She smiled softly and affectionately when she stroked her fingers over the glass which protected the photo. A plush border decorated the frame. It had scuffed hard over the years.

It took some moments before she could put the photo back into the drawer were she kept all the things that meant something to her. She sighed deeply. Her gaze went to the clock that stood on top of the cabinet. There would be enough time left - she stopped in her thoughts. Did she really stare at this picture for such a long time? She closed the drawer hastily. Normally she stashed the key in her bag and took it with her, but in her haste she forgot it on top of the cabinet between all the perfume flasks and make up pots.
With fast steps she left the penthouse on her high heels. She really couldn’t miss this important meeting!

Haymitch hit everything but the alarm after it awakened him so unpleasantly. He nearly pushed everything aside before he found the alarm and threw it against the wall. These bloody alarms! Who had invented such things at all?

He rolled out of the bed and shuffled to the bathroom. Dizzily he stared at his reflection in the mirror. How long didn’t he shave? He decided to shower first. Tomorrow the 72nd Hungergames would begin and therefore he should look just a little bit like a human, shouldn’t he? If Haymitch could have his way he would also be ok with wearing a bag but the little blur of color wouldn’t allow this, would she?

When Haymitch was done in the bathroom he dragged himself through the penthouse, looking for something that could waken him up a bit more. After a quarter of an hour he already wanted to quit his search, when his gaze got caught by Effie’s door. Maybe she hid - ? But could he just enter? At least it was HER room. He guessed it would be filled with too many colors and too many things. But maybe there would be all the bottles? She wouldn’t recognize it, Haymitch decided finally. And if she did he could still say it was one of the Avox. So he walked down the floor to her room.

He stopped shortly in front of the door before he entered as soundless as he could like he could get caught every moment. He was amazed when he saw that her room wasn’t as overloaded as he thought it would be, but very decent and elegant. It was mostly grey and white and there were only some colorful stresses like the violet curtains and the pillows on the bed which were colored the same. Thankfully he knew that she would be away until late this evening. She had this meeting with these - who was it again? Well, didn’t matter.

Haymitch let his gaze wander around, searching. Where could she hide them? First of all he scanned her wardrobe which nearly took one half of a wall. So many things! He lifted the dresses carefully in hope that Effie wouldn’t recognize later. At the very back of the wardrobe, behind the packages with the too high heels he finally found two bottles of the desired liquid. Joyfully he took them out and placed them on the bed. He was sure there would be some more.

Like this he searched the whole room for his beloved friend alcohol. Some hiding places were really strange. One bottle for example was even placed in the med-cabinet in the bathroom.

After he had found four bottles there was only her make up cabinet left. Disappointed he realized that it was locked. When he already turned away to carry his treasure to the living area and start to drink, his gaze was caught by something. It was a little key with a pink bow on it, which was placed between all the make up on the cabinet.

He took it and put it in the locker of the cabinet. But before he opened it he stopped. Right in that moment he realized that this drawer was the only thing in her room which was locked. What could she keep in it? He opened it, curious what he would find.

His gaze lingered over a little accumulation of different things. He knew Effie for two years now but she had never told him anything personal. Of course there wasn’t any alcohol in the drawer but all the things which could tell him more of this little blur of color were much more interesting in the moment. So he sat down on the chair which belonged to the cabinet and began to scan the little things.

The first thing he grabbed was a letter from the Capitol. It said that Effie would be the escort for
District Twelve from now on. Haymitch shook his head. Something like this meant something to her? The next thing he grabbed was a little box which looked like a jewelry box to him. But when he opened it a little ballerina started to dance to a nice melody. In the upper shell there was a photo which already started to peel on the edges. He could see a woman on it who looked very similar to Effie, wearing a colorful wig. On her lap sat a little girl with long blond hair. Could that be…? Haymitch chuckled a bit. For him Effie had always been that colorful bird. He had never imagined her as a child before. And now he caught himself imagining that she still might have this blond hair under all the colorful curls.

He pushed the thought aside and started his search again. There was an old ticket to a theater, a friendship bracelet like the ones the girls in his district had also worn back then and a necklace with a heart on its end. Inside the heart was a little picture of a handsome man - if you could call the men of the Capitol handsome - and on the backside of the heart was a skillful engraving: ‘For my Angel - Love Daddy’. It seemed like Effie’s family meant a lot to her. But he had never saw them before. Were they still alive? Or did they just didn’t like to be seen in public? But this would be abstruse. No one in the Capitol didn’t like to be seen in public. Haymitch decided not to ask Effie about it. Even if she didn’t mean anything to him - he didn’t want to cut old wounds. He himself also didn’t want to speak of his family which had been killed.

Now the last thing that was left was a frame. It laid in the drawer upside down, so Haymitch couldn’t see the photo. When he pulled it out he felt scuffed plush. So the picture might be in there for a while then. When he turned it around he stared at the picture - disbelieving. He could see a boy on the photo, thin but wiry with ash-blond hair and grey eyes. He held a sword in hand and his gaze lingered on something the beholder couldn’t see. If he hadn’t known better one could think the boy looked brave and proud. But he knew better. There was a signature in silver letters on the lower part of the photo. A signature that built his name. Haymitch gulped hard. Why would Effie keep a picture of him as a boy during the 50th Hungergames with all her other treasures? Next to things that obviously meant a lot to her? Out of impulse Haymitch opened the frame and he actual found a note which had lost its color over the years on the backside of the picture. It said: ‘My hero - Haymitch Abernathy’.

His breath caught. What did this note mean which was obviously written by a child? Why had he never noticed before? Did she ever give intimations? Or was it just a childhood memory? A fantasy of a little spoilt girl of the Capitol who thought the Hungergames were something exciting and adventurous?

He decided for the last suggestion and put the picture back into the drawer. He locked it carefully and put the key back between the make-up pots. Haymitch sat there a little longer, absorbed in thoughts, before he picked the four bottles from the bed and went to the living area of the penthouse to disengage himself from all thoughts at all. It was enough to deal with his own problems - he really hadn’t the time to deal with the ones of a little Capitol-Girl which took place 22 years in the past.

During the next days Haymitch tried to evade Effie as much as he could. They told their tributes what they could tell them and tried not to destroy their hope until they had to go to the arena. Of course everyone knew that the two of them had lost since they arrived the Capitol. They were both too thin and too weak. They had never learned anything that could help them to survive the arena. They were fated to die.

Haymitch, Effie and the stylists sat in the big living area of the penthouse to watch the summary of the first day and it seemed as if the sighing wouldn’t ever stop. The boy of their District had been killed right in the beginning by a Career Tribute when he tried to reach the cornucopia. The girl
had ran away. Without anything. She would die the next two days at the latest, everyone knew that.

The stylists said their goodbyes early and left for their own hotel. Haymitch couldn’t tell if their sad faces were for real or not but they tried to show some compassion at least - not like most of the Capitol citizens he had met.

He hoped that Effie would go to bed early, too so he could spend the evening with his alcohol but when he turned his head to look at her she sat on the sofa fossilized. Her gaze was stuck to the screen and Haymitch noticed the emptiness and the shock in her face. They were showing the death of their tribute-boy again in full length. Apparently she couldn’t handle seeing things like that. But when Haymitch looked closer at the boy he realized that he had long blond hair - similar to his when he had been in the arena back then. He remembered the picture he had found in Effie’s drawer. What was she thinking right now while she was watching the death of this boy? Maybe that Haymitch could have died just the same all this years ago?

He could see her tear up and she fought them back brave. She was aware that he would chaff her about it for sure. But that wasn’t what Haymitch had in mind in that moment. For the very first time she seemed to be a human at all. A human filled with feelings, sorrow and pain. Of course all the little things in the drawer had shown him that already but he really realized it just now.

What should he do? How should he react to this event? Haymitch was insecure. Right now he wouldn’t and couldn’t hurt her. She seemed to him like someone he wanted to protect. Yes - he wanted to protect Effie. Protect her from the sorrow and the pain he just knew too well. He didn’t understand why but he was sure about it. It felt right.

So he grabbed his glass which was filled with Gin and offered it to Effie, insecure what her reaction would be. Amazed by his act of friendship she looked at him with her wet eyes, took the glass and drank the rest of the gin with one gulp. She grimaced when the alcohol burned her throat and she put the glass back down. The white make up under her eyes was ruined already.

Haymitch bent a bit forward hesitantly and wiped a tear carefully away which had rolled down her face.

He calculated on being hit every moment and on her jumping up and scream at him, but she amazed him by huddling against his chest and burying her face in his shirt. Haymitch’s heart missed a beat. He had calculated on everything but that! But as she huddled against him and he could smell her - a smell like a sunny afternoon laying over a strawberry field - his feelings just grew. She needed him - that was more than clear now. So he held her for a little longer while she became calm.

Suddenly she jumped back. Apparently she realized what she had done. She stared at him shocked and started to babble. When she rose from the sofa and wanted to haste to her room Haymitch caught her on her wrist. She turned around scared.

“It’s ok, Effie”, he said softly. “You don’t have to apologize or to be ashamed. I -”, Haymitch stopped. Should he really tell her that he had been in her room? That he knew what she thought about him or at least had thought back then? He decided against it. “I won’t tell anyone, Effie”, he finished his sentence. She smiled a little maybe thankful smile and disappeared to her room.

Did she notice anything? Did she think that his hesitation was strange? Did she already notice the disappearing of the bottles from her room? Definitely. But she hadn’t said anything. During all the days she hadn’t said a word about it and had acted with Haymitch like nothing had happened. At least he had rifflled her things and now he had a terrible bad conscience. How could he dare display such insolence to interact so unabashed with her secrets?
The next morning Effie didn’t come to breakfast. This didn’t enlighten Haymitch's mood at all. Was she angry? Sure she was.

But he really wanted to say sorry. Yesterday evening, when she had huddled into him and he could have heard her heart - her little fragile heart - he saw her as a human for the very first time. As a human who meant something to him for whatever reason. That was why he ordered a big pink iced strawberry muffin now (he knew she loved them) and put a little note on the plate. Then he sent one of the Avox to deliver the muffin to her.

Effie was surprised when she got a ‘supply’ that morning. But she was more surprised by the little note which came with it.

Of course she had known that it had been Haymitch who had stolen the bottles of alcohol from her room and she had also noticed that the key to her make up cabinet had been placed on another spot than before she had left that past morning. And of course she had been a bit angry about it. But he hadn’t joked of her or brought her up. And yesterday evening he had acted so differently from other days. He nearly had acted like she had always wished he would. Like the strong Haymitch from her dreams who could protect her and who would always be there for her.

Now she took the picture out of her drawer. The picture which showed Haymitch 22 years ago when she had adored him as the seven-year-old girl and adored him ever since. She opened the frame carefully and put the little note inside it so the signature was half covered. After that she closed the frame again and put it back to her other souvenirs. The note would hopefully become another beautiful memory and maybe it would also become one that reminded her of the day when a shared live with her secret hero had begun.

Sorry, Effie.
Your 'hero' H.

End Notes

Thanks for reading!
If you liked the story just a little I would appreciate Kudos, Bookmarks or comments!
Love Kitty

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!