." You can see where the nickname 'Roar' came from now.

"Well it is basically our home. Just like our house is practically Kat's and Prim's house as well. You and Katniss has said it yourselves. And anyway you are changing the subject why does she have to come over!"

"Rory, Madge is a nice person."

"So? She is a townie Gale! Not to mention she is the Mayor's daughter! She will most likely spend the whole time complaining about how small this place is compared to her giant mansion!"

"Rory, Madge is really nice," Prim says gently "She has come over here before and she never complained or made fun of us or the house. She complimented it quite a bit which you can't deny is hard to do."

Rory looks at her for a while before he visibly relaxes.

Oh great. So he will listen to her but not to me.

Well she is his crush and you are his annoying older brother. He is obviously going to pay far more attention to her than he will to you.

"Ok then" Rory says looking at me for a brief second before turning back to Prim, "Now lets see if you can beat me this time."
I roll my eyes and leave them to it.

"Galey! Galey! Galey!"

"Yes Posy?"

"Is Madge coming over?"

"Yes she is sweetheart she will be here soon."

"Yay!" Posy exclaims and runs off and I close my eyes.

This has been a very long day and its nowhere near over yet.
Madge didn't arrive until half an hour after the phone call.

During that time I had somehow managed to drag Vick downstairs and got him to clean the dishes from lunch. I had convinced Posy to go back to her colouring book and had checked on Rory and Prim several times to make sure they weren't making out...I think they are aware of what I'm doing but hey, you can't be too careful!

After what seems like ages the doorbell finally rings.

Posy jumps up from her seat and rushes to open the door squealing, "I'll get it, I'll get it." I vaguely remember a time where I used to do that. Desperately hoping that it was Mr. Everdeen and that Katniss was with him.

I follow Posy and see her trying to reach the latch that opens the door even though it is way above her reach. I grin and lift her up high so she can reach it. She giggles and opens the door revealing a smiling Madge Undersee carrying two shopping bags.

"Madgey!" Posey exclaims reaching forward and almost following out of my arms in her attempt to hug Madge.

"Heya Pose" Madge hugs her gently smiling at me before giving her back to me and I let her down.

"Thanks for coming." I tell her awkwardly after she comes in and shuts the door.

"Hey it is no problem I wasn't doing anything anyway, you gave me an excuse to not do my homework for which I am grateful."

"Madge Undersee not wanting to do her homework!?" I exclaim dramatically

"Shush don't tell anyone"

We make our way into Katniss's kitchen and she puts her shopping bags on a chair.

"Sorry I am late. I had to get stuff, I know you said not to bring anything but I had all these clothes and things from when I was Posy's age that I never got rid of and well I'm not going to use them right? So I thought I'd give them to Posy if she would like them that is." She tells me nervously and I try not to look as shocked as I really am.

It is extremely rare in which anyone gives Katniss and me anything that's not for trade. I look at Madge who is watching me nervously and wringing her hands.

"Here how about I show you them first. I understand if you don't want them because well....anyway here they are."

One by one she takes out dresses, tops, jeans, shoes, hair...stuff as well as teddies and toys. The clothes aren't in perfect condition but are much better than Posy's current clothes. They all look like they would fit her as well.
I am now officially speechless

"I don't know why I never thought of it before to be honest"

I don't even let her finish her sentence, "Thank you"

She looks up and smiles wide, "Gale really I am glad to do this. And it was no trouble you will be doing me a big favour taking all this off me. There will be loads of space now for me to fill with stuff"

I laugh, "Yeah true."

"So where has Posy gotten to?"

"I'm here!" Posy squeals running in to the kitchen.

"I went to get you my picture I drew for you Madge!" Posy hands her the picture and Madge bends down and takes it and grins.

"This is amazing Posy. Did you draw this?" Posy nods enthusiastically

"Wow you are really good! Thank you so much!" Madge hugs her "I am going to stick this up on my wall the minute I get home." She says standing up and as she stands I get a look at Posy's picture.

Sure enough it is just a bunch of scribbles and lines but Madge seems really happy about receiving the picture.

"Hey Posy I found some clothes for you to dress up in how about you go and change and Gale and I can see how they look. We can have our own little fashion show!"

I doubt Posy even knows what a fashion show is but she grins all the same takes the clothes Madge offers her and thanks her profoundly before skipping off to Katniss's room to change.

"Thanks for that." I tell her as we sit at the table, facing each other.

"For what?" she asks her face frowning in confusion.

"The picture thing…you didn't have to do that."

"Are you kidding?" She asks raising her eyebrows, "Gale I wasn't lying I love this. And it is amazing for a five year old's drawing."

"Oh…sorry."

"It is grand we aren't all notorious liars like you Gale" She says mockingly

"Ah I wasn't informed of that."

"You need to socialize more!"

"I socialize just fine!"

"Sure you do Gale."

"I hang out with-"

"Katniss, Thom and Darius." She finishes smirking
"Right, yeah, ok maybe I do hang out with the same people a lot of the time but that's still socializing….kind of."

"Yeah I'm sorry you're right."

We are left in an awkward silence…great.

"So er would you like a drink?"

She nods shyly, "Could I have some water please?"

"Yeah course I'll get it for you." I tell her, standing up and getting a glass from the press.

"You're lucky we are in Katniss' house today." I tell her as I finish filling up the glass and place it down in front of her.

"Why's that?" She asks smiling curiously

"If we were in mine we would only have cups with Tomas the Tank Engine on them or Doc McStuffins." She laughs and I grin helplessly

"So are you working on this project as well? You are in Katniss' Home Ec class right?"

"Oh yeah I am."

"Who are you working with?" She frowns instantly

"A Career?" I ask

"Worse, Finnick Odair." Ah Finnick is alright enough. He came down from District Four a few years ago. He is the townie version of Darius basically, always flirting and trying to get out of work. Though I think he has a girlfriend but by the way he acts around girls you wouldn't think it.

"That sucks" I say genuinely

"Yeah it kind of does I mean I don't necessarily mind doing most of the work in a project but for this one we need to work together on everything. Our result is going to be included in the final exam results."

"He doesn't pay attention?"

"Oh no he does pay attention," I raise an eyebrow. "To his hair! He spends the whole class brushing his hair or doing his homework for his next class that he 'forgot' do to."

"God well I would help if I could but I can't cook…at all. Why do you think I have clung onto Katniss so much?"

We laugh and then we hear Posy running down the stairs.

I turn around so I can see when she comes in.

She runs in, giggling and twirling before she runs up and hugs Madge.

She's wearing one of the dresses it is pink (obviously) as well as light blue shoes and light blue hair-clip.
It suits her a lot.
"Thanks Madge! I love it!"
"You look amazing Posy! You know what you look so great I am going to just have to give you all these clothes won't I?"
Posy looks up at her wide eyed.
"Re-really?"
Madge nods and Posy tackles her into a hug again
"Thank you so much Madge, Gale was right you are really nice and lovely!"
Madge looks up at raises her eyebrows teasing at me to which I instantly turn away.
Why do children have to talk so much?
"It is no problem Posey and thank you as well. Why don't you try on something else now?"
Posy grins and runs back upstairs.
I cough awkwardly, wondering again why I had to have a younger sister.
"Em thanks again for the clothes they suit her…I think."
She laughs again, "Your welcome."
We stand there in an awkward silence for a minute before she says abruptly,
"I have an idea."
I raise my eyebrows, "I'm listening"

Katniss POV

I sigh in exhaustion. I can't wait to get home and put my feet up. Oh God that makes me sound so old. I should apologize to Gale I guess I shouldn't have yelled at him I know how hyper the kids can get.
I wonder briefly if he asked anyone to help him out.
Probably not knowing him but he did sound desperate. If he did he most likely asked Thom. I doubt he asked Madge. I don't even know why I suggest her to him she just popped into my head.
I'll find out when I get home I guess.
"Katniss clean table 6 will you?" I snap out of my dream world and nod at Ripper.
"Yeah, course."
Gale POV
"Right done" Madge says "That was easy!"

I am shocked but don't let it show, "Yeah it was." If she thinks searching through Katniss' cluttered attic, trying to find a bunch of stuff in less than 5 minutes is easy then townies are even weirder than I anticipated.

"She should be done any minute"

"Yeah"

I look around admiring our work (even though it is quite girly in my opinion but it's for Posy I guess and if you looked up 'girly' in the dictionary it would say Posy Hawthorne), we found an old dark red rug in Katniss' attic and have it laid out at the entrance to the kitchen.

We heard Posy coming down the stairs and Madge pressed play on her iPhone (of course). Posy strutted (something she learned from Vick no doubt) into the kitchen and gasped.

We didn't do anything much really, nothing fancy but Posy loved it none the less. Madge and I had managed to dust off the carpet and made it look like a red carpet (it being red and a carpet did help a lot) and we moved the kitchen table to the wall so there was space going down the centre on the kitchen that Posy could walk up and down on.

"Posy squeals and hugs me tightly then quickly moves to hug Madge."

"Wow oh God thank you guys so much this is amazing!" Posy can't stop grinning and it makes me wonder when the last time she was this happy was. This is most likely the first.

Madge smiles back at her brightly and tells Posy that she deserves it.

Then for the next two hours I was subjected to watching my sister try on each outfit and act like one of those Capital models. 10 minutes after we had started Rory, Prim and even Vick came in.

They all then rated each outfit out of ten while I sat in a chair, just watching. I probably would have fallen asleep but the music was (and still is) so loud it forbade me from doing anything of the sort.

Don't get me wrong I love Posy, course I do but I have absolutely no interest in clothes. Oh god if Darius ever finds out about this I will never be allowed forget it.

Posy leaves the room telling us that she only has one more outfit left. Madge gives me a look and I stand up from my chair and pull Prim aside gently.

Five minutes later we had everything set up. We had dimmed the lights, shut the curtains and brought down Prim's lava lamp that Mr. Everdeen got for Katniss when she was 6 years old and we placed it in the centre of the table. We don't have any fancy disco balls but this seems good enough.

It is weird and girly and very townie-like but it is for Posy.

It can be an early birthday present for her or something.

I look over and see Vick showing Madge his latest dance move, I can tell that Madge is actually interested in what Vick is saying to her, she isn't just faking it for him like many people do.

Maybe she isn't that bad after all….though I will deny I ever thought that.

Katniss POV
It is nearing the end of my shift.

I check my phone for the time and see that it's 4:30. Half an hour left.

Just as I am about the put my phone back into my pocket it rings.

"If this is one of the guys annoying me I swear they'll pay" I mutter to myself before I answer it.

"Hello?"

"Hello Katniss?"

I am surprised to hear that it is not Gale it is in fact my neighbour Cressida.

"Hey Cressida, how are you and the family doing?"

Cressida married young to a man named, Castor who worked with her and they had young boy Paul (who they named after Castor's brother Pollux) in their first year of marriage who is a few years younger than me. Paul has been very unwell for the past few months unfortunately.

They are a lovely family, it is sad to see this happen to them but I try to help them in any way I can. Cressida has been worrying like mad about him and has been forced to quit her job because of it and so Castor is working longer hours now.

I have offered to look after Paul for a bit while she and Castor have a few hours off but she refuses as she wants to spend as much time with Paul as she can.

"Oh we are fine, good thank you. It is just… well I really don't meant to be rude but Paul has that operation tomorrow that I was telling you about. And it is just he was advised to get lots of rest but he can't really because of the music from your house and I am really sorry to have to ask this but is there any chance you could turn the music down? I know it isn't my place to interfere it is just Paul is so nervous about tomorrow he could really do with sleeping for a few hours."

I frown I have personally warned the kids and Gale to not make too much noise for the past few months because of Paul and they go ahead and blast music without any regard for the neighbours.

"Oh Cressida I am so very sorry. I am at the Hob and Gale is minding the kids I had absolutely no idea. I warned them not to make a lot of noise. I am heading home straight away and don't worry the music will be turned off immediately. I apologize this will never happen again I assure you. Whatever trade you want you can have for as long as you need it."

"Oh no don't worry you don't have to do that."

"Well I'll bake something for Paul in Home Ec. then? I'm going straight home now. Goodbye Cressida and sorry again and please tell Paul I wish him the very best of luck tomorrow."

"That sounds great thank you Katniss. I appreciate this I really do and I will definitely tell him Goodbye."

I hang up and run back to the bar where Haymitch is serving.

"Haymitch I am really sorry that was Cressida, apparently the kids are making tones of noise and Paul is trying to sleep you know for his operation? I'm really sorry I'll make up the time but-"

"Sweetheart relax! Take a chill pill, you go home immediately at worry about getting them kids of yours to shut up. The last thing that family needs is more worry. You get off I'll cover for you."
Haymitch eyes are soft as he looks at me and there is a ghost of a smile on his face.

"Thank you Haymitch so much." I take off my apron, grab my bag and run out the door.

There better be a very good reason as to what the hell is going on.

Gale POV

"I am so so sorry" Vick repeats as he attempts to hold Madge up.

"It is fine Vick, it was my fault" Madge says hissing yet she still tries to smile for him

Vick had been showing Madge the newest dance moves he had learnt and Madge (unlike most people) was genuinely interested in what he was telling her.

Unfortunately Madge isn't used to dancing at the pace Vick does and she ended up tripping over her own ankle.

"Is it sprained? Because if it is you have to go to the hospital" Prim says knowingly and I glare at her, the last thing we need is Madge stressing out over going to the hospital.

I walk quickly over to her and Vick, "Here come into the sitting room with me and I will take a look at it. There is one of Mrs. Everdeen's first aid kits in there"

I place Madge's arm around my shoulder and point at Rory and Prim,

"Will you two finish up in here?"

"Yeah ok Gale"

I look at Vick who is looking at the floor,

"Vick you go into the hall and look out for Posy after we leave."

He nods and I slowly bring Madge out of the kitchen and into the sitting room.

I sit her gently down on the couch laying the leg with her injured ankle on the coffee table under a blanket.

"How bad does it hurt?" I ask, searching the room for the first aid kit.

"It is fine." I give her a look

"Ok it does hurt….a good bit."

"See I know everything" I say winking at her and she laughs.

I find and take out the first aid kit from the drawer along with some of Mrs. Everdeen's old nurse equipment that is used for injuries.

I sit in front of her and place the kit and the equipment beside me being careful to not touch her ankle

"Now I am not a doctor, Catnip is the best at this sort of thing, even Prim could maybe do better but I
have looked over the guys numerous injuries for the past few years and they haven't died yet. So I must not be too bad" I say smiling and she laughs nervously

"I can just go to the doctor tomorrow if it still hurts it's no big deal."

"Do you doubt my amazing doctor skills?" I ask faking hurt

"No, no of course not, I just don't want you going to too much trouble when we are meant to be doing something nice for Posy." She says her voice shaking slightly

"Hey, hey, hey it's all right Prim wouldn't mind she would be devastated if something happened to you. Just relax alright?"

"Yeah thanks"

"Great now let me make your injury ten times worse"

We sit in a comfortable silence while I lift her trouser leg above her ankle.

Madge hisses softly as it passes her ankle

"Sorry" I say gulping

After ten minutes I put the kit and Mrs. Everdeen's equipment away.

"Well? What's the verdict?" she asks

I take a deep breath,

"Well it's not a sprain or twisted thankfully it is just as bad as if you banged it off something. But if you do bang it off anything or press down too hard on it them it may twist more easily than it would normally. I think, again I am no doctor or anything but it definitely isn't a sprain or a twist."

"You sure?" she asks warily

"99.987% positive" I say brightly and she grins

"That's very precise."

"Well I am a very precise guy" I say grinning and sitting down beside her, "You should probably go home and rest."

"But-"

"No buts, I don't want you to leave but-"

When I say that we both blush furiously and I do something I never do, I stammer, "not that you know I need you to stay or anything. Not that I don't appreciate you helping out! I wouldn't have survived today without you! It is just em it was really nice having you around today but I mean you need to rest and you won't get much of that here with four hyper kids." Yeah ok breathe Gale.

Madge is smiling and nods, "Yeah you are probably right, I have all that homework to do anyway."

Home-oh yeah she mentioned that before, "Once you do it in bed that's fine with me."

"Whatever you say Doctor Hawthorne" She says slyly.
"So will you ring your dad to collect you?" I ask nervously, I don't want her to go (because the kids will be in a bad mood when she leaves, no other reason!) but she needs to get better but I don't want to seem like I am forcing her out the door either.

"Yeah I will. Could I use your phone please? I left mine in the kitchen." Now I can hear the blaring of the music from the other room, I had forgotten about that.

"Yeah of course you can" I say taking out my phone and handing it to her.

"Thank you"

After a five minutes conversation with her dad she hands the phone back to me.

"He will be here to collect me in twenty minutes."

"Ok"

We sit there awkwardly for a minute or two

"So Posy seemed to like the clothes" she says breaking the silence

"Yeah she loved them, thank you for them."

"Oh I needed to get rid of them anyway and I'm glad someone who wants them has them now. My mum was trying to get me to give them to my cousin but she's a real tom boy and would hate them."

"Like Katniss?" I ask grinning

"Exactly like her come to think of it" We laugh for a bit before Madge speaks again

"Thanks for checking my ankle over."

"Oh it is no problem, the kids are always getting injuries and doctors are expensive enough as it is without needing to go to them every week so thankfully Katniss inherited some of her mother's nursing skills not as much as Prim as but enough. My dad taught me some when I was young and then Katniss has taught me more over the years."

Ok Gale don't go giving the girl your whole life story!

"I thought about being a nurse when I was younger but that dream didn't last too long."

"Yeah no I would not like to be a doctor at all."

We talk about random things for a while then I gently remove the blanket from under her leg and put it on the back of the couch.

When I do I notice that Madge has something on her back,

"Here wait a second sorry I think you have something on your back. I'll get it."

I reach around so I am basically hugging her and get the wrapper off her back

"Here it is" I say and Madge and I laugh and she places her hands on me to push me away so she can see it. "Let me see."

But with all our laughing we didn't hear the front door slam shut and a figure appear in the doorway.
"Well isn't this cosy." A cold voice states and I look up to see Katniss standing in the doorway of the sitting room, completely and utterly furious, there is no denying that.

I realise that it looks like I'm hugging Madge very…em intimately and I pull away as fast as lightning.

I cough awkwardly and I can see Madge is as red as a tomato and I can see her eyes flash with worry and uncertainty at Katniss' arrival. She's not the only one either.

"H-hey Catnip" I say nervously looking up at her, ok what is it with me and stammering today?
"You're home early."

She just glares at me, if looks could kill I wouldn't just be dead I would be straight in the coffin by now.

She turns on her heel and marches into the kitchen, I see Vick standing behind her, he looks terrified and I don't blame him. When Katniss Everdeen is angry, she is lethal.

I turn to Madge, "Don't move alright?" She nods and whispers, "I'm so sorry if I made her angry."

I stand and give her a reassuring smile, "Don't be sorry this probably has nothing to do with you anyway."

I hear the music shut off and my eyes widen, "Be right back." I say quickly running out the room.

I enter the kitchen and see Rory and Prim standing there in shock. Katniss is standing there, Madge's iPhone in her hand and is looking right at me.

I have no idea what this is about. Is it because I invited Madge over? When she suggested I invite her over did she mean it in a sarcastic 'you should never invite her over' way? Or is this because I hugged her? Surely she wouldn't be this angry just because I hugged Madge Undersee.

"What," Katniss starts slowly and deliberately, "do you think that you are playing at?"

What is she on about? She suggested I ring Madge for gods sake!

"I needed help and you suggested I ring Madge for help so I did." I say in defence.

Katniss looks at me for a long time, her face expressionless before she starts laughing.

"You think I am this angry and upset and disappointed because you invited Madge Undersee over to my house? You have no idea do you? Is that what you think of me? Really you think that little of me?"

She takes a deep breath and turns to Rory and Prim, "Can you two please go to your room please?"

"Katniss are you ok?" Rory asks and I look at Katniss more closely and I can see her eyes have brimmed with tears. Which she immediately tries to shake off and she grins at Rory, "Yeah, yeah I'm fine course I am can you two please just head up to Prim's room, maybe watch a movie or something."

"Yeah ok Katniss." Prim says, Rory is clearly worried about her but he leaves with Prim passing Vick on their way out.
"Vick? Do you want to go and play with Posy?"

"But she still has another outfit doesn't she?" he asks confused.

Katniss' eyes flash with confusion and I jump in, "Tell her Madge has to go now and unfortunately she cannot see the last one but she will come over another day. Distract her for as long as possible will you? Maybe join Prim and Rory in their movie evening." Vick nods and leaves.

Katniss and I face each other and I can tell that she isn't just angry, she's furious, disappointed and upset.

"Is Undersee not joining us? She asks coldly.

I haven't heard Madge by her surname in years in fact I'm not sure she ever did.

"She em hurt her ankle dancing with Vick so she is resting, her father will be her to collect her soon."

She stares at me for a moment before asking, "So outfits? Were ye having a fashion show her something?"

How did she go from being furious to calm…..well she's a bit too calm.

"Em well yeah, Madge brought over a bunch of clothes for Posy that were hers when she was Posy's age."

Katniss closes her eyes, "She thinks we are that bad at taking care of our siblings that we don't give them clothes?"

My eyes widen, "No just Posy was at me to play dress up and then-"

"I'm not interested in that Gale!" she shouts, opening her eyes.

"What I am interested in why the hell you had that music up so damn loud that I could hear it three streets away! What I am interested in is how you could be so insensitive to the poor boy who lives next door who is getting a major operation tomorrow!"

"What is she going on about-? Oh no…oh shit I am dead. Somebody kill me (well Katniss will probably take care of that) oh god no what have I done?

"Which I have told you about! Which I have warned you and the kids countless times about! How many times over the past few months have I said to keep the noise down so we don't disturb them? How many times have you or I gone to their house giving food? Gale I get that you were trying to be nice and whatever but come on that boy needs to sleep and to rest! And Cressida and Castor they need to think and rest as well! Tomorrow will kill them especially if something goes wrong! They are such lovely people Gale and they don't need extra stress"

She has stopped shouting but that doesn't mean her emotions have changed in the slightest.

I know the only reason she isn't shouting is because she doesn't want anybody to overhear us.

"I..I didn't-"

"You didn't what? Think? Damn right you didn't think. Next week you are going over there and apologizing. That boy, that family is one of the nicest around here the least we can do is return the kindness they have given us over the years."
I feel terrible, I don't know the family that well but I know Katniss does. I have heard her talk about them millions of times even before Paul became ill. I have spoken with Castor and Cressida a few times in the Hob and they are lovely people.

There is a knock at the door and Katniss closes her eyes again, "Will you get that?" she asks her voice shaking.

I nod even though I realise she can't see but she seems to understand as she sits on the chair I sat in an hour ago. I take Madge's iPhone from where Katniss has placed it on the table.

I make my way to the door and open it to see Mr. Undersee standing there, looking worried.

"Gale! Hi is Madge here? Is she alright?" He asks frantically.

I have always thought Mr. Undersee to be a calm, quiet man. Never spoken to him much. I've never seen him anything like this before.

"Hello Mr. Undersee yes Madge is here and she will be fine. She just needs to rest and she can't put pressure on her ankle so I'll bring her out to you. I advise for her to rest in bed for the evening. I'm not a doctor or anything but that would probably be best just so there isn't the added chance of spraining her ankle." He nods and I head back inside to the sitting room,

"Hey your dad is here?" Madge looks up at me with the same frantic look her dad had just a moment ago

"How is Katniss?"

"She is upset, angry, disappointed. It is not to do with you there's something else I'll explain another time. Text me to let me know you're alright and I haven't killed you with my doctoring skills." I joke as I place her arm over my shoulder again and bring her out to her father's car.

"Ok thanks for everything I hope Posy likes the clothes, I'll see you tomorrow." I help her into her dad's car, "See you then" I say and she smiles before closing the car door and they drive off.

I turn and walk back inside the house to face Katniss.
Jealousy?

Katniss POV

I am not jealous.

I do not GET jealous.

Especially not about my two best friends spending time together…..alone.

How dare Thom suggest I am jealous of Gale Hawthorne and Madge Undersee!

Like I care who either of them goes out with.

And they aren’t even going out anyway!

Not that I would care if they were.

No! I am in this, mood as Thom so delicately described it, because of Paul! Because Gale disregarded my warning to keep quiet for the sake of our neighbours and blared out loud music. It wasn’t even good music!

Add on to the fact that Madge Undersee (of all people!) thinks I am unfit to look after my sibling and the Hawthorne kids is it any wonder I’m not in the best form today?

Posy does not need fancy, posh, townie clothes that scream 'Mayor's daughter'.

And Gale accepted them!

Gale! Of all people!

Gale wouldn't even accept a biscuit off Madge last week and now he is accepting clothes off her!

Not only clothes but toys and teddies and all sorts!

What does our family look like? A charity case?

"Katniss?"

I mean who does that townie think she is?

Coming in to MY house saying she will help look after Posy then trying to butter Gale up by giving him stuff for Posy.

Ugh it makes me sick.

And Gale?

Madge has never shown any interest in Gale.

Why would she like Gale?

"Katniss!?!"
Sure he is good looking.

He is very good looking

Not that I am looking but anyone can see that he isn't exactly ugly.

But anyway Gale hates townies and she knows that.

Everybody in the district knows that!

They've never liked each other before!

I mean they barely know each other, she can't just worm her way into his…well let's not go there

I shudder, rub my hands over my face before putting them down and sighing.

"KATNISS!?!"

I jump in surprise and turn around to see Thom standing behind me, a worried and regretful look on his face.

"There is no need to yell" I spit out before turning so my back is to him.

It's lunch time.

On Monday.

I came to school purposely late today (I sent Prim ahead with the Hawthornes telling her I had to sort out things with mum before school, she didn't believe me but left all the same) to avoid Madge and Gale.

I made sure to enter the Home Ec. door just as the bell rang and sat next to Peeta.

Peeta could tell something was off but thankfully didn't question my mood.

I ran out of the room the minute class was over, apologising to Peeta before escaping.

Thom cornered me in History though...

"Katniss?"

I groan and drop my bag on the ground before slouching in my seat, folding my arms and looking up at Thom.

"Thomas."

"I talked to Gale this morning." He says hesitantly as he sits down, turning his chair sideways he is facing me but I look straight ahead.

"You talk to Gale most mornings" I state, emphasising the Gale

"He seems to think you are mad at him…"

"And?" I ask
"Are you mad at him?"

"Might be." I say automatically

"He is really sorry you know" He says and I catch him leaning forward towards me from the corner of my eye.

"What is he sorry about?" I question innocently

"About the em music…and err Paul. And em…stuff?"

"Stuff yes. That is why I am mad at Gale 'I am God's gift to women' Hawthorne. Because of stuff." I say sarcastically, sneering at him as I turn to face him.

I know I shouldn't be taking this out on Thom but I can't help it.

"God's gift to women?" Thom asks curiously

I just scoff for an answer.

"This…has nothing to do with you walking in on him and Madge Undersee now would it?" Thom asks caustically

I glare at him, "What are you implying? That I walked in on them making out or something!?!"

"No! No of course not! I just thought maybe you….thought that's where things were heading with them. But I'm sure that's not what will happen. I mean we both know what Gale is like and why would he be interested in her anyway like she is a townie for starters there is really no need to be jealous or-"

"What!?"

Jealous?

Jealous? What do I have to be jealous over when it comes to Madge Undersee and Gale!? Sure she is gorgeous…sure they would make the perfect couple.

But it isn't like they are together or anything.

Not that I would care if they were…course not.

Thom eyes widen, quickly realising his mistake, "Well I mean I just assumed, well not assumed-gussed! Well not really guess, I didn't know why you were in this mood so I just thought maybe you might be jealous-"

"Mood?" I ask raising my eyebrows.

How big of a hole is he trying to dig himself in?

"Well..em…not mood exactly….just you know…em attitude. Sorry I have absolutely no idea what I am talking about" Thom stutters "I am going to shut up now"

"You do that" I bite out and turn towards the front of the classroom just as the teacher comes in.
I had managed to swiftly avoid the rebels and Madge Undersee for the rest of the day until now.

I went outside at break and lunch but of course Thom had to find me.

That damn boy knows me too well.

I turn around and take another bite of my sandwich.

I hear him move and then hesitantly sit beside me on the bench.

"I'm sorry for yelling" He apologises as I finish my sandwich and fold my arms.

"It's fine I probably wouldn't have heard you if you hadn't" I say rationally

"I'm really sorry for what I said earlier as well." I look at him and he offers a sideways smile.

I sigh, "It's fine, I over-reacted, it just pisses me off what she did. And Gale hates charity as you well know! And now he is taking clothes and toys for Posy off the Mayor's daughter of all people!"

"I think he was just trying to be polite and grateful. You know how bad he feels for not being able to give more to Posy-"

"She has my old clothes and Prim's! And old toys and stuff! They might not be in perfect condition and scream 'I'm rich!' but she still has them. It's like Gale just pushes aside everything I've ever done for Posy. Never mind Vick and Rory and even him and Hazelle!"

"I'm sure that isn't how Gale meant it, he is really cut up about you not speaking to him."

I scoff

"No he is Kat really. He doesn't even like Madge Undersee! He hasn't spoken to her all day. And I know she is really upset about you ignoring her as well."

"How do you know that?" I demand, narrowing my eyes at him.

Thom raises his hands up in innocence.

"Hey, hey, hey I'm on your side remember? I sit beside her in math and she asked about you."

"What did she say?" I ask inquisitively

"She just asked whether I had spoken to you today or not and I said yeah. Then she asked how you were."

"And you said?" I press and his face turns guilty

"I said you seemed like you weren't too happy with her and Gale after what happened yesterday."

"Hmm" I say lost in thought.

"She said to tell you she is sorry."

"Okay" I repeat not knowing what to say in response.

"You'll have to speak to them eventually Katstar"

I sigh, "Yeah I know"
I hesitate before finally asking the question that has been bugging me since Madge left yesterday, "How is she? She hurt her leg or something right? Is she okay?"

Thom nods, "Yeah, she is good. Legs fine just a really bad dancer is all"

I laugh and mutter "Why am I not surprised?"

Wow maybe I am turning into Gale.

The loud bell rings out from the speakers that signal for the students to head to class.

I stand, place my lunch box back in my bag (I made sure to bring my own lunch today knowing I wouldn't be sitting in the cafeteria as usual) and sling it over my shoulder.

"Thanks" I say "For finding me and staying with me even though I was in a mood as you put it"

Thom stands as well and gives me his side-wards smile again, "Ah it was nothing that's what I'm here for" He winks at me and we head inside.

I've got 'study' class next (study classes are basically free classes where students go if their teacher is absent or unavailable or if you are a senior like myself you get the chance to study or do homework for exams. Of course not many people actually do either of them things. They usually just talk to each other or are on their phones the whole time as there usually isn't a teacher present and if there is they don't take any notice.)

When I walk in to the classroom I see there is no teacher present as usual but also notice that Peeta is here as well today.

I sit next to him and he looks up from his doodles at the noise.

He smiles at me and I am grateful for the friendly face.

"Hi Katniss" He greets cheerfully quickly stuffing his drawings in his bag and I manage a smile

"Hey Peeta how are you?"

"I'm fine thanks how about you?" Peeta asks. I can tell from his tone and facial expression that he is concerned on how I acted in Home Economics but doesn't want to pry.

I am touched he cares so much to be honest.

"I am all right thank you. Sorry if I was off with you this morning I just had a rough weekend."

Peeta's face is full of concern, "It is fine Katniss really and I am really sorry to hear that."

I can tell Peeta is genuine and I smile gratefully then he says hesitantly, "You can all ways talk to me about anything that's bothering you or just anything in general. Some of my friends say I'm good at helping people I don't know. Just you know if you ever want or need to talk to someone. But obviously like you have other friends I'm not suggesting you have none or-

"Thanks Peeta" I say cutting him off and I smile reassuringly at him

He smiles at me and mutters something about it being no problem.

"Just you know" I say sighing "Gale and the kids they...well...they drive me insane a lot."
I would usually never dream of telling anyone outside of The Rebels and Sae my personal life or problems.

And I rarely tell them anything.

Now I find myself telling Peeta Mellark about them.

I tell him about the kids.

About how frustrating they can be, how I can barely cope with them. How I feel sometimes that I shouldn't be forced to deal with this when I am only 17 and how they aren't my children or even related to me, Prim aside.

I tell him how much money they cost. How I'm not sure if we will be able to afford Vick's dance lessons any more even though it is the only thing he is passionate about and he would be gutted if we were forced to take that away from him.

I reveal how it is only a matter of time before Rory and Prim start going out and how I'm not sure I can handle it when they become all lovey-dovey because this is my younger sister and the boy I think of as my brother. I mean It's not like I am going to allow them to...kiss all the time in my house I mean I

I tell him how Posy is finding it difficult settling into school, something she has promised me not to tell Gale about.

I tell Peeta how I fear the children will bully her when they get older for not having good enough clothes because we just can't afford better.

That's where Madge Undersee comes into it.

I try and be gentle as I know he and Madge are friends maybe not best friends but friends all the same.

I tell Peeta how hurt I am that she can provide for Posy only having spoken to her a few times while I can't and I'm the one who has been...well raising her since she was born. Credit given to Hazelle of course but she wasn't all there in Posy's first few years.

I don't have the money Madge Undersee does, I don't have the brand name, great quality clothes and toys from when I was a child because my parents couldn't afford that.

I have old, raggedy, worn-out clothes and toys that have been passed down in our family for years.

That's all I can give to Posy.

Whereas Madge Undersee can give her so much more.

Because I don't have them type of clothes from when I was a child. My parents couldn't afford it.

I explain how I understand that she was probably just trying to be helpful and trying to offload a bunch of old stuff that is like rubbish to her and never meant to cause any harm.

I tell Peeta how it killed me how grateful Gale was to Madge. That while I wasn't there when he received the gifts I could clearly see in the way he treated her that she might as well have given him the world, he was so overjoyed and grateful. He has never shown that sort of gratitude to me even though I have been feeding and clothing his sister ever since she was born.
I divulge how I'm tired I am of being taken for granted by Gale. And just how exhausted I am in general.

I complain about Gale thinking he can just have fun with the kids playing fashion show while I, someone who isn't even related to them, does all the hard stuff.

I feel extremely guilty then and quickly explain that of course Gale does loads of jobs and helps out just as much as I do. If not more. And that he takes care of Prim and my mum as well as his family. But it just feels like I get no gratitude while he does. I tell him that it is stupid because how I'm feeling is and I feel bad about it but I can't help it.

Peeta listens to me as I reveal more about the situation that I hadn't realised I had been fretting over so much until I got it all out.

I hadn't intended to tell him so much but it all just started spilling out.

Years of worries spill out to a boy who I only started properly talking to last week.

I am not this person... I do not tell random boys my worries and problems (in fact I don't tell anyone them)

Except Peeta Mellark isn't a random boy.

He is the boy who saved my life, my mother's life and my sister's life, selflessly when he was just a child.

That is debt that I will never be able to repay.

I suddenly realise that Peeta probably doesn't really want to listen to me drone on and on.

I am about to apologise profusely when I take in the look on his face.

He is frowning in concentration, taking in all the things I am saying. He is concerned, worried and at the same time he seems touched that I am sharing all of this with him.

I'm not stupid.

I do know that this could all be an act.

Or a bet.

Or something of that sort.

And if it were anyone else listening to me right now I would believe it was.

But not him.

I don't know why I just trust him.

It is like instinct.

I am positive it has something to do with what he did for me all those years ago.

I know he could have changed but I doubt it.

That might make me naive but so what? Maybe I'm sick of saying nothing.
I haven't realised I have stopped talking until Peeta takes my hands in his and runs his thumb over the back of my hand softly.

"None of this is your fault Katniss." Peeta tells me gently, "You have every right to feel this way. It must be so tough on you and I am so sorry for your situation and I hope I can help in any way I can. You shouldn't feel bad about feeling this way. Rory, Vick and Posy aren't your responsibility yet you still make sure they are. You still love and care for them as if they were your children which is so incredibly admirable Katniss. I can clearly see why you would be upset by Gale acting like he does. It mightn't be so much that he is taking you for granted as he has just gotten so used to you and Prim being part of his family that he feels he doesn't need to show you any gratitude. He should but maybe he thinks you all ready know how grateful he is for helping him with his family."

I nod and quickly wipe away the tears that are threatening to fall down my face.

I catch Peeta's look of horror and heartbroken when he sees my eyes brimming with tears, "I'm sorry oh god Katniss I'm so sorry"

I shake my head quickly, praying we don't cause a scene.

I cast a glance around the room and see that nobody has noticed our intense conversation.

Most people are either on their phones, doing homework or making out in the corner.

"Don't apologise Peeta you have done nothing but make this ten times easier on me thank you so much" I tell him and now its my turn to run my thumb over his hand in reassurance.

"I…I made you..." Peeta stutters out before he closes his eyes and breathes in deeply.

"Hey, hey, hey" I make an impulsive move and place my hands on either side of his face gently.

His eyes widen immediately with shock and I smile at him, "Thank you Peeta. I have never talked about this with anyone before and you have made it so much easier just being here and listening and I'm sorry if I got over emotional and droned on and on-"

"You didn't!" Peeta rushes out and then looks regretful, "Sorry didn't mean to interrupt" He says guiltily.

I laugh softly, "It's fine"

Before I put my hands down I take in the feel of his face in my hands, how warm his face is. How my two baby fingers are in contact with his ears.

His eyes are bluer than the ocean and much easier to drown in.

My eyes don't leave his as I take my hands away from his face and place them in my lap again.

I think I see a flicker of sorrow and hesitance when I do but he doesn't say anything.

I also notice how close we are to each other. We are face to face, so close our knees are touching.

I can tell that Peeta has noticed it too.

I breathe in nervously, eyes never leaving his.

I notice that unconsciously our faces are now closer than they were a few seconds ago.
I can see his eyes drop down to my lips briefly before his eyes return to mine in horror of what I will now do.

I smile so slightly it is barely noticeable.

Just when I am thinking of leaning forward just a small bit further the bell goes off.

Peeta and I spring apart instantly and we avoid eye contact.

Most others in the room are in Sophomores who don't seem to care about us, who are friends and families are or of our statuses in the District…well namely his.

Peeta and I stand, put our bags on and make our way towards the door, silently.

Peeta coughs and I turn back to look at him.

He looks as startled as I feel, "Emm…thank you…Katniss you know for sharing what you did with me"

Oh yeah I did that didn't I?

I can practically hear Gale's snarky, "Well done Catnip"

"And I just want you to know" He continues "That I won't and never will tell anyone what you told me and that like I said I'm here if you ever need me."

I relax instantly, how can this boy have such a great way with words?

It's got to be illegal!

Along with that cute, puppy dog face of his.

That has to be illegal as well.

"Thanks Peeta that means a lot."

He smiles brightly at me, "If you do ever want to talk you know I will listen. And I promise I won't get bored or sick of listening to you." He looks down and rubs his hand along the back of his neck then says, so quietly I can barely hear it, "I could never get tired of listening to you."

I blush, smile, mutter a goodbye and quickly run to my next class.

Well I know one thing for sure.

That boy is too charming and sweet for his own good.

Even if he doesn't know it.
Every Cloud Has A Silver Lining

Katniss POV

.................................................................................................................................

Home time….lovely.

(And when I say 'lovely' I am saying it in an extremely sarcastic voice because while I would usually relish in leaving school today I would prefer being at school than home. At least at school I can distract myself. Well try and distract myself anyway.)

I shut my locker with a loud, shattering bang and a group of freshmen jump in shock.

They stare at me for a minute but are soon running for the hills when I give them a threateningly glare.

I groan, shut my eyes and bang my head against my locker (I never said I was clever!)

Ow! Okay in times of stress do not bang your all ready sore head against a locker…bad idea.

I take in several deep breaths and try and calm myself down.

Ok heads are not supposed to throb like this!

I need something really cold to put on it (I don't know why I all ways want something cool to put on my head when it hurts like don't really cold things give you brain-freeze? And yet when our heads hurt we put cold things on them. I should ask mum that she's a nurse)

"You all right Katniss?" A voice asks and my eyes fly open to see a 17 year old boy with messy blonde hair, shining bright blue eyes with long eyelashes looking at me with a face filled with worry.

Oh dear god his hair is so- FOCUS KATNISS!

I cough, "Hey Peeta yeah, yeah I'm fine. Just over thinking you know. Stressed about a test coming up. Nothing to worry about." I tell him unconvincingly

Yes Katniss that is why you are stressed it has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that you have a massive crush on the boy in front of you.

Oh and add in the whole Gale and Undersee thing as well.

"Are you sure?" Peeta asks worriedly moving towards me, "You look a bit peaky Katniss."

"Oh so you are insulting me now?" I ask tiredly

"No! No! That's not what I meant at all! I-

"I know it isn't I'm really sorry I've just had a long day and I haven't been getting much sleep lately. I'm sorry Peeta I shouldn't take it out on you." I suddenly feel woozy and grip onto Peeta's shoulders for support

"Katniss!?" Peeta asks frightened moving his hands to my waist to steady me "Katniss are you all right? What's wrong?"
My forehead is pressed against his warm chest, my eyes are shut as I try to steady my breathing. My head is spinning and I'm not sure if I will be able to stay standing when Peeta lets go of me.

"Katniss will I get someone? You don't look well at all."

"No, please, no I'll be fine." I try to tell him firmly but it comes out shakily

"Katniss? I drove today I can drive you home or to the doctors or something."

"Thanks Peeta really but I'm fine" I take my hands off his shoulders and move back but I end up falling back into the lockers from lack of balance.

I hear girls laughing from nearby and I can tell its Glimmer and Cashmere (they laugh like hyenas) but I don't pay them any attention and Peeta doesn't either as he grabs my waist again and pulls me to him gently.

"Katniss? I'm going to bring you to my car all right? You can't walk anywhere like this."

I don't have the energy to disagree with him so I end up nodding and murmuring a "sure th-thanks Peeta" so Peeta leans me gently against the locker and moves away from me.

My eyes are drooping but I can still see Peeta sling my bag over his shoulder.

"All right Katniss? I've got two bags so I can't carry you but just try and lean most of your weight on me."

I think of asking why he can't just bring the bags to the car first and then come back for me but then I remember Glimmer and Cashmere giggling in the corner and realise Peeta must also know that they would take advantage of my weakened state in an instant.

Peeta wraps his free arm around me and we make our way outside, ignoring the pointed looks and the hyenas laughing.

We reach his car sooner than expected and he opens the back door and throws our bags in there. He then opens the passenger door and lifts me in gently.

"Sorry for this" I tell him tiredly but my eyes can't stay open long

I can hear the sad smile in his voice as he says "It's no problem Katniss"

As he shuts the door I can hear somebody yelling my name but I don't have the strength to reply so I just turn my head the other way.

"Its fine I'll deal with it, you just rest Katniss." Peeta shuts the door and I shut my eyes trying to block out the sunlight.

I know if I was in my right mind right now I would be embarrassed by needing someone to practically carry me out of the school.

I don't know what is wrong with me. I just suddenly got really tired.

It is a little while later that I hear the driver's door open and I open my eyes to see Peeta climb into it.

"You okay?" He asks brushing a strand of hair out of my face
I nod, "Thanks" I manage to get out but I think it just comes out as a noise.

Peeta smiles, "My parents are out for the day so only my brothers are home do you want to rest there?"

I know he knows I won't be able to get much rest at home with Prim and my mum there.

I nod "That would be nice" Again I think that might have just come out as an affirmative noise but it seems good enough for Peeta.

I tiredly put on my seat beat (it takes me a while to find the slit to put the buckle in but I get it eventually. Or maybe Peeta did it for me after he did his I can't remember)

The car ride is silent.

But it is a comfortable silence because I'm not up to talking and have my eyes shut the entire time.

When we reach the bakery, Peeta tells me softly that he will go in first and talk with his brother before bringing me inside.

I think I nod and I hear him undo his seat beat and leave the car, bringing the two school bags in with him.

His brothers will probably tease him about this later I'm sure but he doesn't seem to mind.

God I'm going to have to make this up to him big time.

But for now I just want to sleep.

Peeta comes back soon and opens the door for me.

I undo my seat belt and move my legs around to the door.

"Do you think you will be able to walk inside?" Peeta asks as if he has no problem carrying me in.

And while the idea of Peeta carrying me is very, very tempting I figure I won't embarrass him more.

Plus we have stairs to climb up! I don't want to break his back!

"Yeah I think so thanks." I get out of the car and I feel better than I did before.

I think the air and the sitting down helped.

We make our way inside and Bran is behind the counter today.

I don't know if he and Peeta have made up yet but by Peeta's stiff nod to him I would say Bran isn't fully forgiven yet and I don't blame him.

Bran smiles at me, "Hey Katniss, good to see you again."

I try and smile back, "Yeah you too."

Peeta and I make our way slowly upstairs and we sit on the couch.

Peeta feels my forehead, "Well you don't have a high temperature which is a good thing."

I smile and murmur, "My nurse Peeta."
He laughs, "That's me." Peeta stands up "Here Katniss you should lie down."

"Peeta…" I groan

"Katniss! Listen to your nurse and lie down." I smile and follow his orders

"Yes sir."

Peeta grins and sits in the arm-chair beside the couch.

Unlike a few minutes ago I am up to talking now and I ask him, "Peeta? Who was calling my name before?"

Peeta rubs the back of his neck, "Em it was Gale."

I nod "What did he want?" I have a strong suspicion about what Gale Hawthorne wanted me for but I want to be sure

"Just to talk to you" Peeta says softly and I look up at the white ceiling

"Oh… right." Ah I was right

"He was worried about you when I told him you weren't feeling well." Peeta says cautiously

"Peeta" I tell him firmly indicating that I do not want Peeta making Gale out to be some nice guy when I am mad at him.

"Sorry" Peeta moves to get his bag which he must have dropped up here along with mine before.

"I'm going to start my homework if that's all right I just have a lot today." Peeta says and I smile

"Peeta of course it is all right you can do whatever you want."

Ok that sounded a bit suggestive so I quickly add on, "What subject are you going to start on?"

"French" Peeta answers

"You took on French?" I inquire

"Yeah, mum's idea." Peeta says and I detect a note of bitterness in his tone

"Don't like it?" I ask

"I don't have a great teacher for it." Peeta answers

Ah that makes sense

"Did you take a language?" Peeta asks me and I shake my head

"No I didn't, I had no interest in them" The only choices were Spanish and French. We learnt a small bit of Spanish in primary school but I wasn't good at it. I remember very clearly an unfortunate incident in the 3rd grade where I had to do a project in Spanish and then read it in front of the class. Me being me forgot how to pronounce most of the words and used the majority of them incorrectly. Needless to say I wasn't exactly dying to pursue learning the language any further.

And then the effort of learning a new language and the grammar and everything I just wasn't bothered.
"Yeah I don't really want to learn French but my mum thought it would be good for my future or something" Peeta tells me shrugging. He has taken his books and stuff out now.

"Ah yeah well you need a language for some big colleges I think… I don't know" I say, I don't exactly pay attention when teachers tell me stuff, "So what have you to do for French homework?"

"Write a letter to your pen pal in France."

"Oh fun so after this are they going to write back explaining in lavish detail about how they eat croissants every morning and that they have a view from the Eiffel Tower from their home?" I ask jokingly

Peeta laughs, "Em no"

"Aww no! They don't even write back now that is mean!" I say pouting

Peeta shakes his head despairingly, "Right"

"Hmm so what is the name of this rude French pen pal then" I ask him clasping my hands and leaning forwards slightly

Peeta blushes and says "You"

"Aw brilliant" Remain calm Everdeen. Remain calm. "I all ways wondered what it would be like to live in Europe. Now I'm living in Paris. Oh lovely thanks Peeta! I can't wait to read it"

'Don't think too much of it Katniss' I order myself 'He probably just thought of you because you're sitting right beside him. Don't think anything of it'

He laughs, "You won't even understand it"

"Ah sure that will be half the fun!" I tell him

Yeah I feel much better now

"I think I might get a start on my homework as well." I say as I see Peeta has two paragraphs of his letter done.

"Are you sure you're up to it?" Peeta asks worriedly and I smile at him

"Yeah I'm feeling an awful lot better thanks to you." I answer, I thought I would have liked science more as I'm in the woods and surrounded by nature and planets all the time but anything they taught us about plants was either really boring or I had all ready known it.

"I never liked it really" Peeta tells me

"Yeah I only chose it because I had to choose another subject." I say
I open my science book and begin the homework and soon we are both working in silence.

"I give up!" I say throwing the paper down on the table

Peeta smiles encouragingly, "Come on we can do this it is just three more paragraphs"

Just three more paragraphs!? Just!?

Peeta and I are working on our English essays and we have to talk about our favourite character in Romeo and Juliet (That...thing)

I chose Mercutio because he is very comical (I was very annoyed when he died I mean why would you kill one of the best characters?) and Peeta chose Benvolio.

"There just isn't much more to say about why I like him! I've said how he is loyal to Romeo! I've said how he is funny! I've used fancy words and quotes and I still have to write three more paragraphs?" I complain

"Well really it's only two the last one is the conclusion." Peeta says optimistically

"Yeah you are right" I conclude.

I decide to write a paragraph on how he and Benvolio are best friends yet are so different. The second last paragraph I talk about how child-like and playful he is even though he is a member of the royal family. How he would be expected to be very respectful and quiet yet he is a very out-going character (okay so maybe Peeta gave me a few of them ideas).

Peeta and I swap essays and read each other's to check for mistakes.

His is perfect of course, extremely neat and I feel embarrassed at my sloppy writing.

"This is great Peeta" I tell him after I have finished reading it thoroughly (something I never thought I would say about something written by Shakespeare. "You found so much to write about a minor character which I think Portia will admire."

Peeta smiles shyly, "Thank you Katniss yours is excellent." He hands me back my essay and I put it in my folder

"Yeah well you did come up with most of the ideas"

"Ideas are just ideas Katniss it takes a genius to put them all together in the right way" Peeta tells me philosophically and I laugh

"Whatever you say Peeta."

We decide to take a break and I finally get a chance to read the letter he 'wrote me' in French.

I take one look and it and blink madly for a for moments

"Nope you were right I do not understand a word of this" I say in defeat handing it back to him and Peeta just laughs in response.

"You translate it for me" I tell him coyly, putting my feet up on the couch and lying back.

"It's boring" He says warningly
"Brilliant" I respond

Peeta rolls his eyes. "We had to write about school and stuff"

"Oh fantastic I love school and stuff" I grin, "Go on"

Peeta looks down at the letter nervously as I wait patiently for him to begin.

"Dear Katniss" he starts.

The letter continues on for about five minutes as I listen intently as he translates every word for me.

He was right he talks about his school and his friends. He says how he works in his family's bakery. He tells me how he has two older brothers. Peeta reveals his interest in painting. While these are all things I know all ready I still smile and listen.

He finishes telling me about how he used to play football in school and how there is a game coming up and this will be the first time he isn't playing.

He concludes in the usual way letter's end look forward to hearing from you, talk to you soon, from Peeta.

I sit in silence after he finishes for a minute and he seems to feel awkward being on the receiving end of my stare so he sits down.

"Wow….this Katniss must be a bitch to not want to reply to that." I say seriously and Peeta bursts out laughing

"Thanks" he says smiling and I sit up straight again

"No problem seriously though that was great you gave all the information that was asked. Your evil French teacher has to be impressed with that."

"You only heard it in English Katniss it could be rubbish in French."

"Course it's not" I tell him matter of factly

"How do you know?" Peeta asks, leaning towards me and I follow his lead

"Because nothing you ever write could ever be rubbish" I compliment "No matter what foreign language it is in."

He smiles and I reciprocate.

We sit in silence for a while just looking at each other until he breaks it suddenly coughing and moving away from me.

"We should probably get back to homework" Peeta mutters

"Yeah" I agree (even though I don't)

Another hour later and we have finished the rest of our homework.

I groan in relief, "Finally"

Peeta grins, "Yeah that took a while."
I finish packing all my books into my bag and I take out my phone from my pocket.

"Do you mind if I ring Prim?" I ask "I just need to know where she is I only sent her a text earlier and I need to check on her"

"Yeah no of course go right ahead." Peeta says kindly

"Thank you."

I dial Prim's number and she answers soon enough

"Katniss! Oh my god how are you? Gale said you were ill! Are you all right? Have you been to the doctor's yet? Why are you with Peeta? Are ye together yet?" I roll my eyes and look at Peeta to check he hadn't heard Prim's last question and see he is still packing away his things and looks in deep concentration so I doubt he heard.

"Hey Prim, I'm fine really. No I didn't go to the doctors I don't need to I am feeling much better now. Peeta helped a lot and was kind enough to invite me over to rest. Are you still at Gale's?" I ask

"Yeah he is here by the way he keeps asking to speak to you will I let him-"

"No!" I insist "No it is fine just please ask him if you can have dinner at his I don't think I have enough in." Prim agrees and is gone for a minute

"Gale says that is no problem and of course I can and he also wants me to tell you-"

"I don't care what else Prim sorry I have to go Peeta is waiting for me, I will pick you up soon goodbye." I hang up on her quickly before she can tell me more.

I sigh I know I shouldn't hang up on my sister like that but I don't have to energy to deal with Gale Hawthorne yet.

"You ok?" Peeta asks cautiously and I make eye contact with him

"I suppose so. Prim's at Gale's so that's one less dinner I have to organize which is a relief" I say smiling half-heartedly at him

"Oh right well that's good" Peeta says awkwardly, "You know I would invite you to have dinner here but I don't know when my mother will be home and...well...she isn't exactly the politest of people."

"Thank you Peeta, I understand." I reply. Yeah I think a dinner with Mrs. Mellark might just push me over the edge today.

When putting my phone back in my pocket I check the time and see that it is five past six.

"I should get going" I tell him reluctantly, "My mum is at home and I don't...well I don't want her to worry."

I decide not to tell him the real reason why I should be getting home to my mother.

While I appreciated the talk I had with him earlier I think he has heard enough of my problems for one day.

I stand up from the couch and he follows my lead, "Yeah all right"
I sling my bag over my shoulder and we make our way slowly towards the door.

"Thanks for everything today Peeta." I say genuinely

"It was nothing really just make sure you rest. I was glad to help." Peeta says smiling

"Well thank you anyway and I will."

I move forwards and place my hand on the door knob when Peeta tells me to wait.

His hand is on my arm and I shiver.

I turn around and we are standing so close now that I have to look up at him.

"I was just wondering…" Peeta says nervously

"Yeah?" I ask and I bite my lip trying to hide my smile while at the same time trying desperately to ignore the butterflies in my stomach

"Well Finnick is making me go to the football game that's coming up" Peeta's face flushes and his eyes dart between my eyes and the floor, "And he will probably be making out with Annie the whole time so I was wondering-hoping that you would come with me. You don't have to of course I understand it would probably be boring for you stuck with me while them two-"

I cut him off, "I would love to go."

Peeta looks up at me grinning, "Really?"

I nod smiling widely back at him, "Yeah it sounds like a great idea."

"Oh well great! Thanks!" Peeta's voice pitches at the end but he is still grinning brightly.

We make our way downstairs silently with big smiles on our faces. I wave goodbye to Bran who is still working behind the counter.

Once Peeta and I are outside I turn to face him.

"I can drive you home if you want?" Peeta offers

"Thanks but I'll be fine walking, I have to pick up some milk anyway."

"Oh right that's fine" Peeta smiles down at the ground, shuffling his feet.

"So I'll see you tomorrow then?" I say as I walk backwards away from him slowly

"Yeah you will" Peeta says looking up at me again

I turn around and begin to walk away before I turn around quickly and call "Peeta?"

Peeta has his hand on the bakery door and he turns to look at me "Yeah?"

"This football game?" Peeta eyes widen "Just in case Madge asks which I'm sure she will many, many times would this be described as a date?" I ask coyly

Peeta manage to stutter out a, "Em...well I suppose it would yeah…"

I grin, "Cool" I turn around and continue walking, "See you later Peeta!"
I hear a shocked "Bye Katniss…” in the distance and I grin even more.

I'm going on a date with Peeta Mellark…Prim and Madge are never going to let me hear the end of this.

My smile slips off my face as I realise neither will Gale or Darius.

'Well' I think to myself 'They aren't in charge of who I go out with'

If Gale and Darius take loads of girls to the Slag Heap then I can go on a date with Peeta Mellark.

Yes.

Of course I can.

Somehow I doubt they will see it that way though.
Keep Calm And Don't Faint

Chapter Notes

So this is basically 'Jealousy?' and 'Every Cloud Has A Silver Lining' from Peeta's POV.

Peeta POV

I am currently digging my fingers in the steering wheels of my car hoping the discomfort will distract me from the horrifying things coming out of my older brother's mouth.

"And then she-"

"RYE! For the LAST time will you please shut up about that girl last night!"

"Aww is wittle Peety jealous because he isn't getting any off of Katniss Evergreen?" Rye pouts as he mocks me in a baby voice.

I dig my nails into the steering wheel harder and focus my eyes on the road.

I want to throw him out of the car so bad right now in the middle of the road.

But I know he will just go home and tell mum on me as if he were a five year old...which may be the number of his IQ but still.

I don't even know what my mother loves so much about Rye, I mean she is all ways yelling at me to do better while he does no work at all and she treats him like he is royalty.

"Shut up" I growl

We have finally arrived at Rye's college, THANK GOD!

"You know I could all ways give you tips on-

"GOODBYE RYE!" I shout as I turn and glare at him. My older brother covers his ears (hungover again)"All right, all right!"

He slips out of the car muttering something about at least he is able to get girls.

I am going to kill him one of these days.

I really am.

But then again I have been saying that since I was six so…maybe not.

He grabs his bag and slams the door shut. I quickly pull out of the college parking lot and drive to school, plotting the best ways to execute Rye on the way.
I am sitting at my desk in Home Economics drawing the flowers that Ms. Trinket has carefully arranged on her desk when I hear a timid voice above me.

"Peeta?"

I look up and see Madge looking down at me her eyes filled with worry.

"Hi Madge are you all right?" I ask

Madge nods and quickly turns her head around to check the door before looking back at me.

"Em… I'm okay Peeta. Have you seen Katniss this morning?"

Katniss? Why would Madge be so worried about Katniss? Is she okay? Is Madge okay? Has something happened?

"No I'm sorry I haven't seen her. Is there anything I can do to help you Madge?"

"No, no, I'm fine really it's Katniss I'm worried about. Oh she saw something yesterday that I think she completely misunderstood and I kind of screwed up when I was only trying to help her. Well I didn't mean to screw up and well I didn't really do anything but- oh it is a long story but basically I think she is mad at me and is avoiding me. Well I mean I can't be sure I mean she isn't in school yet so she hasn't had a chance. But even if she was I mean it would be understandable after what she assumed happened but I just really need to explain things to her.

Just please don't tell Katniss I spoke to you yeah? I know she puts up a strong act but I think this might have hurt her more than she will be letting on. She is quite fragile after everything she has been through you know. Oh god do not tell her I called her that she would skin me."

I can't help wonder what happened between them to make Madge so worried but I don't pester her,

"Yeah sure, I won't say anything to her about it but I'm sure it will all work out sooner or later Madge. You and Katniss have been friends for years."

Madge smiles sadly, "I think I may have messed it up though Peeta. Or I was going to at least. Or, well I don't know it all happened quite fast." She sighs "Sorry I am probably not making a lot of sense to you I apologise. Look I better go take my books out or Trinket will give me a lecture. Just please make sure she is all right for me yeah?"

"Yeah of course" That is one thing I can hopefully do.

"Thanks Peeta" Madge says gratefully and moves to sit down again.

I wonder what happened between Katniss and Madge that could get Madge so worked up and Katniss ignoring Madge. I shake my head knowing it isn't my business and get back to drawing the flowers.
Finnick spent the whole time nudging me and asking where my 'girlfriend' is while Delly droned on and on about the 'shopping trip' she and her cousin went on over the weekend.

I don't mind Delly talking about clothes.

I mean it's not like I despise shopping like some guys do (I don't necessarily thrive off it but I don't hate it)

But forty-five minutes of her endlessly describing each dress she tried on in major detail was something I wasn't ready for on a Monday.

Apparently Finnick took Annie out to the cinema over the weekend (I'm pretty sure they didn't actually watch the movie if you catch my drift) and they went out to eat afterwards and Annie couldn't stop thanking Finnick today and saying how romantic and perfect it was

I think Thresh was with me on this one they were being waaaay too lovey dovey.

I have a study class next so I head to room 16.

There are only three other people in the room when I get there.

One looks like she is a sophomore and she is listening to music on her headphones and doing homework while the other two are making out in a corner. I make sure I sit well away from them.

I take out a spare sheet of paper and aimlessly doodle on it until I hear a sound beside me that makes me look up.

I see Katniss has plopped down beside me and I smile.

"Hi Katniss" I say happily as I put away my drawings hastily.

Katniss smiles back, "Hey Peeta how are you?"

"I'm fine thanks how about you?" I answer.

Katniss didn't come in to Home Economics until the very last second before the bell rang.

She sat next to me and she did not look at Madge the entire class though I saw Madge look back at us a few times.

I wouldn't say Katniss was angry or sad, personally she just seemed exhausted to me.

But then again who isn't on a Monday morning…well Delly excluded.

"I am all right thanks Peeta. Sorry if I was off with you this morning I just had a rough weekend."

Why is she apologising to me?

She was perfectly polite this morning to me. Maybe a little tired and she didn't talk that much but nothing rude or anything or the sort.

"It is fine Katniss really and I am really sorry to hear that."

Katniss smiles at me as a thank you and I nervously stammer out next, "You can all ways talk to me about anything that's bothering you or just anything in general."
No she is going to think you are a creep stop talking. Leave it there.

"Some of my friends say I'm good at helping... people... I don't know."

INTERNAL FACE PALM

God I am such an idiot.

"Just you know if you ever want or need to talk to someone. But obviously like you have other friends I'm not suggesting you have none or any-"

"Thanks Peeta" Katniss cuts me off and I breathe a sigh of relief

"No problem" I mutter rubbing the back of my neck hoping she doesn't notice the sudden flush in my cheeks.

"Just, you know" Katniss says sighing "Gale and the kids they...well...they drive me insane a lot."

That is when Katniss starts to open up to me.

She does something I never imagined possible and trusted me enough to tell me her fears and worries.

She mostly tells me of her worries over Primrose and the Hawthornes.

She tells me how she is finding it hard to cope with them. She tells me how sometimes she feels she is only 17 and feels like she shouldn't be forced to raise four children that aren't even her own. That most people aren't age don't care about their siblings never mind raise them. She hurries to tell me that she doesn't mind but it is hard.

She reveals how she is having money problems because Gale only works part time and she is only a waitress getting paid minimum wage. Her mum can't see anyone right now and Hazelle (Gale's mum) is only beginning to come round.

She tells me how she is scared her and Gale won't be able to afford Vick's dancing classes. How Vick is really passionate about it and he is really good at dancing and how he would be devastated if he couldn't go any more.

She also mentions Prim and Gale's brother Rory. How they will get together soon enough and how she isn't sure she can deal with them being together never mind what would happen if they were to break up.

She reveals also how the youngest Posy is finding it difficult settling into school. That Katniss is afraid people will pick on her for being poor and not having better quality clothes that aren't hand-me-downs and she worries they have already.

This is where she brings in the whole argument with Madge.

She tells me what happened yesterday. How she was so hurt that Madge Undersee can provide for Posy while she cannot (something I disagree with completely).

She says how she only had old, raggedy, worn-out clothes and toys to give Posy but Madge has brand name, great quality clothes and toys she can give Posy

She then goes on saying how grateful Gale was to Madge after she gave Posy her old things. How he was never shown that sort of gratitude to Katniss even though she has been helping Gale raise
her, feed her and clothe his sister since she was born.

She says more about how she feels like Gale doesn't appreciate her and how he was more grateful to Madge Undersee than he has ever been to her.

When she finishes saying this guilt and remorse flash across her face and she quickly corrects herself as she praises Gale and divulges that he has been amazing, helping her with Prim and their mother while still taking care of her own family.

She stops talking soon after that and she looks so hurt and exhausted and frightened that I want nothing more than to wrap her in my arms and promise her that everything will be all right.

She shouldn't have to deal with this. She is only seventeen and she is forced to raise four children that aren't even hers and to deal with all these adult problems and worries long before she should have to.

I wish so badly that there was more I could do for her. I know it wasn't her mother's fault for falling into depression but I can't help but be angry at her for putting Katniss through this pain.

More than anything though I can't believe that Katniss trusts and cares for me enough to reveal all of this to me. That took immense amounts of courage and trust which just made me fall in love with her even more.

I see Katniss looking at me and she seems worried about my reaction.

How could she be worried? How could she doubt herself?

I take her hands in mine and subconsciously rub my thumb along the back to her hand.

"None of this is your fault Katniss." I begin softly,

"You have every right to feel this way. It must be so tough on you and I am so sorry for your situation and I hope I can help in any way I can." I hope I don't come off pushy with that but I want her to know the offer is always there

"You shouldn't feel bad about feeling this way. Rory, Vick and Posy aren't your responsibility yet you still make sure they are. You still love and care for them as if they were your children which is so incredibly admirable Katniss."

I couldn't imagine Bran and Rye having to raise me never mind actually doing a good job. I would probably been addicted to alcohol at the age of ten and sleeping with girls when I was 13 if they had their way.

"I can clearly see why you would be upset by Gale acting like he does." Okay we all know you aren't Gale Hawthorne's biggest fan Peeta but try to not insult him in front of Katniss he is still her best friend after all.

"It mightn't be so much that he is taking you for granted as he has just gotten so used to you and Prim being part of his family that he feels he doesn't need to show you any gratitude. He should but maybe he thinks you all ready know how grateful he is for helping him with his family."

I look into Katniss's eyes and she nods at my words before lifting her hands up to wipe her eyes.

No, no, no, no, no, you made her cry!
You idiot!

You are not supposed to make the girl you like cry!

Okay it's one of the first rules of life you know breathe at least once a minute and DON'T MAKE THE GIRL YOU HAVE HAD A MASSIVE CRUSH ON FOR YEARS CRY!

Unless it is with happiness.

And these definitely are not tears of joy.

Way to go Mellark!

"I'm sorry oh god Katniss I'm so sorry" I apologise profusely.

Katniss shakes her head and looks around the classroom before training her eyes back on me.

"Don't apologise Peeta you have done nothing but make this ten times easier on me thank you so much" This time it's Katniss who squeezes my hand and runs her thumb along it

Oh god why does she have to be so god-damn nice about this!?

Can she not just slap me?

Well okay maybe not slap

"I…I made you..." I get out then I close my eyes and breathe in deeply. Seriously Mellark do not cry.

The last thing you want is Katniss Everdeen thinking you are a wimp.

"Hey, hey, hey" Katniss says, putting her hands on the side of my face.

My eyes widen.

Is she trying to kill me?

Katniss smiles at me, "Thank you Peeta. I have never talked about this with anyone before and you have made it so much easier just being here and listening and I'm sorry if I got over emotional and droned on and on-"

"You didn't!" I say hastily.

How could she think I would ever get tired of listening to her?

Dammit Peeta you interrupted her!

You aren't doing a great job of making her like you.

"Sorry didn't mean to interrupt" I apologise again.

Katniss laughs, "Its fine"

We sit in a comfortable silence for a few minutes. Her bright silver eyes are looking into mine then she takes her lovely, cold hands from my face and place them on her lap again.

I want to stop her but don't want to come off as weird so I stay quiet.
I now take note of how close we are now.

Our foreheads are almost touching while our knees are.

Katniss breathes in nervously

Have I moved forwards? Or has she?

Our faces have inched closer and I can't stop my eyes drop down to her lips for a split second before they quickly return to her eyes.

I hope she didn't notice but I can tell she did.

Katniss smiles softly which I take as a good sign.

I have half a mind to lean in and close the gap between us but then the bell goes off.

Katniss and I spring apart instantly.

I look at the ground ashamed. I can't believe I was thinking of kissing Katniss Everdeen in the middle of a classroom.

I know that didn't stop the two in the corner but still.

I stand clumsily put my bag over my back and head towards the door.

I don't want to leave things like this though so before I know what I am doing I cough awkwardly and Katniss turns around looking at me curiously.

"Em…thank you…Katniss you know for sharing what you did with me"

I still can't believe she trusted me enough to tell me all that.

"And I just want you to know" I continue "That I won't and never will tell anyone what you told me and that like I said I'm here if you ever need me."

Katniss visibly relaxes

"Thanks Peeta that means a lot."

I smile, well she doesn't hate me that's good at least.

"If you do ever want to talk you know I will listen. And I promise I won't get bored or sick of listening to you." I look down at the ground. Dammit stop talking Mellark. I rub the back of my neck nervously before whispering "I never could get sick of listening to you."

What part of stop talking did you not understand!?

Katniss doesn't seem to mind though and she smiles at me.

I think I notice a tinge of pink in her cheeks before she says goodbye, leaving me alone.

That is before I remember I have a class the other side of the building next and I quickly sprint out of the classroom.
Last class of the day is finally over thank god.

The last two classes were hell as I couldn't stop thinking about Katniss.

My French teacher had to tell me to snap out of my daydream twice.

She even had to say it in English (and she never lets us speak English in class let alone speak it herself)

But I can't find it in me to care.

I head to my locker to find Finnick leaning against it.

"PEETA BREAD!"

Oh dear god

The entire hall turns to look at me and I glare at him.

"Odair" I state as I push past him to get into my locker.

"Awwwww don't be like that Pita" Finnick pouts beside me

I get my English stuff from my locker before shutting it and slinging my bag over my shoulder.

"Maybe you shouldn't yell in the halls causing the entire hallways to stare at me" I advise before pushing turning and heading towards to school exit.

"Aw ok I'm sorry" Finnick says blocking my path "I just wanted to thank you for the advice about Annie" Finnick winks at me and I somehow manage not to groan.

"No problem can I leave now?"

Finnick mocks a hurt expression, "Peeta! I am your best friend! You should bask in the glory of being in my presence"

I blink

"Okay fine I was wondering" And there it is "How is Everdeen doing?" Finnick asks worriedly

"Katniss? She is fine why?"

"She didn't look too well in Home Ec. that's all. I was of course looking at you guys making sure you were talking to her! And Madge mentioned something about a fight. Then I didn't see her at lunch today and Hawthorne looked a right grump all day."

Does he stalk her or something?

"Yeah I don't know the details just that Gale and Madge did something to upset Katniss and now she isn't speaking to them" I lie shrugging.

"Oh she totally walked in on them-"

"Finnick! Mind your own business for once!" I interrupt

"Fine" Finnick sulks
"Shouldn't you be at Annie's locker right now instead of mine?"

Finnick blinks before muttering, "Dammit" and he runs in the other direction.

I laugh and round the corner heading towards the exit when I spot Katniss leaning against her locker. She looks exhausted.

I move towards her carefully.

"You all right Katniss?" I ask and her eyes fly open with fright.

She looks at me for a moment before coughing,

"Hey Peeta yeah, yeah I'm fine. Just over thinking you know. Stressed about a test coming up. Nothing to worry about."

Somehow I don't think Katniss is telling the truth and I move towards her slowly,

"Are you sure? You look a bit peaky Katniss."

"Oh so you are insulting me now?" Katniss asks, bored.

No I definitely didn't mean to do that! Why can't I do anything right today!?

"No! No! That's not what I meant at all! I-" I stammer out but luckily Katniss interrupts me,

"I know it isn't I'm really sorry I've just had a long day and I haven't been getting much sleep lately. I'm sorry Peeta I shouldn't take it out on you." Katniss looks down at the floor then and I think I see her sway slightly before she falls forward gripping my shoulders for support.

At first I think she has fainted but then I look down and she her eyes squeezed shut and her breathing heavily.

"Katniss!?" I question nervously.

What is wrong with her? Is she ill? She has looked exhausted all day. Maybe she isn't eating or sleeping right…

I move my hands to her waist gently to steady her as best I can, "Katniss are you all right? What's wrong?"

She presses her forehead against my chest but stays silent.

"Katniss will I get someone? You don't look well at all."

"No please no I'll be fine." She tells me shakily

I don't want to upset her so I stay where I am.

"Katniss? I drove today I can drive you home or to the doctors or something."

"Thanks Peeta really but I'm fine" She takes her hands off my shoulders and moves back too fast and she ends up falling against the lockers.

Oh God no. I reach out and get a hold of her waist pulling me to her. I hear the loud laughing from the corner and see that it is coming from Glimmer and Cashmere (last names).
How dare they laugh at Katniss while she is ill!? I feel anger bubble up inside me and try to shake it off for Katniss' sake.

"Katniss? I'm going to bring you to my car all right? You can't walk anywhere like this."

I hope I don't offend her with my offer and she doesn't argue.

She nods and murmurs, "Sure th-thanks Peeta." Though it comes out as more of a "Sure bhanks Peeta"

I lean her against the locker and back away slowly.

I grab our bags (I had placed mine on the floor when she fell…onto me.)

I think of carrying her but realise I can't with the school bags and I'm not leaving her here at the mercy of Glimmer and Cashmere.

"All right Katniss? I've got two bags so I can't carry you but just try and lean most of your weight on me."

I wrap my arm around her and we exit the building.

Soon enough we reach my car and I unlock it. I throw our bags in the back-seat before opening the passenger door for Katniss and gently lifting her inside the car.

I smile at how childlike she looks, her eyes barely staying open and her body slumped.

Her face looks sickly pale though and I wish more than anything that I could help her more.

"Sorry for this" Katniss mumbles and her eyes droop shut.

I smile sadly thinking of how tired she is and why she is so exhausted, "It's no problem Katniss."

I am shutting the passenger door when I hear somebody yelling Katniss' name behind me.

I turn around to check who it is and during so I spot Katniss tensing and turning her head away from the noise.

Once I have turned around I see a flushed Gale Hawthorne running towards me.

He is almost at the car and I know Katniss can't deal with this right now so I tell her,

"Its fine I'll deal with it, you just rest Katniss."

I shut the car door and make my way to meet Gale in the middle.

He slows down once he sees this and his eyes narrow.

He stops a few feet away from me.

"Gale." I state and Gale shifts

"Peeta. Why is Katniss in your car?" Gale asks, his voice deadly even as his eyes boring into mine

"She isn't feeling well" I inform him and Gale's whole demeanour shifts,

"Is she all right? What happened? What did you do to her? If you have laid a finger on her-"
"Gale!" I interrupt, "I have done nothing! Katniss is absolutely exhausted! She has to take care of her mum and Prim and then your family as well! And you and Thom and Darius and herself! She has too many things to deal with and she can't cope."

Gale stays silent for a moment and I can tell he is annoyed at me but is mostly worried about Katniss, "Look Mellark you have known her a week ok? I have known her my whole life I think I know more about her than you do. I don't need Katniss to take care of-"

"Gale I am not trying to hurt your pride here for crying out loud" I say sighing.

I briefly wonder whether he will beat me up or not...yeah he most likely will.

Gale folds his arms grumpily and I sigh, "Look Gale she all most fainted today!"

Gale's eyes widen and he is about to speak but I cut him off

"She needs to rest and I really don't think she is up to listening to people never mind talking as well. Look I think Katniss should talk to you and we both know she will soon but not now. She just needs to rest she has no energy for a confrontation now.

Gale seems to be considering this and I continue

"Look I am going to bring her back to my place for a bit" Gale moves forward angrily

"TO REST!" I add "I'm just going to let her rest I'll do homework or work at the bakery or something. My brothers are going to be home as well. Gale I'm not going to let her get hurt all right?"

Gale stares at me for a few minutes and I can practically hear the clogs turning in his head.

"Fine" he mutters

"Ok. I'm sure Katniss would appreciate you bringing Prim and your siblings home so she knows they are safe" I tell him making sure to say that it is what Katniss would want.

He nods, "Yeah I'll do that" He turns around and begins to walk off before he turns his head back and says, "And Peeta?"

"Yeah?"

Gale looks at me strangely before saying, "Take care of her."

Before I can answer he hurries off.

I quickly head back to the car not wanting to leave Katniss alone for too long.

Once I enter the car Katniss' eyes open and she looks at me innocently.

I shut the door before leaning forward and brushing a loose strand of hair out of Katniss' face.

"You okay?" I ask

She nods and mutters something I think was along the line of "Thanks".

Whatever sound she made sounds adorable anyway and I smile,
"My parents are out for the day so only my brothers are home do you want to rest there?"

I really hope she doesn't think I am trying to be suggestive when I say that.

I would of course suggest she rest at home but she would be fretting over her mother and Prim there and I doubt she would get a lot of rest.

Never the less Katniss agrees so we drive home.

I park the car outside the bakery and turn to Katniss,

"I'll go in on my own first ok? I just need to explain things to Bran and then I'll bring you in."

Katniss nods slightly and I take that as an agreement.

I head inside with the two bags and Bran looks up at the sound of the bell.

"Hey Peeta." Bran says smiling brightly at me.

Ever since he told my mum about Katniss and I working together he has been trying to make things up to me.

"Hi Bran" I say "Could you look after the bakery for me today? Katniss is here and she isn't feeling well so I'm going to let her rest upstairs."

Bran nods, "Sure yeah of course."

"Thanks" I say and just when I open the door that leads to the stairs Bran stops me,

"Peeta?" I face him, "I promise I won't…you know tell mum or dad she was here and if they come in while she is up there with you I will come up with something to get them leave."

I look at him for a moment before thanking him again.

I leave the bags upstairs in the sitting room and hurry outside again.

I open the door for Katniss letting her out.

I ask her if she is able to walk inside (I think it is A BIT too early in our 'relationship' for me carrying her even if she is ill. Not that I wouldn't like it but you know…) and she says she is.

Bran and Katniss make small talk as we walk across the bakery and soon we are in the sitting room on the couch.

I feel her forehead, checking for a high temperature but she feels perfectly cool.

"Well you don't have a high temperature which is a good thing." I tell her and she grins,

"My nurse Peeta." She whispers and I have to resist the urge to kiss her right then and there.

I laugh instead deciding she might be more comfortable with that.

"That's me." I tell her after all why would I refuse the privilege of getting to take care of her?

I stand up and advise her to lie down.
He laughs, "That's me." Peeta stands up "Here Katniss you should lie down."

"Peeta…" Katniss groans reluctantly

"Katniss! Listen to your nurse and lie down." I order her but grin to assure her I am only kidding.

"Yes sir." Katniss agrees smiling and lying down.

Wow she actually did something somebody told her to do. She must really be sick.

I sit down in the armchair beside the couch and that is when Katniss asks me the dreaded question.

"Peeta? Who was calling my name before?"

I rub my neck and try not to stress over her reaction, "Em it was Gale."

Katniss face is emotionless as she nods and asks, "What did he want?"

I figure she knows what he wanted but I answer her question anyway.

"Just to talk to you" I tell her honestly.

Katniss turns her head to look at the ceiling.

"Oh… right."

I decide to show a good side of Gale (YES SHOW THE GIRL YOU ARE IN LOVE WITH THE GOOD SIGN OF HER EXTREMELY GOOD LOOKING BEST FRIEND WHO SHE IS MOST LIKELY TO GO OUT WITH AND MARRY AND HAVE REAL KIDS WITH! YES WELL DONE PEETA!)

"He was worried about you when I told him you weren't feeling well." I say hesitantly

"Peeta" Katniss says firmly implying that she does not want to talk about Gale no exceptions

"Sorry" I say quickly.

After a few minutes of awkward silence I decide I should get some of my homework done seeing as I don't know how long Katniss will be here (not that I want her to leave).

"I'm going to start my homework if that's all right I just have a lot today." I inform her

"Peeta of course it is all right you can do whatever you want." She reassures me smiling

"What subject are you going to start on?" she asks curiously

"French" I answers holding up my French book with a picture of the Eiffel Tower on it (how cliché)

"You took French?" Katniss inquires

"Yeah, mum's idea." I say bitterly as I remember the constant arguments we had when I was choosing my school subjects. Telling her I despised French and that I found it far too difficult. She insisted that it would benefit me in the future and that I would go nowhere in life if I did not take a language. It was one of the few times I ever disagreed with my mother out loud and she did not take it well.

"Don't like it?" Katniss asks
"I don't have a great teacher for it." I answer and it is true my teacher is rubbish. One of the main reasons why I was never interested in the subject.

"Did you take a language?" I ask her Peeta asks me and I shake my head

"Nah, no interest in them"

"Yeah I don't really want to learn French but my mum thought it would be good for my future or something" I shrug

"Ah yeah well you need a language for some big colleges I think…. I don't know" Katniss says optimistically, "So what have you to do for French homework?"

"Write a letter to your pen pal in France." Basically what we have been doing since freshman year.

"Oh fun so after this are they going to write back explaining in lavish detail about how they eat croissants every morning and that they have a view from the Eiffel Tower from their home?" Katniss jokes grinning brightly.

This is when I notice there is more colour in her cheeks and I breathe a sigh of relief as I laugh at the sign of her recovering

"Em no"

"Aww no! They don't even write back now that is mean!" Katniss says pouting

I shake my head in despair, "Right" I am at a loss for what else to say

"Hmm so what is the name of this rude French pen pal then" Katniss asks clasping her hands and leaning forwards slightly

I look down at my letter.

I don't know how well Katniss will react to me writing a letter to her in French for homework.

I blush red and mutter, "You"

"Aw brilliant!" Katniss says enthusiastically "I all ways wondered what it was like to live in Europe. I'm getting a letter all the way from France, aw thanks Peeta! I can't wait to read it" Katniss is grinning like I just told her she has won the lotto.

I laugh and tell her she won't be able to understand it.

I realise I am not going to get any decent work done while talking to Katniss but I don't want to stop. I only have the introduction done and the beginning of the next paragraph.

"Ah sure that will be half the fun!" Katniss says "I think I might get a start on my homework as well."

"Are you sure you're up to it?" I question not wanting her to strain herself

"Yeah I'm feeling much better thanks to you."

I smile at her "I'm glad"

Katniss pulls out her science book from her bag and instead of doing my homework like any normal
human would I decide to ask her about science instead.

"You took science then?"

"Yeah it's all right" Katniss says sighing

"I never liked it really"

"Yeah I only chose it because I had to choose another subject." She admits

She opens up her book and we work on our homework in comfortable silence with the odd conversation here and there.

We decide to take a break from our homework after we finish our English essays

Katniss begs me to let her read the French letter and I let her even though I know she won't understand it.

I was right of course and she takes a swift glance over it before handing it back to me saying,

"Yeah no I don't understand this"

I laugh I response to her.

"You translate it for me" Katniss challenges as she gets comfy on the couch

"It's boring" I warn her

"Brilliant" She grins

I roll my eyes, "We had to write about school and stuff"

"Oh fantastic I love school and stuff" Katniss smirks at me clearly loving this, "Go on"

I look down at the letter and begin translating.

It doesn't take as long as I expected and when I finish Katniss doesn't speak for a few minutes which makes me feel a bit uncomfortable under her stare.

"Wow….this Katniss must be a bitch to not want to reply to that." Katniss says seriously.

I burst out laughing and don't recover for several minutes,

"Thanks"

"No problem, seriously though that was great you gave all the information that was asked. Your evil French teacher has to be impressed with that."

"You only heard it in English Katniss it could be rubbish in French." Which is true. The grammar could be off. I could have worded things wrong. I might have misspelt words. Ok let's not think of all the negatives Peeta.

"Course it's not" Katniss says

"How do you know?" I ask raising my eyebrows
"Because nothing you ever write could ever be rubbish," Katniss compliments sweetly "No matter what foreign language it is in."

We smile and I know take in just how close we are to each other. If I moved in just a tiny bit of foreheads would be touching.

I have to stop myself from letting my eyes glance down to her lips again.

After a few minutes I can't take it any more. I know if I stay there I will end up kissing her and I cannot risk freaking her out when she has just began to trust me.

I pull away from her coughing and sitting as far back in my chair as I can.

"We should probably get back to homework" I mutter.

Katniss looks at me before reluctantly agreeing.

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We finish our homework about an hour later.

We pack up our stuff and Katniss asks me if she can ring Prim to which I agree to of course.

There is no reason why she needs to ask my permission to do stuff. I would tell her that but I don't want her to feel offended.

Katniss rings Prim and I make sure not to listen to their conversation I don't want to seem rude.

I continue to pack away my things and put my bag in the corner before sitting down in the armchair again.

I think back to what Finnick said a few days ago about me asking Katniss to go with me to that football game.

I don't even know if Katniss likes football! She probably has much better things to be doing with her time.

If I do ask her out it would be to somewhere…normal.

Like the cinema or something.

But then again Finnick would kill me for not going to the game with him and I don't want to spend the whole time sitting next to him and Annie sucking the faces off each other.

Maybe I should ask her.

I mean she hasn't shown any signs of being repulsed by me and she has blushed a few times around me.

She might see me as just a friend and if she says that I can all ways say that I only wanted her to go with me as friends….

I notice Katniss isn't on the phone to Prim any more and is looking down at her lap.

She disheartened and regretful and I ask if she is all right.
She looks up at me, "I suppose so. Prim's at Gale's so that's one less dinner I have to organize which is a relief"

Katniss smiles but it doesn't reach her eyes.

"Oh right well that's good" I say wringing my hands, "You know I would invite you to have dinner here but I don't know when my mother will be home and...well...she isn't exactly the politest of people."

"Thank you Peeta, I understand." Katniss says and I can tell she does understand.

I think about bringing up the game now but Katniss speaks first.

"I should get going. My mum is at home and I don't...well I don't want her to worry."

Her hesitation doesn't escape my notice but I forget about it quickly not wishing to intrude.

We stand up and we make our way to the sitting room door.

"Thanks for everything today Peeta."

"It was nothing really just make sure you rest. I was glad to help." I say honestly

"Well thank you anyway and I will."

Katniss is about to open the door when I stop her.

She turns around and looks up at me.

"I was just wondering..." Come on Mellark you can do this

"Yeah?" Katniss asks biting her lip (I would like to confirm my earlier suspicion that she is indeed trying to kill me)

"Well Finnick is making me go to the football game that's coming up" I feel my face heat up and I can't hold her gaze for long. Mellark you have planned this moment for over a decade! Just get it out. "And he will probably be making out with Annie the whole time so I was wondering-hoping that you would come with me. You don't have to of course I understand it would probably be boring for you stuck with me while them two-"

Katniss cuts off my babbling, "I would love to go."

Did she just agree to go out with me?

Did Katniss just agree to go out with me?

Did Katniss Everdeen just agree to go out with me?!

"Really?" I don't believe it.

She can't have.

Why would she want to go out with me?

Don't ask yourself these questions just be glad she said yes!

Katniss nods, smiling, "Yeah it sounds like a great idea."
"Oh well great! Thanks!" I say and I think my face may break from my grin.

Katniss leads the way downstairs and I have to stop myself from jumping with joy.

Katniss says goodbye to Bran and we go outside.

"I can drive you home if you want?" I offer

"Thanks but I'll be fine walking, I have to pick up some milk anyway." Katniss says motioning to the shop down the street.

"Oh right that's fine" I don't know what to say.

What do you say to the girl who just agreed to go out with you?

"So I'll see you tomorrow then?" Katniss asks as she slowly walks backwards.  

TOMORROW?!

THE GAME ISN'T TOMORROW RIGHT-?

Oh right she is talking about school...I knew that.

"Yeah you will" I smile and watch as she turns away from me and begins walking away.

I am about to head inside where I would then go up to my run and jump up and down with joy when Katniss calls me back, "Oh Peeta?"

No...

She has changed her mind.

She has realised I'm not good enough. That I am useless and I will never amount to anything. Just like my mother has all way said.

She is clever she knows she doesn't have to go out with me out of guilt and knows she can do much better than me so she is going to tell me straight out so I don't get my hopes up (any further)

Or maybe she will just drop hints about how great it is that we are going as friends (I think the previous version would be easier to cope with)

I pray to god that my face isn't showing my torment as I reply, "Yeah?"

"This football game?" ...I was right "Just in case Madge asks which I'm sure she will do over and over again would this be described as a date?" Katniss asks with a curious smirk.

What do I say?

What the hell do I say?

The truth?

What I hope is the truth?

Yeah go with that one.

What's the worst that could happen? Well...let's not think about the worst that could happen right
now.

"Em...well I suppose it would be yes…" I stutter out

Katniss grins and answers with, "Cool. See you later Peeta!" Katniss walks away and I stare after her in shock.

Katniss wants to go out on a date with me.

Katniss Everdeen wants to go out with me and she thinks it is cool….

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I think I am going to faint.
Apologies

Katniss POV

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*Bang bang*

I startle at the sudden noise and my mum's eyes widen in front of me in fright.

"It's all right." I attempt to comfort her as she begins to shake, staring at me, not blinking with fear.

"It's just the door mum. Just the front door, I'll go downstairs and see who it is now."

I stand and am about to place the tray of soup and water on the cabinet when she pulls my arm almost like a small child would and sends me a pleading look.

"I'm just going downstairs mum just to see who is at the door. It is probably Prim or-"

Mum shakes her head and points to the tray.

"You want to stay eating?" I ask as if I am talking to a baby who can't talk yet.

She nods and I place the tray on her lap again and she smiles in thanks.

I am just about to reply when,

*Bang, bang.*

Honestly can he not just knock like everybody else does?

But no Gale Hawthorne insists on causing an earthquake every time he knocks on a door!

…I am such a nice best friend…..

I leave the room leaving the door ajar so I can hear if something happens and hurry downstairs.

"Try not to wake everyone on the other side of the earth Gale." I comment sarcastically as I open the front door.

Of course it's Gale, I mean who else knocks as if they are trying to knock the whole house down with a bulldozer?

Gale smiles sheepishly (since when does Gale Hawthorne get sheepish? He doesn't even like sheep very much. Thinks they are abnormally fluffy or something)

"Sorry" He lies grinning wolfishly before turning to Prim who is chatting away aimlessly to Rory who has tagged along for the walk (what a surprise)

"Come on you, time to get inside." Gale ruffles Prim's hair and she glares up at him. Whether the glare is the show her annoyance at being treated like Posy or at being forced to leave her beloved Rory I cannot tell.

"Fine. Goodnight Gale." Prim bites out before her voice grows softer, "Night Rory." She finishes turning back to Rory and giving him a big smile (Gale and I never get that smile…I am offended)
"See you later Prim" Rory says with an equally happy grin on his face (never got that smile of him either. Well at least they haven't started on cutsie wootsie nicknames yet otherwise I might kill them).

Prim pushes past me acknowledging me with a gloomy , "Katniss" (well gee thanks, love you too sis)

Gale's eyes are fixed on me and I hold his gaze.

He turns away before I do (obviously) "Roar why don't you head back home?"

Rory raises an eyebrow at him

"It's night time Gale"

"It is seven o' clock!" Gale protests

Oh brilliant a Hawthorne brotherly fight.

As if I don't get enough of them

(okay I lie, their fights secretly amuse me)

"It is half nine Gale" Rory argues and Gale checks his watch and realises his brother is right.

"So?" Gale splutters "You're fourteen now Rory can't you walk a few streets on your own?"

Rory shrugs off Gale's belittling comment and glares at him.

"It's dark!"

I take note of the sky then and realise Rory is right.

It is the middle of September after all, it is getting quite dark for a 14 year old to be walking home on a school night.

"It is darkening there is a difference" Gale counters "And we both know you will just be walking five steps ahead of me if we were to walk there together anyway"

Rory opens his mouth and raises his eyebrows before he shuts his mouth and glares at Gale,

"Fine. Whatever. But if I get killed, I am blaming you." Rory tells him pointing his finger at him before turning to me, "Night Katniss"

"Night Roar" I answer, grinning.

Ah fourteen year olds and their humour (sorry moodiness…meant moodiness. Mood swings, hormones, etc. I do not find their arguments humourless at all..definitely not).

Rory walks off leaving Gale and I alone in the doorway….no awkwardness at all here

Gale shuffles his feet before daring to meet my eye.

I fold my arms and stare back at him.

"How are you?" He asks softly.

"Fine" I answer indifferently "And you?" I ask leaning against the door.
"I'm...fine...well not fine...well I am fine..but" Gale admits and I can't keep the grin off my face. "It's true! Catnip please can we talk."

I want to make some smart remark like 'We r talking now' and then grin at him, we both laugh and carry on as if nothing happened.

But something did happen.

I turned out to be a terrible friend.

Something which I must apologise for before I start making stupid jokes.

"I agree" I say unfolding my arms and standing up straight "But not out here, let's go inside."

I walk into the kitchen and hear him shut the front door and follow me in.

I sit down facing the doorway and when gale enters he hesitantly sits opposite.

Gales shifts before placing his hands on the table,

Gale is about to speak but I stop him with a wave of my hand.

It takes me a moment to gather my words and while I do he stares at me with those big grey 'puppy dog eyes' that make the majority of the district twelve female population melt.

"Look...I know I was wrong"

Gale frowns, obviously as unused to hearing me admit I was wrong as me.

"I shouldn't have got mad. I shouldn't have ignored you and I...I apologise"

Gale blinks in shock.

"You had every right to ring Madge, especially after I suggested it. This is not an excuse I know but I was mad. Confused, stressed, worried and I wasn't coping as it was and then to come home to everyone so happy with" I laugh shakily "With Madge Undersee of all people it just set me off. I've had to listen to you complain about how she never works for anything, how people like her will never appreciate what we have. Then coming back to see you and her getting all...friendly it just tipped me over the edge."

"Its...well its just you have said a million times that people like Madge will never understand people from the Seam. I'm not blaming you or anything yesterday was completely my fault. It was just you accepting her help and old things after everything you say about townies I just well I suppose I judged you. Thought you were a hypocrite. Which you aren't of course you aren't but. That's just how I felt. You know me, stupid, never gets anything right, jumps to conclusions etc etc."

I desperately hope that I don't sound like I want him to feel sorry for me

"You...you have always told me how you despise charity. And well I know Madge Undersee is not the first person to offer you, or even us clothes and toys and money over the years. But you have always refused them all, never considered accepting any of them. It took you ages to finally accept my help even though we had been friends for years. Then Madge visits once, offers you her things
and you accept them. You let Posy keep them and try them on. I understand why you accepted them
I mean who wouldn’t? It isn’t like Posy got good things from me but I have tried to give her the best I
can you know? And god I must sound really shallow and selfish I am really really sorry."

Gale blinks again (well it's good to know he is still alive at least)

I continue as Gale seems incapable of speech, "You had every right to be grateful to Madge. I just,
when I walked in on you two I was just so focused on the fact that she is the mayor's daughter I
never even thought of asking you what was going on. I wasn't thinking clearly enough to know that
you had every right to spend time with her and be grateful to her after everything she did for you
because of course what she did was amazing and kind and well that's Madge all over isn't it? And of
course I will be apologising profusely to her tomorrow as I have treated her badly as well. I am also
sorry for ignoring you both today. I just, I just needed time to think you know? I was so stressed over
everything that has been happening lately and I needed to get my head straight."

Gale stares at me in silence, gob-smacked.

Ten minutes tick by and Gale still hasn't said anything so I speak up again,

"Look I'm sorry for everything and I really hope we can get past this. I probably acted like one of
your pathetic, possessive, love-sick ex girlfriends yesterday which was out of order I know. I know I
have no right over what you accept and what you don't especially when it comes to the ki- to your
siblings. I just, well I thought you didn't like her and so it was such a shock to walk in on you
all...well cosy like that. I mean Gale I do notice the glares you shoot at her almost every day at lunch,
I can tell when you are clenching your fists in anger to stop yourself yelling at her. Or...well that is
what I thought you were doing anyway..."

I don't even want to think of what else he was doing if not that.

Neither of us speak for a few moments before Gale's raspy voice says, "I understand why you acted
that way. I-I really do. I mean if anything, well you under-reacted I mean Katniss just imagine what I
would have been like if I walked in on you and oh I don't know Peeta Mellark getting all cosy on the
sofa! I would have reacted FAR worse than you did yesterday and we all know it. Probably would
have beaten him up and god forbid if he brought anything over for the kids I would have knocked
him unconscious!"

Gale smiles softly and I return it.

"You have no idea how grateful I am for helping me out over the years. And I know you feel the
same way about Prim." I nod "I wasn't going to accept Madge's gifts, or at least I was going to
consult you but then Posy ran in all excited and I couldn't say no to her! I mean you have seen her
when she is over the moon about something"

I know exactly what Gale is talking about.

When Posy is happy her face lights up and it is one of the most beautiful things in the world.

And the hardest thing in the world to say no to along with her puppy dog face (which she inherited
from her eldest brother of course)

"When you walked in on us I was just fixing up her ankle. I mean I had to! Not only because I am an
extremely nice person as you know but also because I couldn't have her suing us for having a broken
ankle"

"Wait what!?" I interrupt "She has a broken ankle!? Thom said she was fine!"
"No, no she is!" Gale tells me hastily and I calm instantly "Fine I mean! She's fine! I just didn't know what had happened to her at first I mean for all I knew she had a broken ankle! She wasn't keen on going to hospital and well I couldn't leave the kids alone anyway. Well Prim and Rory were all over each other so they wouldn't have noticed if anything had happened to Vick or Posy if we had left. But no Madge is fine it wasn't even sprained, just got a bad bang. We were probably a bit dramatic over the whole thing I'm sure if it happened to you or I we would have just brushed it off and moved on."

Gale and I would brush off a broken leg and move in.

"I am really glad that Madge has given Posy her old stuff." I tell him "But Madge shouldn't feel she has to give us her old stuff because she thinks we can't afford any better than what we have. I guess I don't want people assuming we don't treat the kids well. I mean I know my things are old and raggedy while hers are practically new and glowing but I suppose it felt like she was pointing it out. I know everyone knows we aren't well off but its when they make it obvious that they know is when it bothers me"

"I'm the same" Gale says grinning

I hesitate before I begin my next sentence "Gale there is something you should know."

Gale visibly freezes and is anxiously anticipating my continuation

"Posy, well part of the reason why I am glad Madge gave Posy her old things is because she has been having, well a hard time fitting into school and that."

Gale's face darkens

"Its nothing serious." I insist "I mean they are just 5 after all! But you know how hurtful a bit of teasing is at that age. I mean admittedly its nowhere near as much teasing as me and you got when we were growing up but well she's not as strong as us and well she is five. Hopefully she can fit in better now with Madge's old stuff. I'm sure she will be fine you know Posy..."

"Should we go talk to her teacher or principal or something?" Gale asks and I give him a look

"Gale. When have we EVER gone to a principal or anyone in authority about our problems?" I almost want to laugh "No honestly I think we should wait a small bit longer see if she fits in better with the new clothes and toys. The first few weeks into school are all ways the hardest anyway no matter what grade your in."

Gale smiled "Yeah and like you said we had it a lot worse"

"Let's not go into that"

Gale smirks and I glare at him

"Right! Sorry! Sorry!" He raises his hands up in innocence

We smile and let the conversation revert to normal.

"We have to figure out how to pay the school fees as well you know." I remind him cautiously and a glimpse of worry flickers across his face.

"I'll get more shifts don't worry about it Katniss"
"Of course I worry about it" I hear my voice wobble and I swallow "Gale, if we can't afford to pay them then we will have to pull Vick out of his dance classes which will devastate him or we would have to quit the Rebels to get more shifts at work."

Gale sighs "Look I'll work something out, I promise. Mum is feeling better now...maybe she could work again or something..."

Gale and I sit in a comfortable silence for a good few minutes until Gale speaks again.

"I went looking for you after school."

He isn't angry just uncertain and worried.

He stares intensely at me and I can barely meet his gaze.

"I wasn't feeling well." I begin

"What was wrong with you?" Gale inquires gently

"Light-headed I suppose. Almost fainted but luckily Peeta caught me. He brought me back to his house to recover."

"And he couldn't bring you back to yours? Or to a doctor!?"

I can read Gale Hawthorne like a book and today is no different. I can tell he is angry. That he is trying desperately to hide it and focus on his worry for me but he can't. He assumes Peeta was trying to take advantage of me, that Peeta didn't care I was ill and was just pretending to help me to get me into bed. But at the same time Gale can see I am better than I was earlier and is struggling to realise that Peeta Mellark would help me for something that wasn't for his own personal gain.

"I asked him not to take me to a doctor. My head was throbbing Gale, I could barely think let alone see a doctor the last thing I needed was a loud, crowded doctor's waiting room."

Gale is about to interrupt but I cut him off "And we couldn't go back to mine because I would have had to deal with my mum and Prim and possibly the kids as well and that was the last thing I could cope with."

The worry in his eyes doesn't leave so I place my hands over his and smile at him,

"Gale, he was just being nice. I swear to god he never and has never tried anything with me in that way. He just wanted to help and could see I needed it. He couldn't just leave me there after I almost collapsed it would ruin his nice-guy reputation!" I joke smiling and Gale relaxes a small bit

"I know you're worried but there is nothing to worry about I swear. I can handle myself around guys. I've been doing it for years. Peeta isn't a bad person and he is nothing like his brothers. And you know maybe you could be right. Perhaps he is actually an absolute jerk but it will still have been my decision to be friends with him. I will all ways prefer, me getting hurt over you making my choices for me. I know you are only trying to look out for me but please just let me figure this out for myself all right?"

Gale stares at me for a few minutes and I am beginning to question whether or not he is breathing when he says slowly

"You're right. I know you are. Its just he seems...and please don't bite my head off for saying this but just the way Mellark acts around you. Its obvious that he likes you. Like he, likes likes you." I smile
"I mean he can't like you! It's impossible!"

"Wow way to increase a girl's self esteem Gale" I say gritting my teeth

"NO! That's not what I-sorry, sorry poor choice of words. Look, of course it's not impossible for guys to like you. Obviously. But it's just less likely for townies to like you. Especially a Mellark I mean, well you know the history between your two families as much as I do. It's just...weird"

"History between our two families?" I question "what is this Romeo and Juliet?"

Gale smiles, "Hey you know I didn't study that play"
"You watched the movie though" I counter

"Did I?" Gale asks confused

"Yeah there was some 'hot girl' in it and Darius forced us to watch it" well I say forced it was really only me who was forced. Once Darius mentioned there was a hot girl playing the lead Gale was on board and Thom didn't take much (if any) persuading either.

What were we talking about again

Oh right yes, Peeta and I.

I contemplate telling Gale about Peeta asking me to that game and I decide to tell him on the day.

If I did tell him I would only have to put up with him giving out to me until the day. And then he will probably come along and sit behind us...actually forget the probably that is exactly what he would do.

"Anyway point is he is an all right guy. And I need to talk to him for this project in Home Ec. I'll most likely never speak to him again afterwards"

Gale looks doubtful

"Seriously! Come on he is a townie do you seriously think he wants to hang around with someone like me?"

Gale shrugs

"Exactly" I say and he looks at me as if to say 'Yeah I get it, you are all ways right but you don't have to rub it in' and I smirk.

"Did you hear how Paul got on?" Gale asks after a while and I shake my head

"No they will probably want to stick together as a family and keep to themselves for a while no matter what the outcome was"

Gale nods.

I check the clock behind me and see that just over an hour has passed since Gale arrived.

"You should get going" I say quietly "Make sure Rory got back all right."

Gale looks up from where he had been carefully studying his knotted fingers.

"Yeah you're right, knowing him he was too 'drunk with like' to see where he was going"
I raise my eyebrows, "Drunk with like?"

Gale and I stand, "Yeah well I cannot bear the thought of saying 'love' so I'm sticking with 'like' for now. Hopefully it will stay that way."

I laugh as I push my chair under the table.

"I'm sure one of them will make the first move eventually"

"Maybe. I don't know why they don't just kiss all really I mean they spend all that time gazing into each others eyes I don't know why one of them hasn't jumped on the other yet." Gale sighs

"Well perhaps they have and are just keeping it a secret from us" I suggest but Gale shakes his head

"Nah, if that were the case. Rory would be walking around on cloud nine. Plus neither of them are good at acting."

"Yeah, look you better be off. I need to check on mum and you should be making sure Posy is in bed."

We move to the front door which Gale opens before facing me.

"Are we...are we good now?" Gale asks nervously

I nod, "Of course, Gale I would love if we would just forget this ever happened."

"Sounds like a plan" Gale smiles, he heads out the door but before he leaves he says,

"Don't blame yourself for this Catnip, we were both in the wrong and we should both just move on."

I nod, agree, bid farewell to him and shut the door.

It takes me a moment to realise why I am so shocked.

We are both growing up.

Acting mature, making responsible decisions after we make bad ones.

This is weird.

But strangely likeable at the same time.
"Katniss you need to breathe."

"I am breathing Darius"

"Well do more of it, you look like you're going to pass out. You're practically singing the first song on your own, the last thing we need is for you to faint and ruin it for us."

I force Darius face the receiving end of my infamous scowl before asking

"Where's Gale and Thom?"

"Thom's setting up the drums and Gale's tuning the guitars"

"Shouldn't you be setting up the drums? Seeing as they're your instrument"

The smirk appears instantly on his face,

"Who was I to refuse such a generous offer from a friend? It would have been rude of me."

Rolling my eyes I cannot help but also be grateful for the others and their initiative.

I adore playing the guitar, it's one of the only distractions I have from the real world but tuning just gets on my nerves. It takes too long and I end up getting… a bit frustrated.

Cons of having a short fuse I suppose.

My eyes search the room and I cannot fight the butterflies flying around in my stomach.

If James is happy with us it could lead to a contract or a single or even just a contact we could get in touch with a few years down the line when we've improved a bit.

If he isn't impressed then we shall all be crushed and left feeling little else but hopelessness and overwhelming insecurity.

Along with the ability to keep my temper in check I also fail at masking my feelings as Darius soon picks up on my anxiousness.

"Katstar there's no need to be nervous you know the song inside out and you've been playing the second one for months now. You know the lyrics and you know the cords so you don't have to worry."

"I really think we should have picked a different song."

Placing a firm hand on my shoulder the ginger boy looks at me and smiles sincerely,

"Katniss. The song is perfect, okay? You got this. We all do. We're gonna rock this."

Raising an eyebrow at his amusing yet heartfelt attempts at comforting me I return his smile."
His grin widens so much I can see the tip of his tongue poke out between a small gap of his teeth.

"Come along then Katstar let's check on our boys, make sure they're doing their jobs correctly."

Swinging a muscular arm around her slim shoulders Darius walks her across the bar where Gale and Thom sit without a care in the world.

Gale, his hair immaculate as always, I notice is wearing some of his best 'casual' clothes tonight as he fiddles with his guitar strings.

Thom beside him doesn't notice our arrival as he is occupies throwing two drumsticks in the air and catching them repeatedly.

Oh this should be good

I look up at Darius whose eyes have widened in sheer horror.

He releases me from his grip and storms forward. Never breaking eye contact with Thom, Darius snatches the drumsticks, his precious drumsticks from the air above their heads and says in a surprisingly low voice, "Mine."

Turning his back on the guilty looking Thom, Darius chooses to sit opposite Gale and I sit next to him.

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We sit there in a comfortable silence, Gale tunes the instruments, unlike me Gale finds the necessary evil relaxing and not ridiculously annoying. Thom aimlessly scans the room and watches the people chat, gossip, eat and come and go from the quickly crowding bar. Darius has closed his eyes and appears to be on the brink of sleep while I reread and reread the lyrics of the song Gale and I are singing until my brain begins to throb.

"Can I get you guys anything?"

The familiar silence is shattered and the four of us look up to discover the person who interrupted us was none other than Leevy.

She stood in front of us, her usual welcoming smile on her somewhat tired face, her hair was tied back into a messy bun and I thought I caught sight of the end of a pen sticking out of it as she waved the little booklet at us.

We glanced at one another, silently asking each other if anybody's hungry.

I know I'm far too anxious to eat and I can tell Gale is the same.

Darius and Thom on the other hand order a burger and chips each.

Leevy scribbles their order down and cheerily wishes us well tonight before leaving us in the quiet once more.

The peace doesn't last long though as after a few minutes passes by Gale carefully places his guitar beside him and he speaks up for the first time in a timid, curious voice directed towards Thom and Darius, "How are you two not nervous?"

Darius and Thom look at each other for a few seconds before Darius gestures for Thom to speak first.
Coughing slightly Thom begins,

"Well... the way I see it is, if we get signed or a promise of something then it means everything for us will change. Our school, our family, everything. Whereas if we don't get it. Then we'll be undoubtedly disappointed but we'll have more time to improve ourselves and follow our original plan."

One of the underrated qualities about Thom is that he is admittedly quite wise and logical at times. He is probably the only one of us we can truly count on to be the reasonable one. Darius, Gale and I can rarely see past our own stubbornness.

We are drawn back into silence for the following moments. I catch Thom scratching behind the back of his ear as he looks away from Gale's gaze.

It takes him approximately five minutes before I hear Gale whisper,

"You're right."

Darius POV

Scoffing down my food, I'm soon interrupted by a man striding over to us.

He's tall, well dressed in a suit and tie for a moment I think the stranger may have come into the wrong bar or wrong part of town, wrong district for that matter. The man holds his head up high with the confidence of a man who knows something that nobody else in the world knows.

I'm not the only one of the group to notice the oncoming stranger. One by one the others look up to see what has caught the other's attention.

Gale's the last to look up and once he does his whole demeanour shifts. He stands to greet this unfamiliar man, his shoulders back and a pleasant, not too wide smile appears on his face.

When he comes closer Gale extends a hand forward and I'm almost shocked at how mannerly he is being, knowing Gale he probably had to practice it.

This other man however carried himself with natural pose and radiating confidence that seemed to come with ease. A grin was plastered across his face and if it had been just a little wider I would have called it a smirk.

I assumed this must be the legendary James which would explain Gale's attitude.

I'm proved correct once James shakes Gale's hand and Gale quickly introduces him to us after they exchange pleasantries.

"Guys this is Mr. Heavensbee, James this is Katniss, Thom and Darius."

I give a little wave when Gale points to me and James grins again.

"You can all call me James of course, it's lovely to meet you all at last."

He grabs a chair and sits beside Gale, clasping his hands together he takes a moment to analyse each of us one by one and I try and hold back a shiver and the rising uneasiness of the stranger's gaze.
"Well I have to say I'm anxious but also very excited to hear you guys preform. You...all look promising anyway. Hopefully you live up to the things Mr. Hawthorne here has told me about you."

"We hope so too." Katniss says sternly.

From the corner of my eye I catch Gale widening his eyes at her alarmingly which she notices too and quickly she amends herself using a smile and putting on her nice voice,

"It's lovely to meet you James, we hope you have a good time tonight no matter what happens."

The conversation continues.

It alternates from awkward to relaxed before quickly reverting back to awkward once more.

I try not to let myself get anxious. I remind myself of what Thom said to us an hour previous.

It was smart, right. He was right and we'd be clever to listen to him.

I know that.

So why won't my stomach unknot itself?

An hour after James Heavensbee's arrival Thom excuses himself for some air air.

Liking the idea of some breathing space I leave shortly after him.

Escaping the packed, stuffy bar I am welcomed by the brisk, cool air and can't help but be grateful for the change of scenery.

Spotting Thom a few metres away I make my way over to him. He leans against the smooth wall, one foot pressed firmly against the wall for balance while the other rests on the ground.

I stand beside him, my shoes announcing my presence against the gravel. Looking up and catching my gaze Thom unfolds his arms.

"Hey" I smile at him and Thom nods in greeting

"Needed to get away for a bit too?" He asks

"Yeah I mean was it just me or was there a tiny bit of tension in there?"

Shaking his head Thom sighed, "Wasn't just you, I don't know, there's something just feels-"

"Wrong?" I suggested.

Shrugging Thom replied, "We're probably just being suspicious"

"Yeah..."

Rubbing my hands together in an attempt to battle the cold I joke,

"And I thought I'd come out here and catch you indulging in your secret smoking habit."

Laughing Thom grins, "If only I could afford a secret smoking habit."
We stand there for the following moments before silently agreeing to return inside.

Both entering the overcrowded building with small smiles on our faces.

Katniss POV

I can still hear the audience, well not audience, more like a semi-large group of say over 50 people, cheering and clapping following my performance with Gale.

The crowd loved our duet of 'Bring me to Life' while they also adored the boys' cover of Fall Out Boy's 'I Don't Care'.

I had attempted to sway my eyes from watching James Heavensbee's expression during our performances.

Unfortunately I happened to catch it once or twice and in my opinion he seemed to enjoy them.

I try not to get my hopes up as I walk shakily down the steps, my legs apparently turned to jelly the moment I went 'on-stage'.

Gale squeezed my arm gently and grinned at me.

Sae soon led us out back and the fresh air was very much appreciated.

Thom, ever our chivalrous hero brought all our coats with him so we would not freeze.

It was unusually cold and bitter for this time of year yet I suppose it is quite late at night.

Sitting on the ancient wooden benches we pull our coats on without speaking a word.

It was not silent however as we could still distinctly hear the rambunctious chatter from inside the Hob.

We on the other hand had no such desperation to talk.

Thom was distracting himself by playing and picking at pieces of broken wood on the face of the bench.

Darius had his head tilted back and was staring up at the stars.

Gale and I just watched the others and smiled at one another.

"We've done ten times that setlist before in one night and we are all sitting here exhausted!" Gale remarks and I have to agree with him.

Our faces are all burning despite the cold, Darius is half-asleep while the only time I've ever seen Thom looked as bored (or perhaps it was also tiredness) was in math class.

"Well it's been a long week! School, friends, evil teachers etc. etc. we're all wrecked." Darius mutters defensibly

Thom's snigger is interrupted by the back door of the bar opening and James making his way
"Well done kids! That was great!"

All of us automatically sat up straighter. Gale moved to peak, to thank him presumably but James was already in the midst of a speech,

"I had my doubts off course, as one most do in this business. And the first song wasn't what I expected at all but I was still impressed and it was still very good and then you guys pulled out that second song. Really showed the different genres and styles you could do, loved that!"

Pride swelled inside me and we all thanked him profusely

"Oh stop, stop now I just need to get back to the boss and the rest of the company who I will discuss more details with. But there could be a chance, very competitive market so nothing is ever certain but I'd be happy to recommend you guys."

More thank yous and words of gratitude were expressed while James stood there grinning, seemingly lapping it all up.

Eventually he insisted he must leave.

Shaking the boys' hands and unexpectedly kissing my cheek instead he left with a promise of getting in touch soon.

Nobody spoke for several moments. The noise from the bar was getting louder and louder as music had begun to play causing the locals to talk even louder.

We sit on those old, rickety, decaying benches.

Just four random, weird teenagers sitting in the bitter, cruel cold in sheer darkness doing nothing but stare at one another.

All of us reeling from the conversation that just occurred.

That lasts about ten minutes before for some reason, all at once we unanimously all burst into loud, echoing laughter.
I've decided to tell Gale about the date.

Even though it's not technically a date.

The day in the near future where Peeta and I will be going to some sporting event I'll pay absolutely no attention to.

I'm going to tell Gale about that.

If I didn't tell him I would be the very definition of a hypocrite.

My stomach tightens as the guilt rises in my throat as I unwillingly remember what I did.

Shaking my head subtly I attempt to distract myself by my torturous thoughts and focus on Snow's latest tangent.

I'm aware it's silly to be worrying over informing Gale about this.

Truth be told Gale probably doesn't care.

He deserves to know all the same.

Of course going out with Peeta didn't mean anything. She'd gone to events like this with Gale, Thom and Darius several times which meant nothing.

I turn to stare out the window of the boring, bland and stuffy classroom. The sky is dull and a dark shade of grey. I have to squint my eyes before I'm certain it is drizzling as it is so light it is hardly noticeable at first glance.

The classroom is cold as the school has never bothered to install a heating system and right now all I want to do is go home, curl up by the fire and sleep.

Fighting the desire to shut my slowly drooping eyes and take a nice, leisurely nap on this hard, uncomfortable, wooden desk, I'm snapped out of my daydream of a crackling fire and scolding lamb stew by a low, dooming voice demanding my presence.

"Ms. Everdeen?"

I sharply turn back to face the front of the classroom and at the teacher staring at her through narrowed eyes above his dusty, ancient, black book.

"Ms. Everdeen if you would do us the great honour of gracing us with your attention for the remainder of this lesson it would be immensely appreciated."

Resisting a smirk that threatened to appear on my face I replied somewhat bashfully,

"Yes, Sir."
I felt his gaze watching me throughout the rest of the class.

Shrugging it off I ignored him and went back to my daydreaming, I was well used to his prejudice by now and I've far more important things to worry about.

The cafeteria is significantly less packed today as the sophomore students have gone on a field trip.

I appreciate their absence as it gives me more room to breathe.

The conversation at lunch between the guys and I consists of topics such as Friday night, James and the latest novel Thom read.

I listen and join in the conversation at appropriate moments but my mind is otherwise occupied.

In my heart I know Gale will eventually be supportive no matter what happens with Peeta and I. I'm just anxious that I'm being too much of a hypocrite.

Which is why I have to tell him.

As soon as possible.

Such as...today.

While Thom and Darius were engaged in a heated debate over something I took my chance. Leaning over I whisper to Gale,

"Hey, can you come over to mine after school? I kind of need to talk to you about something."

Gale frowned, "Something wrong Catnip?"

I sit up straight again and raise my voice to a normal, non-suspicious tone.

"No, nothing's wrong, promise."

Gale narrowed his eyes, calculating whether or not I'm being truthful.

"Okay, yeah sure."

Out of the corner of my eye I spot a flash of blonde hair.

Madge.

"Hey I'll...eh be back in a minute."

I stand and move to leave but Gale grabs my arm gently.

"You sure you're alright?"

I nod at smile in attempt to lift the worry in his eyes, "Yeah I just need to talk to Madge."

Gale pauses for a second before releasing my arm, "Okay."

Taking a deep breath I slowly walk over to Madge who has stopped at the entrance, watching me.
I've a lot of explaining to do.

And apologising.

Definitely a lot of apologising to do.

Uneasiness, anxiousness and nervousness overwhelms me once I spot Katniss making her way toward me.

I don't know whether to be angry or afraid.

I had always assumed the well-known rumours about Gale and Katniss being a couple were over exaggerated and fake.

Perhaps I was wrong, it would explain a lot.

Katniss had been quite rude that day though yet I suppose I'd always known Katniss never knew when to shut up or how to deal with her feelings.

If Katniss and Gale aren't together then I don't fully understand why she got so defensive when I tried to help him.

Or why she's been practically ignoring me ever since then.

"Madge, can we talk?" her voice is soft and hesitant. The only time I've ever seen her this gentle was with Prim.

I contemplate shortly replying 'no' and storming out but I decide against it.

"Yeah, sure."

We sit at the nearest table opposite one another.

I watch as Katniss fiddles with the hem of her sleeve before finally she looks at me and speaks.

"I'm sorry I know that's not enough but I'm so sorry. I was... a bitch. I really was. I was entirely in the wrong and I know that. It had been such a long day and I was so stressed. There's no excuse and I'm not trying to blame my problems for my horrible actions. I'm just so sorry and I hope you can forgive me."

I watch her guilt ridden expression and I force a soft, forgiving smile.

"Yeah, okay."

Katniss frowns in confusion, "What? Really?"

Sighing I reply, "Yeah, really. You're my closest friend Katniss I'm not gonna alienate you because on one occasion you turned into a regular, jealous teenage girl."

"I..I wasn't jealous of you two..."
"Oh you totally were" I grin "You just enjoy having the hottest guy in school all to yourself."

Katniss's cheeks flame scarlet and I smirk.

"Gale and I aren't like that."

"You're still jealous though"

Katniss groans, "Is this my punishment?"

I grin wider

Oh I could have fun with this.

"Oh yeah, this among many other things. Such as, I want you to come to this football match thing with me."

Katniss eyes widen and gapes at me. Perfect. I've got her.

She despises being social, absolutely despises it, the true test.

"No..."

I raise my eyebrows and fake an innocent, hurt voice,

"But what about you owing me?"

Katniss swallows and turns even redder, "I eh kind of have plans for that day."

I gasp, "With Gale?"

Katniss sighs, brushing a strand of brown hair behind her ear.

"No, not with Gale. I'm going to watch the game with someone else."

"Who?"

"Peeta."

Well no wonder she's been such a mess lately.

"You..you and Peeta?"

"No! Well...I don't think so, it's just a stupid football game. It's harmless."

"Katniss football games are a guy's everything. Well most guys anyway. It's their thing. They go there to enjoy themselves and yell and have a good time. He wouldn't invite you to one if he didn't like you. If he thought he wouldn't have fun with you there he wouldn't have asked you to go."

"Yeah but it's just as a friend."

I wink "One step at a time Katniss, so did you clarify if it was a date or not?"

Katniss frowns, "What? No of course not!"

I sigh, "I suppose it's too late now. You'll find out on the night I guess."
Katniss nods slowly, "Please don't advertise this...I still need to tell Gale."

"Oh I bet you're looking forward to that. When will you tell him?"

"This evening after school."

I grit my teeth, "That should be interesting"

Katniss bites her lip and casts her eyes to the ground, "Yeah..."

We continue chatting for the rest of lunch.

Katniss nervously asks me about my ankle and a wave of relief washes over her face when I inform her it's perfectly fine.

I inquire more about her budding friendship with Peeta Mellark but she is very vague on the details.

The bell shrills through the old, damaged speaker in the corner and my friend and I stand.

"So what's next?" I ask grinning, even though I know what the next class is

"Home Ec. I think?"

I smirk, "Oh brilliant!"

Katniss eyes turn wide, fierce and dark "If you mention anything-"

"Oh don't worry your secret is safe with me"

For the double Home Economics class it turns out I'm the distracted, unfocused one not Katniss Everdeen.

Shockinglly Finnick Odair is hard at work.

Writing, researching five-star recipes while I cautiously try and be subtle about my blatant staring at Katniss and Peeta sitting in the row in front of me.

Oh he definitely likes her. The blonde haired boy could hardly keep his sparkling blue eyes off of the brown skinned girl sitting beside him.

Katniss is no better, from this angle I can see that she's smiling at him every chance she gets. An actual, rare, genuine smile so Peeta's feelings are clearly reciprocated.

I'm interrupted from my detective thoughts by the dirty blonde haired boy beside me poking me in the arm with his annoyingly long finger.

"What Finnick?" I ask, slightly agitated

"I don't care how strong your crush is on Everdeen, we need to finish this project. You can stare at your love another time."

I roll my eyes, "I don't like Katniss like that and since when do you care about our project? You've not done much...or any work on it so far."

Finnick's green eyes swim with guilt and he responses softly, "Yeah I know. But I'm trying now and
"You're completely out of it."

"Yeah, sorry." I turn back to the folder lying open on the table and my stomach tightens with my own guilt as I realise how much work he has done. It's obvious the talkative boy has done a lot of work and research for this assignment outside of the classroom.

Finnick half smiles and I detect a hint of nervousness as my eyes meet his.

"So," Finnick begins breaking eye contact with me and flicking through the pages of the once squeaky-clean folder "I thought we could do the project about a country? Like together you and I choose a country and cook a traditional breakfast, dinner and dessert that comes from that specific country. To make our project stand out you know?"

I can't help but feel a bit surprised about all the thought Finnick had put into this school assignment. I'd never have guessed he would have wanted to spend so much work on something school related. Though I suppose I don't know Finnick all that well, maybe I shouldn't judge him just by what people say about him. I know all too well just how misleading and untrue rumours that fly around this school can be.

I nod and smile encouragingly at him, "Yeah, yeah that sounds great."

Finnick breaks out into a wide smile and hastily he takes out a crumpled sheet from his bag and straightens it out to the best of his ability before handing it to me.

Scrawled in a vertical line in messy handwriting are:

Chinese
Mexican
British
Italian
French

From the corner of my eye I spot Finnick scratching behind his ear nervously,

"These are some of the foods I was thinking of but whatever you think."

I analyse the list and look up at him smiling.

"Chinese and Mexican could be extremely interesting because I doubt anyone else in the class will make those foods for the project. But unfortunately I don't know much about either foods other than the stereotypical stuff."

Finnick pulls out his phone under the desk and grins widely at me.

"Wanna research?"

I dark my eyes up to see if Ms. Trinket could catch him but she is sitting at her desk yelling some very choice words down the end of her fluffy, rose covered phone.

Turning to Finnick I grin back, "Yeah, sure why not?"

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Katniss POV

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Why did I decide to take Home Economics anyway?
I mean I can cook...
Toast...lamb stew.
What else does one really need?
The only good thing about the boring class with it's treacherously time-wasting homework and ridiculous teacher was Madge.
But now her seat has been replaced by Peeta Mellark.
This wasn't necessarily a negative thing about the class but I can't help be a little...distracted.
By him.
By his eyes.
Why has he such stereotypical perfect eyes?
It's not fair.
And sitting beside him has once increased my fascination with them.
Noticing now that they are more than just blue. His pupil's are almost constantly dilated or perhaps they are just naturally larger than other peoples.
His iris are a deep shade of blue but for some unknown reason they still shine brightly like when the sun is bouncing off the sea.
Other things catch her attention too when he sits this close to her.
I realise his eyelashes are blonde but they are not as dark as his hair.
The blonde of his lashes contrasts to how dark his eyes are.
I can feel an obsession with his eyes growing so lately I've been attempting to look everywhere but at them.
"I printed up the recipes you gave me so here's your copy. If you'd like to put it n your folder."
Blinking, I look at the expertly designed and displayed pages Peeta is referring to. The diversity of fonts and colours are foreign to me but I pretend to be familiar with them as I nod and smile.
"Thanks so much Peeta."
He shrugged.
That's another thing, how did a seventeen year old boy have such broad shoulders?
I hope he doesn't do drugs.
He doesn't seem like the type to do them.

Then again I don't know him all that well.

I've heard a few people saying he buys them from Cato and Marvel to increase his strength for wrestling.

Plus he did used to be friends with Cato...

Clenching my fists I force myself to ignore those thoughts.

He's every reason as to why he has such...strong, obvious muscles.

He's been wrestling for years.

Plus from what I can remember his brothers are the same.

Probably a genetic thing.

God I read too much into things relating to Peeta Mellark.

"It was nothing really Katniss. I mean you wrote it all I just typed it up."

"Just accept the thank you Mellark" I say teasingly and he laughs.

Let's not get started on his laugh

"You're welcome"

"Is there anything else we need to do?" I ask.

Peeta frowns in thought and I despise the fluttering feelings that occur in my stomach at the sight of his expression.

"Nope, all we've to do is make the meals now I think."

I grit my teeth and force a smile on my tense face, "Greaaat"

Peeta chuckles.

Well he didn't really chuckle in the santa clause ho ho way, it was more of a half laugh under his breath that I find extremely adorable chuckle.

Yeah.

I'm officially pathetic..

Worse than any conventional, teenage outcast in the common modern chick-flick movies that almost every girl my age cries over.

"Right well there's not much else we can do today then." I say shrugging as I pray that my nonchalant act is working.

Peeta coughs and packs up his things before nodding.

"Yeah, suppose."
"So I assume we'll need to practise them first."

"P-practise what?" Peeta stutters

"Cooking the food."

"Oh! Right! Yeah we should. You can come over to mine some day this week or the next and we-"

"No! No that's alright, we can do it in my house."

The last thing I want is for Peeta to watch as his mother kicks me out onto the street covered in flour.

Peeta quickly catches on and smirks sadly but agrees.

We sit in silence until the bell rings and as I walk out of the room with Madge by my side I contemplate whether Peeta thought the silence was a comfortable or an awkward one.

..................................

His booming laughter echoes through my kitchen.

Anger swells in my chest as I resist the urge to shout at him for his rambunctious reaction.

Gale calms down after a full five minutes of laughing in my face and when he does I ask sarcastically if he's finished.

"Think I am yeah." Gale's expression is unreadable.

Which is saying something as usual I can read Gale like a book.

But his lip turned up into half a smirk put together with his calculating, suspicious eyes and raised eyebrow confuse me onto what his true feelings are.

"It's not a date."

Gale's grin grows infuriatingly wider, "I know."

"Well...good. Because it isn't a date. It was a spur of the moment thing. He asked me, I said yes. I knew you had no interest in going so there was nothing stopping me."

"Catnip part of the reason why I didn't want to go was because I knew you hated football games."

The confusion must be evident on my face as Gale sighs and his face becomes more normal, a genuine kind smile replacing the mocking smirk.

"Yeah, I'm not playing this year and I'd prefer not to be there because it sucks not playing but also I know that you only went to support us. You hate social situations and being around people. You avoid high school students outside of school as much as possible so I suppose it's just shocking that you'd want to go with someone you hardly know."

Nerves and anxiety overshadow any annoyance I had as I fidget with a loose thread on my jeans.

"Peeta's been really good to me...I just didn't want to let him down."

Gale eyebrows narrow and I watch as he enters protective big brother mode,

"Katniss if this is about you having a problem saying no to him-"
I shake my head and hurriedly correct myself "No, I swear it's not that. You know me I never hesitate to beat someone up if they deserve it." I smile in an attempt to break some tension "It's senior year and I've done barely anything social and if we do get signed with James I'll never get the chance to do something like this again."

Gale grins, more familiar and comforting than teasing and ridiculing, "What like hanging out with the most popular guy in school?"

A laugh escapes me before I can stop it, "Yes, exactly Gale. That's all I've ever wanted."

It's an hour later before he brings it up again.

We're sitting on the couch watching some action movie we both adore, procrastinating homework when he says quietly.

"You know what everyone will assume right?"

I can feel his grey eyes watching me but I keep my eyes on the screen.

"Yeah..." I respond in a similar quiet tone.

It's the truth. I have thought about it. But I was far more worried by what Gale thought than what the Careers did.

"And you're okay with that? What they'll think of you and say?"

Anyone else might have thought Gale was judging me but I knew him better than that.

Gale was aware of the rumours that have been spreading about Peeta and I, the rumours about him and I, the rumours about me in general.

I've learned to cope with them, so has Gale as he has plenty of things being whispered about him.

I'm not okay with it if I'm perfectly candid.

Gale isn't either.

But we're used to it.

What I am worried about is Peeta.

The only things people say about Peeta is how gorgeous and perfect and kind he is.

Other than the one or two I've heard about him taking drugs from Cato to improve his wrestling, Peeta Mellark is an angel in the eyes of everyone in District Twelve.

People assuming him and I are dating will not be good for his reputation and while I know Peeta probably doesn't care about that I don't want to do any damage to it or to him.

I sigh and finally turn to meet Gale's eyes, "I'm used to it. I just know he isn't."

Gale thinks for a moment before responding, "He likes you, guys don't like hassle and he must like you if he doesn't care about the rumours or the backlash from his mother."

"Does that bother you? That he likes me?"
I don't mean what I say in a way that implies Gale sees me in a romantic way, I say it out of the guilt still eating away at me of my actions after seeing him with Madge.

This time it's Gale's turn to avoid looking at me, "I noticed he liked you a while ago, I didn't know in what way but I noticed. It did bother me because I was worried he wanted to use you or treat you as some joke. But I don't think he's like that...at least I'm not sure...just be careful."

I nod, "I will...thanks...for being so good about it."

Gale laughs, "Trust me Catnip if I hadn't noticed a while ago and out of nowhere I walked in on you two looking all cosy I would have reacted way worse than you did with Madge and I. I forgave you ages ago and so did Madge so you need to get over it yourself."

I smile in gratitude and turn back to the blasting sound of guns and bombs and I know the silence between Gale and I is definitely a comfortable one.
A Magical, Secret Hideaway

Peeta POV

........................................

You know those girls in usually rubbish movies?

The stereotypically, pretty, popular, teenage girls who stand in front of their closet for hours before a date or outing, sighing because they apparently don't know what to wear?

Well that's how I feel right now, standing over my bed, staring at the possible clothes I could wear while my wet, freshly washed hair effortlessly sticks to my forehead in an apparently effort to cool down my slightly sweaty face.

It's ridiculous as I am lucky enough to have plenty of clothes.

But none of them seem suitable for a 'maybe a date or a not date at all night out' with Katniss Everdeen.

Maybe it's because I stupidly left choosing clothes to the last minute.

Today was the day.

You'd think I would have woke up singing and dancing about how glorious life was.

Instead the school day occurred pretty much as normal except there seemed to be a permanent smile on my face.

Katniss smiled and mouthed hello to me in any classes we had today which only caused me to grin wider.

The smirks, teasing comments, pointed looks and expressions were all things I expected from my friends today. Thankfully Annie's supportive words and Delly's threats helped quieten Thresh and Finnick for a few classes at least.

At home, I had wisely decided not to tell his family anything. Knowing if I had I would likely be forbidden from going.

I'm drawn out from my thoughts by two sharp knocks on the wooden door behind me.

I turn stiffly, anxious that it will be my mother behind the door, though rationally I know she never bothers to knock when she enters my room.

Opening the door I find a grinning, well dressed teenage boy with dirty blonde hair waiting for me with his hands tucked into the pockets of his faded, caramel coloured leather jacket.

Unconsciously I frown, "Finnick? You're early."

"Well nice to see you too." His low voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Sorry!" Stepping aside I let him stroll into my room and I close the door after him, "I thought you weren't arriving until later."
Finnick had offered his assistance with this evening.

Insisting it would be more than beneficial if he and Annie went with Katniss and I to the long anticipated football game.

'It will be perfect! Your first date with your dream girl is a double date with my girlfriend and me! It will be legendary."

I hadn't been so convinced.

If Katniss was hoping, just as he was, that this was actually some vague form of date then I didn't think she would appreciate me bringing Finnick and Annie along.

However Finnick isn't an easy person to talk out of something he believes in so with the help of Annie we convinced him that perhaps it would be better if we all went to the game together, but sat in different seats so we wouldn't crowd each other.

I think Annie persuaded him with telling him if he sat alone with her, she could spend the majority of the time trying to distract him from watching the actual game. He didn't complain about it after that and agreed instantly.

Finnick casts his eyes around the room, as if he hasn't been in this large, cosy, blue room a million times before. Raising an eyebrow at the mess of crumpled clothes on the bed that contrasts the otherwise spotless room he faces me again.

"Trouble finding an outfit?"

I dabble with the idea of lying but I know it's pointless so I sigh and nod.

Finnick smiles, "Looks like I came just in time."

Straightening out the clothes, Finnick quickly as them sorted into three different outfits.

I watch in awe as he places different shoes at the end of each outfit. Of all the talents I thought Finnick possessed I never would have guessed this to be one of them.

Catching my shocked, confused, amused expression Finnick shrugs,

"Delly wants to work in fashion, I help her out sometimes."

My eyes remain wide as I struggle to hold back a laugh, pointing a finger threatening at me Finnick orders,

"Never. Tell Annie."

Before I can nod in agreement Finnick points to the first outfit lying on my, now neatly made bed,

"If you want to impress her wear that one" moving his finger to the right, "if you wish to remain casual yet still want to give off the impression that you want this to be a date wear this," pointing to the final outfit Finnick's face turns uncertain, "And if you want to just act casual, like this is just a friend thing then wear that one."

"Oh…right em…thanks."

Finnick nods, "Anytime, right you get changed I'm going downstairs to make myself some tea. I'll be back up shortly and we can strategize tonight." Winking, the taller boy escapes the room, slams the
door behind him and saunters down the stairs.

Turning back to the clothes I wonder whether closing my eyes and just picking one at random would be an easier choice.

Sighing dramatically I select the middle one, the 'if you wish to remain casual yet still want to give the impression that you want this to be a date' outfit and hastily put it on.

I'm just placing the recently purchased, shiny black shoes on my feet when Finnick returns to my room, walking slowly, juggling two cups of tea in his hands.

Smiling I accept one and thank him.

His eyes run over the shoes, dark denim jeans, scarlet sweater and cheque shirt underneath.

Nodding he sits on the desk chair and smirks

"What?"

"Nothing?"

"What Finn?"

"Nothing it's just Katniss is likely going to want to jump your bones the moment she sees you."

I scoff, "Shut up."

"Only speaking the truth man, only speaking the truth."

I snigger, "Since when do you call me 'man'?"

Spluttering and hiding his face behind his tea Finnick mutters, "That doesn't… I'm trying something new okay. Anyway strategizes for tonight! What are they?"

"First, don't fuck up, second, don't make her hate you, third-"

"Relaaaax Peeta. Just be your usual lovely nice self and make it obvious you're attracted to her otherwise she won't think you like her and will move on to someone else. That's our strategy!"

Biting back a smart comment I take a sip of tea and contemplate all the ways in which today could go very wrong and all the ways they could go very right.

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The plan was Finnick and I would pick up Annie, the three of us would drive to the Seam and collect Katniss and then we would all drive to the game together.

Of course nothing ever goes as planned when it comes to the day you've been waiting for ever since you were five years old.

Pacing back and forth, I clench my fists in an attempt to restrain myself from slapping myself due to my idiocy.

Who forgets to fill up their car with petrol before the biggest day of their life?

Me apparently.
"Peeta you're giving me a headache, can you please pause for a minute?" Finnick sighs, leaning against the car and crossing his arms.

Forcing my feet to halt I huff and lean against the wall opposite him.

"I'm such an idiot."

"Well obviously but we'll sort it don't worry about it."

"We're going to be late."

"Peeta you were about to leave over an hour early, relax, we have ages. Plus girls are always running late getting ready, at least Annie is so we've plenty of time."

"What will we do?"

Rolling his eyes Finnick pushed himself off the car and walked onto the footpath,

"Come on."

I frown, "What?"

"Well we can either walk to Annie's and all the way to the Seam or we can go to mine and use my car."

"But-"

Paying no attention, Finnick walked down the road in the direction of his house and called back, "Hurry up or you'll be late for your date Peeta!"

Glaring at his leather clad back I chase after him and fall into stride beside him.

You wouldn't think they had been dating for over a year by the expression on Finnick Odair's face when Annie opened her front door.

She is wearing a knee length pale blue dress with pink spiral designs running along the hem. She has her dark, red hair pulled back in a tight ponytail. She wears subtle make up, pale pink heels and a faded jumper that I recognize as one of Finnick's old swimming hoodies.

I smile as I remember all the countless girls who desperately dressed up and wore a lot of make up in attempts to impress Finnick. Not that there was anything necessarily wrong with that.

But anyone who knew Finnick knew that deep down he didn't care about any of that, he only ever cared about Annie.

"You…I.eh-" Finnick rubbed the back of his neck nervously before grinning widely and kissing Annie's nose softly, "You look amazing."

Biting her lip, grinning as her face flushed the shade of her hair, Annie slipped her hand into Finnick's while shutting and locking her front door with the other hand.

Annie turned back to them and grinned teasingly at me,
"We ready to embarrass Peeta to hell?"

Finnick’s laugh resonated with my groan and Annie smiled while leaning further into Finnick’s side.

"Just kidding! Finnick and I are gonna be on our best behaviour tonight, we promise."

"Well-"

"Well we promise to be on our best behaviour while Katniss is around." Annie corrects smirking at Finnick who seems to like that answer much better and nods.

"That’s the best I’m gonna get isn’t it?"

"Yup." Annie and Finnick respond together and I sigh, turning my back to them and getting in the back of Finnick’s car.

"You’ve five minutes to be all lovey dovey before we go and get Katniss!" I yell at them as I shut the door shut.

..................................................

When I was six years old I imagined what my first date with Katniss Everdeen would be like.

In this fantasy we were approximately seven or eight, two happy, little kids who had never known any fear or loss or betrayal.

I remember planning it all out.

I would pack a picnic, full of all her favourite treats that she would buy from the bakery when she came in once in a blue moon, then walk to the Seam, knock on her front door and ask her father if I could take his eldest daughter to the meadow.

Six year old me was very confident that this plan would work, he even packed a picnic basket at one point, with one of his mother's old blankets and everything. Then he was forced to come to terms with the fact that he was incapable of carrying such a heavy item all the way to the Seam at his age so he would wait until he was older.

As I stand outside the front door of the Everdeen household, I can’t help but realise that a football game was probably the least romantic idea for a first date ever.

At the age of twelve I had firmly decided to ask her to the cinema with me one day after school, each day I went to school determined to invite her to the movies with me that weekend. Every day I came home with regret ridden in my stomach. I brushed it off to Finnick that there had just been no good movies out that year.

He didn't believe me.

As the years passed and as Gale and Katniss grew closer I forced myself not to fantasize on the impossible.

Grinning to myself and bringing a trembling hand up to knock on the door, I accept that perhaps it wasn't so impossible after all.

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It takes less than two minutes for Katniss to open the door but it's enough time for my right hand to
mess up my hair in while the left fidgets with a loose thread on my jeans that I cursed myself for not cutting off sooner.

Looking up hesitantly from the irritating thread of fabric I am met with the sight that I've imagined for the past ten years.

She wears light brown ankle boots with a faded hint of mud along the sides, black skinny jeans with a plain maroon sweater which is completed with a beautiful necklace that hangs low and takes the image of a bird.

Her hair is out of its classic braid, I'm pleasantly surprised at how wavy and long her hair is compared to when she has it in a carefully tied braid.

Her silver eyes shine and her rose coloured lips grin when my eyes eventually meet hers.

"Hey" She whispers and I blink twice in an attempt to bring myself back to reality.

"H-Hi!" I reply and she smiles wider

A million thoughts and questions and hopes and doubts race through my mind as I mindlessly stare at the truly beautiful girl in front of me.

Thankfully Katniss doesn't let the silence linger and quickly thanks me for picking her up, insisting that he didn't have to.

I can feel the blood rush to my cheeks as I cast my eyes at the footpath and murmur the story of why we took Finnick's car and not my own.

Katniss laughs loudly, a genuine, happy laugh that makes my stomach twist and a grin to unconsciously spread across my face.

"Well you made it here...that's what matters."

You.

You made it here.

Not you guys.

Not you three.

Not you, Annie and Finnick.

Just...you.

Me.

I allow my heart to flutter as I nod in agreement,

"Yeah...yeah well it was Finnick you know. Always the loyal friend"

Katniss nodded, "Of course"

The silence continued for less than a minute before I relented to the hopeful, nagging voice edging me on.
"So, you ready to go?" I ask, cringing at the distinct trace of hope in my voice as I pointed back to the car behind me.

Katniss moved closer to me and I tried not to make the catch in my breath obvious as she lay her hand on my forearm and smiled.

"Yeah, let's kick the asses of whoever we're playing against."

It's my turn to laugh loudly now as we walk the few meters to the car and on instinct I open her car door for her.

Praying to whatever god exists that she takes no offense, I meet her smiling eyes with my nervous ones.

Hopping into Finnick's fancy, spotless car Katniss mouths a thank you to me before turning to greet Finnick and Annie.

Shutting her door for her I practically run to the other side and get in myself.

As the car drove and the three other teenagers in the car chatted aimlessly about trivial matters, I look out the window, attempting to hide my still trembling hands and I remain adamant in ignoring the feeling that occurred in my stomach when Katniss Everdeen placed her hand on my arm.

....................................

The stands were packed, air humid, moist and filled with the sound of hundreds of teenagers loudly discussing the upcoming game.

Finnick, Annie, Katniss and I make our way up the steps as quickly as possible, smiling politely at those who call my or Finnick's name, entertaining the two girls who approach Annie for a minute before excusing ourselves.

I notice Katniss swallowing and keeping her head down as she tries not to get recognized by any undesirables.

Apparently I'm not the only one.

Annie smiles brightly at Katniss and links arms with her, "Come on, I'll show you where the best spot is"

I raise my eyebrow, "You never showed me this place before."

Annie smirks, "I doubted you wanted to be stuck in this place with just Finnick and I, Peeta. We might have made you a tad uncomfortable."

Finnick and Katniss laugh as my eyes turn wide and I cough awkwardly.

"Yes…well….yes show us then."

Barely hiding back a giggle, Annie takes Finnick's hand and leads us on a mystery tour through the throngs of nameless faces.

From the corner of my eye I think I catch Cato watching me but we are walking too fast for me to double check.

Katniss is smiling widely when Annie and Finnick come to a sudden halt in front of us.
I frown.

We are standing at the very end of the stands and there's nothing more than a wall in front of us. Before I can even think of asking the obvious question, Finnick pulls out a large stone approximately half way down the wall, drops it carefully on the ground beside him and pushes into the wall.

The built in door pushes inward, not enough for anyone else to notice but enough for the four of them to individually squeeze through.

Annie turns and rolls her eyes at my gobsmacked expression before smiling in appreciation at Katniss's impressed smirk.

"Come on then, we don't want anyone following us."

Finnick sneaks in first, followed soon after by Annie.

Katniss and I hesitate and meet each other's eyes for a second.

"They're trustworthy right?" she whispers light-heartedly under her breath and it's my turn to nod and laugh.

"Yeah, don't worry, you'll be fine." I smile gently and gesture for her to go first.

Katniss makes her way through slowly and then it's my turn.

My previous expectations of a pitch-black, dusty room with loose floorboards and spider webs hanging from the low ceiling are cast aside as I stare open mouthed at the hidden room.

It's by no means large, we enter at the end of the room and on my right hangs blue and pink fairy lights, stuck up with some duct tape. On my left are two rows of benches behind loose boards which Finnick is kneeling in front of.

He pulls it down slightly and as I make my way over I bend down beside him to peek through the gaps.

We are only a few meters away from the goalposts and you can clearly see from there to at least the centre of the pitch.

"Peeta! Catch!" I stand and turn abruptly and am met with a small, miniature telescope being thrown at me.

Fumbling, I catch the black and gold telescope and frown in confusion at it.

Without explaining, Finnick pulls back more of the wooden boards and sits up on the bench. Following his lead I sit next to him and look through the telescope.

My eyebrows raise and I laugh in surprise at the view I get through it.

"How did you find this place?" I hear Katniss ask gently from behind me.

"I have my ways" Annie replies, "I found it last year though and it was a lot worse than this, dusted it a bit, put up some twinkly lights and a comfy bench and ta da! Magic hideout!"

I hand the telescope to Katniss who copies my actions and looks through it at the pitch and the crowd.
"So this is where you two are when you're late for lunch?" I ask, smirking

"No-" Annie starts before Finnick interrupts her,

"Late for lunch, skip lunch, study classes, before school after school-"

"Finnick!" Annie glares at him but he just shrugs and murmurs something about her wanting him to be honest.

Caught up in the typical, adorable, petty argument between my best friends I miss Katniss sit beside me and I jump when her arm brushes against mine.

"Are they always like this?" Katniss whispers in my ear and I suppress a shiver,

"Yea-yeah pretty much…it's their thing though. They're never serious."

Sure enough two minutes later they are cuddling in the row behind us.

Katniss looks back and grins at me and before either of us can worry about coming up with a subject topic to talk about the whistle blows which signals the beginning of the game.

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We take turns holding the telescope and within a half hour of the game Finnick stands up and gently pulls Annie up with him, "Right, we're going to…eh…head out and see the view from out there. We'll be back soon."

Oh great.

Real smooth guys.

Thanks.

I narrow my eyes at them as they make their way towards the door.

Katniss smiles at them before going back to watching the game with the telescope which gives Annie and Finnick the perfect opportunity to wiggle their eyebrows at me and make several hand gestures.

"Bye." I respond shortly and they only grin wider before exiting through the slim passage and shutting it behind them.

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I'm not sure exactly when it happened.

Whether it was just before, during or after half time but I can't quite recall when one of us put that telescope down, began paying no attention to the match and just…talked instead.

Annie and Finnick never returned, not even during half time but Katniss never mentioned anything so I didn't either.

The conversation started with the game, how utterly useless and rubbish the opposing team were. Commenting on flaws in our teams' strategy while praising our friends moves and scores.

Somehow the topic shifted into one about other sports, then other hobbies and so on.
I told her how my mother forced me into playing soccer and wrestling ever since I was a child. I despised playing soccer as I was never skilled at the sport, however wrestling I grew to accept as I had a talent for it. As I grew older I enjoyed having something or someone to take my anger or frustration out on. While in keeping with the rules of course.

Katniss responded with her own story. Brushing a strand of chocolate coloured hair behind her ear she smiled as she recalled memories of her father and her playing basketball in the local park when she was around seven or eight. Neither of them were very good, she laughed, but they had fun and that was all they cared about.

I wanted nothing more than to take her small hand in mine then. To run my fingers over her caramel skin and never let go.

Cowardice and fear took root in my brain and over-ruled my heart's aching wish and instead I offered her a sincere smile and told her it sounded like a beautiful memory.

Katniss looked away and nodded,
"Yeah…yeah it is."

This time I can't stop myself.

Hesitating for a split second, my large, rough, ivory hand reaches out and touches her beautiful, brown one.

Soft, small, cold, gently, beautiful, perfect.

Words run through my mind at ninety miles an hour as I try to control my emotions and gage her reaction. I watch as her grey eyes flicker down to where my hand covers hers. She blinks twice before her cautious eyes meet my anxious ones.

I want to say something, words of comfort, assurance or even regret.

I'm not sure whether to squeeze her hand gently or retract my own.

Before I can really panic, this amazing, admirable girl in front of me, squeezes my hand back gently before hesitantly intertwining our fingers together.

Inhaling a sharp breath, it's my turn to stare uselessly at our interlocked fingers.

Katniss interrupts any thoughts of confessing my undying love for her right there and then as she begins telling another story from her childhood regarding the time Prim joined in with her and her father and fell, spraining her wrist and her father and her freaking out because they knew her mum would be so mad at them for letting Prim get hurt.

I listen to this story and the ones that follow eagerly and intently. Taking in the small pieces of information she reveals about her late father, what her mother used to be like before she fell ill and most of all her face when she talks of what her family once was.

The dimples that appear on each sides of her lips when she talks of Prim, that unmistakable glimmer of something in her eyes when she remembers something about her father and the new softness about her when she reveals pieces of her past to him that he never knew before.

But through all the stories and memories we share throughout the game, in the midst of the cheers and whistles and screams from the crowd outside, she never lets go of my hand and the butterflies in
my stomach never stop fluttering.

........................................

Neither of us noticed the game had ended until Finnick and Annie returned, completely wrapped up in each other as always. I couldn't help but imagine Katniss and I like that. My arm wrapped around her shoulder, hers locked around my waist, head against my shoulder.

Blinking rapidly I force myself out of my daze, trying to concentrate on Finnick's rant,

"-everyone's talking about it! We knew the other team was awful but they were a travesty tonight! They let our guys stroll right by them!"

Katniss coughed and stood, causing our hands to separate and I tried not to dwell on the ache I felt at the loss of warmth.

"Yeah, yeah they were really bad, we played well though." Katniss remarked positively as she pretended to have been paying attention to anything that occurred in the match.

I hide my laugh with the ruffling of my jacket as put it on and stand.

"Sorry we took so long to get back to you guys, Annie ran into some friends and we couldn't get away." Finnick winked slyly at me and I resisted the overwhelming urge to roll my eyes.

Katniss smiled and even though I have a sneaking suspicion she knew Finnick was fibbing she told him it was fine anyway.

We sneak out of the hidden escape one by one and are each met with a gush of cool air.

I'm beginning to regret not bringing my gloves when I feel a warm hand sneak into mine.

Katniss.

I turn back to her but she is pointedly not looking at me and is in deep conversation with Annie who is huddled close to Finnick and he is staring down at her in utter adoration.

Needless to say I keep my mouth shut as we head back to Finnick's car.

........................................

"Thanks for this evening."

"Don't mention it."

"No I…I had fun." Katniss smiles softly, "I really did, it was nice."

My lips turn upward unconsciously as I reciprocate her smile, "Yeah…yeah I…I think so too, thanks for…eh thanks for coming out."

Katniss grins teasingly, "Don't mention it."

Standing outside her front door, Katniss faces me, wearing that grin that displays to the whole world her dimples and makes her silver eyes shine like the moon.

She steps toward me and I momentarily forget how to breathe.
"I'll see you Monday then."

It takes a second for me to remember how to speak but eventually I get the words out, "Monday, yeah."

Katniss's smile falters slightly and she retreats back, sticking the key into the lock and twisting it.

Before I can stop myself or consider the consequences to what I'm doing I step forward and place my arm on hers.

Katniss freezes and her eyes meet mine.

I wait a moment, searching her eyes for any signs of disdain, disgust or danger.

Taking another step closer I summon the courage to smile down at her,

"Sorry I just forgot to say…you look really pretty tonight."

Katniss opens her mouth to respond but before she can I bend down slightly and throwing all caution to the wind I kiss her rosy cheek gently.

Retreating rapidly, I smile awkwardly and murmur a goodnight while turning towards Finnick's car.

A small hand stops me and playfully tugs me back to face her once more, I am met with Katniss Everdeen with the biggest smile I've ever seen plastered on her face.

"You forgot something else too Mellark."

I frown, my eyes wide, mind in overdrive as my brain scams through all the possible ways I screwed things up tonight. Did I forget the slap she's gonna give me for kissing her cheek? For holding her hand? For-

Thankfully my brain shuts down the second Katniss Everdeen reaches up on her tippy toes and her pale pink lips connect with mine.
Peeta Pov

I had kissed one or two girls before.

They weren't particularly good or bad, they were fine.

Afterwards I just assumed that all those fireworks and butterflies and sparks flying that people say comes with kissing was just for kids and over exaggerating poets and love story authors.

But when Katniss Everdeen's chapped, crooked lips met mine I swear I saw fireworks appear behind my eyes.

Or maybe I am just one of those dramatic, over exaggerating poets.

It was short, quick. Only a few seconds long.

I barely had time to close my eyes and reciprocate before she was pulling away.

A blush, far deeper than any I've seen her wear before, spread across her cheeks as she attempted to smile while stuttering a "Goodnight."

Frozen, I was helpless other than to watch as she entered her house and shut the door, that damn, stupid, insufferable door which separated me from her.

I stood outside her house for a minute or two, staring at the door, trying to convince myself that what happened wasn't a dream or a hallucination.

Eventually my feet move backwards and in my haze I find myself in the back of Finnick's car once more.

Bluntly ignoring Finnick and Annie's teasing remarks and jokes, I stare out the window once more.

My mind works in overdrive, every cell in my brain trying to remember every detail about that moment.

How the strand of caramel hair had fallen and brushed against my cheek.

The shining sparkle in her grey eyes before they closed just as her lips touched mine.

The way her soft, small hand touched my arm and she stood up on her toes to reach me.

The feel of her long, black eyelashes against my blonde ones.

Her lips pressed against mine.

The tightening knot in my stomach, how my heart seems to be beating three times as fast as normal.

How the simple memory of it caused me to break out into a massive smile.

Most of all the fact that couldn't stop swirling round and round in my head was that kissing Katniss Everdeen, going out on a date with Katniss Everdeen wasn't just a fantasy anymore.

It was a memory.
A beautiful, wonderful, perfect memory I would treasure forever.

Without a doubt this was certainly the best day of my life.

And it was only just the beginning.
Katniss POV

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*Text alert*

From Peeta Mellark: Thanks for coming out last night. I had a great time, I hope you enjoyed it and hope I didn't over step anything.

From Katniss Everdeen: No problem, thanks for inviting me. I had a wonderful time and don't worry about it. You didn't.

From Peeta Mellark: Would you like to do it again sometime soon?

From Katniss Everdeen: The date or the kissing?

From Peeta Mellark: I meant the date but sure the kissing too.

From Katniss Everdeen: Yes.

From Peeta Mellark: Okay, great!

From Katniss Everdeen: Sorry, I have to go, Gale's about to arrive any minute now.

From Peeta Mellark: Oh no problem, call you later?

From Katniss Everdeen: Yeah, sounds great. I'll talk to you later, bye Peeta!

From Peeta Mellark: Bye Katniss
Wednesday Woes

Peeta POV

In my opinion, one of the most despicable things about high school is that secrets never stay secret for long.

One thing leads to another, one misinterpreted look, an overheard conversation and before you know it, people stare at you in class, you catch your name being whispered in conversations between strangers as you walk down the hall and before you know it people are confronting you about your own private life.

People like the Careers.

It was the class before lunch, our teacher was absent and a substitute failed to show up so our class was pretty much aimlessly waiting for the bell to ring. Half the class had left to sneak off for the remaining hour, some students were studying, others loudly chatted or laughed about the latest gossip and trends.

I sat in the back, stuck my earphones in and started drawing on my sketchpad, which I now keep with me at all times, in case Katniss wants me to draw her something again.

I'm very comfortable in my little translucent bubble, doodling a faceless girl with a braid when I feel two taps on my shoulder.

I blink at my page, assuming I'm imagining things when I hear a high-pitched giggle emit from right behind me.

Turning I come face to face with Glimmer standing over me. The tall, pale skinned girl twirls a strand of her bleached blonde hair with her perfectly manicured nail and giggles at my discombobulated expression.

"Heyyy Peeta." Glimmer says in a sickly sweet voice and I quickly scramble to hide my not-so-subtle drawing of Katniss from her view.

"Err, hi Glimmer."

I'm pretty sure the only time I've ever interacted with Glimmer was when we were six or seven and she lost her princess fairy pen, she threw a massive tantrum and accused me off stealing it because I was sitting beside her. My five year old self was entirely innocent and had been too busy daydreaming of the pretty girl who sang in class the day before to be bothered with stealing some random pen.

Of course when I returned home that evening and found the pink and white pen with little fairies on it among the old colouring pencils in my pencil case I stuffed it in my drawer and threw it out a few years later.

What? She wasn't a nice person okay? I wasn't going to prove her right by giving her that god damn pen back.

Glimmer slips into the seat beside me and places her fist under her chin, grinning,
"How are you? How are things!?"

I frown before forcing myself to be polite and I fake a smile.

"I'm good thanks Glimmer and you?"

Glimmer bits her lip and sighs dramatically, "Oh I'm just fabulous Peeta really."

"Em…okay."

"But tell me more about you! I mean you've been friends with Cato since like forever and we've never talked!"

"Actually I eh..wouldn't really say Cato and I are…friends-"

"Oh sure you are! He's always talking about you and praising you!"

Praise? Definitely doesn't sound like Cato Hunter.

"Err… right"

"You should really eat lunch with us today" Glimmer flick her hair back and leans forward on the desk. "You know? So we can get to know you better"

For a second, I stare wide eyed at her before stammering, "I can't…s-sorry. I've plans with Finnick."

Glimmer pouts, "But he's got his girlfriend right? The swimmer? Anne? Anne-Marie? Anyway, you were friends with Cato first. I'm sure Finnick won't mind. He's SUCH a good guy."

From her tone I'm unaware whether she is describing Finnick or Cato but I don't care to ask.

"It's Annie and yes but we usually eat together. I'm sorry Glimmer, I can't, not today."

Glimmer's eyes freeze over and she straightens her posture.

I swallow as her cold eyes stare into mine and at this she smirks and stands,

"What a shame," fake-pity and annoyance drips from her tongue, "Cato was really looking forward to talking to you about your girlfriend."

Glimmer's slow emphasis on the words 'really' and 'girlfriend' cause me to freeze.

How would Cato know? How would Glimmer? I've only told my friends, I assume Katniss told hers and none of our friends talk with Cato and his gang.

Maybe he read my note when I gave it to Katniss over her shoulder?

Or perhaps Glimmer is just winding me up, perhaps they don't know we are really together now.

Before I can think of a reply, Glimmer has pushed in her chair and looks me up and down before turning sharply and sauntering out the classroom door.

I sit shell-shocked for the remainder of my free period. When the bell shrills through the speakers, I practically sprint out of the classroom, bag slung over one shoulder and my sketchpad clutched tightly in my hand.

..........................
My stomach clenches as I attempt to listen to Darius and Thom's eccentric debate about some unimportant soccer match. Usually I would gladly partake in such light hearted conversation but somehow my mind can't seem to focus today.

I foolishly hoped James might have gotten back to me by now.

I keep trying to remind myself that if this doesn't go the way I hope then I'm not sure where to go next. Where we go next.

It's easy to say we'll have uproot our lives and move to California, become rich and famous and tour the world but it's never that simple.

None of us have that sort of money, to move anywhere at the moment let alone move to California and pay for college there. Even if scholarships were an option, there would be no way the four of us would get one each.

Even if it were, could Katniss and I really leave home? Mrs. Everdeen has her good days but I know Katniss fears if she leaves home that her mother will fall back into her severe depression again.

While my mum has improved greatly, she'd still have to provide for three children and without me around I'm not sure whether she could.

The teachers have practically drilled into our heads that we all are expected to go to college, but in this town it's rare for the majority of students from the Seam to advance to third level education. It's just how it is.

I wouldn't even know what else I could study if it weren't music. I know a bit about cars, if the worse comes to the worst I could be a mechanic. Katniss might study plants or something, she does well in science and her father was obsessed with teaching her all about plants, wild berries and birds.

Thom could teach music lessons and Darius, well Darius can walk into any job interview with a blank CV and a winning smile and get the job on the spot.

Is that where we'll all end up?

I'm drawn from my thoughts as from the corner of my eye I spot a tall figure standing awkwardly in the doorway of the cafeteria.

Madge Undersee frowns and scans the room, holding her tray in one hand and her bottle of orange juice in the other.

I assume she's searching for Katniss so swallowing I push all negative thoughts from my mind and I attempt to catch her attention by wavering my hand.

It takes her a second but she notices me, blue eyes widening before she smiles politely and walks towards me.

"Hey Gale."

"Hiya, looking for Catnip?"

"Eh, yeah I was but-"
"Mr. Snow called her back after class, apparently he caught her doodling in class." Madge's naturally upbeat expression falls, she rolls her eyes and huffs causing a smirk to appear on my face.

"She's so subtle, if she says something smart and lands herself in detention again I'm going to have to give her the friend-mom lecture and I hate those."

A laugh escapes me and Madge smiles,

"You want to sit with us while you wait for her?"

I don't know where the words come from, before my brain can catch up with what I've said, the blonde girl's ears tinted pink as she nodded and sat in front of me.

"Eh, sure thanks."

We sit in silence for a moment, awkward silence. Thom and Darius noting her presence with a nod, before returning back to their heated debate.

I don't know why there's such tension between Madge and I.

We've both gotten over the incident with Katniss.

Madge has sat with us a hundred times, but in all honestly, when she did I rarely talked to her.

I decide to at least try and make it up to her now, "So did you go to the game Friday?"

Madge grins, "Well I was thinking about going with Katniss but she told me she was going with Peeta so I decided not to gate-crash and stay at home instead."

I match her grin with one of my own, "Oh the nerve of her."

"I know! I asked her this morning who won and she said she couldn't remember."

I scrunch up my nose and try to burn the images of Peeta and Katniss making out in the stands of a football game that appear in my mind.

"Gross." I reply, doing a near perfect impression of my ten year old brother.

Madge laughs loudly and claps her hands together, "It was probably just Katniss not paying attention to the important things as usual."

"Probably" I say in a disbelieving tone.

From then on we discuss our days, Katniss's likely dreadful conversation with Snow and hobbies (music for me and watching youtube videos for her).

We've just finished telling each other what classes we have next when Katniss finally joins us, a murderous frown plastered to her face and I can practically see stream spurting from her ears.

Forcefully throwing her bag on the floor and dropping into the seat Katniss makes a muffled scream which causes Madge's and my eyebrows to raise to our hairline and even Thom and Darius shut up to wonder what's going on.

Katniss launches into her story of Snow lecturing her for doodling in his class which she wasn't, she was just flickering through pages of her refill pad for her notes and he stopped her on one with a drawing on it.
"It wasn't even one I did! P-Someone gave it to me! It's ridiculous! He was threatening me with a note and detention and he even mentioned suspension! For doodling! Or what he thought was doodling! Oh I could-"

Katniss lists off numerous threats and Madge and I listen in amusement at her dramatics. Everybody despises our useless, dictator of a principal but Katniss has always felt he had something out for her personally. From his actions towards her over the years, none of us could blame her.

Catnip manages to eat at least half her lunch when the bell shrills and we must leave for class. Groaning, we pack up our stuff and all head out the door together.

I make my way to maths with Thom but turning to Madge before I go,

"See you later" I murmur, offering her a half smile.

Madge smiles back brightly and winks, "Not if I see you first."

As Thom and I purposely slowly walk to the dreaded maths class I ignore the knowing look on Thom's face and the mischief in his eyes.

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Katniss POV

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So…

Before planning to cook something you should probably make sure you have all the ingredients need for the recipe.

Which me being the stupid, thoughtless person I am, forgot.

Leaving Peeta sitting awkwardly in my sitting room with an inquisitive Prim was the least of my worries as I frantically searched through all the cupboards in my tiny kitchen, tore the drawers apart for anything I could use as a substitute for the numerous ingredients I failed to buy.

Leaning against the counter, I brushed my fringe back from my face and breathed heavily.

Here was this perfect, good-looking, kind boy who actually seemed to give a damn about me and I'd been too busy and forgotten to get the stuff we needed to practise our project.

I let out a shaky sigh and stand up straight again.

I'll just have to face him, I know I will, there's no escaping it.

Walking into the sitting room, I find Prim lying on the couch, grinning at a blushing Peeta who is sitting in my father's armchair, drumming his fingers against the armrest.

They both smile widely when they notice my presence and I politely smile at Peeta, "Kitchen?" I suggest, trying not to let the nervousness seep into my tone.

Peeta nods, says some dreamy, sweet words of goodbye to my sister that has her in a fit of giggles and follows me out.

When I explain to him, in a bashfully, hushed voice what I've foolishly done, Peeta stares at me for
an achingly long moment before bursting out laughing.

He bends over slightly as his booming laugh rakes through his body. At first I frown, confused as to why he reacted in such a manner when I so clearly have messed up, pretty bad.

"What-" Peeta interrupts me by taking two steps towards me and taking my cold hands in his.

"Katniss!" Peeta reassures gently "Don't worry about it, we've already done one practice and we didn't burn the house down. It's no big deal."

I swallow the lump that has been annoyingly building in my throat since I returned home from school,

"But-"

Peeta smiles and when he brushes his thumb against the back of my hand I can feel him trace over several scars and I shiver, "But nothing Kat, trust me I'd much rather spend the evening talking with you than fretting over cooking temperatures and ingredients and not the mention," Peeta scrunches up his nose and as he does I can feel it brush against my own "Not the mention the dreaded washing up."

A quick laugh escapes me, I look up into his blue eyes and search for something to say but all I can come up with is,

"Kat?"

Peeta grins but I can spot the twinge of a blush rising in his cheeks, "Yeah, Kat. All your other friends have nicknames for you so I thought, why not?"

I decide to continue with my one-word questions when I ask, "Friends?"

This causes the great Peeta Mellark to stammer, "I...well...I'm not...well I am but I'm also..." Peeta groans loudly before mock-glaring at me and my rising smirk, "Oh shush, you know what I meant."

"Mmmhmm" I respond, fully aware of the stupidly large grin upon my face.

"I-"

"I like it" I interrupt

Peeta frowns, "Like what?"

"The nickname. Kat. I like it."

Peeta smiles genuinely at me before bending down so we are at each other's eye line, "I'm glad."

We are close. Peeta and I. Barely centimetres between us.

We may have acknowledged that we are 'together' but nothing has happened in person since I agreed to go out with him.

My eyes widen as I fight to push the want to pull back from him away. My stomach is tied in knots and I'm not sure what to make of the stutter that occurs in my chest when I feel him exhaling gently on my skin.

Part of me wants to turn around, change the subject and listen to him ramble about something
unimportant, both of us pointedly ignoring the elephant in the room.

While the other side of me desperately wants to lean further into him, curl my hand around his neck and press his lips against mine once more.

I do neither, instead remaining completely frozen.

Guilty overwhelms me when Peeta pulls away from me, stepping back several inches and returning to his full height once more. Spotting the sadness in his eyes, I knew he saw the internal battle I was having and I desperately want to explain myself yet I find myself at a loss for words.

"Do you.." Peeta scratches behind his ear "Want to watch a movie or something?"

His words take a minute or two to register with me which he takes as a bad sign,

"Or we could study! Or do homework if you need to do that. I could leave either! If you want, I'll leave I don't mind-"

"No!" I shout over him before he comes up when any other crazy ideas.

I move towards him and return my hands to the lovely, warm heat of his, "A movie sounds perfect."

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Peeta POV

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I leave Katniss's house just before dinner.

We watched some badass, action movie that she had clearly watched a hundred times from her commentary on almost every scene.

I kiss her cheek before I go and tell her I'm really glad she forgot to get the ingredients.

This causes her to flush red and mumble a "Sorry" and "Goodbye."

Rolling my eyes, I pull her closer and kiss her small nose gently, "Kidding" I wait for Katniss to smile back at me before pulling away and saying "I'll see you tomorrow."

Katniss nods, "Bye Peeta"

I turn and I can hear the door close behind me.

The smile drops from my face as I let my feet drag me home, knowing I'd much rather be back in Katniss's cool house, sitting close to her on the couch while her sister comes in every ten minutes to "Make sure you two are watching the movie and not eating each other's faces off." To which, after the third time, Katniss forcefully threw a throw pillow at her tiny, giggling younger sibling.

Reliving the past two hours again would be much more exciting than going home to my dull, tension filled house.

Deciding to go through the back door, I finalise what lie I'm going to tell my family about where I've been this evening as I push it open.

I trudge up the stairs and am about to continue upwards to my bedroom when I hear my mother's
voice calling me from the sitting room.

I cringe and prepare my story about how I went to Finnick's house after school and how I'm very sorry I didn't text her but when I enter the cool, familiar room I freeze.

My mother is sitting on the couch, her hair tied back into a tight bun and a bright smile on her fresh face. Two cups of tea sit on the table, the fancy, expensive cups she rarely uses.

"Peeta! Finally you come home! Look who came to see you!"

I cannot echo my mother's enthusiasm when I straighten my back, clench my jaw and say flatly, "Hello Cato."
Peeta POV

I stand in silence, my brain in overdrive, contemplating all the possible, far-fetched, devastating reasons for why Cato Hunter is sitting in my sitting room with my mother drinking tea.

Needless to say none of the explanations I come up with lead to anything good.

"Peeta" My mother barks firmly at me, drawing my attention away from Cato's perfectly masked face, "Greet our guest properly!"

Cato breaks out into a wide grin, "Oh, no need Mrs. Mellark, Peeta and I see each other all the time in school. I'm sure he's sick of my face at this stage."

My forty-something year old mother sighs dreamily at my old friend and pats his hand gently in such a sincere, motherly gesture that I can't help the twinge in my stomach at her actions to someone who isn't even her son, while she would never dream of acting so kindly to me.

"We miss you around the house Cato. Peeta's new friends…well they just aren't the same as you."

Of course my lovely mother brings up her distaste for my friends in front of him. I can see the glint in his eyes from here and I silently groan.

"Oh I'm dreadfully sorry Mrs. Mellark, truly I am. I'm just so busy studying these days. I get no time to myself."

My mother tilts her head and her face melts at his soothing lies while I dig my fists into my pockets to refrain from punching him in his pathetic, stubbled, lying face.

"How many times have I told you to call me Paula, Cato!" my mother giggles and I roll my eyes up to heaven.

These two could start a great comedy act I swear.

"But seriously, you should come by more often, you are always welcome here. Isn't that right Peeta?"

My eyes are trained on Cato, drilling into his small, brainless skull as I try to figure out what he's done, why he's here and just what exactly he knows.

"Isn't that right, Peeta?" Anger slips into my mother's sickly sweet tone as she repeats herself but I refuse to answer.

My mother's eyes stare wide and deadly into mine but she decides against embarrassing herself in front of the son of one of the wealthiest couples in the District.

"Why don't you two go fetch some biscuits from the kitchen? Your father made some for the charity bake sale tonight but I'm sure they won't be missed. Go, go! Bring me in a few won't you Peeta!"

I decide not to bring up that dad warns us not to eat these cookies every year because they are important as the bake sale relies on him for most of the products they sell and it's for a good cause.
She'd never listen to me anyway.

When Cato and I are finally alone in the kitchen I turn on him.

"What do you want?" I demand harshly

Cato's demeanour shifts completely, he lowers his head and sneers

"I don't want anything."

I scoff and push myself away from him, "Don't, Cato. We aren't friends. You certainly don't want to be my friend. So why the hell are you getting your girlfriend to interrogate me and coming to my home to butter up my mother?"

Cato sighs, "You always see the worst in everyone, Mellark."

I simply glare when he continues,

"Glimmer never could be coy could she? She's hot though. Good to have around when I need her."

I try not to throw up with sheer disgust.

"And I just thought I'd pop in, have a nice chat with an old friend and well…your mother was here and you weren't. I thought it would be a good idea to find out just how much she…knows."

"I'm not hiding anything." I sneer.

Cato cocks an eyebrow, "Aren't you?"

I struggle to find an appropriate answer but before I can, Cato has placed the perfectly iced cookies on a tray and is halfway out my kitchen door.

"I'll give these to your mother and go but don't worry Peeta. I'll be in touch."

The kitchen door swings shut behind him and I slump against the coffee table.

He knows.

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Gale POV

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Two weeks following our meeting with James in the Hob, he finally gets in touch.

Hidden under a secluded tree in the school-yard, I take out my phone that began vibrating in my pocket over twenty minutes ago.

My hands shake as I click into the voice-mail that he left on my phone while I was in class.

"Gale! Hey! Sorry it took me so long to contact you! One of the most popular members of one of my bands decided to quit which caused an uproar at the office! Anyway I showed a few of my colleagues your stuff and the videos I took the last day! They loved you guys! Look there's just one or two things I need to talk to you about. I'll drive down tomorrow, text me somewhere to meet you, that bar you sang at maybe? Anyway see you tomorrow! Oh and by the way, maybe don't mention it
to the others until after you and I talk. You'll understand tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then!"

My heart thumps frantically in my chest when I hear the click that signifies the end of the voice-mail.

They liked us, a group of people out of our friends and family actually think we are good, decent, maybe good enough to make an album for.

But my stomach remains in knots.

Why can't I tell the others?

There must be a reason, something the company didn't like about us that James wants to confront in person with me.

What could it be? Our skin colours? Accents? How none of us are close to well off? Because those are all things we can't really help.

Perhaps it's something small like our name.

I admit 'The Rebels' is not very eye-catching or original so maybe he wants to change that.

That probably wouldn't be a problem, I don't think any of us are all that attached to it.

But that can't be the reason why I can't let Katniss, Darius and Thom in on the news.

So what is it?

"Gale?"

My head shoots up and I blink rapidly until Madge Undersee's concerned face comes into focus.

"Are you alright?" Madge is mere feet away from me and I curse my hunter instincts for not noticing her presence sooner.

I nod vigorously "Yeah, yeah I'm fine…"

Madge's blonde eyebrows narrow in confusion and disbelief. I realise how I must look to her. Hair tossed and messy from my hand running through it all last period, my phone clutched tightly in my hand and confusion etched on my face.

"Are you sure? I can go get Katniss if you want-"

"No!" I shout, louder than intended. Seeing Katniss's worried face right now is exactly what I don't need. I've never been able to hide things from her and vice versa.

Even if I tried to lie about the phone call with James she would see right through me

"No, no don't get her. I'm fine, really." I calmly reassure the pretty, popular girl in front of me.

From her rigid stance and the way her soft blue eyes flit from my face to the death grip on my ancient phone, I can tell she doesn't believe me.

"Okay" Madge smiles warmly and my brain struggles to come up with a solution for how a smile can be that warm and genuine on such a freezing cold October day like today.
"Okay?" I ask, puzzled.

Madge shrugs, "I won't pressure you to tell me something you don't want to. I won't pry where it isn't my place. I do hope you are okay though."

I blink numerous times before my mouth catches up with my brain.

"T-thank you."

Madge's smile broadens, "Anytime."

We stand there in silence for another few moments. I rack my brain and try to think of a good conversation topic but nothing comes to me.

Madge seems to be struggling too but she has better luck than I, "Do you want to go inside or anything? It's pretty breezy out…"

The cold doesn't bother me that much but looking at Madge in her jeans, t-shirt and flimsy cardigan with her long, wavy hair flowing in her face, I can't help but understand her struggle.

"Yeah, sure."

Once we are inside the building, Madge begins to walk in the direction of the cafeteria as it is lunch time but halts once she realises I'm not walking with or even behind her.

"Gale?" She asks softly "You coming?"

The thought of walking in to that large, suffocating room only to sit down with Katniss, Thom and Darius and proceed to lie to them about James forces me to swallow the formulating lump in my throat.

"Eh, no you're alright Madge. I think I'll just sit under the stairs today, maybe plug in my earphones and block out the world ya know?" I joke but there is nothing but truth to my words.

Madge straightens her pink bag that hangs from her shoulder and timidly asks, "May I join you?"

Ignoring the relief that overcomes me at her request, I simply nod and together we sit on the cushioned benches under the secluded, quiet staircase.

We don't say anything, both of us plug our earphones in and sit side by side. Madge eats most of her lunch but it takes me until almost the end of lunch to manage to swallow down two biscuits.

If Madge notices how little I eat she chooses not to mention it for which I'm grateful.

When the shrilling school bell interrupts our individual songs, we move to stand, accidentally brushing our hands against one another's in our attempt to gain our balance.

I turn, stuffing my earphones clumsily into my pocket to give myself a minute or two for the flush of crimson to hopefully vanish from my cheeks. Students pile out of the cafeteria and hundreds of peers make their way up and down the stairs above us.

Madge offers me a soft smile and as we mouth goodbye, our hands accidentally brush again.

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*Text Alert*
From Katniss Everdeen: Are you ready for tomorrow?

From Peeta Mellark: Am I ready to slay our classmates with our amazing cooking skills and project work? Yes. Yes I am. Are you?"

From Katniss Everdeen: Sure

From Peeta Mellark: You don't sound too enthusiastic

From Katniss Everdeen: Sure :D

From Peeta Mellark: Better ;) You'll remember the ingredients right?

From Katniss Everdeen: Course I will

From Peeta Mellark: You sure?

From Katniss Everdeen: You have little faith

From Peeta Mellark: Well you've a bad track record

From Katniss Everdeen: I'll bring them in

From Peeta Mellark: I'll bring extra just in case

From Katniss Everdeen: You're kidding right?

From Peeta Mellark: Of course babe

From Katniss Everdeen: No.

From Peeta Mellark: No?

From Katniss Everdeen: We are not the 'babe' couple, I refuse to be the 'babe' couple. You'll have to come up with a better nickname than babe.

From Peeta Mellark: Love?

From Katniss Everdeen: cliché

From Peeta Mellark: Doll? Sugarplum? Pumpkin?

From Katniss Everdeen: brb while I go vomit

From Peeta Mellark: haha okay I'll come up with a better one

From Peeta Mellark: I promise!

From Peeta Mellark: Wait you were just joking right?

From Peeta Mellark: You're not really sick are you?

From Peeta Mellark: Okay I'm worried I'm going to ring you

From Katniss Everdeen: Relax, I was joking but sugarplum made me slightly queasy

From Peeta Mellark: Sorry Katniss ;)}
From Katniss Everdeen: I'll forgive you, but only because of this fabulous project we are working on
From Peeta Mellark: I totally believe that's the reason babe :*
From Katniss Everdeen: -_- ..................................................
Katniss POV ............................................................
It's a dreary Friday morning on the second week of October and I stifle a yawn as I stuff my Home Economics ingredients into my locker for my cooking presentation with Peeta today.
I jump out of my skin when I feel long fingers brush my braid away from my neck.
Before I launch into badass, fighting, action hero mode, a familiar, low chuckle emits from behind me.
"Peeta" I whisper softly, the fear and tension leaving my body instantly. I feel a soft, cool kiss on the back of my neck and I bite my lip and shiver uncontrollably.
He doesn't confirm his presence, instead choosing to stand to his full height once more and presses his lips to my ear
"What about Kat?" his voice is low and husky and I swallow down the pathetic sound that desperately tries to escape my mouth
"Kat is good" I respond weakly and I can feel his ear-to-ear grin against my ear "Yeah…yeah I like Kat, much nicer than babe." I continue, mentally ordering myself to get a grip.
In the blink of an eye Peeta's strong hand has slammed my locker shut, turned me gently around to face him and pulled me closer.
He leans his forehead against mine and just as I begin to tell him we really shouldn't do this in a crowded hallway in school, his precious lips meet mine in the most passionate kiss we've had yet.
Wrapping my arms around his neck, I willingly melt into him.
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Peeta POV ............................................................
Kissing Katniss Everdeen in a hallway in Panem High has admittedly been a fantasy of mine for many years now.
Needless to say it was ten trillion times better than I could ever have imagined.
It was deep and passionate and all of our worries about who was watching faded into the black, endless, silent void of never-ending space.
Afterwards, as I walk a blushing Katniss to her next class I catch a certain Career sending death glares my way.
Well damn him.

Fuck Cato Hunter and his stupid, pathetic threats and his childish attempts at blackmail.

If he wants to hurt me then he can try all he likes.

He can do whatever he wishes, tell my mother I'm dating Katniss, make up lies about her, about my friends or about me. He can order me to do countless, horrible and most likely illegal things to keep him quiet about my dating life if he wishes.

He can do all that and more but I refuse to do anything he or my mother wants, including breaking up with Katniss Everdeen.

If he decides to tell my mother about her than I'll take whatever I get.

But I won't leave Katniss because of them.

They done too much damage to me and my life already.

I won't let them ruin my relationship with Katniss, the one thing I've hoped and dreamed for since I was five years old.

I won't.
Gale POV

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I fidget with my fingers as I anxiously wait in the crowded Hob for James to arrive.

It's irrational but I keep waiting for Katniss to walk in for a shift at work or for Darius and Thom to stroll in the door and order their usual meal.

The mere thought causing his heart to ache at the thought of his friends finding out that he had lied to them.

Arriving an hour early probably wasn't a good idea.

With each passing tick of the clock and every stranger that enters the Hob, my shoulders tense and my fists clench as I wait.

*Text alert*

Scrambling to check my phone, I swallow my guilt when I read the sender.

From Katniss Everdeen: You want to come over for dinner? I have some food left over from my cooking practical.

From Gale Hawthorne: Sorry, I can't. Save me some? How did your practical go?

From Katniss Everdeen: Maybe, oh we got an A for sure.

From Gale Hawthorne: Really? You got an A in Home Ec.?

From Katniss Everdeen: Okay maybe I was on clean-up for most of it but I did all of the preparation myself!

From Gale Hawthorne: Wow, well done

From Katniss Everdeen: I know that was sarcastic but thanks anyway. Talk you later!

Shoving my phone into my pocket, I put my earphones in and attempt to drown out my over-bearing thoughts and fears with music.

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James appears a half an hour later and after the general greeting and chit-chat, he eventually explains everything.

"First of all, I want to apologise Gale. It wasn't right for me to ask you to hide this information from your friends but I'm afraid the bosses wanted me to discuss this with you first."

I nod and fake a smile,

"Of course, don't worry about it."

James smiles, "I knew I liked you. So, the producers love your stuff. They really do. They are just a
little em...unsure about your image."

I frown, "Our image?"

"Yes. You see there isn't very many...how should I phrase this...bands these days that have the majority of boy members and only one girl members. The only bands that do are ones where the female singer is the main vocalist but in your group, you all seem to be equal." James says

Somehow I can tell that I won't like where this is headed.

"It's quite unusual for our company. When we produce artists and bands, it's either all male or female. So...we are just wondering whether you are entirely happy with everyone in your band. Because the producers want you and they love you, all of you. Including Katniss! They think she's amazing! But...the label feels that she would have a better career as a solo artist."

"So you are saying you want us...but not Katniss?" I say, wariness and a trace of resentment on my tongue.

"Well I'm sure we could work something out for her as a solo artist but this is just too good an opportunity to miss!"

I wonder if he means a great opportunity for me or for him.

"Don't you think it'd be good that we're different?" I ask, gritting my teeth "More memorable? Not just another boyband."

"Oh Gale" James dismisses my comment with a wave of his hand. As if I were a petulant child.

"Boybands are extremely popular nowadays. They're pretty much all everyone under a certain age listen to. You and your friends are better than half of the bands on the charts today! It'd be a shame to lose you over something trivial like this."

"You're asking me to kick someone out, my closest friend! All because she's a girl and that wouldn't be good for our image!" My eyes narrow as my tone rises in anger.

James sighs, "This isn't some patriarchy scheme Mr. Hawthorne. It's what the company thinks would benefit you most in the long run. All of you. We have everyone's best interests in mind here, I assure you."

No wonder he wanted to see me alone, if the others were here right now I'm not sure who would hit him first, Katniss or Darius.

James stands and places a hand on my shoulder.

"Think it over. Talk to the others, we'll talk soon."

I silently nod, knowing if I open my mouth, I'll say something I will most likely regret.

"Don't give up your dream just because you have to make one small sacrifice."

With those words, James Heavensbee walks out the door.

"Everything alright?"

I turn around to find Leevy standing behind me wearing a sympathetic smile and holding a tray of empty coffee mugs.
I can't even manage a convincing nod in return.

2 hours later I am internally cursing James Heavensbee for putting me in this position.

We are in Katniss's sitting room, the faint sound of Prim and Rory's music drifting down the stairs from Prim's room is all the interrupts the tortured silence.

Thom's expression is solemn, he leans forward in the old, comfy armchair and frowns at me as he takes in everything I just said.

Darius radiates pure fury. His normally soft, bright eyes are illuminated by a fog of rage and disgust but the few times that his eyes flicker towards Katniss, they become gentle and worrisome.

Katniss sits cross legged on the couch beside Darius. Her face is unreadable but her eyes portray her anger, hurt and fear.

The emotions I know Katniss hates to feel more than anything.

"What…." Katniss's voice is soft and uncertain "what are you saying? They want to sign you guys but they don't think I'm…acceptable?"

"He eh…said that…together we all aren't…their idea of a perfect image for the media at the moment. Or something like that. James said the company loved your voice and would probably try and pursue a solo career with you."

Katniss nods but her eyes are far away.

"Bullshit."

Katniss and I break eye contact to turn to Thom who is glaring at the opposite wall

"Sorry?" Darius says, shock evident in his tone

"You heard me. It's bullshit. That's bullshit. Everything James said was bullshit. We'll find someone else, another company, and another foreseeable contract. We'll figure it out." Thom says simply

"But-" Katniss interrupts

"But nothing. Absolutely nothing" Darius interjects "We aren't changing, we aren't agreeing to anything. I'll talk to him, we'll talk to him and if James and his bosses don't accept it well then who cares?"

"It's not about-"

"Katniss" I say sternly "There is no choice to make."

Katniss looks at each of us for a moment before nodding, "Okay…"

"Good." Darius grins "Because the Rebels without Katniss is like…I don't know it's just unimaginable"

Katniss lets out a small laugh but her smile is genuine and grateful.

Together we talk and several hours later Katniss takes out her guitar and sings an acoustic version of
'If I Were a Boy' by Beyoncé which would have made us all laugh at the irony if she hadn't sang it so beautifully.

Maybe Thom and Darius were right all along. Perhaps this recording contract wasn't our big break. Maybe we didn't even need one.

Perhaps sitting here in Katniss's sitting room singing softly to the songs we all loved is all we need.

The rest will fall into place in due time.

I'm sure of it.

Katniss POV

I wince as I trip over something large and rock-shaped for the third time and I begin to rethink my trust in Peeta Mellark.

"Peeta?" I grumble "If you're going to blindfold me then can you at least do a good job of leading me to wherever we are going?"

"Sorry! I'm really sorry!" Peeta says and I scowl at the laugh he fails to hold back

"You should be"

Peeta had turned up ten minutes before my shift ended this afternoon, a scarf in hand and a cheeky eyebrow raised.

"Trust me?" He had asked cautiously when I frowned uncertainly.

I swallowed before nodding and hurriedly went back to cleaning tables.

That's how I ended up on a very long walk, incapable of seeing anything, only feeling Peeta's soft hand in mine and the occasional rock or hard surface he bangs me into.

Whether his actions are accidental or not, they will almost certainly leave bruises.

"We're almost there Kat"

Against my better judgement I smile and let him take me to this secret destination.

"Okay we are here, no don't take it off yet, I've to sort something- Katniss stop trying to take a peak just wait a minute-"

My laugh is loud but it doesn't overshadow the clutter of noise that Peeta makes, honestly that boy could never be quiet about anything.

Suddenly I am blasted by a flash of light as Peeta rips the scarf away from my eyes.

As my eyes begin to focus I see Peeta's bright grin as he holds his woolly, navy scarf in one hand.

"Ta dah!" He sings and gestures to his side

My heart thuds as I realise where we are.

The meadow.
We are at the side of the large, beautiful green haven, just beside a large, magical tree which casts a giant shadow over the blanket and basket Peeta has apparently placed under it.

I swallow down the tightness in my throat as the memories come to me in waves.

This is where my father used to take my mother, Prim and I after our weekly family walks through the forest when I was growing up. We would walk for a few hours and then arrive here somewhere between lunch and dinner and have a picnic.

Nothing lavish, we brought a tattered blanket my father's mother had once knitted, whatever food we could spare and a treat every month or so if we were lucky.

Prim and I used to dance in the flowers in the springtime while my father and mother watched, leaning against an old tree trunk, my father's fingers entwined with mother's, as if nothing else mattered.

Because back then, nothing else did matter.

Peeta takes my silence and shocked expression the wrong way and he rubs the back of his neck.

"I…well you told me what happened yesterday and I know despite how you brushed it off that you were upset about it. Because who wouldn't be? But I know how you don't like to talk about things so I thought I could take you here and we could have a nice picnic. It's not much, few sandwiches, some treats I swiped from the bakery which are a tad stale but they should be ok."

His rambling is cut off when I press forward and tug him down to kiss me. He makes a noise of surprise before closing his eyes and eagerly returning the favour.

We lose ourselves in kissing each other for several moments before I finally pull away, Peeta leans his forehead against mine and our panted breathes mix together and I wonder to myself how I got to be so lucky.

Three hours later, Peeta walks me home, we stroll hand in hand, our stomach's full and our lips tinted red. Peeta's hair is tussled from my fingers running through it while mine is tied together by daisies as flower crowns are another unexpected secret talent that Peeta Mellark possess.

At my front door, Peeta envelops me in his arms and I can't remember a time in my life where I felt this safe.

I feel his lips against my ear and I shiver when he whispers,

"You're so strong"

I look down, "Not really…"

Peeta gently coaxes my chin upwards so our eyes meet again

"Really. That guy and his bosses are all idiots. You're an amazing singer and they're all fools not to see that."

I raise an eyebrow, "When have you heard me sing properly?"

Peeta's cheeks flame red and shakes his head, "It was a long time ago, we were just kids. I just remember…you sounded good…really good."

"You sure it wasn't someone else?"
Peeta smirks, "Definitely not, this little five year old had her hair in a braid and she was ridiculously stubborn. She was adamant that the teacher pick on her and not anybody else from what I recall."

I blush deeply as that sounds an awful lot like my younger self

"Though" Peeta continues "The girl was wearing a pretty red dress and I don't ever remember you wearing one since so perhaps it wasn't you."

I only wore dresses as a child when my mother forced me into them and only for special occasions. Such as the one wedding I went to of my father's best friend, the day after Prim's birth, one or two of my birthdays and my first day of school.

"Maybe it wasn't me then."

"Nah, it has to be. I knew right then and there that she was prettier than any princess I had seen on T.V. and she sounded better than any of the singers my mother listened to in the car. Though looking back she has awful taste in music but I didn't know that then…"

I shake my head and laugh.

All of this seems too good to be true, too fast and too perfect. Peeta's words hint at the possibility that he knew who I was before we were paired up for that project, they imply that there he is more to the story of us that he hasn't told me yet.

I don't pry, he will tell me when he's ready and if he doesn't that's okay too.

I kiss him gently, pry my reluctant fingers from his grip and whisper my goodbyes as I enter the house and close the door behind me.

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Two Weeks Later

When I imagined sitting in front of James Heavensbee again, I expected to be nervous, fidgeting and on edge. If not anxious then I would certainly be angry, lose my temper, snap at him because how dare he tell Gale he should kick me out of the band I put so much work into over the past few years?

Instead two weeks after James meets with Gale, all of the Rebels sit across from him, united as one and instead of fear or anger all I feel is cold.

It doesn't escape my notice that James can't maintain eye contact with me or that his hands are wringing so much, I suspect he is sweating.

It's obvious that he didn't expect me to show up.

Gale got in contact with him a few days ago and asked for a meeting. James had only been too eager to accept but as he sits on the receiving end of Darius and Thom's death stares and Gale's deadly calm expression, his enthusiasm seems to fade away.

"It's good to see you all again." James says half heartedly

Darius snorts and Thom elbows him under the table but the former does not look the least bit apologetic.

I hide a smile, however annoying they are, my friends really are the best.
Instead I force myself to be the bigger person,

"You too, Mr. Heavensbee." I say in my sweet voice

James finally meets my eyes and I refuse to offer him any forgiveness just yet.

"Ms. Everdeen I-

"We don't accept your offer." Gale interrupts firmly

James promptly shuts his mouth and stares dumbly at Gale. He opens his mouth a moment later as if to protest but then he catches my gaze again and rethinks his response.

"As I told you Gale…the producers love you…all of you. They just feel that Katniss would have a better-"

"No they don't" Thom says plainly and everyone turns to look at him "We aren't stupid, we've seen the papers and magazines and the online articles. Your biggest and most popular boyband has split up because of that guy you told us had quit. Now you want to replace them with us. Katniss would just complicate the pretty-boy, goody two shoe image your last trophy band had so you want to buy her off with a separate deal. Whichever is the biggest hit with the public will be successful and you'll forget about the other soon enough."

James eyes flare but he attempts to keep his temper under control to match Thom's cool tone,

"It isn't like that at all Thomas."

"Yes it is" Darius says, an edge to his voice.

Everybody knows how much Thom despises being called by his full name and Darius is very protective and defensive about anything when it comes to Thom.

"Look. There are plenty of other bands out there!" James' voice rises and his eyes narrow "You should be grateful you are being given this opportunity in the first place!"

The table turns silent, the hustle and bustle surrounding us seems distant as we watch James' face fall as he realise his outburst a little too late.

"We won't change for you" Gale shrugs "Or for anyone. We would be thrilled to work with you, as one band, one group. We aren't leaving anyone behind for the sake of an image. If that makes us less popular than so be it, we don't care. All we care about is each other and that comes before any success we may have if we were to part ways."

Gale sends a smile my way and I return it

He faces James again, "There was never a choice to make. Katniss was the cause for the Rebels, she founded us. The rebels without Katniss is like…a mockingbird without a song. I'm sorry for your wasted time and I'm sorry if our decision stops us from working together now or in the future. Thank you for the offer but unless Katniss is with us every step of the way then we politely decline."

James and Gale stare at one another for approximately five minutes before the older man stands and awkwardly pushes his chair in after him.

"I…I will talk to the produces and those in charge. I might be in contact with you, I might not." His eyes flit to each of us and they stay a second longer on me.
"I never meant to cause offense. I'm just the messenger. If we don't meet again…I hope you are successful in whatever path you go down together"

Without another word, the man who holds our hopes and dreams in his hands walks out the door, most likely never to be seen again.
Short and Long Term Plans

Peeta POV

I inwardly curse my school for its improper heating system as I reluctantly pull my woolly scarf from my neck and throw it into my locker.

This has to be one of the coldest winters we've had in the past few years and it's only the first week of December.

I don't necessarily mind the winter, I like sketching the children who play happily in the snow, I live for the two weeks holidays at the end of December and I especially like the way Katniss looks with her hair hidden under her dark green hat that protects her ears from the cold.

What I hate is that my principal is a cheapskate who would rather see the students suffer than install heaters in the classrooms and hallways.

"Peet? Peeta? Are you even listening to me?"

"Yes Finnick, you were talking about how excited you are for the new Marvel movie. I remember."

"We need to see it ASAP Peet."

I shut my locker and shrug, "We can see it for my birthday if you want, seeing as you keep insisting that I have to do something for it."

Finnick scoffs, "You're about to turn 18! This needs to be celebrated with more than just our regular trips to the cinema. We need to have a party!"

I raise an eyebrow, "I don't want a party."

"Tough."

"I would never be allowed have a party. Or if I were allowed, my mother would forbid half my friends from attending, including you."

Finnick smirks, "I thought about that so I asked if you could have the party at my house."

My eyes widen, "Finnick, you shouldn't have."

"Probably not but it's too late now. Anyway they said yes, so this Saturday we are having a big blowout party for you and you're just going to have to accept it and pretend to have a great time."

Finnick is grinning widely and something tells me he has been planning this for a lot longer than he's letting on.

"Okay" I reluctantly agree "Sure, why not? Thanks Finn."

Wiggling his eyebrows, Finnick replies "What are best friends for?"

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Gale POV
I've always had my life planned out.

Ever since my father died, I wanted my life to mean something.

I knew what I wanted to do and I was determined to do it, no matter what.

I was going to stick with my friends, provide for my family, work as hard as I could before heading west for college after graduation.

There I would make something of myself, I would make my father proud.

I would achieve everything he wanted me to and nothing was going to get in the way of that.

However, life has a way of throwing curveballs into your life at just the right moment to throw your whole world upside down.

Turning down the record deal of a lifetime had certainly not been in my plan.

Achieving almost enough grades to go to college in California was not the plan. I get good grades, just apparently not good enough according to my teachers.

Watching Katniss slowly fall in love with someone took me by surprise. Especially when that someone turned out to be Peeta.

I didn't expect to say hello to people like Delly Cartright almost every day or that boys as intimidating as Thresh would compliment me on my singing because Katniss showed them a video from practise one day.

Though I think the most unexpected turn of events was when I realised that I might like Madge Undersee.

But I can't dwell on that.

I'm still struggling with whether I like her as more than a friend or not.

If I dwell on it, I might do something stupid like tell her how I feel.

No, I think it's a much better idea to keep that piece of information in a box, in the back of my mind for now.

If I have to spend every day trying not to notice the way her blonde hair looks as she pulls it into a loose ponytail in the middle of class, then I will.

I won't notice that the perfume she wears smells faintly like roses and blueberries or the way she bites her lip when she's unsure of something.

I certainly will pay attention in class and not distract myself with how her voice sounded when she whispered my name in Biology to ask if she could borrow a pen.

Okay, maybe I might like her as more than a friend after all.

But I'm not stupid.

Even if Madge did like me like that, school ends in a number of months.

We'll likely never see each other again once high school comes to an end.
It's probably best to pretend that everything is normal.

Because while this could be the best of my life's recent plot twists, it also holds the potential for the most pain.

"Gale?"

I snap out of my self-pity to find the classroom empty and Madge standing in front of my desk, a quizzical expression on her face.

"Gale? Class ended five minutes ago. Come on, it's lunchtime and I'm hungry."

I blink three times before hurriedly shoving all of my belongings into my bag and muttering my apologies.

"It's fine, don't worry about it." Madge smiles brightly at me and I stand.

"Thanks" I swallow "Come on, I want to find out what this news is that half the year has been gossiping about."

I certainly don't notice how close we are as Madge and I walk to the cafeteria.

"Oh didn't you hear? Finnick is throwing Peeta a birthday party on Saturday. It was only arranged this morning but everyone is talking about it. Peeta's sick of it already." Madge laughs lightly and I smile.

"Poor guy, Katniss should be just as enthusiastic. She just adores parties."

Madge snorts, "Oh I remember."

When we reach our table Finnick, Peeta and their gang have joined ours and the conversation is alive with ideas for the party.

"Oh Gale! We were wondering if you'd play at the party Saturday night."

I raise an eyebrow and sit down as Finnick stares eagerly at me.

"Emm I don't know if you'd want that"

"Why not?"

"We don't exactly do...party music."

In the back of my mind I imagine Finnick, Thresh and Peeta drunkenly trying to dance to one of the Rebels' slower songs and I cringe.

"You wouldn't have to play the whole night." Delly intervenes "Maybe an hour or two? Later in the evening. You could just bring your guitar."

The second eyebrow joins the first and I hope my expression is enough for Delly Cartwright to know that I am not putting my guitar at the mercy of reckless, drunk teenagers.

"Maybe" Thom agrees, offering me an understanding nod.

While the others chat about the party, I focus on my food and try to tune the others out.
I succeeded enough to eat most of my lunch until I feel someone's elbow nudge my arm.

I turn and frown at Madge whose face is masked with a look of pure innocence,

"I think you should play at the party you know."

Swallowing my food as subtly as I can, I turn to her, "Oh really?"

Madge smiles, "Yeah, I'd love to hear you play in person. I bet you're amazing."

I vaguely hear a snort from across the table that sounds faintly like Darius but I ignore it.

"I don't know about that." I shrug "I just play guitar mostly and sing a bit. Thom and Katniss do most of the writing."

"Still. I tried to play the guitar when I was younger but I sucked at it."

I laugh, "How can anyone be bad at guitar, you just learn the chords?"

Madge groans, "I know! I just couldn't keep up with the other kids in the class and I could never memorise the chords so after two years my father pulled me out of guitar lessons and pushed me into ballet instead."

"Ballet?" I unconsciously grin too wide as I imagine Madge as a ballerina. Wearing one of those pink tutus, a real one not a make-shift one that Posy used to wear when she was younger, and matching pale pink ballet shoes. Madge's long, wavy blonde hair pulled into a bun as she danced and bounced effortlessly and elegantly around a stage.

Madge blushes, "Yeah. I started when I was nine and I've been doing it ever since."

"Wow, that's impressive."

"Oh shut up." Madge mutters and looks away

"No, I mean it! I imagine it takes a lot of work. I mean…I know absolutely nothing about ballet but it sounds difficult."

"It is but I enjoy it." Madge's eyes meet mine again and they hold a spark that I've never seen before as she talks about her passion. Her blue eyes have brightened somehow and it takes all I have not to let myself get lost in them. "We have a recital in spring, you can come if you'd like but it would probably bore you."

I shake my head, "Don't be ridiculous. Course I'd want to go."

"What? Really?" Genuine shock laces her voice and I realise that Madge possibly has nobody who would offer to go to these things with her. I've only seen her hang out with Katniss in school and Katniss is the last person who would turn up at a ballet recital.

I nod and smile, "Really. Just remind me closer to the time and you can tell me all about it then."

"Eh…yeah of course. Thanks Gale"

The bell sings not a moment later and against my will, Katniss is dragging him to our next class.

It takes everything in me not to look back at the pale blonde with the uncontrollable grin on her face.
Darius POV

The bell rings at the end of lunch and as everyone in the cafeteria stands and heads to class, I walk over to Thom.

"What do we have now?"

Thom frowns, "Math? I think?"

I groan, "Can't we just skip it Thom?"

Thom laughs, "Nope, not happening."

I pout, "Not even for me?"

Thom shakes his head, "Definitely not for you, now come on."

Our math classroom is on the opposite side of the school but Thom and I still walk slowly.

"Strange how our group seems to have grown over the past few months isn't it?"

Slinging my arm lazily over Thom's shoulder, I contemplate his words.

He's right. For the past few weeks our usual group of the Rebels ad Madge has been joined by Peeta and his group of friends.

I don't particularly mind it, we all still only really talk to our own group members anyway but I'm just afraid for Katniss. If she's making friends with Peeta's friends and they break up, it'll be hard on her when they start distancing themselves from her.

"Yeah it has."

"Peeta's nice enough though" Thom says hesitantly

I nod, "Yeah...yeah he seems good for her."

"He looks at her like she's his whole world, he's like a lost puppy." Thom grins.

"Oh he does!" I agree "But that shows he cares so..."

"Yeah that's true."

"You know who else has been looking like a lost puppy these days?"

Thom eyes widen, "Wha-who?"

I smirk, "Gale"

Thom laughs, somewhat nervously, "It hasn't just been me who noticed then?"

"Yes! Oh my god! He never stops staring at her!"

"And she never stops taking glances at him."

"Madge though!" I say "It's mad! I mean she's lovely but I just never thought of them together..."
"I know what you mean. They'd be good together though. If only one of them would make a move."

Thom's careless words cause a spark to ignite in my brain.

"What if we…give them a little push?" I offer slyly

From the corner of my eye, I see creases forming on Thom's forehead and I ignore the itch to gently rub them away.

"What do you mean?"

"Well…at this party that Finnick won't shut up about…what if we…got them together?"

"We are not forcing Gale and Madge to play spin the bottle Darie"

I bite back a grin at the nickname, "I wasn't talking about that-"

"Or 7 minutes in heaven."

"Or that! Would you listen for a moment?"

Thom slows down his pace and sighs, "Go on"

"Right well, here's the plan."

Bending down, I whisper the details of my idea into his ear and when I pull back, his face is thoughtful.

"Well?" I ask anxiously

Thom smirks, "The wannabe love-birds won't know what hit them."

I grin but before I can respond, Thom has grabbed my hand and is practically running through the halls.

"Come on! We're almost ten minutes late for class!"

I laugh as I realise we had been the only ones in the hallways for the past five minutes.

I guess I hadn't noticed.
Birthday Blowout (Part 1)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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*Text Alert*

From Katniss: Help

From Thom: With what?

From Katniss: I don't know what to get Peeta for his birthday

From Thom: I thought you already got him something?

From Katniss: Well it's his 18th so I kind of want to get him something else…

From Thom : Awww

From Katniss: Shut up and help me!

From Thom: I don't know, I doubt he'll care, just make out with him the whole time at his party and he'll be happy

From Katniss: That's what Darius said

From Thom : Great minds think alike

From Katniss: I'll ask Madge

From Thom: Good idea

...

Peeta POV

"What do you mean you're going to Finnick's?"

I pour milk into my cereal while my mother shrills from across the kitchen.

"Finnick asked me to his house. I said yes."

"It's your birthday!"

I swallow, I don't know whether to be grateful she remembered or sickened that this is how she wishes me a happy birthday.

"Exactly, it's a birthday celebration for me."

"Why would he do that?" My mother sneers as she fixes her already perfect hair in the mirror.

"Because he's a kind person and my friend." I say as I sit at the kitchen table and begin eating my breakfast.
She huffs but doesn't speak again until her blonde hair is tied into a tight bun and she finally faces me,

"It's what you want?"

I look up but aside from her words, her face shows no sign of care for what I actually want.

"Yes."

My mother sighs in despair and hurries around the kitchen for her keys, wallet and handbag.

It's Saturday morning, she's getting ready for shopping and lunch with her friends.

"Will she be there?"

Her familiar emphasis on the word 'she' informs me that she's not talking about Delly or Annie.

"Yes Katniss will be there."

My mother opens her mouth to most likely go on her usual rant but she is interrupted by my father rushing through the door.

"Peeta! Happy Birthday son!" I smile and stand from the table as my father envelops me in a hug,

"Thank God, I thought I missed you!"

We part and I notice my mother leaving but I choose not to say anything about it.

"No but I'll leave for Finnick's after breakfast to help him set up."

Dad nods but doesn't seem to really be listening.

"Here" Dad passes me a bag and I raise my eyebrows, "Your present, it's not much but-"

"Dad! You didn't need to get me anything."

Dad brushes it off,

"It's not wrapped or anything, you can open it later but I have to go. I'm really sorry but there are loads of weddings coming up and-"

"Dad!" I raise my voice but stay smiling "Thank you, I'm sure I'll love it. Now really, go. I'm fine."

Dad looks a little unsure but pats my arm, goes to the stairwell to yell at Rye to "wake the hell up" before apologising again and leaving for the bakery.

Finishing my breakfast, I drop dad's present in my room without opening it, grab my phone and hurry out the door before Rye has the chance to wake and tease me mercilessly.

...

"Just how many people did you invite Finnick?" Annie asks as she stumbles to regain her balance when she hops down off the ladder.

Finnick quickly dashes across the room to help her upright again and kisses her on the head tenderly,

"Only people we like…"
Delly groans, "Finnick you like everyone."

"Not…everyone."

Delly, Thresh and I snort while Annie just kisses him on the cheek.

Katniss shakes her head and asks Finnick what she can do next.

"Oh great! Could you get the food? I've most of it bought but there's still one or two bits we need from the shop. I made a list on the counter."

Katniss nods, "Yeah of course."

"I'll go with her." I say as I stick up the last of the fairy lights.

Finnick sends a smirk my way but he thankfully doesn't say anything about it.

I walk over to Katniss, grab the list and then her hand and we leave the others to it.

Things have been good between Katniss and I so far.

We've gone out on a few dates, we talk every day and we trust each other.

We're comfortable around one another and that's really all I could have asked for.

"So are you looking forward to your party?" Katniss asks as we walk to the store.

"Yeah I think so. It'll be nice, something different."

Katniss laughs, "Different? I know for a fact that all the girls in our year invite you to their house parties."

"It doesn't mean I go to them." I squeeze her hand gently "I used to go with Finn when we were younger just to satisfy him but once he and Annie got together there was no point. They'd be making out in a corner and I'd be left with too many people that I didn't know so I stopped going."

"You poor thing" Katniss teases

"I know" I sigh dramatically

"I did get you a present by the way but I wanted to give it to you later at the party."

I smile at her, "Thank you, you didn't have to."

Katniss rolls her eyes, "Course I did now stop being so modest we have to buy-.". She checks the list "chips, frozen pizza, soda and- beer? How are we supposed to get beer, Finnick knows you're 18 not 21 right?"

I wink at her, "Finnick has a friend."

Katniss shakes her head and mumbles something under her breath before kissing my cheek and heading to the right side of the store while I go to the left.

This party should definitely be different alright.

...
By 11 o clock that night the party is in full swing.

Half the guests are drunk, most of the couples are kissing and empty beer cans and paper plates are scattered on every surface but I'm just thankful that none of Finnick's family things have been broken yet.

Thankfully Finnick doesn't live close enough to anyone to disturb his neighbours with our loud and cheesy music.

Gale begrudgingly brought his guitar but he insisted that Finnick lock it in his room.

I sit on the couch, lazily running my fingers through Katniss's hair while she talks to Annie who is sitting quite comfortably in Finnick's lap in the armchair beside us.

"So what do you think then?" Finnick asks, quirking an eyebrow at me "Did I do a good job?"

I look around, the fairy lights shine above the mirror, there are multicoloured banners and balloons stuck to the walls and the stairs that loudly scream my age to whoever notices them and so far nobody has thrown a punch or thrown up.

So for a High School house party I'd say that's pretty good.

"Excellent Finn" I grin "Truly excellent"

Katniss sniggers and sups innocently from her coke can when Finnick narrows his eyes at her.

"Do you disagree Everdeen?"

Katniss shakes her head and hiccups, "Certainly not."

I kiss her head gently, partly to be romantic, partly to stifle my laugh.

If I didn't know any better, I'd say Katniss was drunk, but she hasn't drank anything except coca cola all evening.

Hyper then.

A hyper Katniss Everdeen, that should definitely be different.

Annie bursts out laughing at something that Finnick says before nuzzling his neck in embarrassment.

Now Annie on the other hand is at least tipsy.

Katniss giggles and leans her head back to look up at me.

"Hey"

"Hi" I smile down at her "You okay?"

She nods, "Of course, I'm happy. You're happy. We're all happy!"

I grin, "I'm glad."

"What about you?" Concern flickers in Katniss's eyes and I can't help but feel comforted, "You're not regretting agreeing to this party are you?"

And miss hyper, excited, giggling Katniss? Definitely not.
I don't tell her that though

"It's great." I say instead "Really, I'm glad Finnick convinced me-"

"Hear that guys!?" Finnick shouts over me "Peeta's glad I persuaded him to have this party! Achievement!"

I roll my eyes but blood rushes to my cheeks at the cheers and hollers that answer him.

Katniss abruptly sits up and throws her legs onto the floor.

"I'm going to get another can from the kitchen and look around for the guys. Be back in a minute."

I do my best not to pout.

I really do.

"You want me to come with?" I ask, looking up at her when she stands.

She laughs and leans down to kiss my forehead before straightening up again, "I'm fine. Socialise with your guests. It's your day, enjoy it."

I smile and I watch as she walks into the hallway.

Twenty minutes later, I'm chatting to two guys, Blight and Bristol who are on the football team when I hear the loud, shattering sound come from the kitchen.

My eyes widen and I take a quick glance around the sitting room.

Katniss never came back.

...

Katniss POV

After spending a few minutes talking to Gale, Darius and Thom, I head for the kitchen.

Dumping my empty soda can in the bin, I open the refrigerator door with the hopes that not all the good drinks have gone by now.

"Need a hand?" A condescending voice asks from behind me and I turn sharply, cursing my hunter reflexes for being off their game.

Especially when Cato Hunter is standing right in front of me

I stifle a gasp at how close he is and try to swallow down the fear building in my stomach.

"I'm fine. Thank you." I say with little to no emotion in my voice.

Cato laughs but it comes out cold with no humour attached,

"Where's the birthday boy?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Em. It's his birthday. I was invited." Cato says slowly as if talking to a rather stupid child.
I step to the side and try to put some space between us, "Who the hell invited you?"

"Why Katniss I'm hurt. I only came to wish your boyfriend a happy birthday."

"Well I'll tell him so you can go now."

Cato steps towards me, I look away but I can feel how close he is by his disgusting breath on my face.

"Well there was something else I wanted to talk to your lover boy about."

His fingers slide along my arm and I shiver.

His hand is ice cold against my bare skin and I curse my decision to wear the button up top with no sleeves that Peeta thinks is pretty.

"Don't touch me." I demand.

Cato simply cocks an eyebrow and only grins more as he continues to trail his fingers up and down my arms.

"I just wanted to ask you about Peeta, seeing as you won't tell me where he is then I'll just have to have this little chat with you instead."

Peeta.

The name sets a fire in my veins and I meet Cato's eyes that glint with something predatory and dangerous.

Bringing my hands up to his chest, he smirks for a split second until I use them to shove him hard into the counter behind him.

I hear the sound of shattering glass and dread overpowers me. I hope I didn't break anything important.

"You bitch!"

Cato's eyes are dark and he growls threateningly at me.

I back up towards the door but it doesn't stop him from stalking towards me with his teeth gritted together and pure hatred in his eyes.

"Just-"

I'm interrupted by a gentle hand on my shoulder, I jump but quickly realise that it's just Peeta.

Peeta.

He rubs his thumb on my shoulder reassuringly but when I turn my head, his eyes are focused solely on Cato.

"Is there a problem?" He asks and I've never heard him sound so detached.

Cato straightens his back, his eyes are focused on Peeta now but the hatred hasn't left his face.

"Peeta. Just the man I wanted to see."
Peeta raises his eyebrows but otherwise, his face remains expressionless.

"I don't remember inviting you Cato." Finnick's voice this time, appearing on my other side and standing half in front of me.

Normally I would despise the act of protection but there is something in Cato's eyes that I don't like.

"You didn't." Cato eyes flicker to Finnick before back to Peeta "Mrs. Mellark did."

I shut my eyes for a second and curse Peeta's mother to hell and back.

I'm not even surprised.

"Well that wasn't her call I'm afraid so I must ask you to leave." Finnick says, standing his ground.

Something tells me that he and Cato have been here before because Finnick clearly has no problem standing up to him and something shifts in Cato's demeanour when Finnick speaks to him.

Cato looks at me and I glare at him.

I want to yell at him, show him that he can't push me around, that I don't need two boys to protect me from him.

But it's late and it's my boyfriend's party so I really can't be bothered to cause even more of a scene right now.

"Goodbye Cato." I say drily.

He clenches his jaw and pushes roughly past us. A minute later we hear the front door slam shut and we know he is gone.

Unconsciously I feel myself lean back into Peeta and sigh.

"Thanks guys" I whisper

Finnick scoffs as he moves about the kitchen, "Please. I heard you shatter my mother's favourite bowl. I had to come out and stop you before you broke anything else. Or punched him. Punching Cato Hunter wouldn't be a good idea."

"You'd know." Peeta teases from behind me but I hardly hear him.

"Your mother's favourite...oh Finnick I-"

Finnick laughs, "Kidding Katniss. I've been at enough of these to know what to hide out of sight and what I can afford to leave lying about." He brushes the pieces of broken glass from the counter into a shovel and dumps it in the bin, "I always hated that thing anyway."

I smile and when I feel Peeta press a soft kiss to my neck, my smile widens.

"Are you alright?"

I nod and turn to him.

"Yeah I'm fine. He just wanted to talk to you but then he started touching my arm and wouldn't stop so..." I shrug
Peeta smiles and kisses my cheek,
"That's all?"

"That's all." I promise

He leans his forehead against mine for a minute before pulling away, "Good. I won't kill him then. You want another coca cola?"

Peeta moves towards the fridge and I laugh, "Maybe something stronger."

...

Finnick POV

I decide to leave the two lovebirds in the kitchen and I walk back to the sitting room, casting a cautious eye around the place on the way, making sure nothing else is broken.

Annie is still sitting in the armchair and is talking to Madge who has taken Peeta's seat on the couch.

I bite back a smile.

Annie is wearing a stunning sea-green dress that comes just above her knees. Her heels are small, white and the small beads on them glint in the fairy lights when she crosses her legs.

She looks just as beautiful as always.

Annie spots me out of the corner of her eye and even before I reach her she stands and gestures for me to sit down. This has been our routine for over a year now and I love how it never gets old.

I sit and gently bring her down to sit on my lap, our arms wrapping around each other like we have done a hundred times before.

Annie intertwines our fingers and continues talking to Madge.

"Well I think you should just go for it." Annie says in her matter of fact tone and that makes me smile.

"No, no I really shouldn't." Madge insists.

"Why not?"

"Because it's a bad idea!"

Annie scoffs, "How so? What's the worst he could say?"

"He wouldn't have to say anything. He could just laugh at me."

I try not to listen in.

Thresh isn't anywhere around to talk to so I happily play with Annie's hair.

Parting her hair and twisting strands so I can plait it down her back.

Don't ask me where I learned this talent because I don't even know myself.

Back in District 4, I used to tie knots all the time on the beach. It was different from the sandcastles
and the swimming and it came in handy when my dad went fishing. That might be where it originated.

Though I don't think Annie would be too pleased if I tied her long auburn hair into knots.

"Finn? What do you think?"

I look up into Annie's bright eyes,

"About what love?"

One of Annie's arms is draped over my shoulder, her hand at the back of my neck and I try not to tremble as her expert fingers thread through the sensitive hair there.

"Madge wants to ask Gale Hawthorne out on a date."

"I do not! Shut up Annie!"

"Course you do. You're just scared he doesn't like you back."

Madge opens her mouth to protest but instead she sighs and leans back into the couch.

"Yeah..."

Annie grins in triumph and turns to me, "So? What do you think Finn? Should she go for it or not?"

I love Annie.

I really do and I've no hesitation about it. I never have.

But if she thinks I'd have any idea on what Gale Hawthorne's feelings are then she may have drank a small bit much.

I indulge her anyway.

Because I'm an amazing, helpful, supportive boyfriend.

Plus she looks really, really pretty with her hair pulled back in the plait I did and I'm trying really hard not to stare at her exposed neck.

"Eh" I try and be polite and turn to Madge who is looking at me with wide doe eyes, "Well do you like him like that?"

Madge takes a sip from her cider and nods bashfully.

"Well then, go for it. What's the worst that can happen?"

Madge laughs and then splutters when she gets cider up her nose.

"What?" I ask when Annie starts giggling too.

"Nothing!" Annie insists and she leans her head against my neck

"You two are just way more alike than I anticipated." Madge mutters, rubbing her nose.

"Oh..." I say, even though I don't fully understand.
Annie's still giggling into my shoulder and I kiss the side of her head.

"But I think you should go for it Madge. Gale's a decent guy and I think he likes you." I continue

That's not even a lie. Every time I see them at lunch, they are always talking or looking at each other.

"Yeah?" Madge asks, her voice dripping with hope.

I'm only half paying attention now because Annie has started pressing subtle kisses up my neck and yeah she definitely drank more than I thought she did.

"Eh- yeah. Really. Plus if he doesn't then he's an idiot. And he doesn't seem like an idiot so..."

My voice catches in my throat and I clench my fists, reminding myself that sober Annie would never do this in public so I can't encourage her.

"So you could maybe bring it up with him that you like him as more than a friend and see what happens."

Madge is silent for a few minutes before she starts nodding enthusiastically,

"Yeah. Yeah. You're right. Thanks Finnick."

Annie lifts her head from her solace in my neck and we both watch in surprise as she stands, downs her drink and walks, well more like stumbles, out of the room to find Gale Hawthorne.

I laugh softly and turn to Annie who is grinning,

"Thanks for that."

I kiss her nose, "Anytime."

My eyes catch sight of Madge's empty drink and I frown, "Just how much did she have to drink to get the courage to do this?"

Annie bites back a smirk, "Emmmm...a few drinks?"

I raise an eyebrow

"No more than me!" Annie insists, grinning.

"That's very comforting" I say sarcastically but instead of swatting me like she usually would, she just grins.

"She'll be fine. I've caught Gale staring at her a few times. They'll be fine."

I nod and pull her closer, "Okay good."

Annie bumps her nose against mine gently, "What happened in the kitchen? Was there a fight?"

I shake my head and lean my head into hers,

"Doesn't matter." I murmur before pressing my lips to hers.

And just like that I forget all thoughts of stupid Cato Hunter, shattered glass and Madge Undersee's complicated love-life.
All that's left is the beautiful girl in my arms that kisses like sin and I'm perfectly content with that.

... 

Chapter End Notes

Part 1 of Peeta's birthday! Please let me know what you think!!
Birthday Blowout (Part 2)

... Gale POV

How I ended up at one of Finnick Odair's house parties is beyond me.

It's for Peeta's birthday and Katniss made it clear that she expected us all to be there. I don't know why, we knew she'd spend most of the night with him anyway. Not that we mind but parties aren't exactly our scene.

Darius has spent the past hour trying to fend off a girl that won't stop flirting with him while Thom watches on in amusement.

I wind up having a conversation with Delly Cartwright about our future careers.

Yeah. Very interesting party topic.

But it surprises me when she tells me that she wants to go into business.

I can't quite imagine the bubbly, eccentric Delly Cartwright in board-meetings with clean-cut men and women in suits and ties but when she elaborates on what course she wants and why she wants it, I think she'd make a great businesswoman.

I'm telling her the story about how I started playing guitar when I feel someone come up behind me and tap me on the shoulder.

It's Madge.

"Gale? Can I talk to you for a minute?"

My immediate thought is definitely, of course, yes but then I think of Delly and I know it would be far too impolite to abandon her in the middle of our conversation.

However when I glance back at her, Delly has a massive grin on her face and is nodding encouragingly.

"Go, go." She pushes, before I can say anything "I've lost Thresh anyway. Talk to you later Gale, bye Madge."

I think I spot Delly sending Madge a wink as she heads down the hallway but I can't be sure.

I lean against the banister of the stairs and face Madge.

She's wearing baby blue high waisted jeans, a pale pink crop top and white converse shoes. I think she curled her hair because they fall in ringlets that frame her face more so than usual.

She looks amazing.

She wrings her hands and I smile at her.

"Is everything okay Madge?"

"Huh?" Her eyes flicker between each of mine "Yeah, yeah I just..."
She hesitates for a moment before stepping closer so we are only inches apart. I freeze.

Madge takes a deep breath and in a split second her long fingers have clutched the front of my shirt and she's pulling me down to her height.

I can't seem to breathe.

The air that smelled of beer and stale pizza a second ago now smells of expensive rose perfume and make up.

I can't breathe.

But that doesn't seem to matter because the last thing I see is Madge Undersee's crystal blue eyes before she shuts them, steps even closer and kisses me.

It takes me a minute to react.

I close my eyes and my mind shuts down.

I hear the whoops and hollers from the people around us, cheering us on as if this were any of their business. I can feel the cold beer can that's still in my hand and the strands of Madge's hair that brush against my cheek.

But I ignore all of that and I focus on Madge.

Madge who tastes like cheap beer, chapped lips and salted chips and that shouldn't be a good thing but it really, really is.

Something clicks inside my brain then and suddenly the can in my hand has fallen to the floor and my hands are clutching either side of her waist, pulling her towards me and I start kissing her back properly.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I hear the crash of the beer can as it meets the ground, can feel the alcohol pouring onto the floor and onto my shoes but I really, really couldn't care less.

...

Madge POV

I'm kissing Gale Hawthorne.

I kissed Gale.

He's kissing me back.

Fuck.

I should have regretted it the second I done it but everything about it just felt so right.

He didn't respond for a minute and dread was beginning to pool in my stomach until I felt his strong hands on my waist pulling me towards him and he finally kissed me back.

I know this probably isn't a good idea.

He mightn't even like me back, he could pull away any second now, throw me a disgusted stare and never speak to me again.
But right now I can't find it in me to care.

... 

Gale POV

I don't know how long we stay like that, embraced in the tight hallway by the stairs but sooner or later we both accept that we need to come up for air.

I break the kiss, cursing myself for panting slightly while I lean my forehead against hers. We open our eyes, worry and fear flicker prominently in hers so I try and reassure her with a smile. When we finally catch our breath, Madge whispers

"I'm sorry..."

"It's alright."

It was more than alright but I felt it wasn't appropriate to tell her how I've been wanting to do that ever since senior year started in the middle of a hallway in Finnick Odair's house.

"No, I shouldn't have just kissed you like that, it wasn't-" I cut her off by gently brushing my lips over hers. It was supposed to be a simple chaste kiss but we didn't pull back until ten minutes later. I laugh under my breath and smile down at her,

"There. Now we're even."

... 

Katniss POV

After the incident in the kitchen, Peeta and I head to the garden.

It's dark and cool because of the early December night but the stars are out and fairy-lights dangle from the stone walls surrounding us.

There are a few people sitting on the grass or leaning against the wall but Peeta and I choose to sit in the fold out deck chairs that we laid out earlier.

We lie there for a while, staring at the pitch black sky illuminated with stars. Every once in a while Peeta's thumb will brush over the back of my hand and I'll smile. It still surprises me how we are here. How we are still together even after everything.

It shocks me how Peeta has stayed with me over the past few months. Even as he begins to find out the things about me that I hate, the things that only Gale knows.

The trivial things like how I've to constantly watch out for my sister, the scarier things such as my mother and her mental illness and how some days it feels like she doesn't recognise me at all and the personal things like the nightmares of my father's death and my anxiety that always seems to
constantly be there except when I'm singing or playing an instrument.

He listens.

Not like Gale listens because Gale will smile, pat my hand or hug me and then after making sure I'm okay he'll distract me with new music or a rant about something he feels passionate about.

Peeta...Peeta takes my hand and hugs me too. He makes sure I'm okay as well but he also asks me more about whatever the subject is.

He talks to me about it, he reassures me that I'm not stupid or over-dramatic or pathetic.

He helps.

He really helps.

I haven't told him everything.

He doesn't know how bad the nightmares are, how I used to get panic attacks all the time when I started high school by simply walking down the hall and listening to the Careers' taunts and he doesn't really know just how damaged my mother is, though I'm sure he suspects.

It works both ways too.

We talk about his mother. How he genuinely thinks his parents might get a divorce one of these days and how he secretly hopes they do.

He tells tales of his brother Rye and how he never fails to make Peeta's life a living hell.

Normal brotherly behaviour but sometimes Peeta is sick of being taken advantage of.

He tells me about Cato.

About the threats he's made, how he showed up at his house one day and talked about us.

He told her why they stopped being friends.

What the final straw was in their friendship and how Peeta knows Cato will never forgive him for leaving the Careers behind in favour of Finnick, Delly and Thresh.

Those moments are nice, the quiet moments where we reveal little bits of ourselves to one another for the first time.

It's strangely intimate and new because I never talk about my problems or my past.

I only talked to Gale because he was always there and he was so close to my family and I that he knew everything already.

I never expected this at all but I love it all the same.

"Peeta?" I say quietly and he turns his head to face me, his blue eyes shining in the moonlight.

"Yeah Kat?"

"Happy Birthday"

Peeta grins, "Thanks love"
"Do you want your present now?" I ask

Peeta sits up, "Well I don't know, is it appropriate for you to give me it here?"

He wiggles his eyebrows and I swat him, "Yes it is, you idiot, now wait here."

It takes me less than a minute to retrieve his present that Finnick let me hide in his room and bring it back downstairs.

On my way I spot a very cosy looking Madge and Gale and the surge of happiness I feel surprises me.

I walk past them and don't say a word, they don't notice me and I'm glad.

I'm happy once they're happy.

It's a shame it took me so long to fully accept that.

I grab my jacket on the way out and tug it on, I don't mind the cold but if I'm going to be staying out there for a while then I'd prefer to stay warm.

There are only two other couples left outside with us when I return and neither of them are paying any attention to us.

I slide into my deckchair and Peeta grins, his eyes wide in wonder and anticipation.

My heart flutters. He looks every bit of a young child on Christmas morning.

I hand him the bag, it's not one of those fancy birthday bags that you buy with glitter and decorations on it. It's plain and simple but it is orange which Peeta loves and why must a bag have to be fancy anyway? It's not like that's part of the present.

"Here you go...I hope you like it. My friends were pretty rubbish with the advice so I was kind of left to my own devices so sorry if you hate it."

Peeta rolls his eyes, "Kat, I'm sure I'll love it. Seriously you don't need to worry."

He carefully removes the present from the bag.

I wrapped the present pretty badly too but Peeta doesn't seem to care.

I'm not at all surprised that Peeta is one of those people who carefully removes the wrapping paper bit by bit until it's all gone and then he puts it into the bag. As if he's going to use it again.

I gulp as he looks down at what I got him.

I wish I could have gotten him something better.

I spent the past few weekends looking in the local art stores, trying to find him something worthy and something he will actually use until finally I found something last Saturday.

"Katniss..." Peeta looks up from his gift to my eyes, "Is this..."

I swallow and pray I got the right set, "I remembered you complaining about your pencils a while ago. I bought a few for you but then there was a special set especially for sketching. I knew you wanted to experiment more with that so I though they might help you out. I hope they're the right
ones. There's normal ones and colouring pencils in it too. I kept the receipt anyway if they-

Peeta cuts me off by surging forward and kissing me deeply.

A moan escapes me in my surprise but I instantly kiss him back.

My fingers tangle in his hair and I smile as I gently drag my fingers through it.

Finnick had the ridiculously stupid idea of putting gel in Peeta's hair tonight.

He still looks gorgeous of course but I personally prefer it natural when it's that tiny bit curly and falls in front of his eyes when he looks down.

So I appreciate this chance to ruffle it back to normal.

Peeta catches on to what I'm doing soon enough as he breaks the kiss and starts laughing,

"You don't like the gel huh?"

I smile shyly, "I do but I just...prefer your natural hair. It's more you."

Peeta shakes his head in supposed despair but nudges his nose playfully with mine.

"There eh...there's something else under the pencil set by the way." I murmur and Peeta pulls back, sitting back down again.

"Oh, you really didn't have to get me anything else-

"Just...see what I got you first" I suggest and I try to hide my fidgeting by putting my hands in my jacket pockets.

Peeta sticks the pencils in the bag and he opens the box that contains his other present painfully slowly.

It's a wooden A4 photo frame and inside it there's a painting I found that a local artist did years ago of the meadow.

In the photo, the meadow looks beautiful and bright, it's a place of happiness and peace.

A place that Peeta and I have gone to more than once since we started dating, a place we both love.

There are two children dancing in the middle of the grass while a man and woman sit by the trees and watch them.

It caught my eye a week or two ago and I couldn't resist buying it for him.

"I know you could paint something much better but..."

Peeta traces his fingertips lightly over the glass that shields the picture,

"I love it."

His eyes meet mine and he smiles genuinely, "I really do, thanks so much Katniss."

I smile and settle back in the chair again, staring up at the night sky,

"Happy birthday Peeta."
I feel his hand grasp mine and I squeeze back

"Best birthday by far." he whispers

...

Peeta POV

When the clouds cover the stars and the bitter cold sweeps the air, Katniss and I decide to head inside.

Most of the guests seem to be making their way towards the door anyway.

Finnick and I stand at the door, thanking our peers for coming, helping the intoxicated ones with their coats and calling taxis for those who need them.

I spot Gale and Madge helping to clean up and I can't help but notice their entwined hands.

Katniss is watching them as well, when Gale catches her gaze he sends her a look that clearly reads, 'Is this okay?'

She simply grins and winks at him.

I suppose that's a good sign.

By 2 am most of the clean up is done so we crash in the sitting room.

Finnick and Annie sit on one end of the couch, resting against one another while Thom and Darius whisper to each other on the other side.

Thresh and Delly sit against the wall going through their phones.

Gale and Madge are entwined in one of the armchairs while Katniss and I sit in the other.

We sit there for about half an hour, all of us content with the peace and quiet after the past few hours of booming noise.

Then the spell is broken,

"Hey Gale? Are you gonna play something for us then?"

All of our eyes turn to Delly.

Gale's eyes widen, "Emm I don't think so-"

"Aw why not?" Finnick asks smirking.

Gale throws him a dirty look.

"I thought we were enjoying the quiet?" Gale retorts

"You don't have to if you don't want to" Annie says sleepily "But if you want to then I think we'd like to hear you...and the others of course."

I feel Katniss straighten up a bit and I smile into her hair,
"Whatever you guys want love" I whisper into her ear and I bite back a grin at her shiver. Thom and Darius glance at each other before shrugging. "We don't mind."

Gale looks from them to Katniss before sighing, "I'll be back in a minute."

Sliding Madge off his lap gently, he goes to get his guitar for Finnick's room.

I think I hear him whisper a "Thank you" to Katniss when he passes us but I can't be sure.

We all waken up a bit and listen as the four of them softly sing a few of their songs.

Katniss sings quieter than the others but I can hear her clearly because of how close we are.

Her voice is softer when she sings. Lighter somehow.

I close my eyes and let myself listen to the strum of the guitar and the way their voices mix perfectly together as they sing the songs they know so well.

Ironically I give in to a blissful sleep during Gale's acoustic version of 'Happy Birthday'...

Gale POV

If I weren't so exhausted I would laugh at the fact that half the people are asleep by the time I finish strumming to happy birthday, even Peeta.

Madge sits on the armrest now because of the guitar but even I can feel her breathing growing swallow against my neck.

Thom and I exchange looks and silently agree that it's time for us all to head home.

Gathering our things, waking each other up, placing my guitar ever so gently back into its case, we quietly bid goodbye to those still awake.

Katniss kisses Peeta's forehead lovingly before grabbing her bag from the ground and heading into the hallway too, leaving Peeta, Finnick, Annie, Delly and Thresh to it.

Katniss, Madge, Thom, Darius and I all grab our coats from the cloakroom and quietly head into the cool night air.

Madge and I should probably talk about what we are.

We didn't get much chance between the kissing, the cleaning and the singing to actually discuss what we were doing.

All I know is that whatever this is, I hope it's not a drunken one night thing.

We walk Madge home first and she bashfully kisses my cheek before heading inside.

I know if it wasn't so late the others would rightfully tease me the whole way back to the Seam but we are all so exhausted that they can't find the energy.

The orange glow of the streetlights are our only guide home as the clouds have blocked the stars and the moon from our eyes.
Thom and Darius lean against one another and mumble goodnights as they turn down the road to their houses.

Katniss and I continue our walk down our road and I remember that Prim is staying in our house tonight.

"Are you okay going home?" I ask "You can always stay at mine if you want."

Katniss shakes her head, "Thanks but I should check on mum anyway."

I nod in understanding, already I'm dreading waking up to the excruciating noise of Posy and Vick running around and playing in the morning so I don't blame Katniss for preferring to go home.

We reach Katniss's door and she lets herself in,

"You want to stay here or are you okay getting home?"

I smile, "I'll be fine."

Katniss nods and before I know what's happening she's stepped forward and her arms are wrapped around me in a familiar, warm hug.

"I'm happy for you" She whispers and as quickly as she moved towards me, she moves away.

"Night Gale"

"Night Captnip"

The door closes and I smile all the way home.

As I climb into bed twenty minutes later, I text Katniss that I got home safe otherwise she'd kill me.

As I drift off to sleep I hope that in the morning I still feel these stupid butterflies that are currently swirling around my stomach at the thought of Made Undersee and that first kiss.

...
Gale POV

When I first wake up from my slumber, my first thought is that I hate my little brother.

I can clearly hear him singing along to that stupid Just Dance game Katniss bought him at a second hand store last year and I wonder why on earth a ten year old boy would get up at such an hour just to dance along to a screen.

But when I check my phone, I realise that it's half 11 and I should probably have been up hours ago.

I swing my legs over the bed and stand up.

My eyes go hazy and my head feels lightheaded so I sit back down again.

I groan, partly in annoyance, partly in pain.

Why on Earth did Darius have to be right about me being a lightweight?

After about five minutes I feel well enough to stand so I go through the usual morning routine, bathroom, shower, get changed and then head down to breakfast.

It's only when I'm stumbling down the stairs that I remember a memory of my hands in pretty blonde hair, sparkling blue eyes staring into mine and giggling, chapped lips kissing mine.

Madge.

"Gale? Everything okay?"

I blink and find Prim at the bottom of the stairs, watching me with worry in her eyes.

Lost in my thoughts, I had forgotten to keep walking down the stairs.

Hungover and lovesick. I could write a song about that.

Speeding down the stairs, I land in front of her and nod more than my poor head is able for.

"Yeah. Good thanks. Just a long night."

Prim doesn't let up her frown but she thankfully doesn't press the issue,

"Okay…were there many people there?"

We make our way into the kitchen and I put on two slices of toast, thanking god that my siblings didn't eat all the bread.

"Oh yeah loads. But I just stuck with Thom and Darius so I was fine."

'And Madge' I think to myself 'You were with her too'

Grinning as I fetch the butter from the fridge, I turn the conversation back to Prim.
"So what about you? What did you get up to last night?"

"Just the usual movie marathon."

"Oh what was it this week?" I grab the knife from the drawer

"Harry Potter."

"Oh lovely, my favourite wizard."

Prim giggles just as my toast pops up and the sound of both at the same time causes my head to throb but I ignore it.

I butter both slices and put them on a plate.

Holding out the plate to my surrogate sister I ask, "You want one?"

She shakes her head, "No thanks I'm good. I better head home anyway. Katniss might worry" Prim rolls her eyes and I hide my smirk by taking a bite of my toast.

"See you Prim."

"Bye Galey!"

Rory rushes out of the sitting room to say goodbye to her and I can think of a million teasing comments to say but instead I focus on my toast.

I take my phone out of sweatpants pocket and scroll through the pictures people have posted online from last night.

There are several sets of people posting pictures of their outfits with cheesy captions that cause me to snort into my water.

Darius posted three pictures, one of the two of us and Thom before we went out and I grimace at how annoyed I look in it, there's one he took of the fairy lights and I can see Katniss and Peeta in that picture and then there's one of Thom laughing, most likely at that girl who wouldn't leave Darius alone last night.

Delly posted at least twenty photos, half of them selfies with people I didn't even know were there, there were a few pictures she took of Finnick and Annie who were 'couple goals' as she captioned and there was even a picture she took with me that I honestly can't remember being taken.

Thankfully none of the photos are too bad or incriminating so I happily shut down the app and see I got a text message.

From Madge Undersee: Morning

I gulp down a mouthful of water and try and settle the nerves flying rapidly in my stomach.

From Gale Hawthorne: Hey

She doesn't respond for a few minutes and in that time, I distract myself with cleaning up the dishes and checking on Vick and Rory in the sitting room.

"Where's Posy and Mum?"
"Shopping" they respond at the same time

I nod and sit beside Rory who is unsurprisingly also on his phone.

I snigger, "She just left Roar, do you have to text her right away?"

His eyes shoot to me and his eyes widen in unnecessary alarm, "How did you know I was texting Prim?"

I laugh, "You aren't very subtle."

Just then my phone bings.

"Well who is that then?" he pesters

"None of your business," I stand, knowing that if I stay he won't let the subject go.

"That's not fair!"

"Sorry" I tease and ruffle his hair

"Hey!"

Ignoring his protest, I go into the hallway and read the message,

From Madge Undersee: You want to maybe meet up today? To talk about last night.

No matter what Rory tells you, I did not grin like a madman at that message.

From Gale Hawthorne: Yeah sure, what time suits you?

From Madge Undersee: Well are you busy now?

I stick my head back into the sitting room,

"Will you two be alright if I head out for an hour or so?"

Vick doesn't even look at me as he dances along to one of Taylor Swift's faster songs, "Sure"

"Where are you going?" Rory asks instead of answering, narrowing his eyes at me

"Out with the guys. Now I'll see you later. Be good."

From Gale Hawthorne: Nope
From Madge Undersee: You want to meet in the square? We can go for a walk? Maybe get some coffee or something

I'm already putting my coat on and covering up the leftover smell of last night with cologne.

From Gale Hawthorne: Be there in 15. I'll meet you by the statue

From Madge Undersee: Okay :)

Running a hand through my hair, I stick my house keys in my pocket, yell goodbye to my brothers and hurriedly leave for the town square.

...

*Text Alert*

From Primrose Everdeen: Katniss is wearing that stupid grin on her face that she gets after she has seen Peeta and its weird

From Rory Hawthorne: LOL I know, something must have happened at that party, Gale's been acting strange too

From Primrose Everdeen: He seemed a bit off when I saw him but I just thought he was hungover

From Rory Hawthorne: Probably, maybe they got high and it's only setting in now?

From Primrose Everdeen: That doesn't sound like Gale and Katniss

From Rory Hawthorne: Anything can happen at a Mellark party

From Primrose Everdeen: I think it was in Finnick Odair's house actually

From Rory Hawthorne: Even worse

From Primrose Everdeen: Rory!

From Rory Hawthorne: It's true...

From Primrose Everdeen: Did you tell Gale?

From Rory Hawthorne: Tell him what?

From Primrose Everdeen: About what happened last night?

From Rory Hawthorne: What? That we ate all his chocolate? No but I'll just go to the shop in awhile and buy him more.
From Primrose Everdeen: No! That we kissed you idiot!

From Rory Hawthorne: I'm not an idiot!

From Primrose Everdeen: Hmm

From Rory Hawthorne: No of course I didn't. Why? Did you tell Katniss?

From Primrose Everdeen: No...I don't really want to either

From Rory Hawthorne: Why? Do you regret it?

From Primrose Everdeen: No it's just that she'll make a big deal out of it

From Rory Hawthorne: Same with Gale

From Primrose Everdeen: Maybe we should just keep it between ourselves for now?

From Rory Hawthorne: Sounds good.

From Primrose Everdeen: Sorry I've got to go, Katniss wants me to help her with something. Talk to you later ;*

From Rory Hawthorne: Byeeee ;*

From Rory Hawthorne: BTW I'm still not an idiot.

From Primrose Everdeen: Sure

...

Gale POV

Standing against the monumental statue, I fidget with the keys in my pocket and wonder whether this is a good idea or not.

Maybe Madge wants to meet up today so she can tell me that the kisses last night were a huge mistake and that she just wants to stay friends.

My stomach twists at the thought.

But what if she wants more than that?

What if she actually wants a relationship?

With kissing and talking and feelings.

I've never been good with talking about my feelings.

Except with Katniss but that's just because we both don't feel a lot so we understand each other that way.

I try and imagine Madge and I as a couple.

The looks we'd get in school would be outrageous. The teasing from Thom and Darius would be equal to what they gave Katniss about Peeta and the judgement from the people in the district would be quite bad if they heard about it.
But I also think of what it would be like to hold her hand in the hall, to kiss her forehead before she goes to class like Peeta does with Katniss.

I think of her blushing at Darius, Thom and most likely Finnick's teasing words and squeezing her hand reassuringly under the table. Going on dates, kissing her at her doorstep, inviting her over to have dinner with my mad family, meeting her's.

Those butterflies from last night are back with full force and I know that no matter how badly I have tried to deny it, I do want all of that with Madge.

I have ever since she tripped over her own feet while helping my siblings play dress up.

(How she can be clumsy and also a graceful ballerina is something I will never understand)

I suppose Katniss just realised my feelings before I did.

"Hi Gale"

A soft voice pulls me from my thoughts and I meet Madge's eyes.

"Hey"

She's wearing black jeans, the white converse from last night and a navy sweater with a maroon scarf to shield herself from the cold.

While her outfit is simple, it fits her perfectly and I'm instantly feeling underdressed in my grey sweatpants, everyday hoodie and duffle coat.

Madge doesn't seem to mind though as she smiles,

"Okay so I know I said we could walk around but its absolutely freezing so do you mind if we go straight to the coffee shop? Or we can go somewhere else if you want?"

I don't think I've ever been to District Twelve's coffee shop, it felt disrespectful to the Hob but I suppose there's a first time for everything,

"No, no. The coffee shop is perfect."

The shop is in the square so we don't have much of a walk but I spend the whole time agonising over whether to take Madge's hand or not.

I know I shouldn't, we need to talk first but that doesn't make the temptation any harder to resist.

The coffee shop is quite cramped but it's vintage décor holds a comfortable atmosphere.

I try not to be unsettled by the knowledge that most of the other people in the shop are well dressed, white residents from town who look like they probably came here straight from church.

Great.

While we wait in line I debate whether to get coffee or not because despite the myth it probably won't help my hangover so I get hot chocolate instead.

Madge giggles a little at my order and I glare teasingly at her,

"I like chocolate! Don't judge me!"
Madge only laughs more and but manages to control herself enough to order some fancy coffee with caramel in it.

I don't catch the exact name of it, I was too distracted by the way her lower lip quivers when she's trying not to laugh.

We are directed to a small booth at the back of the shop and are told that are orders will be delivered to us in a moment or two.

We nod and thank the barista before heading in the direction she told us to after we pay.

Madge opens her mouth to protest when I pay for the both of us but I cut her off before she can start, "You almost broke your ankle under my guidance. This is my feeble attempt at compensation. Who knows? I could have destroyed your ballet career for life!"

I can tell she's tempted to argue but then she's grinning and shaking her head at me before turning away from me completely.

Madge walks around the tightly packed tables and chairs with ease and it's as clear as day that she's been here before.

We settle into our booth, I take off my jacket and she removes her scarf and suddenly it's just her and me.

Just us, without any friends around us, kids to look after or peers surrounding us.

We're finally really alone.

I wish I knew what to say.

Well, that's not strictly true. I know what I want to say.

I want to tell her that I like her, that we could try and see if we could try being together. I need to let her know that even though there's only a few months left in school, I want to spend those few months with her.

But I can't say all of that because it sounds cheesy and pathetic.

"So...emm..." Madge starts off and we look at one another, both trying to figure out what the other is thinking.

Madge's cheeks are stained with red and I'm uncertain whether she's blushing or if it's from the cold air outside.

"Do you regret it?" I find myself asking "Last night?"

Madge shakes her head.

"No" she says, her voice full of certainty "No I don't, I regret that I had to wait until I had drank that much to get the courage to kiss you but I don't regret actually doing it."

I exhale a sigh of relief just as the barista comes over with our drinks.

"Thank you" Madge and I say to her as we accept them.
I weigh the cup gently in my hand for a minute, appreciating the amazing warmth compared to the bitter cold outside before taking a sip of the warm drink.

I shiver at the shock of hot liquid to my system but it tastes so good that I immediately go back for more.

Madge smirks from behind her coffee cup,

"Good?" She asks and I nod, too lost in my chocolate bliss to come up with a retort to her teasing.

Madge takes a long gulp of her coffee before asking, "Do you regret it?"

I place the cup back down on the table, "No."

"Really?"

"Really. I'm...really glad you kissed me."

Madge raises her eyebrows and drinks again, "Me too"

I take another sup from the intoxicating drink,

"Is that...is kissing all you wanted or..."

Madge frowns, "What do you mean?"

It takes everything in me to maintain eye contact with her when all I want to do is look at the floor and mumble an explanation instead.

"I mean...would you like to go out on a date with me?"

Madge blinks, "Are you asking me out?"

"Christ Madge we spent two hours making out last night and now you look positively petrified at the thought of going on a date with me!" I snigger, trying to press down my internal fear.

Madge glares, "Answer the question!"

"Yes. I'm asking you out on a date."

Madge sits for a moment, sipping her coffee and just...looks at me.

Sitting there and watching me while I sit here in turmoil just to torture me. Why do I like her again?

Then she moves forward, her blonde hair falling forward, a smirk gracing her lips and her eyes alight with joy.

My breath catches in my throat.

Oh yeah. That's why.

"Will there be kissing? Because I rather liked the kissing..."

I laugh, a loud, annoying laugh most likely but Madge is giggling too so it's okay.

"A lady never kisses on the first date" I remind her
"Well I'm not a lady" Madge winks at me

I frown, "No, I was talking about me." I say in all seriousness

Madge laughs into her coffee, "I'll treat you right I promise."

"Good" I grin at her, "So when does it suit you to have said date?"

Madge frowns and I can practically see the cogs turning in her mind as she figured out when she's free.

"Friday?"

I know it makes the most sense but I hate how far away that is. I'll be a nervous wreck all week. She's worth it I suppose.

Then I remember my previous engagement.

"Oh damn, I've a gig in the Hob with the Rebels on Friday." I admit

Madge grins, "Perfect."

I frown in confusion, she wants to come to the Hob? To see us play?

"But-"

"I heard bits of you singing last night. I will admit I was half asleep because of the time and because your voice is so goddamn soothing but you were good. Really good, the four of you. I'd like to hear more."

"I don't mind you coming" I reassure her and I find that I'm not even lying "It's just is that really how you want our first date to go? It would just be you watching me sing, aren't dates supposed to be about talking and getting to know each other?"

At least that's what I've seen from Prim's rom-com movies.

Madge scoffs, "We're friends Gale, we know a decent bit about each other already. Plus there's plenty of time for that. We can get food before or after or something but...I mean if you'd prefer me not to be there I understand. If its more of a thing with you and your friends-

"I want you there." I state again and Madge definitely blushes this time.

"Okay so it's a date then."

"Yeah it is" I smile

"That's great but seriously Gale drink your hot chocolate or it'll become lukewarm chocolate."

I grin and follow her orders.

Well all I know now is I'm definitely insisting that I choose the setlist for this Friday night. Because whatever we play it has to be perfect.

The whole night has to be perfect because that's what Madge Undersee deserves.
Now I just need to find someone to help me make it perfect.

And in that moment as I drink my admittedly slightly lukewarm hot chocolate, I think of the perfect person that can help me.

...
Winter Wonderland

...  
Thom POV

Gale plonks down into the seat across from Darius and I, drops his lunch tray on the table and stares at us.

"I have a proposition."

Darius and I glance at each other for a brief moment before turning back to Gale,

"Alright." Darius says

We were planning an elaborate scheme to set our charming friend Gale up with Madge Undersee. It was all thought out and everything until we turned around at Peeta's party to see his tongue already down her throat.

Seemingly they didn't need our help after all.

"It's about Madge…"

Darius frowns at me, "Madge?"

I nod seriously, "Yeah, we know Madge. Blonde girl? Blue eyes? Mayor's daughter."

Darius clicks his fingers and turns back to Gale,

"Oh yeah the girl you were making out with at Peeta's party!"

"That's the one!" I agree

Gale rolls his eyes at our antics and I snigger,

"Yeah, yeah okay guys-"

"You remember back in the day when Galey here used to complain all the time about how the people in the town thought they were so much better off than us?"

"I remember that" I respond "I also remember him saying that none of those girls were his type."

"Something about conventional beauty wasn't it Tommy?"

"Yeah, yeah something like that."

"Haha very funny." Gale says drily "You done now?"

I sigh, "I suppose so. Now what's your issue with the girlfriend?"

Gale runs his hands over his face once and when he takes them away, I can see the confusion and despair in his eyes.

"I kind of asked Madge out on a date…"
"Kind of?" I ask

"Yeah…we went out to coffee on Sunday and…it just sort of happened."

Nobody speaks for a moment, Darius continues eating his lunch, Gale stares at his food to avoid our gaze and I struggle to figure out how we ended up here in the first place.

Then Darius swallows and raises an eyebrow,

"And you need our help planning the date?" he presumes

Gale nods slowly.

Darius clasps his hands together, tugs his lips up into a tight smirk and leans forward.

"Have you any ideas? Cinema? Dinner? A picnic perhaps?"

Gale rubs the back of his neck, "Well actually, she mentioned that she wouldn't mind if the date was on Friday…so she could see us play at the Hob."

"Lovely" I say truthfully.

It's difficult to imagine Madge Undersee watching us perform in the Hob of all places but nothing seems to be going to plan this year. And if it makes Gale happy then who am I to judge?

"So what do you need our help with?" Darius asks

"Well…I know we decided on a setlist already…but…."

Darius and I simultaneously nod in understanding.

I pull out a notepad and pen from my bag and we all make room for them on the table,

"What are you thinking?" I ask, clicking my pen.

Gale smiles for a moment before listing off a few songs and I write them down.

Darius leans over my shoulder and watches as I write, every so often commenting on whether a song is romantic enough or if we should swap it for another and I let him.

It takes us about ten minutes to come up with a decent list of romantic songs, thrown in with one or two others so we don't bore everyone else in the Hob to tears (something I don't mention to Gale). I rip the page from the notepad and hand it to Gale.

"You want to tell Katniss about the change?"

Gale looks up from the paper to me, his eyes wide,

"Yeah, sure." He mumbles

"She won't mind" Darius insists

"Of course not." Gale replies, but he sounds less convinced than us.

"She really won't" I smile "Speaking of, where is she?"

"Oh she said Peeta wanted to show her something" Darius says and I can feel him shrug beside me.
"See!" I say pointedly "She's happy and in love! Who's she to stop you and Madge from being happy and in love!"

Gale sighs, "Suppose so"

I smile softly, "Nothing bad is gonna happen Galey."

"Definitely not!" Darius agrees "Not while we are around anyway!"

Gale scoffs, "Yeah okay." he hesitates for a moment, "But thanks for your help."

Darius grins, "Oh we aren't done yet. Now let's talk about what you're doing before the show."

"And after" I include.

"And after, very good point Tommy. So I'm thinking food beforehand and a nice walk home afterwards?"

"It'll be quite late and dark by then. She might prefer to drive home." I say

"I don't have a car." Gale mentions

I glance to Darius who is already looking at me.

"You could borrow one?"

Gale glares at Darius, "I'm not stealing!"

"Borrow" Darius emphasises "I said borrow."

"Who would I borrow a car from?"

Darius and I meet eyes again and we both know we have the same person on our minds.

"Peeta"

...

Peeta POV

"I'm getting a strange sense of déjà vu here Peeta." Katniss remarks from beside me and I grin widely.

"You aren't blindfolded this time." I remind her, opening the first door on the left of the hallway and making sure nobody is watching before gently ushering her through it.

Katniss narrows her pretty eyes at me, "If your plan is to fulfil some fantasy of making out in a broom closet then its not happening."

I shake my head, "It's not a broom closet and that's not the plan, just go in."

Katniss bits her lip nervously and I try not to stare at that too much,

"I promise it's safe." I reassure her.

Katniss looks both ways of the corridor before rushing inside and pulling me in after her.
I shut the door and fumble for the light-switch that I knew is somewhere on my right and just as I find it, I feel Katniss's cool hand slip into my left.

As light fills the space, Katniss looks around in confusion,

"Peeta? What are we doing here?"

I press a finger to my lips and tug her gently up the secluded staircase.

She doesn't say another word and lets me guide her up the four flights of stairs.

I catch her frown from the corner of my eye but she doesn't say a word until we finally reach the top

"But...the school only has two floors?"

I slide my bag off my shoulder and bend down to open it,

"Yes it does, but the building has three to include the attic." I remind her

"But then...that would mean-"

I stand up again, the light from the staircase below us has dimmed so I can hardly see anything except the anticipation in Katniss's grey eyes.

"That would mean, we've reached the roof." I hand her the hat and gloves that I retrieved from my bag and put on my own.

"But-" Katniss splutters "Don't you need a key? Or even a passcode to get up here?"

I shrug, "My brothers used to come up here all the time. They're the ones who told me about it. If they hacked the system to let them out then they never said. I tested it yesterday just to be sure."

"But what about safety?"

I raise an eyebrow at her but it's unlikely she can see it in the dark.

"You think Principal Snow cares about that?"

"Fair point." She admits as she fumbles to put on her gloves.

I throw my bag over my shoulder, put my hand on the doorknob and look at her,

"You okay with this?" I check.

Despite the terrible lighting I can still see Katniss's teeth when she grins at me,

"Definitely."

I take her gloved hand in mine and I pull the door open.

The blast of bitter cold hits us without warning and I gasp but Katniss simply laughs behind me.

"Come on." She exclaims and before I know it she's running out onto the roof, tugging me along with her.

A laugh escapes me too as we recklessly run along the somewhat icy rooftop.
There isn't much to see, there's a chimney yet I fail to see why a chimney is needed in a school but it wouldn't surprise me if Principal Snow were to have such luxuries as a fireplace in his office.

White, soft, light layers of snow trail along the edges which have stone walls along them that come up to approximately a little more than half my height.

Katniss slips on a bad patch of ice causing her to clutch onto my coat tightly as she struggles to regain her balance.

"S-sorry." She whispers and her voice is almost lost in the rough breeze.

"It's alright" I kiss her head gently "Perhaps we should stop the running yeah?"

She nods and snuggles more into my neck, "Good idea."

I try and hold back my massive grin but it doesn't work.

There's a rotten bench along one of the walls at the back of the roof, looking over the football pitch. The bench is long and wooden and seems to be one of the lost ones from the physical education department. The sound of students playing outside below us is faint and faraway and I'm grateful that we can hardly hear them. It makes it that much easier to forget them, to forget where we really are and just lose ourselves in the beauty of this moment.

Katniss leans her head on my shoulder and I'm about to lean my head against hers when I remember something.

"Oh I've a surprise for you."

Katniss laughs again and a smile spreads across my face just from the sound of it.

"Another surprise?" She asks me but there's no annoyance or irritation in her tone which I take as a good sign.

"I promise it's worth it." I whisper, leaning down to kiss her nose which has turned slightly red from the cold.

I grab a small box from my bag and open it before handing it to her,

"Want one?" I tease and Katniss mouth opens,

"Brownies? You made brownies?"

"Yeah I made them yesterday, they were supposed to be for the bakery but I made too many sooo..." I place one on a napkin I brought and hand it to her, "Now we can enjoy them."

Katniss accepts it and smiles, "Thank you."

We sit there in silence for a few minutes as we munch on our brownies which turned out really nice, not that I'm boasting.

"Thanks for bringing me here Peeta." Katniss whispers when we've both finished eating and I've packed the box of leftover crumbs away.

She leans her head into my neck again and I feel the thick fabric of her hat scratch my skin but I don't complain.
"Well I thought about bringing Finnick but I didn't think he'd appreciate it as much as you would."

Katniss laughs softly, "You're probably right."

Although it's the last thing I want to do, I know we should probably go back downstairs.

Unfortunately we still have three more classes of torture to sit through.

Katniss seems to be thinking the same as she rises her head from her solace in my shoulder.

"You want to head down?" she asks halfheartedly

"No but we probably should anyway."

She smiles and kisses me gently.

We stay kissing on that cold, rotten, wooden bench for a minute more, the feel of the wind brushing against us and the taste of chocolate brownies still on our tongues as we try to savour the memory of this.

Both of us desperately trying to hold onto this fleeting moment of light snow, freezing cold skin and warm lips in our private, beautiful little winter wonderland.

We pull apart and I lean my forehead against hers for a brief moment, eyes closed and our gloved hands ridiculously intertwined.

This is real. After all this time, all those years of hopes and dreams and cautious glances across the classroom. This is actually real.

It's only now that I realise how wrong I was as a child.

When I was convinced that I was in love with the girl from school with the pretty brown hair and mesmerising voice.

I didn't know that girl, I didn't love her, I had a crush on her yes but I certainly wasn't in love with her.

But this...the feeling in my chest whenever I see her, the smile that spreads unconsciously over my face whenever I hear her name or hear her talk or laugh, mixed with the way her hand always seems to fit perfectly in mine and how I feel every single time she tells me something about herself that I never knew, the knowledge that she trusts me enough to know her secrets and about her past...this is loving Katniss Everdeen.

My eyes snap open and they meet hers, the grey orbs that glint with kindness and warmth, both a contrast to the weather that surrounds us.

Her eyes flicker across my face and I smile reassuringly.

Now that I've finally accepted the nagging thought that's been lingering at the back of my mind for several weeks, there's a strong, bubbling feeling in my chest that begs me to tell her.

But I can't, I shouldn't. We've only been together two months or so, it's too soon.

Too soon for a normal teenage relationship and definitely too soon for Katniss.

So instead of obliging the newfound ache, I stand and throw my bag over my shoulder.
Katniss stands too and we walk inside to the blissfully warmer building.

We stop for a moment after I shut the door, both of us reluctant to leave.

"Thank you for coming Kat." I say

"I'm very glad that I did" she leans up on her tippy toes and kisses me cheek.

We each take off our hats and gloves and I place them in my bag again.

I take Katniss's hand in mine, grateful to feel her skin properly against mine again and we trudge down the four flights of stairs before blending into the crowds in the hallway once more.

...

When the bell rings at the end of the day, I'm still lost in the memories of my lunchtime adventure with Katniss.

As my feet guide me through the halls, I reminisce on the feeling of her in my arms as we ate surrounded by nobody except Jack Frost.

I'm so lost in thought that I almost bump into the three people standing protectively outside my locker.

I snap out of my daydream and blink twice to make sure I'm not seeing things.

Gale, Thom and Darius are all leaning against my locker, they all stand up straighter when they see me and I know they've been waiting for me.

"Hey" I offer awkwardly.

What are you supposed to say when your girlfriend's three best friends corner you at your locker after school?

"Peeta" Thom says and he smiles at me as if to let me know that they aren't going to give me some protective best friend talk, "Just the person we wanted to see."

I nod even though I've no idea what he's talking about.

Darius has his arm slung around Thom and is looking me up and down in that way of his that always makes me feel like he's judging me. Thom nudges Gale beside him who has his arms folded and is staring determinedly at the ground.

Gale sighs in exasperation, "Peeta we...I need to ask you a favour."

Raising an eyebrow, I drop my bag to the floor and I know this is going to be interesting.

...
Date Night

Gale POV

I'm not sure what I'm more nervous about.

My date with Madge or the thought of me crashing/damaging Peeta Mellark's car on my date with Madge.

It had taken a few days of Darius and Thom's careful persuasion for Peeta to actually agree to letting me borrow his car for tonight.

I'm pretty sure Peeta just agreed so my friends would stop annoying him about it which was probably their plan all along.

Among that issue, I also had to tell Katniss that we changed the set-list and when I told her why she burst out laughing.

Seriously she didn't stop laughing for ten minutes, I was tempted to get up from the table and leave but I figured that would be a bit rude after everything.

Thankfully she didn't mind and she told me that she was happy for me.

So I now have the Rebels' approval to date Madge Undersee, I just need Madge to want to properly date me and I'll be the happiest person on earth.

I was feeling pretty confident about the date until this morning.

Everything was going fine, I talked to Madge a bit before class and I was just taking out my books when Delly approached me.

Ever since Finnick and Peeta's party I've had a newfound respect for Delly Cartright so I wasn't as annoyed I would have been if anyone else had interrupted me trying to tell my English and Math notebook apart first thing in the morning.

"Gale!"

I had looked up from my notebooks, startled at the sound of my name but when I saw Delly's bright smile and distinctive hair, I smiled.

"Morning Delly."

Most of the students in the classroom were either talking or half asleep but I was still unprepared when Delly sat on my desk and started clapping her hands together loudly.

"So is it true that you and Ms. Undersee over there have a date tonight?"

The classroom that had previously been buzzing with noise suddenly became quiet. The students who weren't asleep, turned to gape from me to Madge, as if they were trying to put the pieces together.

As if trying to figure out how someone like her would date someone like me.
From the corner of my eye, I saw Madge's whole face flush red and she determinedly avoided my gaze by looking out the window.

My own cheeks turned pink and I tried to ignore everyone's looks as I faced Delly whose face had crumbled as she realised how loudly she spoke.

I wasn't sure whether to tell the truth or to lie.

If I told the truth, Madge might be upset because it's only our first date and we don't want people gossiping. If I lie then she might be worried that I'm ashamed to date her or something equally preposterous.

So I opted for a simple shrug and I was grateful when our teacher walked in a minute later, ranting about her car that refused to start.

I didn't get a chance to talk to Madge for the rest of the day but even I noticed that I was getting more inquisitive looks from our peers than usual.

Even Cato Hunter of all people sent a disgusting, sly smirk and wink my way after school and I had to swallow down the bile that rose in my throat.

I shake my head and fix the collar on my shirt.

I can't think about that now.

Tonight is my first date was Madge and I can't screw it up.

This is too important. If it fails dramatically it could damage our friendship and that's the last thing I want.

I hear a double knock on my door and I turn to find my mother watching me.

Her dark hair is tied back into a messy bun and a jolt of guilt hits me when I see just how tired she is. Her eyes trail over me and when they reach my eyes, she smiles thoughtfully.

"Are you sure that's what you're wearing?"

My eyes widen and I spin around to check myself in the mirror for what could possibly be the tenth time in the past half hour.

"Y-yeah, why? What's wrong with it?"

My mum tilts her head to the side before walking over to my wardrobe and picking out my black shoes. They're shiny and polished because I only ever wear them to fancy occasions.

She hands me the shoes.

"Wear them. They look better."

"But-"

"No buts!" She points a finger at me "Now put them on and go. You don't want to be late for your big date."

Her eyes gleam with what could be tears and I sigh as I sit on the bed and take my shoes off.
"I've gone on dates before you know Mum." I remind her as I replace my admittedly slightly worn shoes with the impeccable coal coloured ones.

My mum scoffs, "They didn't count. You didn't care about any of them."

I stand in my proper shoes and raise an eyebrow,

"How do you know I care about this one?"

My mum smiles and shakes her head.

"You smile when you talk about her love." She pats my arm lovingly "You smile brighter than I've ever seen you smile."

I'm stunned into silence so I just kiss her cheek and tell her I love her before grabbing Peeta's keys and my jacket and then I run down the stairs and head for the door.

No matter what happens, I know this evening will definitely be one to remember.

…

*Text Alert*

From Annie Cresta: Good luck tonight! Don't be nervous xoxo

From Madge Undersee: I'm not nervous

From Annie Cresta: Yes you are.

From Madge Undersee: Okay maybe I am a little

From Annie Cresta: Everything will go great I promise! x

From Madge Undersee: I know…I just really like him. I don't want to make a fool of myself like always

From Annie Cresta: Well he clearly really likes you too. He spends half his time watching you when he thinks nobody is looking. If you do make a fool of yourself then he'll only think you're adorable and cute.

From Madge Undersee: Yeah?

From Annie Cresta: Definitely. You still wearing the outfit we talked about?

From Madge Undersee: Yeah and I curled my hair like I did the night of the party but I'm not sure if he likes it curled or not but ah well.

From Annie Cresta: Trust me he likes it ;)

From Madge Undersee: I've got to go, I think he's here. Bye! xxx

From Annie Cresta: Have a great time! xoxo

…

Gale POV
I shake my head as I try to exhale my nerves

I bring one hand up and knock on Madge's door; praying that her father doesn't open it.

The door opens a minute later and my first thought is that I'm grateful that it's Madge standing there and not her father. My second thought is that it really is Madge standing there and oh my god she looks...she looks wow.

Her blonde hair is curled again, somehow her hair always seems shorter when she curls it. Madge wears a dainty lilac dress with white flowers decorating the hem, white shoes with a tiny bit of a heel that makes her taller but still nowhere near my height and a dazzling smile that shows off her pearly white teeth and her rose-painted lips.

I realise I'm staring rather bluntly and I blink rapidly and smile at her.

"You...eh you look great."

I want to tell her she looks as beautiful as a child of the moon and the sun but I think that's a bit much for a first date and she'd probably think I'm a creep.

Madge bites her lip but grins widely,

"So do you"

I dart my eyes down to my own outfit and I curse myself when I realise I'm still wearing my black (fake) leather jacket. My mother would not be impressed.

"Eh thanks." I reply

That's when I remember the bag in my hand.

"Oh em this is for you."

The present had been Darius and Thom's idea.

They insisted that one could not just show up for a first date with a pretty girl with nothing. I had told them that I'm pretty sure that only happens in movies. They just shook their heads at me and told me I was bringing something and that was that.

Madge's eyes widen in shock and I immediately feel like an idiot.

Who brings a present on a first date? She's going to think I'm a complete fool. A sappy, romantic fool maybe but still a fool.

"Wow. Oh my god, you didn't have to."

I hand her the bag and she thankfully accepts it.

"Can I open it?"

I stick my hands in my jeans pocket to hide the shaking and I nod.

"Yeah, I didn't get a chance to wrap it or anything but..."

Madge doesn't seem to be listening as she's already taking the square box out of the bag.
"Is this…?" She whispers, turning it over in her hands.

"Well I was going to bring flowers but then I remember you telling me you had bad allergies to them. Hayfever or something so I didn't want to set you off." I gulp.

That was Madge that said that right? I'm not thinking of someone else and making an even bigger fool of myself "So I thought I'd get you something else. And you said that you liked that band so-"

"Like them?" Madge asks rhetorically as she runs a finger delicately over the cover of the CD, "I love them! They're my favourite!"

Against my will, a bright smile takes over my face that only widens when Madge runs forward and hugs me tightly.

She pulls away too quickly and puts the album back into the bag and leaves it inside the door.

"Thank you, thank you so much Gale. I love it." She shuts her front door gently and smiles that perfect smile at me again, "Where on earth did you find it? I've been looking for it for ages but they stopped selling it years ago."

I swallow, "Well…honestly? Rory went through a phase of that band a few years ago. It was one of his old ones so I traded it for something else he wanted."

Instead of the look of disdain I'm expecting; Madge's smile never strays,

"Oh that's amazing! Well tell your brother I appreciate it immensely."

"I will." Well I might, I can only imagine the teasing Rory would give me if I told him why I actually wanted that music album "Do you em...want to head off?"

Madge nods, "Yeah, sounds good."

"Okay" I say softly and we walk back towards Peeta's car.

Madge frowns when she sees it and I hurry to explain.

"Peeta let me borrow it for tonight. The show mightn't end until after it gets dark and I didn't feel comfortable walking you home at that time so-"

Madge cuts me off by leaning up and pressing a reassuring kiss on my cheek.

I'm still frozen by the time she pulls away and walks around to open the passenger seat door,

"It's perfect Gale thank you."

I nod and hop into the driver's seat, shutting the door behind me.

"So what's the plan?" Madge asks from beside me and I grin

"You'll just have to wait and see."

…

Madge fidgets with her silver bracelet when arrive at the Hob.

Thankfully I had been prepared for this. Katniss told me when she brought Peeta to the Hob for the
first time, she felt like they were the star piece at an art exhibition.

I take her hand in mine and squeeze gently.

"Don't worry we aren't actually going in until later."

Madge looks at me confused,

"Trust me?" I whisper and when she nods, I begin walking around the corner; never letting go of her hand.

I lead her down the street and into the back alleyway. I squeeze Madge's hand again reassuringly and finally we get to the familiar door.

I rap my knuckles on the door three times and wait.

We wait a minute and then two but nobody comes.

I throw my eyes up to heaven and I knock again, louder this time.

A minute later, the door is pulled open and Thom is waiting with a smile on his face.

"Good evening! Come in, come in." Thom ushers us in and closes the door behind us.

He's dressed in black trousers, a spotless white shirt and the standard Hob apron.

I take a nervous glance at Madge who is looking around with her mouth open and her eyes wide.

After school, Thom, Darius, Katniss and I came straight to the Hob to set up. Sae agreed in an instant to letting us use her back area for anything we needed. We put a fancy red tablecloth from the attic in the Hob over the outside bench. Fairylights from Peeta's party were borrowed to hang from the walls behind the table. Plates, cutlery and two candles were on the table courtesy of Thom and Darius.

Darius who is also here, standing to the side of the bench in front of the large old wooden bookcase that held typical bar stuff but also a stereo that Thom had brought that's playing low music from a band that I know Madge likes. Darius was wearing an identical outfit to Thom and his trademark grin.

I turn and face Madge properly and she silently stares back up at me.

I rub the back of my neck and begin to explain,

"Well I didn't really want our first date to be in front of so many people you know? But I also wanted to take you out to eat so…I combined the two." I point to my friends "Thom and Darius are our own personal waiters tonight." They wave politely at a stunned, unblinking Madge "We can still order whatever we want from the menu and Sae in the kitchens will cook it for us…it'll be the same as eating in there" I point to the door that leads to the Hob "Except without all the strangers and random people talking over us…or about us."

I feel a tightness in my hand that causes me to jolt. I had forgotten Madge was still holding it but she was squeezing it in reassurance and not anger I assume as her face lights up a second later.

"I love it…I really love it Gale. It's perfect. Thank you. And thank you guys too" Madge turns to Thom and Darius and they blush and wave a hand in dismissal.

A wave of relief hits me and I smile back at her.
We make our way to the bench to sit and after they take our orders, Thom and Darius make themselves scarce.

"So…do you want to play twenty questions?" She asks

I laugh, "Madge, we've known each other for years."

She runs a hand through her hair and I lose all train of thought.

"We'll just have to be pretty inventive with our questions then."

I blink hard to snap myself out of my spell,

"Okay, okay. You go first."

Madge bites her lip in concentration and I curse her for being able to distract me so easily.

"Okay favourite food?"

"Oh Sae's burgers" I answer immediately. "They're the best."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I'll let you have some of mine later if you want."

She smiles, "Thanks."

"Favourite colour?"

Madge shrugs, "I like pink. Call me a stereotypical girl but I don't care. I love it."

I smile, "Pink's nice."

Madge raises an eyebrow.

"What?" I ask defensively "I live with Posy whose life goal is to live in a house where all the furniture is pink!"

Madge giggles, "Okay understandable. Pets?"

I scrunch up my nose, "Nope. Prim's goat turned me off every getting a pet so far. I think I'd like to have a dog someday though. You?"

She shakes her head, "I used to have a rabbit but she passed away."

"Oh I'm sorry, what was her name?"

Madge's cheeks flush pink, "Em."

I tilt my head and grin, "How bad was it? Did you call it floppy because of her ears?"

"No…"

"Flopsy? Oh god please don't tell me you named it 'Rodger Rabbit'?"

Madge laughs, "No I called it bunny."
I raise an eyebrow, "But…it was a bunny."

She sighs, "I was six okay? I didn't know any better. I wanted to call it the Easter Bunny but my dad said that was copyright."

I laugh loudly, picturing the big tough mayor of District Twelve trying to explain copyright to a six year old tiny Madge.

"Bunny's a cute name."

"Shut up Gale" She says playfully

"Fine, it's your turn anyway."

"Favourite T.V. Show?"

"Doctor Who"

"Oh yeah I've heard you and Darius talking about that a few times."

"More like arguing." A voice that isn't either of ours says and we look over to see Darius walking towards us with a tray in his hand. If I didn't know better, I would say that Darius actually worked here.

"Don't mind me" Darius continues "I'm just here to give you your drinks."

He places my coke and Madge's sprite down on the table carefully, winks at me and then retreats back inside the building again.

"Did they help you plan all this?"

I blush, "Yeah they did"

Madge smiles, "They're really good friends."

I nod, "Yeah they are but they probably have their ears pressed against the door so lets not give them any more compliments."

Madge throws her head back and laughs but I'm pretty sure I hear muffled complaints from behind the door that confirm my suspicions.

"Anyway" I continue, "What age were you when you started ballet?"

... 

The questions continue, the food tastes amazing and eventually my hands stop shaking.

Halfway through the meal, Madge curses herself for not bringing a jacket so I offer her my one.

She spends five minutes refusing it but then eventually accepts and the contrast of my large black leather jacket with her pretty feminine purple dress makes my stomach twist in the best possible way.

About two hours later Thom comes out the back and gives me a nod to let me know that we're getting ready to set up for the gig.

"Are you still okay with watching us?" I double check when Madge and I make our way inside.
"Of course!" Madge confirms "I wouldn't miss it for the world."

The flush in my cheeks is certainly from the sudden heat from the Hob and not from embarrassment or anything like that.

We meet up with the Rebels and Peeta who has tagged along for moral support, for Katniss or for Madge I'm not sure which.

Darius and Thom set up the stage. Madge was right they really are quite amazing. I'd never tell them that though. They've gotten rid of their waiter attire and are in their usual jeans and t-shirt combo. I'm pretty sure the band t-shirt that Thom is wearing belongs to Darius but I'm not sure so I don't mention it.

"We're starting in five minutes Galey." Darius shouts down at me and I nod.

"You alright to stay with Peeta while we're up there?" I yell at Madge.

I'd much prefer to whisper it or at least say the words in a normal tone but the place is already filling up, some customers sitting and some standing waiting for the show to start. It always gets louder when there's more people so I hope Madge doesn't mind.

Madge is sitting up on one of the high chairs with Peeta beside her and she grins at me,

"I'm fine. You go ahead. Good luck." Madge leans forward and kisses me on the cheek.

I pause for a moment before grinning and heading up on stage.

…

Peeta POV

When the Rebels finish, I'm not at all surprised by the intensity of the cheering and the applause that the round of customers give them.

I'm pretty sure most of the people here came solely to see them perform and I can't blame them. The minute they started playing everyone's eyes and ears were just drawn to them.

I thought I would be biased and think that Katniss would be the best but honestly the four of them are all equally outstanding.

Gale has an incredible voice, I didn't get to hear the volume of it the other night but I was very impressed. Darius is spectacular on the drums, if I hadn't known him I'd have considered him a professional. Thom stood out on the guitar. Both Katniss and Gale played too but Thom did solos and cord songs that Darius insisted Thom had written himself and they were amazing, his fingers moved so fast but the music travelled swiftly and I loved it.

I already knew Katniss was a beautiful singer but her stage presence was fantastic too. The way she moved or spoke to the audience was so unusual and out of character for her. Her voice changed when she sang songs she wrote herself, there was meaning behind every word and the songs came off so much stronger.

Okay maybe I'm a lovesick puppy fangirling over my girlfriend and her band but they were amazing and I don't regret it.

Katniss comes down off the stage after their second encore and I'm overcome with surprise and joy
that the first thing she does is run straight over to me.

"Well?" She brushes a loose strand of hair behind her ear "What did you think?"

She has to shout because the crowd have gotten louder since the gig ended so I stand and lean down to whisper in her ear,

"Amazing, beyond amazing Kat. I loved every single second."

Katniss smiles and kisses me gently,

"Thanks Peeta. I'm going to help Dariee and Thom put everything away. Wait for me yeah?"

I nod and watch as she flies up to the make-shift stage again.

I look over to my left and see Madge excitedly talking to Gale.

I'm guessing she's complimenting him on his performance because his head is ducked just a bit and he's rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly.

I stay there for a minute or two before I decide to head up and help Katniss out.

She's putting the guitars into their cases when I approach her.

"Hey!" She exclaims when she sees me, "Everything okay?"

I bend down and help her clasp the case up, double checking that I did it right because god knows what Gale would do to me if I harmed his precious guitar.

"Fine, perfect, I just felt like I was the silent third wheel back there." I pointed over my shoulder to Gale and Madge and Katniss nods when she spots them.

"Oh I understand. Thom and Darius said they seemed to be having a great time before the show started." Katniss says as she watches them over my shoulder.

She's trying to be subtle but she's an open book.

"That's good." I say

We stand and place the guitars against the wall. When we're all finished I catch Katniss looking over at Gale and Madge again who are talking to the elderly woman Sae who cooks here.

"Do you think they're a good match?" She asks me

I take another look at them. Gale's hand is resting on the small of Madge's back just under where her hair ends. Madge is talking to Sae but her head is half rested on Gale's shoulder.

Madge turns to look up at Gale as if asking if he agrees with her on something. Her smile is wide and bright; Madge always looks pretty happy but I've never seen her this happy before.

Gale looks down at her and I see him smile back before saying something I can't hear.

They seem happy, like they really like each other.

I'm not an expert on relationships and I'll never claim to be. I spent 12 years crushing on a girl before finally asking her on a date so I'm pretty useless but from what I can tell they're well suited.
"They look like they like each other a lot." I tell her honestly "I think that's all that really matters in a relationship. I don't know if they're a good match, I don't know either of them that well but they've been friends for a while so they must have some similar interests." I shrug "It's only their first date Kat but they seem happy to me."

Katniss nods and watches them for another moment before she breaks out into a smile,

"Yeah, they look really happy."

I smile and kiss the top of her head gently,

"I'll walk you home." I tell her.

She picks her guitar up and raises an eyebrow at me,

"You didn't bring the car today?" Curiosity laced in her voice.

I sigh and roll my eyes, "That's a story for the walk home."

... 

Gale POV

It's quite late when I bring Madge home and I'm glad that Thom and Darius convinced me to ask Peeta to borrow his car.

Madge leans against the window with her eyes closed for the ten minutes it takes to get to her house. She does seem tired but I think she had a good time.

Despite my worries, Madge actually fit right in at the Hob.

She loved the show, she really did. She spent twenty minutes talking to me afterwards and boosting my ego even more. Either that or she is secretly a really good actor and was just lying to protect my feeling.

After that we chatted with Sae, Madge insisted on complimenting her on the delicious food and Sae talked to her for a few minutes. When Sae left to go into the kitchens she gave me a smile that said she approved.

Sae refused to let me pay for our food so instead I offered to give her any trade I have for the next while to her for free and that I'll do a few shifts during the week if she ever needed a pair of extra hands. Sae just patted my cheek and returned to the kitchens.

We talked to Thom and Darius for a while but we left soon after that. Darius was falling asleep on Thom's shoulder and Madge had yawned a few times so Thom and I looked at one another and suggested we head home.

I make a promise to myself to send a text to the guys in the morning, thanking them for everything. I'll have to make it up to them somehow but I'm not sure how yet.

Before I know it, we are at Madge's house.

I can't believe the evening went so quickly and that the date that I was so nervous for is actually all over now. Well almost over.

I walk Madge to the door and apologise for bringing her home so late.
"Don't worry about it." Madge says "I had...an amazing time. Thank you for everything."

"Don't worry about it." And it's only then that I realise I just repeated what she said and we both laugh.

Madge's eyes widen suddenly, "Your jacket!"

I blink and then I realise that she's still wearing my jacket.

"Oh, that's alright you-" But before I can say anything she has already slipped the jacket off her shoulders and handed it back to me.

Madge smiles, "It was comfy, thanks for lending it to me. I felt very badass."

I laugh, "You look better in it than I do." I assure her as I tug the jacket on.

Madge cocks an eyebrow and bites her lip again, does she not know how much that tortures me?

"I wouldn't say that." Madge says and I swallow.

"Thanks for eh...thanks for coming out Madge."

Is it my imagination or has she gotten closer?

"No problem. Like I said I had a great time."

Closer again. Though this time I'm not sure if she stepped forward or I did.

"Yeah...me too." The words come out of my mouth as more of a whisper.

I watch as Madge's eyes flit from my eyes to my lips. I stand there frozen. A million thoughts and questions and hopes run through my mind as we stand there, close enough to touch under the stars.

"Gale?" Her voice is just as quiet as mine.

"Yeah?"

"Would you like to do this again sometime?"

"Definitely."

"Me too."

I smile and bend my knees just a bit and she leans up so we are the same height.

I swallow and let myself look into her shining bright blue eyes for a minute before murmuring, "Good" and kissing her gently.

It's not like our other kisses. Those were hot and passionate, laced with traces of beer and chips. This was soft and gentle. There was meaning behind it.

The fingers running through my hair were soft instead of tugging on the strands; my hands were laying gently on her hips and not wrapped around them, tightly holding her to me as if I were afraid she's disappear like I did last Saturday night.

This kiss is what all first kisses should be like on a first date.
It's not our first kiss but it's the first one where we know that both of us definitely want there to be more.

...
Happy Holidays

... 

Gale POV

The joys of having a sister who is young enough to still believe in Santa Claus is that you get the pleasure of being woken up at six am on Christmas morning by said younger sister jumping up and down on your bed and squealing, very loudly.

Thankfully Posy didn't wake anyone else up in her excitement to see what father Christmas brought her so only my sleep was disturbed.

I throw on an old sweater, take her hand and bring her downstairs.

"Yay, yay, yay-"

"Posy, remember what I said? We need to whisper so nobody else wakes up." I say, tiptoeing around the room so I can turn on the lights of the Christmas tree.

Posy puts a finger to her lips and nods but when the lights of the tree sparkle in the dim light of the sitting room, she claps her hands together and squeals again.

I try not to groan in annoyance, I was probably just as excited when I was her age. Though I can't remember ever waking my parents up this early to open my presents, my mum assures me that I did.

"Galey! Galey! Santa got me the doll I saw in the store last week! I didn't put it on my list! How did he know!?!"

I shrug, "Santa knows everything Posy."

Posy nods seriously and turns back to her presents, "You're right."

She doesn't receive as many presents from Father Christmas as she did last year unfortunately but Posy certainly doesn't notice. Mum's cleaning business is picking up again but we are trying to save more and more for college next year. If I chose to go to college of course, honestly I still haven't decided.

Posy runs over to me and pulls me down to kneel beside her, shoving her new dvd in my face and all thoughts of my treacherous future drift away.

"Can we watch? Can we watch?"

My laugh soon turns into a yawn so it takes me a minute to properly respond to her,

"Maybe later Pose."

Posy sighs and then spots something behind me,

"Mummy! Mummy! Look what Santa got me!" I turn and spot my mother standing behind me, tying her bathrobe tightly and grinning down at Posy.

"Yes show me, show me!" My mum replies, excitement drenched in her tone and I smile.
A few minutes later, Posy is still rambling about her presents when mum turns to me.

"You can head back to bed you know? I got this."

I shake my head, "Nah I'm up now. I wouldn't be able to go back to sleep anyway."

I catch the worry in mum's eyes so I kiss her on the head to reassure her.

"I'll make us some coffee."

Mum frowns, "You hate coffee."

"Presents!" Vick shouts from the top of the staircase. He flies down the stairs and joins Posy at the bottom of the tree. Less than a minute later a rather exhausted looking Rory appears too, rubbing his eyes but wearing a bright smile.

I turn back to mum, "Yeah but it looks like I'll need it."

...

Katniss POV

Prim strolls into the kitchen while I'm eating my cereal, arms full of blankets and pillows.

I raise an eyebrow but she simply grins at me.

"The Annual Everdeen Christmas Movie Marathon starts in five minutes; get dressed and meet me in the sitting room. Oh and bring your pillows, I couldn't carry them."

I sigh and run upstairs to change into my comfy green sweater, sweatpants and fluffy socks. The sweater belonged to my dad and for some reason I always seem to wear it at Christmas time. It's oddly comforting.

When I enter the sitting room five minutes later, pillows in hand; Prim has a mixture of sweets, healthy food and drinks spread on the small table and she is scanning through multiple DVD's on her lap.

"You want to watch the 'Santa Claus' movies? Or 'Home Alone'?” Prim asks, spreading the DVDs on what's left of the coffee table.

I sit on the couch beside her and wrap a blanket around myself.

"Home Alone is Vick and Rory's favourite right?” I ask, "We might watch that later when they come over. What about 'A Christmas Carol'?"

Prim clicks her finger at me and nods, "Yeah you're right. 'A Christmas Carol' it is."

A half hour later mum comes in and joins us. She sits in the armchair with her own blanket. She's up and dressed and there's something about her today. She's smiling brighter and commenting on the movie with Prim.

She seems happy.

The magic of Christmas I suppose.

I hope it lasts.
Two hours later, we are in the middle of the first Santa Claus movie when I get a text message.

From Peeta Mellark: Merry Christmas

From Katniss Everdeen: Merry Christmas

From Peeta Mellark: Is it alright if I come over some time today? I understand if it's a family day, I just wanted to see you

From Katniss Everdeen: Of course it is. Nah we aren't religious at all. Come over whenever.

From Peeta Mellark: Is it alright if I come over in around half an hour?

From Katniss Everdeen: Sure

From Peeta Mellark: Thanks Kat, see you then

From Katniss Everdeen: See you

"Is it alright if Peeta comes over for a bit?" I ask

Prim nods from her spot snuggled into my side while my mum turns to face me.

"Your boyfriend?"

I nod

"Sure if you want." Mum smiles before turning back to the TV again.

…

Peeta POV

I put my phone into my pocket and re-enter the kitchen.

Brian sits at the table with his arm around Gwen while Rye is perched on the counter, his eyes trained on his phone.

"Where's mum and dad?" I ask

Usually they try and act like they love each other for the first few hours of Christmas Day at least.

Rye snorts, "Mum's gone to mass. She mentioned something about how she's the only decent one of us because she's going to church. I think dad's at the shop."

I frown, "Dad's at the bakery?"

Rye rolls his eyes, "Duh."

Some days I hate my dad for being as dedicated to his job as he is.

"I'll go check on him"

"I'm sure he's fine." Brian reassures from the table but I just shake my head and walk to the bakery.

Sure enough when I let myself in; I find him in the back hunched over some books.
I cough twice before he notices my presence.

"Peeta! Merry Christmas son!" Dad stands and envelops me in a quick hug.

I smile, "Merry Christmas, Dad… what are you doing here?"

Dad sighs, "I just wanted to look over a few things. It's one of the only days we have off and-"

"Dad you'll have tomorrow off. I'll take over some of your shifts while I'm off from school but you can't work today."

"But-"

I shake my head and close the books on the table and pile them in the corner.

"No. Not today Dad I won't allow it."

He raises an eyebrow at me, "Who's the son and who's the father here?"

I shrug.

Dad rubs a hand over his face before nodding,

"Alright, alright. Are you coming in for some tea?"

I shake my head as we make our way outside, "No I'm going to head out to Katniss's."

Dad raises an eyebrow at me.

"Unless… you want me to stay." I add uncertainly.

"No of course not" Dad smirks, "You go have fun."

"Dad if you want me to stay-" Dad locks up the bakery and turns on his heel to face me.

"I'm serious Peeta. Go, enjoy yourself. Be home for dinner or your mother will go mad."

I nod and he frowns when I don't move; I hold my hand out expectantly in response.

Dad narrows his eyes at me, "Really?" he asks drily

"We both know the minute I turn the corner, you'll be back in there working unless I take them."

Dad rolls his eyes but he places the keys in my hand anyway.

"Good and don't even think of getting the spare from Brian. I've already warned him not to give them to you." I lie

Dad gives me a gentle push, "Go!" he insists

"Bye and make sure to relax!" I say and I hop into my car and drive to Katniss's. 

The roads are pretty clear but there is snow all along the roofs and the sidewalks; I assume it snowed during the night. Thankfully it isn't heavy this year. Business gets bad if it snows a lot so hopefully there won't be any major snowstorms this year.

Before I know it I'm at Katniss's house, the journey has become familiar to me as of the past few
weeks. When she opens the door, she is dressed in casual sweatpants and an overlarge sweater with a blanket draped around her shoulders. She looks comfy and beautiful.

She smiles at me, "Merry Christmas Peeta"

I step closer; bringing my gloved hands to her cheeks and kiss her lips gently.

"Merry Christmas Kat."

I shut the door behind me and Katniss helps me remove my coat, hat and gloves; putting them on the coat hanger beside me.

Taking my hand, Katniss leads me into her sitting room where her sister and mother are sitting watching that Christmas movie with Tom Hanks in it. There's a small Christmas Tree in the corner, white lights draped around it that Prim and I arranged and the star that Katniss put on the top of the tree (even if I might have had to lift her up a bit to reach it).

"Hi Mrs. Everdeen, Prim, Happy Holidays."

Mrs. Everdeen turns her head to smile at me and Prim wishes me a Happy Holiday back but she is happily engrossed in her movie.

Katniss and I settle into the couch beside Prim and I'm barely there five minutes when Mrs. Everdeen stands and announces that she's going to go out for a walk.

I can feel Katniss stiffen in my arms and I try and give her arm a comforting squeeze.

"Are you sure?" Prim asks softly

Her mother nods and kisses Prim on the head,

"I'm sure, nobody is out on Christmas Day. I'll have some peace."

Her eyes flit to Katniss and they look at each other a bit longer than necessary.

"I'll be back in an hour." Mrs. Everdeen says calmly.

Katniss waits a second before nodding and then Mrs. Everdeen is gone.

Prim turns back to the screen but Katniss's eyes are glazed over; unfocused.

I kiss the side of her head and whisper in her ear,

"She'll be fine."

After a minute, Katniss relaxes in my arms and leans her head back on my shoulder. She doesn't say anything more but I catch her smiling and laughing under her breath over the children's movie and I know she's okay again.

…

Unfortunately time flies when you're watching Christmas movies and soon it's time for me to go home for dinner.

When I start getting ready to leave, Prim rushes forward to give me a hug. I laugh and hug her back. Katniss is right she is growing taller; it wouldn't surprise me if she's taller than Katniss is a few years,
though I'd never tell Kat that.

"Are you still coming over later?" Katniss asks me when she walks me out.

On the last day of school Thom and Darius asked everyone at our table at lunch to meet at the Hob at 8 pm on Christmas Day. None of us had any idea what they were planning but we agreed nevertheless. Except for Delly and Thresh who said their families wouldn't allow them to leave the house on Christmas day.

I nod, "Yeah I think so."

If I can escape from my family that is.

Katniss's lips twitch but she doesn't smile.

A hand dives into her pocket and she hands an envelope to me.

I frown, "Katniss…"

"I know your birthday present was also supposed to be your Christmas present but this doesn't count because it didn't cost me anything."

"But-"

Katniss shoots me a glare and I shut my mouth; accepting the envelope with a small smile.

"Well open it then." Katniss says impatiently, folding her arms.

I raise an eyebrow at her but tear the paper open anyway.

Inside is a small rectangular business card with a phone number on it and a name that I recognise but I'm not sure where from.

"Cinna from school helped me out." Katniss explains "I asked if he knew of any local artists that give lessons to teenagers. Good ones. He told me about this one, she lives in District 7 though so you might have to get the train. He said she's very good and I already contacted her and she said Cinna had been in touch and that she'd give you a few lessons for free. A favour to Cinna I don't know-"

I want to tell her that I love it, that I love her. That I can't believe she went to all this trouble for me but for once in my life words fail me so I don't use words at all.

I step forward and press my lips to hers.

Her lips are cool and I feel guilty about bringing her out in the freezing cold to make out on her doorstep but I can't bring myself to stop.

Seconds, minutes, hours pass and we stay like that; content to be locked in each other's embrace for a little while longer. Eventually I remember my own parcel in my pocket so I reluctantly pull away.

Katniss's cheeks are pink from the chilly air but she smiles widely so I don't feel too bad.

I take out the small, poorly wrapped present from my pocket and hand it to her.

Katniss opens her mouth, probably to say something stupid like I shouldn't have bothered and that she isn't religious anyway but I beat her to it.
"Just take it Kat" I grin "If you hate it, you have every right to throw it back in my face."

Katniss rolls her eyes but thankfully opens it.

She opens the slightly worn box and her mouth opens but no words come out. Lifting the chain up in one hand, she traces over the face of the golden locket with the other.

Finnick surprisingly loves shopping and dragged Annie and I Christmas shopping a week or two ago. After admitting I had no clue what to get Katniss for Christmas, they suggested jewellery. At first I was adamant that jewellery was a no-go area. I've never seen Katniss wear jewellery before and she never showed an interest, but when Annie pointed out the locket with the engraved mockingbird on it; I couldn't walk away.

Ten minutes pass of just Katniss staring at the locket and I'm beginning to get more than a bit nervous. My palms are sweating inside my gloves and I've gulped approximately six times in the past five minutes.

I clear my throat, "So…is it alright?"

Katniss looks up at me, her eyes wide and her eyebrows raised. She lets out a little laugh, clutches the locket tightly in one hand before stepping forward to hug me tightly.

One thing I've noticed about Katniss in the few months that we've been together is that she isn't a hugging person. Not really, I mean she kisses and cuddles, even holds hands but we rarely hug. With that in mind, I wrap my arms around her and hug her back.

The treasured bliss doesn't last long but it's worth it to see Katniss's shining grey eyes and massive smile when she steps back. She turns around too quickly for my liking and offers me the necklace.

"Would you…?"

I take the locket from her and press a gentle, chaste kiss to the back of her neck causing her to shiver.

"Of course"

I put the necklace on her and it embarrassingly takes me a few minutes of fumbling with the clasp to close it on her.

"That okay?" I ask when she turns around again, "It's not too long?" I silently pray that it's fine because I don't think I can handle dealing with that dreaded clasp again.

Thankfully Katniss nods and kisses my cheek, "It's perfect. I love- I love it. Thank you."

... Katniss POV

My eyes widen as I realise what I almost said.

'I love you'

No, no, no. I can't say those words, I don't even feel them towards Peeta.

At least I hadn't thought about it before but now I'm not so sure.

My brain is working on overdrive, Peeta smiles down at me so I don't think he realises what I almost
said but I can't seem to focus.

Why did I almost tell my boyfriend that I love him?

It's not like I thought about telling him that before.

We're taking this slow. Or well as slow as any modern day teenage romance can be.

But as I think about it, the clench in my stomach when his name appears on my phone, the smile on my face whenever I catch myself thinking about him and not to mention how I manage to forget all the bad things going on in my life when I'm with him. Or the times when I do remember them and I talk about them with him and instead of rolling his eyes or changing the subject he comforts me, he helps me.

It's not at all what I thought love would feel like.

But as I stare up at Peeta's flushed cheeks, kiss-bitten lips and intense blue eyes, I realise that I've fallen in love with Peeta Mellark.

Just as I realise that some part of me deep inside has known since the beginning that I would love him sooner or later.

It just happened a lot sooner than I was anticipating.

…

Peeta POV

Katniss smile drops suddenly and she pulls away.

I wait for her to explain but she only stares at me as if I had grown another head.

I brush a hand over my face, suddenly insecure that something was on my face but I find nothing there.

"Kat? You alright love?"

Katniss seems to snap out of her spell at my words and she smiles but it doesn't reach her eyes.

"Yeah, fine. I'm fine. You better get home, your mother will be looking for you."

Katniss steps back again and opens the door to her house.

Even though I know she's right, a sickening feeling settles in my stomach at the thought of going home when I'd rather be here.

"I'll see you tonight?"

Katniss swallows and nods, "Yeah, see you then Peeta."

Then she's gone, a door placed between us and for the whole drive home, I contemplate over what on earth I might have done wrong.

…

Katniss POV
I shut the door and lean against it, letting out a deep breath.

One hand clutches my stomach while the other clings to my locket.

A million thoughts circle in my brain but all of them silence when I spot my mother watching me from down the hall.

She looks fresh from her walk, there's mud on her shoes so she must have gone to the woods and come in the back door.

Mum takes in my appearance for a minute and then she smiles a small, little smile that she used to use on me when I was a child.

"He feels the same way, you know?"

My eyes widen at her words, I open my mouth to say something, anything but that's when Prim rushes in; telling me a Harry Potter marathon is starting on TV and that we need to watch it now.

That's one thing I love about my sister, she never fails to help me forget about my problems; as big or small as they may be with the help of an eleven year old wizard with a lightening bolt scar.

…

Gale POV

Our family used to be quite religious, we'd go to church every Sunday, pray and all of that. But after Dad died and Posy was born we kind of stopped.

Whether it was because of lack of faith or we were all just so busy, I don't remember. All I know is that the only time we've been to a church since was for Posy's christening and Mum spent most of it crying her eyes out over Dad so needless to say none of us are eager to return, even if it is Christmas Day.

Instead we happily continue our tradition of spending hours fawning over presents that Mum and I scrambled to get at the last minute, letting Vick put on a mini-dance show for us and Rory helping Posy put on a puppet show that Mum always thinks is utterly hilarious because she usually has more than a few glasses of wine in her at that stage.

And it's good, really good.

We're having our typical Christmas dinner when Mum turns to me and says,

"You should ask her to visit for an hour or two, if she's allowed."

I narrow my eyebrows, "Who? Katniss?"

Mum shakes her head in despair, "No not Katniss, Madge."

Incoherent words fall out of mouth and my mum just rolls her eyes. She stands and grabs my phone from the counter before shoving it in my face.

"Text her, no call her. Ask her to come over. There's no better day for a mother to meet her son's girlfriend."

I swallow, "Well she's not officially my girlfriend…"
Mum just sits back down and returns to buttering her potatoes,

"Well then, there's no better day to officially start dating the girl you're clearly mad about. Finish up your food, clear it away and then call her."

I decide its better not to protest and the minute I've cleaned up; I call Madge.

"Hello?" Her voice is loud and I can hear the distinct sound of 'Jingle Bells' playing in the background.

"Hey, Happy Holidays."

"Gale! Hi!" There's a bit of shuffling and then the background music becomes more muffled. "You too, sorry all of my relatives are here and they don't know the meaning of quiet." She jokes

I laugh softly, "You want to escape for a bit?"

"Absolutely." She answers immediately, "Before the thing Thom and Darius have set up or after?"

"Well eh…mum wants to meet you…"

There's a beat of silence and then two.

"Oh…do…do you want me to meet her?" Madge stutters

"Yeah…if you'd like to…she's nice, she won't kill you. She doesn't have the power, it's not like she's the mayor or anything."

The sound of Madge's loud laugh drifts into my ears through the phone and I grin.

"I'm sorry!" Madge exclaims "You don't have to meet my family today though, there are waaay too many of them here. I don't want to overwhelm you. When can I come over?"

"Emm," I look around the sitting room and realise that most of the ground can't be seen from all the torn wrapping paper and sweet wrappers thrown everywhere, "Say about a half hour?"

"Great, see you then."

"Bye Madge."

"Bye Gale and Happy Holidays to you too."

…

Two hours later I'm playing a very competitive game of snap on the couch with Rory; I'm losing but that's only because I'm facing Madge and Vick who are playing an intense round of Just Dance and it's slightly distracting.

Madge is out of breath by the third song and I can't stop laughing.

"This…this is harder than it looks. Gale stop…stop laughing, Gale!"

I bring an arm up to cover my mouth and I use the other to place another card on top of the pile.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry babe" where did babe come from? "We just have a lot of practice in this family with Just Dance as Vick is a tiny bit obsessed."
"Am not." Vick defends

"Are too." Rory counters before exclaiming "Snap!" and Madge sniggers

"Alright alright, I can do this." Madge stretches and I have to look away, "Pick a decent song this time Vick."

"But the decent songs have super easy dance moves!"

"Exactly." Madge replies in a monotone voice and Rory and I have to avoid eye contact so we don't both have a heart attack from laughing too hard.

A half hour later Madge has given up with Wii games, Rory has won snap three times over and I hesitantly ask Madge if she wants to go up to my room, in the least creepy way possible.

Madge nods, grabs the rucksack that she brought with her and as we head upstairs, I catch Rory's raised eyebrows and my mum mouthing, 'Leave the door open'; I roll my eyes but follow her orders nonetheless.

Madge looks around my room and I silently pray that she isn't judging me for how tiny it is.

There's barely enough room for my bed, wardrobe and desk but I'm happy with it. I have pictures of my friends on the notice board across from my bed and posters on every other surface of the walls.

I tried to tidy up a bit before Madge arrived so it isn't as messy as it usually is.

"Your room's really nice." Madge says, perched on the end of my bed.

Rubbing the back of my neck; I join her, "Well my parents painted my room a horrid shade a green when they moved in so ever since I lived here it's been my effort to make it look semi-decent."

Madge grins and I watch as her fingers trail along the crumpled duvet,

"Still, it's very you."

I shrug, "Suppose so."

We sit in silence for a minute, sitting side by side on the end of my bed and if Darius were here right now he'd say something along the lines of how he could 'cut the tension with a knife'.

Eventually Madge is the one that breaks the silence,

"So eh…I wasn't sure whether to get you anything. I know you said you aren't religious anymore but…well it's that time or year so…"

She digs through her bag and pulls out a shoe-box.

I raise my eyebrows, "Thank you so much, you didn't-"

Madge rolls her eyes, "They're practical and Katniss helped me pick them out so just…open them."

Following her orders, I open the box to see two brand new hiking boots enveloped in paper-thin white tissue.

I blink twice as I numbly take them out of the box and look at them in detail. I feel the sides and I instantly know they are waterproof. These could not have been cheap. I check inside the soles and
sure enough they are my size.

"Madge…Madge I know this brand. They're incredibly expensive…you can't…I can't accept these."

Madge smirks, "Well they're bought now and I threw away the receipt so you'll have to keep them. I won't wear them. No offence but you are like five shoe sizes bigger than me."

I let out a sound that is between a chuckle and a sigh, "There's nothing I can say that will get you to take them back is there?"

Madge grins and shakes her head "Nope."

That's when I hug her. It's awkward from our positions and the shoe-box and heavy boots in my lap but the feel of her in my arms is good enough for me.

"I've something for you too." I say as I pull away and open the drawer of my dresser.

Madge raises an eyebrow, "What? Really?"

I laugh, "Of course what kind of a- anyway…” I retrieve the present I spent an hour wrapping last night and hand it to her.

Seriously who knew wrapping presents was such a difficult task?

Madge takes her time, gently opening the present. As each tick of my alarm clock passes, another jolt of dread hits my stomach. She probably won't like it…it was a bit presumptuous. Really presumptuous actually.

I'm drawn out of my negative thoughts when I feel Madge take my hand.

"You made me a mix tape?"

"No I made you a CD with all your favourite songs on it."

Madge raises an eyebrow

"Okay yeah a mix tape basically. And I know I got you another CD but you said you like music so…”

Madge squeezes my hand, "Don't worry, I adore it. How did you even know I liked half of these?"

I shrug, "Well I pay attention half of the time and Katniss pays attention the other half."

She laughs under her breath and traces the track-list on the back before stopping at the last song.

"Is…is that one of yours?"

I gulp, "Yeah…it's eh…one I wrote."

Madge grins, "Yeah?"

"Yeah" I confirm

Madge checks her watch and groans, "I'd listen to it now but I better go home. Who knows what relatives have arrived in my absence.” She makes a face that's supposed to be one of disgust but just comes out completely adorable instead.
"That's fine," we stand "Thanks for coming over"

"Oh no...no problem"

Madge slings her bag onto her back and leans up to kiss me on the cheek.

"I'll see you later?" She asks

I nod, "of course"

Downstairs, Madge says goodbye to my family.

Posy rushes to hug her, Vick gives her an enthusiastic high five while Rory just nods from his spot on the couch where he's face timing Prim; honestly they live less than ten minutes away from one another. Mum hugs Madge and wishes her a 'happy holidays' for what must be the fourth time since she's arrived but Madge doesn't seem to mind.

Once we're outside, I help Madge put on her button up black coat. Only when she has flipped her hair out from under the collar, wrapped a purple scarf around her neck and put on a matching hat do I notice the sprinkles of white falling onto her coat.

Madge is too busy fussing with her bag to realise so I brush them off for her.

She looks at me in confusion but then her eyes drift to my hair and she lets out a deep breath that is visible in the bitter air.

"It's snowing" she breathes

I laugh, "Yeah it is"

Madge's fingers thread through my hair, picking the specks of white mush out of it yet the snow keeps falling.

Madge whimpers, "I think that's the best I can do. You better head inside so it doesn't get worse"

"Hmm in a minute." And then my hands are on her face and my lips are on hers.

Her arms wrap around my back; she deepens the kiss and as we stand there in front of my door I can feel the snowflakes falling all around us.

When Madge insists that she has to leave, I tell her "If your family complain just tell them that your boyfriend distracted you."

Madge bites back a large grin before taking off down the road; leaving me standing alone in the snow.

...

Katniss POV

The Hawthornes arrive at 7 and I'm overcome with gratitude as I don't think I can watch anymore TV or eat any more junk food even if I wanted to.

We all sit in the sitting room, Hazelle and my mother talk happily in the corner while my mum braids Posy's hair; Vick flips through his new magazine that we got him, Prim and Rory sit close together on the couch and Gale and I stand by the doorway.
He throws a bag at me and I clumsily catch it.

I shoot him a scowl but he simply grins, "Hope you like it."

I grab the thin rectangular box from under the tree and fling it at him.

My mother's words of disapproval can't be heard over Gale's giggles as he hurries to pick up the wrapped parcel.

"You open yours first." Gale says when he's regained composure

I hastily rip open the packaging and am faced with a soft grey t-shirt. I toss the paper on the floor and hold out the t-shirt so I can read it.

In big block letters it reads:

'Me?
Sarcastic?
Never!'

I snort but from Gale's dazzling smile I can tell that he knows I love it.

"Thanks Galey. Your turn."

Gale tears open his gift as carelessly as I did mine and I can practically hear our mother's flinch.

Gale holds the glass case tenderly in his hands; his mouth drops open as he opens it.

It's not much. I ordered a case of five guitar picks for him online. He has had the same ones for years and I know he's been meaning to get new ones. I found these ones on a music website but what appealed to me the most was they had the name of a band on them that I know Gale adores.

Gale swallows before closing the box and shoving them in his pocket.

"Thanks Catnip; they're eh really great."

"I know" I tease

Gale rolls his eyes and opens his mouth to retort but Hazelle interrupts him,

"I hope you two are gonna clean up that mess"

Gale and I exchange mutual sighs and mutter our agreements; spending the next five minutes picking up and throwing out all the wasted wrapping paper from the day.

"Hey" I say to him after we're finished, "Have you any idea what Thom and Darius are planning?"

Gale shakes his head, "No idea. I guess we'll find out soon enough. We better get going actually."

"Yeah I suppose we better."

...

On our walk to the Hob we hear a loud car horn sound from behind us and after we jump out of our skin, we realise it's Peeta's car.
He rolls down the window and we can see Finnick and Annie in the backseat.

Peeta raises an eyebrow, "Want a lift?"

... 

The ride to the Hob seems longer than it should be. I sit in the front beside Peeta but I can't bring myself to say anything to him after the almost incident earlier today.

Gale sits in the back with Finnick and Annie, they are talking amicably until Gale lets out a shocked gasp.

I turn sharply and frown at him, "What's wrong?"

Gale is staring at Annie's left hand that's innocently resting her lap, specifically the sparkling ring on Annie's finger.

I look from the ring to Annie, back to ring again.

"Emmm...guys? Something you want to tell us?"

Annie and Finnick's faces portray utmost horror but I'm pretty sure Gale and mine do too.

"It's...it's not what you think" Annie protests

"It really isn't" Finnick insists

Peeta laughs from beside me, his eyes still trained on the road.

"Is this about the ring?" He asks

"Yes" Finnick sighs

"What do you- of course this is about the ring!" I say, horrified that Peeta is so calm about this.

"Can I...?" Gale asks, reaching for Annie's hand and when she nods he takes it in his and studies the ring carefully.

A minute later he breaks out into an understanding smile.

"Promise ring right?"

Finnick nods and Annie bites her lip, presumably to hold back her laughter from the way she's shaking.

Finnick notices it too because he pinches her arm gently,

"I don't know what you're giggling about, you almost had a heart attack when I gave it to you."

Annie rolls her eyes, "Finnick you practically got down on one knee and you said a whole speech declaring your love for me, of course I assumed it was a proposal."

"Can I see?" I ask awkwardly.

I have little interest in rings but curiosity gets the better of me.

Annie offers me her hand and I take it, taking in each detail of the delicate piece of jewellery.
The diamond looks real enough but I wouldn't know anything about that sort of thing. Up close you can tell that it isn't fancy enough to be an engagement ring but it's beautiful nevertheless. On the back, engraved in the band is the word 'Indivisible' in italics.

I let go of her hand and smile genuinely at her,

"It's gorgeous."

Annie smiles and leans her head on Finnick's shoulder.

Finnick suddenly breaks out into a wide, proud grin,

"Oh that's nothing! Wait until you see what she got me!"

Annie blushes a deep shade of scarlet,

"It's really nothing compared to what you gave me."

Finnick shoots her a look that clearly says 'don't be ridiculous' and pulls something out from under his shirt that's hanging around his neck.

It's a necklace, a sea-shell necklace that has been carved into a thin, upside down pyramid shape. The twirls and bridges in it are intricate and well-made. It suits him really well and I know it must mean a lot to him as it's clear that the shell came from District Four.

Finnick still has the soppy grin on his face as he explains his present,

"We went to Four a few months back and she brought home a bunch of shells. I didn't understand why but it turns out she made lots of necklaces for me with them. And look she made the rope too just like I taught her to!"

Finnick continues his explanation and I face the front again; half-listening to the conversation but smiling and nodding along nevertheless.

Finnick and Annie are one of those couples in the movies that you just know are endgame.

Peeta and I are both vastly different, Madge and Gale might turn out to be better off as friends but Finnick and Annie...have something really special. Something different than we do.

The way they look at each other like there's nobody else around. I think that's what it looks like to not only be in love but also accept that you're in love and to thrive in it.

I feel Peeta take one of my hands in his and squeeze it gently, no doubt assuming that I'm bored by his friend's small talk.

It's then that I realise that even though Peeta and I aren't in the place that Finnick and Annie are, we seem to be well on the way there.

I'm not sure whether that excites me or frightens me. Maybe a bit of both.

...

We arrive at the Hob a few minutes later, somehow I've eased in Peeta's presence now after the conversation with Finnick and Annie.

Madge is waiting for us at the door, understandably uncertain about going in alone, especially since
the building is not supposed to be open today and yet the distinct sound of Christmas music emits from inside.

Gale looks relieved at not being the fifth wheel anymore and he's the first out of the car to greet her.

Peeta and I exchange knowing smiles and we follow his lead.

Together the six of us huddle outside the Hob for a moment, it isn't snowing as bad as it was a few hours ago but every now and then I'll feel a speck of crystal white fluff fall onto my hair or forehead.

"So...should we knock? " I suggest

It's the Hob yes and I do work here but it seems like uncharted territory to come here on a holiday when we are clearly not working. Part of me worries Thom and Darius have broken in even though I know neither of them ever would.

Finnick nods, Peeta makes a half nod, half shrug gesture but only Gale actually answers,

"We might as well"

He steps forward, his left hand still entwined in Madge's and he uses the other to knock twice on the door.

The door swings open two seconds later and Thom and Darius stand there grinning at us, wearing shockingly vibrant red and white identical Christmas sweaters.

"Happy Holidays!" They unanimously exclaim and before I can blink, they pull out those tiny party poppers that pop confetti everywhere right at us.

So now we are all covered in both confetti and snow.

On any other day I think we would have been a little mad but the five of us can't help but laugh. The secrecy and tension of the past week of Darius and Thom's side looks and sly hints have been driving us around the bend; but I suppose their surprise can't be that bad if they start the evening with colourful confetti all over my coat...right?

"Well don't just stand there dumbfounded in the cold, come in, come in!" Thom reaches out his hands and pulls the two closest to him, Madge and Gale, inside before standing back and hurriedly gesturing for us all to follow.

The Hob looks relatively the same as a few days ago, the decorations are still up, the lights are on but the tables and chairs that are usually scattered on the floor have been pushed to the side. The ancient jukebox in the corner is playing Christmas music and there are plates of party food and cans of soda on the counter.

"What's all this then?" Finnick asks curiously

"Well Mr. Odair," Sae emerges from the kitchen, wipes her hand on a tea-towel and smiles at us, "Nobody celebrates the holidays as well as we do so why not make an party out of it?"

Finnick hesitates for a moment before grinning; in an instant he has bolted over to my boss and is happily chatting to her about who knows what while helping her carry out the rest of the food.

Why am I not surprised that they get along so well?
Gale POV

I have to admit I'm impressed.

Thom and Darius managed to pull off this successful, secret Christmas party with the help of Sae and none of us knew about it.

"Well we just thought we’d do something fun you know? 'Tis the season and all that." Darius explained

I'm sitting with him and Thom on two tables that are pressed against the side wall.

Madge is talking with Annie across from us and Katniss, Peeta and Finnick are laughing about something with Sae.

"Plus it's our last year of school and things have finally settled down so we decided to celebrate." Thom adds

I raise an eyebrow and smirk at them,

"Is that why you two are wearing matching sweaters?"

Darius bursts out laughing while Thom just shakes his head,

"No we just accidentally got each other the same Christmas present." Thom explains

"Yeah, we were in town a few weeks ago and we both commented how horrific the sweater was. I thought it would be hilarious to buy it for Thom since he practically vomited at the sight of it and he apparently he had the same idea."

I roll my eyes but a chuckle escapes my lips anyway,

"You guys are such idiots."

Darius raises an eyebrow, "Says the boy who gave his girlfriend a CD with a song he wrote her on it for Christmas."

My smile falls, "Shut up."

"Did you even tell her that the song is about her?" Thom asks, his tone a little softer than Darius's

I look over to Madge who is listening intently to something Annie is saying and sigh,

"I didn't get a chance."

"Are you going to tell her?" Darius asks

"Well I..." I hesitate "It's pretty obvious...if I point it out then I'll probably ruin it."

Thom rolls his eyes, "Gale, if you don't tell her then she'll spend hours agonising over whether or not you wrote it for her or about someone else. Then things will get awkward and I'm not ready for things to go bad for you two just yet."

"Thom's right" Darius inputs, "You've got to tell her. Girls like it when you tell them how you feel. Or at least I think they do. Maybe we should ask Katniss on that one?"
All three of us look over at Katniss who is in a deep conversation with Sae but her hand is holding on tightly to Peeta's; without saying a word we all know that we don't need to ask Katniss to know the answer to our question.

...

Peeta, Katniss, Finnick, Annie, Madge and I are all dancing to 'Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree' in the centre of the floor when Thom opens the back door and shouts at us from outside,

"Hey guys, there's a surprise out here too!"

We grab our coats and gloves; strolling outside to see what the excitement is all about but when we get outside there is nothing there except for a blanket of snow and the old, worn bench from my date with Madge.

Finnick frowns and looks around, "Thom? Darius? What's the surprise?"

"This" A voice says from behind a dustbin and in the blink of an eye a snowball is flying through the air and has hit Finnick full force in the face.

Silence fills the air for a minute. Annie's eyes are wide, Madge has a hand to her mouth in shock while the rest of us are barely holding in our laughter. Finnick calmly wipes the cold snow from his face, cracks his neck before locking eyes with Sae who has come out of her hideout.

"Oh it's on."

...

After twenty minutes, the bitter cold has got to us and we are forced to go back inside; every last one of us covered in white frost and snow but with wide grins etched on our faces.

Unfortunately it's also time we all go home.

Thom and Darius insist that they are fine clearing up alone but I decide on staying behind to help anyway.

"You want me to stay too?" Katniss asks

"No you're fine, just maybe bring Rory home for me? I presume he's still at your house but mum and the two kids will probably be home by now."

Katniss nods and she walks back over to Peeta.

I feel a tap on my shoulder and I turn to face Madge who is smiling brightly at me.

"Hey, Peeta's going to drive me home with the others."

"Oh that's good."

"I eh...I listened to the CD by the way. I loved it."

I rub the back of my neck, "Oh yeah?"

She nods, licking her lips, "Especially the last song."

"Oh..."
I can practically feel Darius and Thom's eyes drilling into the back of my head.

"It was..." I take a deep breath "That song, I wrote it a week or two ago."

"Yeah?" Madge asks and the hitch in her voice gives me the courage to continue

"Eh yeah...I wrote it about us. Well about...about you really."

After the words leave my lips everything seems to stop. The music in the background becomes muffled, Annie's laughter from outside and the sound of opening car doors are drowned out by the thumping in my ears.

Madge's fingers are in my hair and her mouth is firmly on mine.

We stay in our own little world for who knows how long before I'm forced to pull away, all too aware of our surroundings.

I let out a breathy laugh, "You really liked the song then?"

Madge shakes her head, "No, I really loved it."

I kiss her head gently before shoving her every so slightly towards the door, "Happy Holidays Madge, text me that you got home safe."

Madge bites back a grin, "I will. Happy Holidays Gale...and thanks."

And then she's gone.

...

When we are finished, I check my phone for the time and I see four new notifications.

One is a text from Katniss letting me know that she dropped Rory home, another from Madge letting me know she got home safe, a text which she ended with two x's I may add.

The others are from an unknown number, one is a missed call and the other is a voicemail.

Standing outside, waiting for Thom, I dial my voicemail box and press the button to listen to it.

"Gale...Gale it's James Heavensbee. Listen I know it's been a while since I've been in contact and I'm sorry. I just wanted to let you know that I talked to my bosses, we had a lot of meetings and conversations but I convinced them to give you a shot. The four of you. I'd really like to meet up with you to discuss this. Preferably with the three other members there as well. I talked to the head guy and he agrees with you. We want to sign you. All four of you."

My fingers tremble as the voice from the phone continues to speak. His words circling round and round in my head.

'I understand you mightn't want that anymore but if you do then call me back on this number. I understand if you need time to think about it but you should know that my company and I are very sorry for any offence and hurt we may have caused and we want to make amends. Goodbye Gale, I hope to hear from you soon.'

When Thom finds me a few minutes later, I'm slumped against the wall with my eyes shut tightly.

Thom places a gentle hand on my shoulder and when I open my eyes, he searches them for any signs
of a problem.

"I suppose our drama-free weeks have come to an end?" Thom says quietly, he has always been quick to catch on when something is wrong.

I nod, tilting my head up to stare past the snow-covered rooftops to the twinkling stars,

"You could say that Thom...you could definitely say that."

...
Happy New Year

... 

Gale POV

I postpone telling the Rebels about James for a few days.

I convince myself that it's because we are all so busy which isn't technically a lie.

Katniss's mum caught a cold so she was busy taking care of her, Thom's family wanted him around during the holidays and Darius and I were almost always caught up with work.

I certainly couldn't tell them through text or over the phone, it would have been all kinds of wrong.

I think Thom has his suspicions because of my reaction to the voicemail on Christmas Day but he hasn't said anything and neither have I.

Then New Year's Eve arrives and Darius has organised for us to have a get together at his house from nine pm onwards.

We decide to keep it small this time, just the four rebels and I think we're all happy with that.

Darius enlists the help of Thom for the barbecue and Katniss and I sit on the outside bench in Darius's backyard, laughing at them.

Darius has an apron that says 'kiss the cook' on it and he forces a crisp white chef's hat onto a blushing Thom's head.

"You could help you know; instead of lounging around and giggling at us." Thom remarks

"Em I offered." Katniss reminds them

Thom gives her an 'are you serious?' look while Darius just snorts.

"Don't worry we'll clean up." I promise

We love Katniss but she's not the best cook. But then again neither am I which I suppose is why Thom is the one who is doing most of the work.

Darius's face lights up and he goes back to looking over Thom's shoulder to make sure he's doing it right.

Their muttered bickering drifts over to us.

"Dariee you don't have to check up on me every five seconds okay?"

"I know, I know. I just don't want anything to get burnt."

"It won't!"

"But-"

"It won't okay? So just relax and go sit with the others." Thom turns his head to look at Darius who is still standing directly behind him, "I'm fine."
Darius hesitates for a minute before begrudgingly sitting beside me on the bench.

"Darius?" Katniss asks cautiously

"Yes Katstar?"

"Could you tell me why are we having a barbeque? In the middle of winter no less?"

Katniss Everdeen, asking the important questions.

It definitely isn't a stupid question seeing as I'm still wearing my winter coat, Katniss has gloves on and Darius is wearing a thick woolly scarf.

Thom was wearing a scarf too but Darius tugged it off of him, fussing that bits of it could get into the food. Thom had glared at him but said nothing in favour of not starting an argument.

"Because it's New Year's Eve!" Darius grins "We need to celebrate in a unique and fabulous way! So while all our peers are out drinking themselves ill or god knows what else, we are going to have a lovely barbecue."

Thom sniggers from his place behind the transportable grill and Darius shoots him a look.

"Well we could sit inside if you're cold but I doubt we could get that thing inside. Plus it would be rude to abandon Thom out here all alone."

"Very rude" Thom agrees; a smirk still etched on his face.

Katniss wraps her arms around herself and runs her hands up and down her arms to warm herself up, "Okay, okay! I can handle a bit of cold if good food is on the line."

"And it better be good." I add; receiving a sharp hit over the head with what I suspect might be Thom's spatula.

"Ow! Anyway there's something I want to tell you guys." I say carefully

"You got Madge pregnant." Darius says instantly

I roll my eyes,

"Dariee no-"

"Thom, I told you! What did I tell you? I said this would happen and-"

This time Darius is the one being hit over the head with a spatula,

"Shut up and listen to him or I'm eating your burger." Thom orders

Darius sticks his tongue out at him but he obliges.

"What's up Galey?" Katniss asks

I have thought of a thousand different ways that I could tell them but I decide that just showing them is easier so I pull out my phone and play the voicemail for them.

"Gale...Gale it's James Heavensbee."

I watch Katniss's eyes widen from across the table.
"Listen I know it's been a while since I've been in contact and I'm sorry. I just wanted to let you know that I talked to my bosses, we had a lot of meetings and conversations but I convinced them to give you a shot."

Darius huffs.

"The four of you. I'd really like to meet up with you to discuss this. Preferably with the three other members there as well. I talked to the head guy and he agrees with you. We want to sign you. All four of you."

I hear Thom put down his weapon (spatula) behind me.

'I understand you mightn't want that anymore but if you do then call me back on this number. I understand if you need time to think about it but you should know that my company and I are very sorry for any offence and hurt we may have caused and we want to make amends. Goodbye Gale, I hope to hear from you soon.'

An irritating beep signals that the voicemail has come to an end, leaving only the sizzling of the food and the distant sound of cars driving by to fill the cool, quiet, bitter air.

I take a glance at the others, Katniss's mouth is agape in shock, Darius is staring wide eyed at the phone with his eyebrows pulled into a frown while Thom's eyes flit between me and the phone and I know he has put the pieces together from Christmas Day.

"I got it a few days ago but I wanted to tell you in person." I explain

The others nod in understanding but still nobody speaks.

Thom runs back and forth from the kitchen, gathering plates and alike; Darius rushes to help him and Katniss and I are left alone.

Even though she hasn't said anything I can tell that this has unnerved her.

Things were going so well, we didn't need this curveball to complicate things.

Katniss's fingers tug on the end of her braid and when I catch her gaze, I smile at her.

"You know none of us are going to agree to this unless you want to?"

"I can't ask that of you…” Katniss says

"Don't be so self-centred Catnip." I tease "It would be the same if they originally said they didn't want Thom or Darius or me. And even now if one of us doesn't want to do this than we won't."

Katniss drops her hands into her lap, "Really?"

"Really." Darius answers for me.

He and Thom appear at the top of the bench, placemats under their arms.

"The food is cooked but we might want to eat inside…” Thom suggests, looking up at the pitch black sky and I can hear his teeth chattering.

I laugh with relief, "Sounds perfect."

All talk of James Heavensbee is postponed until after we eat.
The food is amazing and we all thank Thom generously. Darius jokes that he thinks his food may be a bit burnt and Thom quickly threatens to take it away from him which causes Darius to immediately shut up.

Despite the discomforting news they have just received, my friends make an effort to keep the mood light.

"We need some music!" Darius exclaims

Katniss and I are cleaning up but Thom, who is sitting comfortably on the kitchen table laughs as Darius rushes about the kitchen, plugging in his stereo and flickering through his CD case.

I shake my head and tune out Darius and Thom's debate over which CD to play, focusing more on not getting soap all over my clothes.

By the time Katniss and I are finished, Darius and Thom are giddily dancing around the kitchen, high on the coca cola that we drank with our food.

Katniss and I lean against the counter and we watch as Darius twirls Thom around the small kitchen. Thom reaches forward and tugs Darius closer gently by the hem of his scarf and then one hand is on his waist, the other clutched in Darius's palm and they are galloping around the room.

Before I know what's happening, Katniss tugs me out and we're laughing and dancing along with them to the beat of our favourite music.

The four of us push the thought of our future to the back of our minds; we completely forget about James Heavensbee, music contracts and college just for a few minutes.

For a few minutes we allow ourselves to be free.

…

Katniss POV

"We should talk to him."

We're sitting on the couch pretending to watch the people in Times Square prepare for midnight when I bring it up.

Gale turns to give me an inquisitive look, Thom raises his eyebrows and Darius shoots up from where he was comfortably lying against Thom's shoulder.

"James?" Darius checks

I nod, "We could at least hear what he has to say."

Part of me never wants to see that man again.

I probably wouldn't have minded so much if he had told me that he didn't want to sign me because he thought I was vocally weaker than my friends. But instead his problem was with my gender which infuriates me.

I remember what Thom said to James the night we last spoke to him. All of us were slightly shocked that the soft-spoken Thom chose to speak so harshly and honestly to someone who had his future in their hands.
Thom had said how James's company were desperate to replace their last boy-band that had recently split up. Apparently they must be severely desperate if they're changing their minds so much that they'd let a girl as well as three boys sign with them.

I'm not stupid. I know this is an amazing opportunity that we might never get again. Yet for some reason after our last conversation with Mr. Heavensbee I was left feeling more than a bit unsettled.

But I know it can't hurt to at least hear him out.

I catch Gale's eye and he watches me for a moment, probably trying to see if I'm lying or not before he nods in agreement.

"Alright, I'll call him in the next few days." He turns to Darius and Thom who are sitting on the other couch. "What about you two? Are you happy with talking to him?"

Thom and Darius share a look.

Darius shrugs, "I am if you are."

Thom nods, "I'd like to hear what he has to say for himself, so definitely."

"Alright then."

And that's that. We don't talk about it for another half hour.

The presenter Caesar Flickerman on the TV is quite entertaining this year. His hair is dyed dark blue to match his suit and he's practically bouncing up and down with excitement as he interviews people in the crowd, the performing celebrities and so forth.

"Emm guys?" All of us turn to look at Thom, "If this doesn't work out with James. Have any of you given much thought to universities?"

It was always our dream to move out to the west coast and study there. To find a good music college, hopefully all get into the same one and to study there while still working on our songs.

However dreams aren't reality and even though we've been saving for years, I doubt any of us have the money to move to the other side of the country let alone go to university as well.

The tension builds as nobody wants to be the first to talk about their plans because we all know what going to university means.

Gale sighs, "Well…I think we've all thought of them but…affording them is another issue."

Thank god for Gale, one of the only people who can actually say what we're all thinking.

"Well I mean..." Darius swallows "I'd love to study music but…if that doesn't work out I might study engineering so I could work with my dad…"

Thom nods, "Yeah…I've thought about applying for some English literature courses…they aren't what I want to do but…"

We all know what he means. That if this all goes badly or if the band splits up, we all need to have a backup plan.

Trouble is I've never been good at making a plan B.
My plan Bs are always rubbish because I like plan A too much to want to try something else.

"Have any of you applied for any music scholarships?" I ask hesitantly

We never talked about it but it was always sort of known that if we were to go to university then we would need scholarships.

We also know how hard they are to come by and how it would be almost impossible to give them to four students from the same school in one year.

The boys glance to one another and each of them nods silently.

Caesar Flickerman announces that there's five minutes until midnight and just like that we force ourselves to forget about our futures again for another while.

Darius opens a few bags of popcorn and even though we all berate him for still being hungry it doesn't stop the rest of us from eating some too.

Darius's parents come in for the countdown; I have to squeeze into Gale's side so they can sit beside us but I don't mind.

We're happy, despite everything we've talked about tonight and that unexpected voicemail the four of us are still happy.

Darius pulled himself up from leaning into Thom's side when his parents came in and he's now pulled his knees to his chest and is eating from the bowl in his lap.

His parents are asking Thom about his resolutions for this year. Thom lets out a nervous laugh, exchanges a glance with Darius then says he hasn't decided yet.

Gale is muttering playful insults about the presenter's fake personality and cheesy jokes; I have to choke back a laugh at them because he isn't wrong.

Then the crowd on the TV starts chanting:

"10"

"9"

I send a quick text to Prim, telling her I hope she's okay and that I'll be home soon.

"8"

"7"

Darius sets his bowl of popcorn down on the table and claps his hands together excitedly.

"6"

"5"

Thom runs a hand through his hair and grins at the screen.

"4"

"3"
Gale squeezes my shoulder gently and I smile at him for a split second before turning back to the screen.

"2"

"1"

"HAPPY NEW YEAR!"

Fireworks explode on the screen and Times Square is filled with music, cheering and clapping.

Darius's parents kiss to mark the occasion and I had almost forgotten that that was the custom of this holiday.

I feel Gale press a kiss to the top of my head before ruffling my hair up mischievously. I glare at him and nudge him in the ribs causing him to laugh.

Darius and Thom kiss each other on the cheek and just like that another year has come and gone.

I feel my phone vibrate in my pocket and when I check it there's a message from Peeta.

"Happy New Year Kat!"

I smile and reply,

"Happy New Year Peeta"

I look around at my friends and I wonder what on Earth this year could bring because last year was certainly full of surprises.

I look down at Peeta's response of several heart emoticons and I smile.

I suppose not all of those surprises were bad.

...
Our Future Plans

Katniss POV

"Ms. Everdeen?" A stern voice says "Katniss?"

I snap out of my daydream and look up to see Principal Snow standing over me with dead eyes and a raised eyebrow.

"Eh yeah?"

Immediately I wince at my tired tone of voice which he will certainly not be impressed with.

Principal Snow snorts and walks to the front of the class,

"Just because this is a study class Ms. Everdeen does not mean that you're allowed to fall asleep."

A few giggles from the back of the classroom reach my ears but I ignore them. Frustration bubbles inside me and I want to protest that I was just thinking with my eyes closed and that I certainly wasn't sleeping but then I catch Thom's gaze from the corner of my eye.

He sends me an encouraging smile and a slight shake of his head.

Principal Snow is already comfortably seated in his chair so I give in and open a book even though I know I won't be able to take in a word of it.

I write the date in my copybook, '5th of February' and try to drown out the noise from Marvel's earphones behind me.

Of course Snow cares more about my daydreaming than Marvel's rubbish, boisterous music.

I try to focus on writing notes but I can't focus.

It's been about a month since we last saw James Heavensbee yet he always seems to be in the back of my mind.

Gale arranged a meeting with him for a week after New Year's Day and it went about as well as anyone could expect.

He apologised for his behaviour, even produced a written apology from the CEO of the company. Darius commented later that they were probably fearful that we would sue them for sexism and he was probably right.

But James definitely gave the Rebels some food for thought. He told us that the company would be more than happy to help pay for certain fees if we agreed to sign with them.

'Compensation' or something Thom had explained later but I didn't fully understand it.

The conversation didn't last long but a lot was discussed. The four of us agreed to think about James's proposal and to get back to him.

Four weeks later, we still haven't reached a decision.
We are well aware that whatever we decide will affect all of our futures.

Signing with this record label could be the best thing we ever do or the worst.

Not to mention the fact that we are a bit young. I know there are plenty of celebrities my age who are extremely rich and famous because of their music but Gale, Thom, Darius and I don't really want to be extremely rich and famous.

We just want to write, play, sing and make people happy; if we get paid for that then… well that's just a bonus.

I think it's an amazing opportunity that we would be stupid not to take.

But at the same time I can't help but feel wary.

And I think the guys feel the same way.

The bell shrills and as Thom and I make our way to our next class, I can feel Principal Snow's death glare burning into my back.

Our next class is career guidance with Ms. Portia.

Today the teachers have split the year in half so we have a larger class than usual because apparently they want to try something new.

I sit in my usual spot beside Thom, Darius and Gale and when Peeta and Madge walk through the door, they sit with us too.

Cinna walks in after his class and stands beside Portia. He is wearing a navy trench coat today that has paint splattered onto it to give it an edgy twist. Thick black eyeliner highlights his eyes and he has his trademark swirls at the end of his wings.

I admire him for his passion to bring art into everything he does, it makes me sad that I was so useless in art class; I would have liked to learn more from him.

"Alright class listen up for a minute!" Portia says and everyone goes silent.

She isn't a strict teacher but everyone likes her so we listen to her whenever she asks something of us.

"Today you will pair up in groups of five or six and each of you will discuss your future. Everyone has to say at least one thing that they plan to do after you leave school. I don't care if that one thing is going to the moon or weekly trips to the local bar but you have to say something. Try and keep the noise level down as best you can."

Seeing as my group is conveniently already formed, the six of us manage to arrange our chairs so we are sitting in a small circle.

"Right, well who wants to go first?" Gale asks

None of us look too eager to begin.

The rebels and I hate discussing our future, especially seeing as that's all we seem to be doing lately. Peeta and I have actually never talked about what we want to do after school and the last I heard was Madge wasn't sure what she wanted to do yet.
Nobody speaks for a minute or two and then Darius is the one who caves in,

"Well if I decide to go to college then I'll probably study engineering…like my dad." Darius's frown turns into a grin, "But aside from that I plan to get a tattoo one day, probably more than one if I can afford it so yeah."

I smile; Darius never fails to make a tense situation light-hearted.

Peeta goes next,

"Well…honestly I…I've no idea what I want to do."

My eyes widen and I turn to him but he is carefully avoiding my gaze. I know we never talked about how futures but…I hadn't expected him to say that and in such a quiet, lost voice too.

It never dawned on me that Peeta might be in the same boat as me. He's always so calm and collected; I suppose I just thought that because he's so talented at so many things he knows what he wants to do.

"That's alright." Gale smiles reassuringly at him "I don't know what I want to do either."

Peeta smiles in thanks and I'm grateful that I'm sitting beside him so I can take his hand in mine. Peeta jumps when he feels my fingers lace through his but before I get too worried, he relaxes into my grip.

"I do want to go to an Arctic Monkeys concert someday." Gale offers "Do you think Portia will accept that as a plan for the future?"

Thom looks past Darius at Gale and shakes his head, "Probably not but it's pretty cool either way."

Gale smirks, "True so you still sticking to English Lit then?"

Madge and Peeta turn to Thom in confusion

Thom swallows, "If the whole music thing doesn't work out then yeah…either English Lit or teaching."

"Sounds great" Darius says, smiling at him

My turn, "I'm not sure what I want to do. Maybe go to a music college somewhere or take a course." I shrug "I don't really know."

I feel Peeta squeeze my hand just as I did for him a minute ago and unconsciously I smile.

"What about you Madge?" I continue

I catch Madge's eyes drift to Gale who sits across from her for a second before shifting back to me.

"Em… college wise…I'm thinking about the Academy of Ballet in the New York. I don't know whether I'd be good enough but that's where I've applied so far."

To give him credit, Gale does a very good job of masking his shock and his pain.

His shoulders stiffen slightly and I catch his eyes flicker but I doubt anyone else notices just how this has affected him other than me…and maybe Madge.
Madge meets Gale's eyes again but neither of them says anything.

The air is thick with uncomfortable tension but this time not even Darius can say anything to break it.

...

Darius POV

After career guidance, Thom and I walk to our lockers and immediately I start rambling just so we don't have to talk about what happened in our last class.

"Tommy?"

Thom opens his locker and his lips twitch a bit at the nickname only I'm allowed to call him,

"Yes Dariee?"

"Did you know that today is National Nutella Day?" I open my locker and throw in my books

Thom sniggers, "Seriously?"

I face him and with my right hand I slowly pull out the massive Nutella jar from my locker,

"Ta dah!" I sing-song teasingly

Thom laughs out loud, "Oh my god Darius you'll get sick if you eat all of that."

I smirk, "That's why you're going to eat it with me."

Thom raises an eyebrow, "I don't even like Nutella."

I gasp dramatically, "Blasphemy!"

"Okay, okay no I was joking!" Thom protests, his voice shaking with laughter.

I roll my eyes but Thom rips the jar from my hand, our fingertips only brushing for a fraction of a second but long enough for a lump to lodge in my throat.

"Woah it even says its National Nutella Day on it." Thom whispers in wonder and I snort, of course Thom would be fascinated with the design of it. "Alright we can eat it all at lunch if that's what you really want."

I lick my lips "Of course it is"

Thom pointedly avoids my gaze, "But if you throw up because you ate too much, you owe me."

I grin, "Okay."

...

"You hate engineering."

I take a bite of my Nutella sandwich and I throw Thom a dirty look; he's as subtle as ever.

"Cheers Thom."

"It's true! You went on work experience with your dad two years ago and you called me every ten
minutes to complain about how bored you were and how much you hated it. And if I remember correctly you told me that if you ever consider being an engineer of any kind, I should tie you up and smack some sense into you."

I wiggle my eyebrows, "That was just me trying to get you to tie me up."

There's a pause.

Thom's mouth drops open and a rose blush spreads over his cheeks.

After a second he breaks eye contact and eats some Nutella, "Stop changing the subject."

"I'm not changing the-"

Thom cocks an eyebrow and I sigh.

He knows me far too well.

"Fine okay you're right." I throw my arms up in surrender "But there's nothing else I want to do…"

"Other than signing with the record label?" Thom supplies

I open my mouth to ask how he knew but I think better of it. After all he's probably thinking the same thing about his future.

"Yeah…I mean that's just it for me you know? I love drumming, I like writing songs and…I like working with you guys. It's not the smartest option I know but-"

"I know" Thom reaches over and places his hand over mine "I feel the same"

My mind goes blank and I instantly forget what we were just talking about.

My mouth opens and closes as I struggle to formulate a sentence.

Thom seems to catch on and he quickly takes back his hand,

"Sorry"

Panic fills me and I shake my head, "Don't apologise for that, ever."

Thom's cheeks flush again

"Just…" I tilt my head in the general direction of the rest of the cafeteria filled with our peers "Not here yeah?"

Thom nods in agreement and moves on,

"So we both want to sign with James?"

I snatch Thom's spoon from my hand and use it to scoop up Nutella, plainly ignoring his protests

"Yup" I mumble through my mouthful of chocolate

Thom scrunches up his nose "You're gross"

I wink at him, "Yes but you love me anyway."
Thom's eyes widen and I curse myself again.

What is it with me and my big mouth today?

But this time Thom doesn't apologise, pull away or even blush.

Instead he rips the spoon from my hand and eats his own mouthful of chocolate, though his is admittedly half the amount mine was.

He swallows hard, making his Adam's apple prominent before tugging his lips into a thin smirk,

"Of course I love you; you share your Nutella with me."

The bell sings and the chorus of students' groans chime around me. Thom packs away his things and slides the jar of Nutella over to me.

"We can finish it later after school."

"A-after school?"

I stuttered. I never stutter.

Thom stands and leans over the table to look down at me,

"Yeah, you're coming over to mine remember? We're studying for that test this week."

I gulp, I had forgotten about that.

"Yeah…"

Thom slings his bag over his shoulder and stands up straight again,

"See you later then."

A minute later he is out the door and fading into the crowds while I'm still frozen to the chair.

God, I'm screwed.

...

Gale POV

"Can we talk?"

I don't look up from my textbook but I can tell just from that soft voice that it's Madge who is standing in front of me.

I nod and I hear her slip into the seat beside me.

We're in a study class and our teacher has fallen asleep as usual.

Most of the students have left but those of us who remain are either asleep as well, listening to music or like me are actually trying to study.

I hesitate for a second, admittedly reluctant to have this conversation but then I shut my textbook and turn and face her.
Madge's blue eyes are staring intently into mine as her pale pink polished fingertip twirls a loose strand of her blonde hair from her ponytail.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you."

Her voice is so small and fragile that any frustration I felt evaporates instantly.

I pull my chair closer to hers and take her hands in mine.

"You don't have to apologise Madge. I…I shouldn't have acted so cold towards you after what you said. I was just surprised…New York is" I let out a breathy laugh "It's really far away." "I mightn't even get in or decide to go there." I nod, my eyes focused on how our hands are intertwined and the contrast of our skin tones that is somehow a strange kind beautiful.

"I know, I know and it shouldn't have hit me as hard as it did because in a few months we'll all be going our separate ways."

Madge shakes her head and leans her forehead against mine, "Don't say that." She begs "Please don't say that."

"I didn't mean-"

"Can we just…can we just live in the here and now?" Madge closes her eyes "I like this, I really like this and I don't want to taint what we have, what we could have with what ifs."

I shut mine too and squeeze her hand "I like this too." I say, even though I'm aware that I might more than like this.

"We can talk more about…us when we find out what we are doing after high school. But there's plenty of time for that."

I lean down and kiss her chastely on the lips, pulling away quickly due to our surroundings.

Madge opens her eyes and smiles softly at me, "Thank you."

"Anytime"

Needless to say I don't get any studying done in that study class.

But even though the idea of Madge moving so far away pains me in a surprisingly intense way, it makes me realise something.

If she does get into that college then we'll be far apart no matter what decision the Rebels and I make.

So…there's not much else stopping me from signing that contract.

I've thought a lot about it over the past few weeks and even though James's words about Katniss from a few months ago still turn my stomach, I know that this is something that I have wanted for years.
I'm confident that this is what I want; I'm just not sure if it's what the others want too.

The Rebels' Group Chat:

From Katniss Everdeen: Okay so do we all know whether we want to work with James or not?

From Gale Hawthorne: Yeah I know

From Darius Homesway: I do and Thom's with me too and so does he

From Katniss Everdeen: Okay so…I think we should work with him. Maybe not him personally but I think it would be amazing if we could work with the company. What do you think?

From Gale Hawthorne: I agree

From Katniss Everdeen: Guys? What do you think?

From Darius Homesway: Sorry, yeah we think we should take up the offer.

From Katniss Everdeen: Okay…unanimous vote then.

From Darius Homesway: We have to make sure the contract is right first and that we agree to pretty much everything in it.

From Gale Hawthorne: Yeah, good point Dariee. Should I call James then?

From Katniss Everdeen: Yeah, let him know that we say yes

From Darius Homesway: Right that sounds great! Thom and I are going now to play video games so bye bye!

From Gale Hawthorne: I thought you hated video games?

Message seen by Darius Homesway at 6:55
Katniss POV

Boggs's narrowed eyes skim through the contract, his fingers tracing under the words and nodding every now and then.

I fidget with the hem of my mother's suit jacket; this is only a meeting but the Rebels and I decided to try and look our best.

Though wearing our parent's suits isn't really that impressive. Gale is the only one who fits well into his. Thom is half a foot smaller than his father so he is practically swimming in his suit while Darius is the opposite and his trousers come up to a few inches above his ankle.

I don't fit too badly into mine but the fabric of the cotton is making my skin red and uncomfortable. We mightn't look the best but of course James Heavensbee is looking exceedingly dapper on the other side of the table.

His custom-made black suit is crisp and proper. His navy tie is spotless and is tied correctly; unlike Darius's was an hour ago until Thom fixed it for him.

"I can tie my own tie." Darius had mumbled bashfully

"Yeah you can, badly." Thom had countered causing Darius to stick his tongue out at him.

"Well..." Boggs puts the paperwork on the conference table "It's definitely legitimate."

Boggs is a family friend of the Undersee family and he agreed to help us out at a few meetings with James and his company.

"He's highly recommended" Madge informed us in a study class at the beginning of March "Good at his job, we've known him for years. He's very kind."

"I'm not sure if we'd be able to afford a lawyer." I admitted

Madge just waved a hand in dismissal "Don't worry about it; he's repaying a favour for me."

Gale raised an eyebrow but Madge only winked at him in response.

In the present, Boggs is handing copies of the contract to Thom, Darius, Gale and me. I'm not someone who understands a lot of technical law language but as far as I can tell this seems pretty legit.

An album contract, if it sells a certain number of copies then we can make another with their company. In signing this contract we cannot switch record labels for a second album and we have to go along with the promotion guidelines to a certain degree unless we're uncomfortable. In signing this contract the employees of the company must treat us with respect, not discriminate and not put out any of our music without discussing it with us first.

There are other deals and points but they seem to be pretty much common sense.
I look at the boys and see the knowing expression on all of their faces.
"Well I agree to it anyway." Darius says, placing his copy on the table
Thom nods, "Me too" he places his alongside Darius's
Gale looks at me and at the same time we put our contracts on the table.
"Okay we'll sign." I say
James's face brightens with a wide smile and his lawyer is just about to say something when Gale speaks.
"Actually there's something we'd like to add to it."
I whip around to gape at Gale; wondering what on Earth he is playing at.
He isn't looking at me though; his eyes are on Thom and Darius who are nodding at him in agreement over something I clearly don't understand.
"Gale what is going on?" I hiss, forgetting briefly about being professional and glaring at him.
"What would you like to add Mr. Hawthorne?" James's lawyer Mrs Coin asks in a skeptical tone.
Gale finally catches my eye before looking at Mrs. Coin again,
"We want to change the band name."
My eyes widen in alarm.
Why is this the first time I'm hearing about this?
I lean forward to look past Gale at Darius and Thom but they are obviously informed about this sudden change. Thom is dutifully avoiding my eyes and Darius has a hand on his face to cover his smirk.
Oh Lord, what have they done?
Mrs. Coin narrows her eyes into slits, "I don't think that's possible at this late notice-"
"Ah let them," James says, oblivious to my turmoil as he shrugs "Once it's nothing crude or offensive I doubt we will care. Or copyright! Make sure it's original."
Gale grins, "Don't worry its original alright."
Mrs. Coin's long fingers grasp at a ball point pen as she leans over to edit the contract,
"Right what is the new name then?"
'Yes Gale', I think to myself, 'what is this new name?'
Gale turns in his chair so he's facing me, smile never wavering from his face,
"We're changing it to 'Katniss and the Rebels'"
My mouth drops open and I can hear my own heart beat twice as fast in my chest.
"What?" My word barely comes out as a whisper "But-

"Katniss" Thom catches my gaze and smiles genuinely, "We've already talked it over. There's nothing you can do about it."

Darius nods aggressively, "I agree, it's done Katstar so you may as well get used to it."

My mind can barely wrap around everything that's happening when I hear a feminine sigh from Mrs. Coin across the table.

The four of us turn back to face James and his accomplice.

James looks at each of us before settling his gaze on me and smiling genuinely,

"We can work with that."

...

A week later we walk out of another conference room with bright smiles on our faces.

Boggs grins at us, displaying his perfect straight teeth,

"Congratulations, you four." He shakes each of our hands, "You guys are officially 'Katniss and the Rebels'; how does it feel?"

We look at one another and simultaneously laugh,

"Surreal" I answer

"Amazing" Darius and Thom chime

"Unbelievably brilliant!" Gale exclaims.

Boggs chuckles, "Well I'm happy for you. We'll meet up again soon but right now just enjoy yourselves. Get through school, don't do anything too wild and just wait for summer to start. Because that's when the real work begins."

"Thanks so much Boggs" I smile

He returns a smile, "It was a pleasure Katniss. Now I best be off! I've another client to meet with but I will talk to you soon!"

We all say our goodbyes and the four of us walk out into the soft April air.

We stand there for a minute, leaning against the wall as we bask in the warm sun.

"This is real right?" Darius asks "I mean is this really happening? After all these years of dreaming and hoping, this is actually going to happen?"

Thom leans his head on his shoulder as he watches the birds dancing along the rooftops across the road, "This is real." he promises

Gale slings an arm around my shoulder and kisses the top of my head,

I look at them and grin, "Katniss and the Rebels having a proper plan for their future; who would have thought it?"
Gale snorts, "Certainly not us."

The four of us burst into laughter, not because he is wrong but because he is absolutely 100% right.

Sure this was what we always wanted but we never actually believed it could happen.

I understand how Darius feels. All of this seems like an elaborate joke or a dream.

But it isn't because Thom is right.

This is real, this is happening, we're growing up. In two months high school will end and we will leave it with an actual, thought out plan for our futures.

Not one that involves minimum wage jobs for the rest of our lives though we'll probably have our fair share of those too.

But we're set out a plan so that we can actually make something of ourselves.

We can hopefully earn money and help our families by doing what we love and if that isn't everything we've ever dreamed of then I don't know what is.

As we stand there in the bright sunlight, I close my eyes and let myself finally relax.

After the weeks of debating over whether to sign or not, the months of confusion and the years of dreaming here the four of us stand, Katniss and the Rebels.

And for the first time in my life...everything just feels...perfectly right.

...
Love Is In The Air

... Madge POV

Today's the day.

The date of the 22nd of April has been haunting me for weeks and now it has finally arrived.

Today is the day of my ballet recital.

And this isn't like any other recital I have done.

I was upgraded to point shoes over a year ago and for some reason my teacher thinks that means I'm capable of leading the opening dance.

I'm not able to lead this dance at all but when I asked my teacher about it she simply looked down her long nose at me and told me that if I put in the work and the practice then I should be fine.

She also informed me that there would be people in the audience from colleges which offer ballet or dance as a study option; including the Academy of Ballet in New York.

So if I wasn't nervous enough about tonight, I certainly am now.

I'm halfway through picking at my breakfast when there's a knock at the door.

I roll my eyes, knowing that it's probably my dad who forgot his keys.

Why he was ever elected mayor of District Twelve, I will never know; he is always so forgetful.

I walk to the door and as I'm opening it, I open my mouth to say my usual lecture to my dad about writing things down and checking he has everything before he leaves the house but then I realise it's not dad at the door, it's Gale.

Gale standing on my doorstep at 8 AM on a Friday morning holding a bouquet of flowers.

He's wearing a bright smile along with his sweatpants and t-shirt and his schoolbag is slung over one shoulder.

"Morning M" Gale chimes

We had a whole half an hour conversation last week on what his nickname for me should be. He wasn't keen on Mad, Mads or Maddie so we're sticking with M for now. He seems to like it a lot and I have to admit that I do too.

I snap out of my daze and step down onto my doorstep to kiss him on the cheek, "Gale! Hi, what are you doing here?"

As pleased as I am to see my boyfriend on the most stressful morning of my year so far, I am a bit curious as to why he's here as usually he walks to school with his siblings and the Everdeens.

"Well I wanted to walk you to school." Gale shrugs "Katniss and I dropped the kids off early and she went straight to school and I wanted to wish you luck for tonight alone."
I usher him inside the house quickly and then close the door behind him,

"Thank you, it's great to see you."

Gale smiles and then I spot a tinge of red work its way up his neck and to his cheeks,

"Em...these are for you." He says before handing me the flowers.

One of my hands shoots to my mouth while the other hesitantly reaches forward and accepts them.

"Gale..." I whisper "You really didn't have to. These are beautiful."

Gale scratches behind his ear, "Well I just wanted to give you something for today. I know how important it is to you. Plus you took me out when we signed the contract with James."

That was true, a few weeks ago Katniss, Thom, Darius and Gale made 'Katniss and the Rebels' official by signing the final contract with the record company representative from the Capitol, James. The day after, I persuaded Gale to let me take him out for the night.

He refused to let me pay for a meal so we went to the cinema instead.

Still he didn't need to do this.

"Well thank you, I adore them."

I really, really do.

Gale grins and his shoulders relax. We make our way to the kitchen and I put the flowers in a vase of water.

"Okay just let me get my bag and we can go." I say, walking towards the door but then Gale stops me.

"Madge?" He gestures to the table where my half eaten cereal and toast lie abandoned, "Do you want to finish your breakfast?"

I open my mouth before closing it again because I'm not sure what to say. Yes I'm hungry and I should eat but my stomach is turning so much with nerves that I'm afraid that if I eat anything, I'll throw up.

Gale seems to spot my hesitance as he walks over to me and takes my hands in his.

"I know you're nervous about tonight but everything will be amazing. I promise and I'm going to be there in the audience cheering you on the whole time." Gale frowns "Well I suppose that's not appropriate for a ballet concert but I will clap at the right times and try not to embarrass you by shouting how amazing you are, sound good?"

This time it's me who blushes and I nod, "Yeah. That sounds perfect, thanks Gale."

Gale smiles and kisses my forehead gently, "So would you like to eat a bit more? You don't have to but I'll wait if you want a few more spoonfuls." Gale shudders "I'm in no mood to rush to school. Principal Snow is covering my history class this week and he's trying to feed us propaganda, it's awful."

I laugh, "You poor thing."
We sit down and his rants about Principal Snow distract me while I eat and in no time I've all of my breakfast eaten. I have to admit, I do feel a tiny bit better now but I'm not sure if that's because of the food or because of Gale.

I take two minutes to brush my teeth and throw everything I need into my bag before running downstairs to meet Gale again.

He kisses me gently before pulling away and opening the front door,

"You ready?"

I take a deep breath, reach forward to take his hand as I nod,

"Yeah, I'm ready."

…

Gale POV

I check my ticket to make sure I'm in the right row and when I'm assured that I am, I take my seat.

The quaint theatre is packed with people and I feel a little guilty because I didn't even know District Twelve had a theatre.

It's nice enough though, a bit run down but the stage looks purely magical.

There are no curtains drawn and a backdrop that's been painted to look like the night sky is proudly on display. Bright yellow and white stars are carefully painted on the dark navy background with a silver moon in the corner to compliment the design.

Thankfully Madge calmed down quite a bit during the day and everyone railed around to help distract her.

Katniss asked her for help on their Math homework during study class, Finnick and Annie started playing twenty questions with her at lunch and in between classes Darius didn't seem to know what to ask because he started questioning what her ideal first date with someone would be.

My phone buzzes from my pocket and I'm beyond grateful that it went off now and not after the show began.

From Rory: Going out with Prim, be home later

From Gale: ? Who's going to take care of Vick and Posey?

From Rory: Mum says she can handle it. Relax.

From Gale: Where are you two going anyway?

From Rory: None of your business

From Gale: …

From Rory: Sorry, we're going to the cinema.

From Gale: Okay, stay safe and tell Prim I say hi
From Rory: I will and you stay safe too

I smile and turn my phone off, storing it away in my pocket just as the lights flicker.

I presume that means it's showtime.

The few remaining stragglers take their seats and a few seconds later, the lights directed at the stage dim ominously.

The quiet chorus of an orchestra playing soft, gentle music begins.

I frown, casting my eyes around the theatre as I desperately try to figure out where the music is coming from.

The childlike, magical music grows louder and I suspect that it originates from below the stage.

I don't have any further time to dwell on that however because within a few seconds, the sparkling white lights are back on the stage again.

Except now the stage is no longer void of people.

On the stage there are three girls in the back with their hair tied into buns and wearing cute white pink outfits. On either side of them are two boys who look to be around Rory's age if not a little older.

Madge stands in the front and for a brief second everything is still.

The music is quiet, the dancers don't move but somehow I manage to catch Madge's gaze.

Her eyes are focused, concentrated but as recognition flickers over them, I spot a tiny, relieved smile grace her features.

Then there's a beat, the music tempo increases and as the dancers begin to twirl and move in sync with one another and the music, I keep my eyes trained on Madge.

I watch her lose herself in the music. Her long legs delicately glide from one side of the stage to the other, her moves coincide with her peers but there's just something different in the way she moves than from the others.

Something about her movements just seems so effortless, flawless even. But I think that what makes Madge come across slightly more talented than the others is her passion.

The love for her sport is clearly evident in her face; you can tell she has gladly practiced this routine a hundred times as she doesn't need to think twice about her moves.

They're all just so on point and perfect.

She's perfect.

A swooping, knowing feeling circles in my stomach as it has been doing for the past few months. I swallow and try to ignore it.

I know if I acknowledge it then I will have to accept what it means.

And I don't think I'm ready to accept just how deep my feelings go for Madge. We've been together for months and it's been brilliant.
She's smart, funny and clearly a magical ballet dancer. But I know that if I accept that I more than like her then watching her move to New York would feel like a thousand knives being expertly stabbed into my heart over and over again.

And watching her tonight, I know there is no way that she won't get accepted into the college she wants to go to, not with the amazing talent she has.

The music shifts and it turns darker and sharper so I sit up straighter and prominently ignore the doubts swirling in my mind.

But some part of me knows that if I were to get hurt by the capturing girl on stage, then it would definitely be worth it.

Because she's worth it, Madge is worth…everything.

…

Prim POV

I turn the corner and a grin spreads across my face when I see Rory standing outside the cinema waiting for me.

He's wearing a casual button up shirt and jeans but my mouth drops open anyway; partly because I rarely ever see Rory out of his trademark sweatpants and t-shirt combo so this is a welcome change.

He looks up from his phone and catches my gaze. He smiles and as he walks towards me, he slips his phone into his back pocket.

"Hey-" He starts when he reaches me but I interrupt him by kissing him gently on the lips.

Rory lets out a noise of surprise but then I feel eyelashes brush my cheek as his eyes close and he starts kissing me back.

We kissed for the first time back in December when Katniss and Gale were out at Peeta's birthday party but since then nothing much has happened.

Rory kissed me that night but ever since he hasn't made a move.

There's been flirting, blushing and lots of suggestion but every time we hang out, he just smiles, hugs me and then walks away.

And it was driving me a bit insane.

I could have talked to Katniss about it but she was stressed for a while with that man Jay? James? And her senior year is coming to an end so she's studying and busy most of the time. As much as I love talking to Katniss about things, I sort of wanted whatever is happening between Rory and me to be just between us.

I pull away and when Rory whimpers and his lips chase after mine, I know I made the right decision.

I giggle, "Was that alright?"

Rory's eyes slowly blink open

"What?" He whispers, "Yeah, yeah that was fine. No it was great, perfect! It was…yeah it was alright."
I bring a hand up to try and mask my laughter as my giggles increase and Rory's cheeks darken pink.

I've noticed that he's very cute when he blushes and tonight is no exception.

Thankfully I manage to gather my composure quickly enough,

"You ready to go?"

Rory frowns in confusion

I jerk my head to the cinema on our right and his eyes widen,

"Oh right! Yes of course!"

I grin, "Great!"

We make our way inside and as we walk upstairs and debate what movie to watch, I feel Rory's slightly sweaty hand take mine in his and I know that my smile will be etched onto my face for the rest of the night.

…

Thom POV

I throw the two potential sweaters on my bed and run my hands through my hair for the tenth time this evening.

Okay this is ridiculous.

This probably isn't even a date, scratch that it definitely isn't a date.

Just because Darius had winked at him at the end of school today and said 'it's a date' when they decided to go bowling that evening, did not mean it was actually a date.

I walk to the bathroom and splash water on my face, desperately trying to shake myself out of my thoughts.

Sometimes I hate Darius.

Like when he smiles that stupid smile at me where his teeth shine and his dimples are visible and his tongue pokes out in that small gap between his teeth.

Or when he talks to me as if he is flirting with me and how he doesn't do that with anyone else.

Especially when he makes those goddamn suggestive comments and then he never follows them up.

I look at myself in the mirror, the water droplets trickling down my face and I realise how ridiculous and pathetic I am.

Darius is just being Darius.

I need to get over…whatever this is that I'm feeling and move on.

He's my best friend, he always will be my best friend and I can't let my stupid hopes destroy that.

The chime of the doorbell sings throughout the house and I snap out my haze.
Grabbing a towel, I try and dry my face as I hurry back into my room and throw on one of the sweaters without even checking which one it is.

Rationally I don't know why I'm worried about what I wear, Darius has probably seen me wear my whole wardrobe twice over with all our years of friendship and he certainly isn't going to care about my fashion choices anyway.

I sprint down the stairs and relief floods over me that my parents didn't open the door before I did.

Not that they have a problem with Darius it's just...they keep hinting that he and I are 'a thing'.

And we certainly aren't a thing...or at least I don't think we are.

I pause in front of the door for a second to catch my breath before twisting the knob and opening the door.

Darius looks up from the ground and greets me with that special smile.

"Hey Tommy"

I don't know where he picked up calling me that but he's insisted on using that nickname for me and refuses to let anyone else use it. Gale called me Tommy one time last year and Darius glared at him all day so he never did it again.

But again, I'm reading too much into it. He gives other people nicknames like Katniss with Katstar and nobody else calls her that.

I smile, "Hey Dariee"

Darius swallows, "Okay so em, you remember when Gale went on his first date with Madge and we gave him advice on it?"

I frown, wondering what on Earth this has to do with us going bowling, "Eh, yeah?"

Darius flexes his hands and speaks hurriedly, "Well I know we told him that he had to bring something when going on a date with a pretty girl but I didn't know what to get you so is buying you stuff at the bowling alley okay? I'll pay for all your slushies, the raspberry ones of course because I know you love them."

I probably look like my eyes will bulge out of my head but I can't quite focus on that right now.

My heart has either stopped completely or is running a marathon.

I want to say something smooth or tell him he doesn't have to buy me anything or at the very least question that this is actually a date but instead all I can manage are the pathetic words,

"But I'm not a pretty girl."

Darius snorts, "Well I don't really want you to be."

I open and close my mouth like a stupid goldfish but no words come out. What do I say? Where did all of this come from? What do I do? Can I just kiss him? Would he mind if I kissed him because I kind of really want to kiss him...

Darius's smile slides slowly off his face and I helplessly watch as anxiousness cloud over his beautiful eyes,
"Oh em…" Darius scratches the back of his ear, a nervous habit of his, "I'm sorry."

"No I didn't-" I try to say

"Thom please." Darius interrupts "Fuck I'm sorry. I thought...I mean I thought you were flirting with me for a while...well I flirted with you and then you'd blush or flirt back and...I don't know it seemed like we were practically...together so I thought I'd...make it official or something because...we always seem to come close but neither of us cross the line." Darius shakes his head and laughs but it sounds too high pitched and fake, "It sounds ridiculous to me now, I'm-"

I can't bear to hear these painful words anymore so I stop him,

"Darius?"

"Yeah?"

"I like you."

Darius's eyes search mine, "Is there a 'but' to that?"

I shake my head but then I remember that we're still standing in my doorway and I pray that my nosy parents haven't been listening in.

"Let's em, stand outside?" I offer

Darius nods and I shut the door behind me, shouting to my parents that I'm going out and that I wouldn't be home late.

It's around 7 pm but the sky is still bright due to the lovely spring day so we walk down to the park by my house; bowling be damned.

We wordlessly sit on the swings for a few minutes, watching the couples who are out walking, the women gossiping on their evening jogs and the middle-aged men walking their hyper dogs.

The uncomfortable feeling in my stomach doesn't go away in the silence and I know that it's my turn to confess my feelings.

"I do like you. No buts." I add "I really do. I thought you were just...being you all of those times...we would kind of mention that something would happen between us and then...it would be forgotten about or swept under the rug so I didn't push it."

"I was scared." Darius whispers, I look over at him to find his that he has his head tilted upwards and he's staring up at the slowly darkening blue sky, "I was afraid that I was imagining things, afraid you wouldn't feel the same way and...my parents."

I nod in understanding; I had gotten the feeling on more than one occasion that Darius's had pretty conservative parents. They're lovely and they have been nothing but polite to me or Gale or Katniss but Darius and I were always especially close.

At the beginning I thought Darius was just a touchy-feely person so I got used to how he leaned his head on my shoulder or hugged me all the time but then eventually I caught on that I was the only person he did that with.

Nevertheless, he always sprung apart from me when his parents entered the room; understandable but a little unusual for Darius who never cared about being affectionate around other people.
"We don't have to tell them." I say quietly

Darius turns to face me, his eyebrows half raised and his mouth ever so slightly open, "Really?"

Unconsciously I lick my lips, "If...if you do want this to be something more...we don't have to tell them. Or even Katniss and Gale. I'm not...I wouldn't be ashamed or anything but if you aren't ready..."

Darius's eyes flit to my lips and unlike all of the other times where it happened so quickly that I couldn't tell, this time his gaze stops at my lips purposely for a few seconds longer before making eye contact with me again.

I'm almost positive that my breathing is coming out faster and less evenly.

"Are you...are you sure?" Darius asks cautiously

I nod, "If it's what you want."

Darius hesitates for a minute before covering my hands with his,

"I want you...I've wanted this for a while now."

I raise an eyebrow, "Yeah?"

Darius blushes, a rare but beautiful sight, "Yeah..."

I squeeze his hand gently, "So boyfriends?"

Darius doesn't answer.

Instead his eyes drop to my lips once more and he leans out of his swing to kiss me on the lips softly.

My eyes flicker closed and I kiss him back.

People say you feel fireworks when you kiss someone. I don't feel fireworks.

I feel more than fireworks.

It's different but it's oh so familiar. The comforting scent of his cologne envelops itself around me as the gentle breeze ruffles our hair. His thumb caresses the back of my hand as his lips brush over mine again and again.

His lips are so much softer than I thought they would be...and I thought about them a lot.

We pull away sometime later, both of us on the very edge of our seats so we can reach each other, our hands interlocked and our foreheads leaning against one another as we catch our breath.

"Boyfriends." Darius agrees after a minute

I smile, "Secret boyfriends though?"

Darius looks down at our hands, "I'm sorry."

I press my lips to his cheek gently, "Stop apologising. It's okay, I really don't mind."

"Are you sure?" Darius still doesn't meet my eyes but I don't press him.
"I'm sure." I promise "Plus you were right. It's like we've been dating this whole time and this is just us making it official."

I catch Darius's lips quirk upwards at that, "Thanks Tommy." He doesn't look at me but when his head settles into my shoulder, I know everything's okay.

I know everything's more than okay.

The butterflies in my stomach are bouncing around the walls as they dance with joy at what just occurred. I replay our kiss over and over in my head and my smile just keeps growing wider and wider.

I really, really hope that this isn't a dream.

"Dariee?" I whisper around ten minutes later.

"Yeah?" He murmurs tiredly

"You still want to go bowling?"

He snickers, "Of course. I'm going to kick your ass at it."

I gasp in mock-offence but let's be realistic I'm absolutely rubbish at bowling and Darius knows it.

"Where did you even get the idea to go bowling on the first date?"

Darius shrugs, "I saw it on TV."

Now it's my turn to snort, "Of course."

"We can do something else if you-"

I turn and kiss his head, "It's perfect Darius."

He snuggles further into my shoulder, it must be pretty awkward seeing as we're on the uncomfortable park swings and he has to tilt his neck awkwardly but he doesn't complain.

"Let's just stay here for another minute yeah?"

I lean my cheek against his head and look up at the massive flock of birds that fly over our heads,

"Yeah, sounds perfect."

...

Katniss POV

I wake up to fingers gently treading through my hair.

I moan softly, stretching my legs out and blinking my eyes open.

I'm in my sitting room, my feet have hit the armrest of the couch and when I look up I see Peeta's bright blue eyes and charming grin looking down at me.

"Morning sleepy head."

It's not morning at all of course.
Prim went out to the movies with Rory so I invited Peeta over to watch some films.

We watched the breakfast club and I vaguely remember us starting Grease before exhaustion overpowered me.

"Hi" I mumble, rubbing my eyes and sitting up "Sorry for falling asleep on you."

Peeta wraps an arm around me and I bring my legs up onto the couch and slip into his side.

"Don't worry about it. I'm a little disappointed though; I wasn't able to sing along to all the songs because I didn't want to wake you up."

I roll my eyes but I can't help but smile,

"I'm so, so sorry." I say sarcastically

Peeta laughs, "I guess you'll just have to make it up to me."

My eyes widen and my breath catches in my throat at what that could imply.

He leans forward and pecks my lips before pulling back and grinning at me,

"Don't worry. That was more than enough."

God, when will this boy stop being so perfect?

Not that I mind.

I like this; I like how he never pressures me into anything.

I just…like this.

I like spending time with him, watching classic movies and feeling comfortable enough to fall asleep with him, something that I probably wouldn't have done with anyone except Prim a few months ago.

Except I know that I more than like this…I love this…I really, really do.

And I love him.

Peeta grabs the remote from the coffee table and turns the movie up a tiny bit. He must have turned it down while I was sleeping and suddenly before I know it, the words that I've been holding back for the past few months spill out of my mouth.

"Peeta?"

He looks down at me and raises an eyebrow curiously, "Yeah?"

"I love you."

My words are so rushed and jumbled that I wonder if he understood me but when his eyes widen and his posture becomes straighter, I know that he did.

Fear fills my body and I open my mouth to take it back or to apologise but Peeta beats me to it.

"I love you too."

I let out a shocked laugh but it doesn't last very long as Peeta has leaned down and captured my
Something about this kiss is different than all the others we have had before. This is deeper, more passionate. There's a knowing feeling behind it and meaning now that we both know how the other feels.

It's loving and fierce all at once.

It's purely us.

And I can't get enough of it; I can't get enough of him.

And I hope that I never will

...
Katniss POV

"Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Katniss! Happy birthday to you!"

I groan into my pillow and pull the covers tightly over my head.

"Thanks Prim" I grumble "Now can you leave me in peace?"

I hear her giggle from the doorway and I know she's not going to leave anytime soon.

"Come on! It's your birthday! I'm aware you have school but we can at least make the morning fun!"

I peek over the covers to glare at her.

"Not now?" Prim asks tentatively

I sigh, hating myself for loving her so damn much. Even though I know she's just being a kind, good sister, I can't help the lack of enthusiasm due to my exhaustion.

"No, no I'll get up, I'll get up." I throw my legs out of the bed and shiver, already missing the warm comfort of my duvet, "Go downstairs and have your breakfast, I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Okay"

Prim hesitates for a minute before running towards me and hugging me around the waist.

"Happy Birthday Katniss!"

I smile, "Thanks Little Duck."

After she skips down the stairs, I get myself ready for the day. I'm just pulling on my shoes when my phone vibrates from my dresser.

- 4 Unread Messages -

From Peeta: Morning Kat! Happy Birthday! Might or might not have a plan for it ;) I'm not giving away any details though. See you soon! Madge and I will try and make double Home Ec. easier to cope with but I'm not sure how possible that is xx

I snort and move on to the next message.

From Gale: Happy Birthday Catnip :) Be at your house at 8

Short and sweet, I love it.

From Darius: Dude, stop growing up so fast. You're getting old. We're getting old. I don't like it. Anyway Happy B-day, Thom made me promise not to make your life a living hell today so I'll try
my best.

From Thom: Happy Birthday Katniss! Hope you have a great day. I know it's unlikely with school and everything but we'll try our best to make it as tolerable as we can.

I grin, stick my phone into the back-pocket of my jeans before making my way downstairs.

My friends are definitely the best.

…

Gale arrives ten minutes later than promised but when I open the door to let the Hawthornes in; I am faced with several haphazardly wrapped presents being shoved in my face and a chorus of,

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY KATNISS!"

I know I must look an interesting sight. My eyes and mouth wide open as I stare in shock at the four familiar faces in front of me.

Posy and Vick are grinning eagerly at me, Rory is smiling genuinely and Gale stands behind them, towering over his siblings with amusement written all over his face.

"Wow em…thanks guys…" I eventually stutter out.

I probably should hug them or something but my arms won't coordinate with my brain.

"Can you open the presents now?" Posy asks, her eyes looking up at me pleadingly.

Gale speaks before I can, "We're already running late Posy because you guys insisted on wrapping the presents before giving them to Catnip."

"Well obviously Gale, you can't just give someone an unwrapped present. That's just bad manners." Vick states in a matter of fact tone and I choke back a laugh.

Vick is becoming more and more like his older brothers every day. Though he'd probably be extremely offended if I were to tell hi that.

"I'll open them quickly okay?" I say, ruffling Posy's hair gently "You guys really didn't have to get me anything."

They shuffle inside and we head into the sitting room and I already know that it will be a nightmare trying to get them to leave for school.

"They insisted" Gale informs me, plonking down beside me on the couch "Didn't cost much though so don't worry."

I shove him teasingly and open my presents.

Posy drew me a collection of drawings in crayon that I think are supposed to tell a story of a princess. As I flick through it, I blush madly when I discover that the princess's name is 'Katniss' and the prince's name is 'Peeta'.

I really hope Gale doesn't know about that, otherwise he won't stop teasing me about it for the rest of our lives.

Vick gave me a framed photo of the two of us playing just dance and it's so adorable that I
immediately put it up on the mantelpiece.

Rory gives me two free cinema tickets from he and Prim for whatever movie I choose and I immediately know where I'm going on my next date with Peeta.

Gale gingerly hands me a square box and in it is a beautiful silver necklace with a music note dangling from the end of it. I half-hug him as a thank you because I may or may not be a little in love with it.

Posy helps me put it on and it takes an extra five minutes than if I were to do it myself but I don't complain.

When she's done however, Gale and I insist on getting a move on.

Rory and Prim whine, Vick sighs and Posy is on the verge of throwing a tantrum when Gale reminds them sternly that they're supposed to be on their best behaviour for my birthday.

I want to argue and say that they don't have to behave just because of me but when Gale shoots me a disapproving look, I relent because if it makes the long walk to school more bearable then I can't disagree.

Five minutes later, we have got all the kids out the door when Gale pats me on the back and smiles.

"Happy Birthday Catnip."

I roll my eyes out of habit but smile gratefully in response,

"Thanks Galey. Now come on, time for hell."

His groans drown out the sound of me slamming the door closed and I flinch, grateful that my mother left early to go on a walk.

She's been going out for walks more and more lately which makes me quite happy. I try not to have too much hope but I can't help it. She left just as I came down the stairs, pausing to kiss me on the cheek and wish me a happy birthday before leaving. I'm not sure whether she remembered or Prim reminded her but I'm grateful for it either way.

I'm snapped out of my thoughts by Posy pulling at my clothes and asking me if she can tell me the story of Princess Katniss and Prince Peeta.

Gale's eyebrows dart to his hairline and I inwardly sigh, knowing that he is going to use this one against me for a long, long time to come.

…

After enduring Darius's sobs of my old age, Thom's attempts at restraining him while he fails at holding back his laughter and Gale's made up tales of Princess Katniss and Prince Peeta all morning, I manage to escape at lunchtime to the secluded school rooftop with Peeta.

It's pretty much the same as it was in the winter except with the lack of snow and chill in the air.

We sit on the same bench as the first time, well Peeta sits properly on it and I lie sideways with my head in his lap.

We have a free period after lunch so thankfully we have a little extra time here.
My eyes are closed, the little light from the bright sunshine peaks through but it's peaceful. It's nice to get away from the crowded halls, vicious peers and tedious classes and just spend some time with Peeta; even if it's only for an hour or so.

I feel Peeta treading his fingers through my hair and when he starts spending extra time on it, I open my eyes and squint up at him.

"What are you…?" I ask quietly and he smiles

"I'm making you a flower crown" He explains

I look over to the wall behind Peeta's head and see that there are a collection of daisies waiting on the ledge to be placed in my hair.

I raise an eyebrow at him,

"Where'd you get them?"

Peeta shrugs

"My back garden, now stop moving please, you're going to ruin all my hard work."

I snigger but settle into his lap again and close my eyes.

Time passes slowly, the birds chirp in the sky above us, the distant sound of our peers playing sport on the field below us and the feel of Peeta's nimble fingers working in and out through my hair is more comforting than you'd expect.

This is a perfect way to spend my birthday, no fuss but still spending time with the people I care about the most.

Gale and Prim are cooking dinner this evening which should be extremely interesting.

Darius and Thom were really sweet though, they made a photo album for me.

It was homemade and filled to the brim with photos of the four of us. There were pictures of me going back to kindergarten and I know Gale must have given them those so I'll have to get back at him for that later.

Sae was in a few of them and she must have taken some of the pictures too because there were several pages dedicated to our band preforming on stage at the Hob.

Family photos of Prim, my mother and I, pictures of me with Gale's family and a lot with Madge from over the years. On the last few pages were the pictures of latest additions to my life.

Someone had taken a picture of Peeta and me at his birthday party; we were sitting outside in the dark glow of the fairy lights with our eyes closed, holding hands.

There was a picture with Finnick and Annie and I'm not sure when it was taken but it was in the cafeteria in school and we are all in the fits of laughter over something.

I must admit I don't particularly like having my photo taken so I'm surprised that Darius and Thom managed to find so many but I love it all the same.

They must have put a lot of time and work into it which I greatly appreciate.
Seeing as it was homemade they also went a bit wild with the glitter on the majority of the pages which have made my hands sparkly since this morning and I know it'll be a nightmare to try and wash off.

"Kat?" Peeta says softly, breaking the tender silence

I make an affirmative noise, too relaxed to speak.

"Do you remember when I said how I wasn't sure what I wanted to do after high school?"

I open my eyes, the overpowering beam of sunlight making me squint but I manage to make out his face.

His eyes are trained on the fingers working in my hair but his eyebrows are drawn together in more than just concentration.

"Yeah" I whisper, honestly a little fearful of where this conversation is going.

"Well...I was talking to my dad" He informs me quietly "And he said that...the bakery is practically mine if I want it. When I'm older obviously, you see he doesn't trust Rye with it and neither he nor Brian particularly want it so...if I want it then dad says when he retires, I can run the place.

I want to take one of his hands in mine but they are still busily working in my hair and I can tell that this is sort of a distraction for him so I put my hand on his arm and rub circles reassuringly there instead.

"And do you want to?"

I think I already know the answer but I don't want to assume.

Peeta hesitates for a minute before I see him nodding.

"I do" He answers "I really do. I've been thinking about it for a while and I think it would be the right thing for me to do. I could just work full time in the bakery after high school but...I still want to go to college and study you know? I don't want to just run the bakery because dad wants me to; I want to actually be able to do it."

I ever so slightly nod so I don't ruin his masterpiece in my hair.

"I understand." I reply

"So I was thinking of doing a business course and then maybe one on food management. I mean I've been helping dad out ever since I can remember but it wouldn't hurt to have the proper qualifications."

I smile at him, "That sounds great Peeta."

He waits another few minutes before continuing and when he speaks again, his voice is quieter as if he's unsure whether he should say the words or not.

"There's a college in the Capital that specialises in a course like that. It seems really good and it's not too expensive. I know it would be a few train rides away but...I think it's the one for me. If I get in that is..."

Screw the hair.
I lean up and press a gentle, loving kiss to his mouth. I stroke his cheek softly and smile against his lips.

"It sounds amazing Peeta. I'm happy you've found where you want to go."

I really, really am.

Peeta leans his forehead against mine, his arms leaving my hair and wrapping them around my back, "Thanks Kat."

I swallow, "Just promise me something yeah?"

He raises an eyebrow, "Anything."

"Don't...don't give up on your passion for art." I tell him "I know how much it means to you and how much you enjoyed working with Cinna's friend. Don't become one of those people who works so much that they forget to spend time doing what they love."

Peeta smiles and nudes my nose with his, "Never."

I kiss his nose and grin, "Brilliant."

Peeta is the first to pull back and he sits me up properly beside him and I try not to pout.

"Speaking of art, I have your birthday present." He reaches into his bag and goes searching

I sigh, "Peeta, you really didn't have to-"

He hands me a rectangular parcel, "I know but you're stuck with it now and it didn't cost me anything."

I stick my tongue out at him in protest but he just winks at me.

The parcel is delicately wrapped and so I open it slowly, the sound of the green wrapping paper being torn breaks the anxious tension.

I gasp when I see what the present is.

It's too much, it's far too much.

It's a picture in a frame. The frame is plain, wooden and a dark brown colour that reminds me of tree bark but it's what's inside the frame that causes my heart to speed up.

It's not so much a picture than it is a painting; a painting that has clearly been done by Peeta as I can spot his familiar styles and textures in it.

It's a painting of our first date, all those months ago, in a secret hideaway at a football game.

In the painting it is shown as if it were a photo taken of the two of us. You can only see the back of our bodies but it's clearly Peeta and me. Peeta has painted his blonde curls perfectly and my brown hair is seen falling on my back.
Other than us and the bench we're sitting on, everything else is pitch-black in the painting. Everything except for the white light shining through from a crack in the shutters in front of Peeta and me, the light brightens up the painting and portrays the safe, enclosed feeling of the hideaway perfectly.

It's perfect, it's absolutely perfect.

Tears begin to sting my eyes the longer I continue to look at it so with one hand still clutching the delicate frame, I fling my arms around him and hug him tightly.

"I love it" I whisper into his neck and I feel the tears reluctantly fall down my cheeks, "I really love it."

Peeta hugs me back and kisses my head lovingly.

"And I love you."

I laugh softly and my returned words get lost in his neck.

I know I will never be able to thank Peeta enough for this. Not just for the ridiculously beautiful painting but for everything else he has given me.

Peeta has given me the feeling of being safe, being loved and not having to go through everything alone with my walls up. I know I'll spend my life trying to repay him for that.

I only hope that me loving him back is enough for now.

As I feel his gentle words in my ear as his comforting hands rub up and down my back reassuringly, I know that it is enough for him. I know that we're enough for each other for however long we have together.

And the romantic, hopeful part of me prays that we have forever together because I'm honestly not sure how I could go back to my life without him.

And I know he feels the same way.

...

Chapter End Notes

Two more chapters to go...
Katniss POV

I take a deep breath and look around at the swarm of people. The sun is beaming down on us, summer has finally arrived and today is the day we have all been waiting for since we first entered this horrific high school.

It's Graduation Day, the day that marks a momentous end to our high school experience.

It honestly hasn't hit me yet.

I suppose for everyone else here, they're struggling with their newfound freedom. The independence of moving out and away from this treacherous small town without their parents' guiding them or watching their every movement.

But that's not how it is for me.

I had to grow up years ago. And I'm not complaining; if anything it's benefited me in the long run.

And I won't be going to college after this; I'll be working on recording an album instead.

I did get the usual parent lecture on that though. My mum was reluctant for a few days but she came around eventually.

Hazelle took months before finally agreeing, Thom's are still slightly wary and I'm not sure whether Darius's parents have actually fully agreed yet or not but they will.

The sweltering heat swirls all around us and my animosity towards my soon-to-be-former principal only grows because he's the one who insisted that since the weather is so lovely, we should have the graduation ceremony outside.

I take off my ceremonial hat and fan myself with it; nobody ever tells you just how heavy these graduation robes are and you've your own clothes on under it as well and add that to the hundred degree heat it's just not a good combination.

Hopefully I don't faint when they call my name.

"You know I don't think that's what those hats are supposed to be used for" A teasing, familiar voice taunts from nearby.

I keep my eyes fixed on the people setting up the stage but I smile as I hear loud steps come to stand next to me and the scent of cinnamon and fresh bread fills the stale, dry, humid air.

"It's really, really warm okay?" I groan

Peeta sniggers, "Yeah, yeah I get it, don't worry."

We lean against the wall and watch our peers and their families rush around, trying to get the best
seats, attempting to console sobbing parents and even a few students are crying though I can't imagine why.

"Hey" Peeta whispers "Your mum's over there talking to my dad."

I whirl around and follow his pointing finger; sure enough there my mum is seated next to Mr. Mellark. They're grinning and chatting happily, Mrs. Mellark is nowhere in sight and Peeta's brothers sitting next to them, lost in their own world.

Thankfully my mother was able to come to the ceremony. She was pretty enthusiastic about it too, fussing all week and calling Hazelle so they could both cry about how 'grown up' Gale and I have gotten.

This morning when she saw me in my cap and gown she stopped short. Tears glazed over her eyes as she took a step towards me, cupping my cheek softly and whispering,

"Your father would be so proud."

And honestly that's just what I needed to hear today.

As I watch her with Peeta's dad, my expression turns into a confused frown,

"Hang on, do you see Prim anywhere?"

Peeta frowns and we scan the crowds, he finds her before me though.

"There" Peeta points over to the left corner "She's sitting up near the front beside Rory and his family."

I see her now, huddled close together with Rory; they're probably looking at something on their phones. I settle against the wall, content in knowing that she's safe and not alone.

"So" Peeta continues "When are you going to tell Prim and Rory that you and Gale know they're dating?"

I snort.

Prim and Rory have been pining after one another for years but there's been a distinct difference in them over the past few months.

They seem to be trying extra hard to make it seem like nothing's going on which of course made it all the more obvious.

Gale and I figured it out a while back but we're not telling them yet. It's much more fun this way so we can 'accidentally' crash their dates or 'accidentally' make it so they don't have a lot of time together.

It might be a little cruel but hey, what are older siblings for?

I smile as two people at the end of their row catch my eye,

"Probably when Gale and I let Thom and Darius know that we're aware that they're dating."

Peeta whirls around to face me, his eyes and mouth open wide in shock,

"Wait, what?"
I raise my eyebrows at him because honestly he's supposed to be the smart one.

"Thom and Darius, they're dating but haven't told us yet." I point to them and Peeta looks over at them.

They're talking to Darius's parents at the end of the aisle beside where the Hawthornes and Prim are sitting. Thom and Darius stand close together and every few seconds their fingers 'accidentally' brush against each other's.

Peeta takes them in, pauses for a minute and then nods,

"I can see it" He admits, a small smile of surprise but joy on his face. I can tell that he's happy for them.

My smile widens, "Yeah. They're good for each other I think. They balance each other out."

Kinda like Peeta and I, I can't help but acknowledge.

"How long have they been together?" Peeta asks

I shrug, "Hard to say. I think a few years. Neither of them has really dated anyone else. There's been chemistry between them for as long as I can remember. I'd say a year or two but I doubt they made it official until recently. They can be quite clueless and stubborn at times."

Peeta smirks at me, "Thank God you aren't like that."

I elbow him in the ribs playfully, "Shut up."

He responds with a laugh and throws his arm around my shoulder as I settle my head into his neck.

"I can't believe we're here." Peeta whispers

I nod, "Neither can I…but…if I had to be here, I'm glad I'm here with you."

I don't have to see his face to know that he's smiling

"This isn't the end Kat. You and me, we're not some high school romance that'll drift apart once September comes. We're different; we're…more than that. What we have, it's real."

If it were anyone else spinning these words, it would sound cliché and sickening to me but when it's coming from Peeta and he's talking about us, it just feels so right.

"So you'll stay with me?" I murmur

"Always" He responds, pressing a gentle kiss to the top of my head, "Always, Kat."

…

Gale POV

Clutching my graduation cap in my hand, I turn the corner and begin to walk back to the stage. I didn't even realise I had forgotten my cap inside the school until Posey asked why I was the only one not wearing one of the hats with the soft tassels on them.

On my way back, I spot a familiar face sitting beneath the large oak tree.
It's Madge.

Stopping in my path, I make a detour and slowly walk over to her.

"Do you mind if I join you?"

Madge looks up and her stiffened body relaxes when she sees that it's only me.

"No…no of course not."

She shuffles over and I sit on the grass beside her, taking her small, soft hand in mine.

The sound of the chirping birds above us breaks the tender silence. I patiently wait until her shoulders slacken and her fingers interlock with mine to ask the important question that I have to ask.

"Is everything alright?"

Madge leans her head back against the bark and closes her eyes,

"I got accepted." She confesses "The college in New York, the Academy…I got accepted."

"Madge…" The whisper is all I can get out.

I know it does little to display the pride, shock and sheer happiness that I'm feeling right now but it's the best I got.

She turns and her eyes slowly blink open,

"I'm not sure whether I should go Gale."

"What? But you were so excited about New York. Especially after the amazing performance you gave a few months ago! No wonder you got in. Madge, you deserve this."

"But what if I can't handle it Gale?" Her voice is quiet and it kills me to see her so lost and fragile like this, "I'd have to move all the way across the country. Would I be able to move away from my parents, from my friends, from…from you?"

"Yes." I answer with utmost certainty.

She looks away unsure, "I don't know-"

I use a finger to tilt her head back towards me gently,

"Hey well I do know." I reassure her "I know that this is the perfect course for you. I know that this is what you love and what you're talented in. I know that it'll be hard for you to move away but you'll be able for it because that's how strong and brave you are. I know you, Madge and I know that this is what's right for you. I won't pressure you to go but Madge…I honestly believe that you should. This is your dream M."

"But what about us?" A singe tear falls down her face and I hurry to wipe it away, ignoring the stab of pain in my chest at the sight of it, "What if we can't handle long distance or if I'm too busy to come home or-"

I cut her off by kissing her lovingly.

With my forehead pressed against hers and our lips barely touching, I tell her all the things I've been
thinking and dreaming of ever since she first mentioned New York.

"We will work out. I've planned this all out in my head okay?" I inform her "We're going to skype every week. We'll text all the time; I'm going to rant about how annoying James is during your lectures so you can giggle at the messages afterwards. You're going to complain about the drunken frat boys and I'm going to threaten to come up and fight them off for you. You're going to have first dibs on all my concert tickets when 'Katniss and the Rebels' become famous and when your finals roll around I'll travel to New York and make sure you aren't working too hard. I'll make the coffee and offer cuddles and highlighters whenever they're needed."

Madge is the one who interrupts this time but it's not with a kiss.

"I love you" She hurriedly reveals.

I open my mouth to respond but the words catch in my throat. Time seems to halt for a second. The birds still chirp and the sound of the distant crowd is still there but they're only background noise. All there is now that I can focus on is Madge.

A bright grin takes over my face before I can stop it.

"I love you too"

And I do, I really, really do.

Madge stretches out her legs and snuggles into my side and somehow I just know that we're going to be alright.

Everything is going to be alright.

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Chapter End Notes

One chapter left...the epilogue...
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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- 6 Years Later -

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Peeta POV

I push through the wooden door of the Hob and am met with the familiar scent of Sae's delicious food and the welcoming greeting smiles of the residents I've come to know better and better over the past few years.

I still remember the first time I came in here with Katniss all those years ago.

We weren't even together at the time, we were working on that ridiculous Home Ec. project for Ms. Trinket and I worked on it at the countertop at the top of the room while she breezed around the bar with her polite smile, cute black apron and a heavy tray of food on her arm.

The eyes of every customer had been on me that day, surely curious as to why the baker's youngest son would visit their part of town. I remember swallowing the tightness in my throat because I admit I had been nervous but it wasn't their opinions I cared about, it was only Katniss's.

Funny how it's been over 6 years since that day and that hasn't changed.

Something else that hasn't changed is the Hob. The homely, comforting feeling is still here. Sae is as healthy and in charge as ever and she always makes a point to talk to me whenever I come in.

She and I are talking about proposing a contract between the Hob and the bakery, Dad's on board but he's letting me take the reins of it.

I'm the manager of the bakery now so he's letting me take charge of these sorts of things.

It's a lot of work but I enjoy it. I really do.

I started working full time at the bakery when I finished my college business course two years ago. Then Dad promoted me to manager a few months ago when I completed an extra night-time food management course. It's working out great so far.

Dad's a lot happier too. He and my mother revealed that they were separating when I came home for Christmas my first year at college. A few months later they filed for a divorce and now they're happily parted.

I know that seeing your parents get divorced is usually heartbreaking but for my brothers and me, it wasn't. It was always just a matter of time and we all knew that.

Of course my mother tried to take my dad for all the money she could get but dad actually ended up hiring Madge's family friend Boggs and he made sure that my mother only got what she was entitled to and what she deserved; nothing more and nothing less.
I take a seat at the bar and order a glass of water from Haymitch. He grumbles something under his breath but gets me my drink anyway.

Katniss says that he's drinking a lot less, not exactly sober but he's not swiping a slug from his flask every chance he gets so that's a good thing.

Town gossip says that's because he's been getting rather friendly with Ms. Trinket from school but I learned a long time ago that town gossip more often than not is mostly lies.

I turn to the left and see the stage being set up for Katniss and the Rebel's show tonight.

Darius is assembling the drum's breakables with Thom's help; Gale is tuning the guitars while Katniss is setting up their microphones.

Just from watching them, anyone could see that they've done this a thousand times before.

And while I've seen them do it at least a hundred times before, it never gets old.

Before every show, Gale has that look of focused concentration on his face as he tunes out the rest of the bar and focuses solely on the sounds coming from the plucking of the strings.

How every time Thom helps Darius set up the drum kit, Darius's eyes flit to Thom every few seconds just to make sure that he's doing it right and that he won't somehow damage Darius's pride and joy (aka his beloved drums).

The change from Katniss's stiffened posture as it slowly relaxes each minute leading up to performing before finally when the music starts and all the tension leaves her body and she's finally free.

"Peeta! Hey!"

The words and a sharp clap on my back have me turning around in my chair and smiling.

"Finnick, Annie, hi, glad you could make it!"

They take the seats next to me and order their own drinks.

"Yeah well, I figured we may as well come seeing as we're home for the weekend." Finnick says, not so subtly winking at me and I shake my head, grateful that Katniss wasn't here to see that.

Finnick and Annie moved to District Four three years ago. First they lived in a lovely ocean view apartment but after they got married last year, they put down a lease on a family home by the seaside.

Katniss and I saw it when we visited them two months ago and it's gorgeous. Big enough but not too big, warm and welcoming with a back porch that you can sit on and look out at the beach.

It's beautiful and the perfect place for the both of them to start their married lives together.

I've a big enough apartment here in District Twelve. It's still in the town but it's far enough away from the bakery that I have some breathing room.

Katniss unofficially moved in last year, she's not always in District Twelve, especially seeing as Katniss and the Rebels spent the last year touring America and they did the same in smaller places two years before that but all her stuff is at my place and she lives there whenever she's not touring.

Katniss and the Rebels turned out to be a big hit in America. They've released two albums and this
They have a pretty significant fan base who love them dearly which the four of them still find hilarious.

But a few months ago Katniss and I were lying in bed, it was the first night she came back from her tour and as we were drifting off to sleep, I asked if she was glad she made this decision.

If she was glad that she chose to sign the contract with James Heavensbee and not go to college.

She told me it was the second best decision of her life.

When I asked what the first was, she snuggled into me and smiled, murmuring into my chest,

"Agreeing to go on that first date with you."

And that's when everything fell into place and I knew what I wanted.

I wanted that moment, lying in bed, falling asleep with Katniss, every night for the rest of my life.

"Oh great! Madge is here!"

At Annie's voice, I snap out of my thoughts and turn, spotting Madge making her way through the tables and chairs.

She gives Gale a small wave and then sits beside me, running a hand through her tousled blonde hair.

"I'm so sorry I'm late! The train got delayed."

After Madge graduated from the Academy of Ballet, she's been starring here and there in small ballet recitals. The one she's currently in has her as one of the main dancers and she's performing it in the Capital but she came back for tonight.

Gale has been staying with her for the past month but he travelled down two nights ago as he wanted to catch up with his friends before the show.

Gale and Madge are still together.

They worked through some pretty tough years of long distance. It got particularly rocky at one point when they hadn't seen each other for over ten months but they loved each other too much to let that ruin them.

Thankfully they're very happy now.

Speaking of happy, I look over and see that Thom and Darius have finished setting up the drums and are laughing over something or another; they're still together too.

They came out to Katniss and Gale the Christmas after high school ended. Katniss and Gale of course knew the whole time and supported them one hundred percent.

It wasn't Katniss and Gale's approval that they were worried of though.

Thom's parents were understanding as they had suspected something for years so they didn't mind at all. Darius's parents on the other hand were clueless and it took a lot of courage and multiple times of them backing out for Darius and Thom to finally tell them.
They were surprised but once they accepted that it really wasn't some phase Darius was going through, they quickly got over it and Thom even had Christmas dinner at their house last year (big deal for them because Darius's parents are quite religious).

Darius and Thom have their own apartment in District Ten. It's only a half hour away on the train and it's close to the record studio that Katniss and the Rebels work in.

So yeah they're really happy too.

It's pretty magical I suppose. All the couples from high school are still together even after all these years. Well the couples we care about anyway. I'm pretty sure I heard from my mother a few years ago that Cato Hunter split up with Glimmer after school ended.

Though last I heard he was arrested for dealing drugs or something so needless to say, I couldn't care less who he's dating these days.

Even Prim and Rory are still together. They refuse to let Gale and Katniss know too much about their relationship but they're a lot more open about their relationship now. Prim is preparing to study medicine once their senior years ends while Rory will study history, which of course Gale very proud.

Over the next half hour, the Hob fills up. Most are regulars who have been watching the Rebels performing here for years but there are a few who travelled specifically to see them tonight.

Like I said, they're kind of a big deal in America at the moment.

Katniss taps the microphone and everyone knows that it's time for the show to start.

The four of us at the bar stand and stand in front of the stage. We aren't at the front but near enough to see the band clearly.

I feel a hand squeeze my arm and I see Annie grinning madly beside me.

God dammit, Finnick must have told her, why do I ever tell him anything?

Finnick and I are still best friends. Both of us made friends when we went to different colleges but us being so close never changed.

He didn't like the course he chose but at college he joined the swim team which he adored. The coach saw pure talent in him and urged him to pursue a career in swimming.

Finnick was uncertain but after a little encouragement from Annie and me, he gave in. He finished college and immediately went back to work as a trainee under his swimming coach, Mags.

He has the potential to swim professionally but Finnick says that for now he's content with helping people learn to improve their skill. He also doesn't want the hassle of constant training when he's just getting his married life with Annie started and that's understandable.

I know first-hand what that's like to have your job affect your relationship. Those times when Katniss was on tour were difficult but we made it work. I visited her at several of her shows and I must say that seeing strangers singing along to the words of my girlfriend's songs was incredible.

Songs that I had been the first to listen to, songs that I knew the true meaning of and even some songs that were written about me.
We were nervous at the idea of long distance for so many months and I know when she tours Europe this summer, it'll be difficult but I'll visit her in some countries and take time off work (benefits of having your dad as a boss) and we'll skype constantly I'm sure.

This is what she loves, writing and singing her own music with her best friends and travelling the world, this has always been her dream.

And I'm beyond proud of her.

The lights dim and instantly clapping erupts throughout the Hob. Madge and I are probably cheering the loudest as usual.

Darius sits himself behind the drums and Gale and Thom put on their instruments, ready for action.

Katniss steps forward to the mic stand and when the crowd dies down, she speaks,

"Hi everyone! Thanks so much for coming and seeing us tonight. And thanks Sae for having us back here after all this time. Seeing as this is sort of where the Rebels and I all began, we thought it would be the perfect time to sing our new single for the first time."

More clapping and cheering and I spot Katniss's familiar blush as her and Gale make eye contact and laugh to themselves.

"So anyway, this is from our new album Catching Fire and this song is called My Mockingbird. I hope you like it."

I feel someone nudge me in the ribs teasingly, clearly knowing that the song is directed at me but I don't look to see who as my eyes are trained on the stage.

Gale, Thom and Darius begin to play the soft, delicate intro music and with the spotlight on the stage, I can see Katniss clearly and as her sparkling grey eyes sweep the audience before they finally land on me.

A wide, beautiful smile graces her face and I return the smile just as brightly.

Discreetly, I slip my hand down to my right trouser pocket and trace my fingers along the smooth surface of the ring box that hides there.

'Tonight' I promise myself 'I'm definitely doing it tonight'.

Then Katniss opens her mouth and starts to sing and with that I let myself drift away to the silky voice that has captivated me since I was five years old.

And in this moment, everything is perfect and I know in my heart that somehow, someway once I have Katniss by my side, everything will always be pretty much perfect.

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The End

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Chapter End Notes
Thanks for reading!

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