Summary

25 days, 25 short chapters about Effie's first Christmas in District 12.
First Christmas

“It’s her first Christmas here, we have to make it special.”

It was the middle of the night. Haymitch was at Katniss and Peeta’s house, where the three of them had gathered around the table.

“Of course.” Katniss said, agreeing with Haymitch. “It’s Effie, after all.”

“What did you do last year?” Peeta asked, frowning as Katniss and Haymitch shared a look as they tried in vain to stifle their laughs.

“I’ll tell you later.” Katniss shook her head, smiling at the memory.

Last year, they had all been in District 13. It was the first Christmas Effie was spending out of the Capitol and she had been rather down about it, so Katniss and Gale had promised Haymitch they would sort something out to surprise her. In the end, they surprised both of them as they hung a piece of mistletoe over the doorway to Effie’s compartment before sending Haymitch to see her on the pretence that Effie had asked to see him.

Peeta, who had been recovering in the hospital at the time, looked between Katniss and Haymitch before shrugging, shaking his head in amusement. There was silence for a few moments as they tried to think of what to do.

“Maybe a tree?” Katniss suggested. “We couldn’t get one last year, so that might be nice.”

“Yes.” Peeta nodded. “I can make up some decorations as well.”

“I think Effie might have had a box of ornaments back at her place in the Capitol.” Haymitch nodded thoughtfully. “I could see if Plutarch can send them over.”

“What about some baking?” Katniss asked, looking at Peeta. “Effie always loves the cakes you make.”

“I’m sure I can come up with something.” Peeta nodded, grinning.

Later, when they had finished planning, Haymitch went back to his house.

He went up the stairs quietly, pushing open the bedroom door and wincing as the hinges creaked. Thankfully the blonde haired woman in the bed didn’t stir, even as Haymitch crept around the room getting ready for bed. Finally, he slipped under the covers, wrapping an arm around a still sleeping Effie. He smiled softly.

He hoped he could make this Christmas special for her. She had already made it special for him, just by being here.
“Do you think they’ll like it?” Haymitch asked, weaving a string of lights around the fence of the Victors Village.

After their discussions the night before, Peeta had gone up into the attic of his and Katniss’ house to see if he could find anything up there that could be of any use to their Christmas plans. He had ended up finding a string of lights, which had reminded him of the Christmas card he had received from Effie two years ago. It had featured a picture of a Christmas tree in the centre of the City Circle, decorated with thousands of tiny lights. As much as he hated the Capitol, Peeta had to admit that all the lights were beautiful and certainly added some festive spirit to the place.

He had knocked on Haymitch’s door early in the morning and told his former mentor what he had found, and they had been outside decorating for most of the day. They asked Katniss to keep Effie distracted, though exactly what she was keeping her from they didn’t say. It would be nice to surprise her, too.

“I hope so.” Peeta replied, placing small, individual lights around the primroses he had planted back when he first returned to District 12.

They planned to wait until it was dark to turn the lights on, and it was rather helpful for that reason that the lights were so small and the strings so fine. Unless you were deliberately looking for them, it was almost impossible to find them. And indeed, when Katniss and Effie returned from the meadow later, Katniss having suggested they spend some time out there before the good weather turned, they didn’t notice anything different.

It wasn’t until after dinner that Haymitch and Peeta suggested that they all go outside as it was a clear night, with a bright full moon shining high in the sky. Effie and Katniss were clearly confused by this, but they were curious enough that they followed the men.

They stepped outside, shivering slightly at the cold air. The light coming from the moon and the stars bathed the area in a soft, white glow. Then, Peeta quietly pressed a switch, and suddenly the Victors Village was lit up by hundreds of tiny lights. Katniss and Effie gasped, and even Peeta and Haymitch were taken aback by just how beautiful it all looked.

Haymitch stepped up behind Effie, who was staring around in awe. He wrapped his arms around her, kissing her cheek softly as she leaned back against him.
“Why are we doing this again?” Haymitch asked as Effie practically shoved him out of the house.

“Because,” she said, wrapping a knitted scarf around her neck as she joined him. “Annie is always sending us pictures of her and Finn. It would be nice if we could have some to send her for Christmas.”

“That’s different.” Haymitch argued. “Finn is a child.”

“Well right now you’re acting like one, so there’s not really that much difference.”

Haymitch rolled his eyes. He had never much enjoyed having his photo taken – it all just felt so awkward and posed. Still, if it would keep Effie happy then he supposed it was worth it. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Peeta and Katniss descending the steps from their house.

“You got roped into this too?” He called out as they approached. Peeta shrugged, laughing, whilst Katniss just rolled her eyes.

“Alright, Katniss and Peeta first?” Effie said as she approached, camera in hand.

Katniss and Peeta shared a look with Haymitch, before turning to Effie, trying hard to look at least a little enthusiastic.

“Let’s just have you both in the middle here.” Effie directed, leading the way into the centre of the Victors Village and positioning the young couple. “Lovely!” She stepped back, smiling at the pair before lifting the camera and starting to take some photos. “Smile!” She called out.

Behind her, Haymitch started walking up and down the path in a variety of bizarre ways. Katniss and Peeta burst into laughter on seeing him, and Effie was clearly thrilled with the resulting pictures.

“Oh, I think it’s your turn now!” Katniss said at last, waving Haymitch over as Peeta took the camera from Effie.

Haymitch and Effie stood in the same place Katniss and Peeta had been.

“Relax, Haymitch!” Peeta called out.

Effie glanced to her side, frowning slightly. It wasn’t hard to see Haymitch was uncomfortable having his photo taken, but she wanted one. Not just to have something to send to Annie, as she had told the others, but because there weren’t any pictures of her and Haymitch together. At least, none that even remotely resembled the way they were now; any pictures from before were taken at various Hunger Games events, back when he was just a drunk and she was a Capitol doll. She wanted something to capture them as they were now.

Thinking fast, she tapped Haymitch on the shoulders, then acted as if it wasn’t her when he glanced down at her. Suddenly she felt him prod her just under her ribs on each side, and she squealed as she jumped forwards out of his reach, turning to face him as he did.

The camera forgotten, Haymitch began pursuing Effie, smirking as she feigned fright. At last he caught her, grabbing her around the waist. She laughed as he turned her round to face him.

Peeta and Katniss had watched the scene unfold in amusement. Now Peeta raised the camera,
taking a picture. Even without seeing how it printed, he knew it would be perfect. The unlikely couple were smiling at each other so warmly, their love in their eyes easy to see. He smiled as he lowered the camera again, reaching out his free hand to take hold of Katniss’.

A moment or two later, Effie seemed to remember why they were out here in the first place. She kissed Haymitch on the cheek before walking over to join Katniss and Peeta.

“One final picture then.” She said, taking the camera and setting it up on the tripod she had brought out with her. “All of us this time. The whole family!”

All four gathered together, and this time it wasn’t such an effort to smile at the camera.

“Say ‘Merry Christmas’!” Effie called out.

“Merry Christmas!” Everyone chorused.
"Haymitch Abernathy!"

Haymitch grimaced as he looked up from the letter he had been reading from Plutarch.

"You haven't written a single one of those cards!" Effie chastised, indicating the pile of Christmas cards she had put out for him to write. Her half were already in envelopes ready to be sent.

"Come on, Effie." Haymitch shook his head. "You know the cards will look better if you write them. Your writing is so much neater than mine."

Effie pursed her lips, but she couldn't deny that. She had been trained in penmanship and calligraphy as all Capitol children were, whereas Haymitch had only been taught how to write. District 12 hadn't really put much emphasis on how neat handwriting was, all that mattered was that the children learned to write in the first place.

"We agreed. We would write half of the cards each."

"Actually, that was your suggestion. I just didn't disagree." Haymitch pointed out with a smirk. Effie narrowed her eyes, but eventually shook her head. By the time she managed to convince Haymitch to write the cards, she could have written them all herself ten times over.

"Fine." She sighed. "But you can wrap all the presents."

Haymitch bit back the laughter as Effie picked up the cards and walked away, taking them to the table to write.

"We'll see about that."
"Why are we doing this, exactly?" Effie asked, pulling on her coat.

"Because," Haymitch said as he opened the door and stepped outside. "This is the only way to get a tree here."

"We could just have Plutarch send a couple over."

"Where's the fun in that?" Haymitch grinned. It had been too long since he last had a Christmas tree, but he vaguely remembered seeing a young boy and seeing some of the men sneaking out past the fence and coming home with small trees, laughing quietly amongst themselves as they kept an eye out for any peacekeepers.

Effie just sighed as she joined Haymitch outside, shutting the door behind her. She couldn't see what would be so fun about going up into the woods to drag a couple of trees home, but she supposed she ought to give it a go. After all, the others had gone through with her Christmas photo idea, so it was only fair for her to join in with this.

They met Katniss and Peeta by the edge of the Victors Village.

"I used to do this all the time." Katniss explained as they made their way to the forest. "Every year, Gale and I would come out and find the best trees we could to take home for our families." Effie didn't miss the sad smile that crossed the younger girl's face when she mentioned Gale. He had been her best friend, but the two had barely spoken since the end of the war. "We could never bring home anything too big, though," Katniss continued.

"We can this year." Peeta smiled at her, touching her arm in such a way that told her he knew she still missed Gale and he was ok with that.

"So how exactly do we do this?" Effie asked as the four of them crossed the point where the old fence used to stand.

She got her answer a moment later as Katniss jogged over to a log and knelt down, reaching in and pulling out a couple of axes.

"My father and Gale's father used to bring trees in for us when we were younger. They taught us how to use the axes." She shrugged, passing one to Haymitch.

They spent some time searching for the perfect trees, and Effie was surprised by how much she enjoyed herself. To the old Effie, being out in the woods in the winter would have been a nightmare, especially for something like a tree, which was so easily obtained in the Capitol. The new Effie, however, laughed along with the others as they pointed out trees that didn't have enough branches to decorate or ones that were so tall that it was ridiculous to imagine trying to get it back to the Victors Village, let alone inside a house!

At last they found two fir trees of a reasonable height and with a good coverage of branches. Haymitch and Katniss got to work on chopping the first down, with Effie and Peeta staying out of the way.

After the first fell, Peeta took the axe from Katniss to start chopping the second.

"Want a go?" Haymitch asked Effie.
"Me?" She asked, eyes wide. Haymitch nodded, grinning. "I don't know how. I've never even held an axe before, let alone used one!"

"It's not that hard." Haymitch shrugged. "Come on."

He led her over to the tree, and handed her the axe. She took hold of it with both hands, one at each end of the handle, and went to take a swing, but Haymitch stopped her.

"Like this." He said, coming to stand behind her. He covered each of her hands with his own, the one nearest the blade down closer to the other one, before showing her how to swing it.

"Now you try." He said, keeping his hands on hers but relaxing his grip so that he wasn't helping or hindering her movements. When he was pleased with how she was doing, he tightened his grip again and together they swung the axe into the tree. And again.

A few cuts in, Haymitch stepped back, allowing Effie to do some more on her own. He smiled fondly at her, thinking just how much she had changed over the past couple of years. The Effie had had once known wouldn't be caught dead holding a weapon, especially not an axe, and she certainly wouldn't be found out in the woods cutting down a tree!

"Timber!" Peeta called out as the tree toppled down, and Effie laughed.

Getting the trees home was another challenge in itself as they tried to manoeuvre through the woods. The air was filled with the sounds of instructions being called out, and laughter as someone inevitably stumbled again.

By the time they got back to the Victors Village, it was dusk. Haymitch and Effie helped Katniss and Peeta get their tree inside their house, and then the younger couple returned the favour. They stood the trees in a couple of pots and filled them with some water to keep the trees alive.

Effie and Peeta cooked that evening, preparing a roast pheasant that Katniss had brought home from her early morning hunt.

As they all started eating, Effie looked round the table at these people who were now, for all intents and purposes, her family. She smiled. She understood now what Haymitch had meant when he asked her where the fun would be in simply having a tree delivered. She wouldn't change today for anything.
"You can't put that there!" Effie cried. "It's too close to that one!"

She swooped in, plucking the bauble Haymitch had just hung on the tree and moving it.

Haymitch shook his head. Who knew decorating a Christmas tree could be so difficult? He couldn't remember the last time he had decorated a tree, but he was pretty certain it had been more a case of just hanging things from the branches than creating a work of art. But, he thought with a fond smile, this was Effie, and she was a perfectionist when it came to these sorts of things.

"How about I just pass you things?" He suggested, sitting down beside the box of decorations. They were Effie's from her old flat in the Capitol, and Plutarch had sent them over at Haymitch's request. Effie was delighted, and Haymitch was pleasantly surprised when he saw the decorations themselves. He had been imagining all sorts of crazy things, given the sorts of clothes Effie had worn back in the Capitol. However, it seemed her taste in Christmas decorations had been rather modest. A few garlands of lights and tinsel, and some silver baubles made up the majority of the contents. There were also a few novelty baubles, such as a glittery golden reindeer and a red miniature Christmas stocking.

At last, Effie placed the final bauble on the tree and stepped back to have a look. She smiled, pleased with how it looked, then turned to Haymitch who was unwrapping the final decoration. As the white tissue paper fell away, it was revealed to be a delicate china angel, dressed in a simple white gown with a pair of lightly sparkled wings on her back. He turned to pass it to Effie, noticing that her smile was almost sombre as she looked at the angel.

"She was my grandmother's." Effie said quietly, taking the ornament and gazing down at her. "She left her to me when she passed. She didn't agree with the Games, you see. She was born before the rebellion, so she knew what things were like before. She tried to bring my mother up to be against the Games, but… well, that's not really possible in the Capitol. She didn't take it too well when my mother married my father, what with him being a Gamemaker, and so they shut her out of our lives." Her voice was distant as she spoke, and Haymitch listened silently. They may have known each other for years, but she had never mentioned much about her family aside from her father being a Gamemaker.

"I only saw her a handful of times, and I don't think I ever fully appreciated her. I could never understand why she didn't enjoy the Games as everyone else did. I know now." Effie paused, sighing sadly. "She left me this in her will. My mother tried to get me to throw it away, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. She's been at the top of my Christmas tree every year since I started living on my own." She turned to Haymitch, blinking herself back into the present. "You don't mind, do you?"

Haymitch stepped towards her, wrapping an arm around her shoulders as he kissed her forehead.

"Of course not." He said softly. "Every tree needs an angel, and she's yours."

She glanced up at him. "Ours." She corrected, but he shook his head.

"No, sweetheart. I've already got my angel."
Hot Chocolate

It was definitely starting to get colder, Haymitch thought as he and Katniss parted ways on entering the Victors Village. The pair had gone up to the woods a few hours earlier to hunt. Haymitch had hunted a little when he was younger, before he went into the Hunger Games, but since then he had spent most of his days drinking himself into a stupor so he really hadn't the time or inclination to go out. Besides, he was one of the richest people in District 12 at that time, so any meat he needed he could just buy.

It was Katniss who suggested he came out hunting with her one day. He had once told her that he used to hunt a little, and being a keen hunter herself she had naturally kept that fact in mind. He had gone with her, and as he stalked quietly through the woods, he felt younger than he had done in a long time. It was a regular occurrence now. The woods seemed to revitalise him, and it gave him a sense of purpose; he liked being able to return home with food for the table.

He pushed open the door to the house, taking off his fleece lined coat that had protected him from the cold air outside.

As he hung it up, he caught a sweet smell in the air and sniffed. He followed the scent along to the kitchen, where Effie stood at the counter. She turned as she heard him enter the room.

"Is that hot chocolate?" he asked, spotting the mug she held.

"Yes." She smiled, then frowned. "Haymitch Abernathy, what have I told you about wearing your muddy boots in the house?"

He glanced down, then gave Effie a sheepish smile.

"Take them off." She said firmly.

"But…" He started, looking longingly at the hot chocolate.

"Not until you've taken those boots off."

He stared at her for a moment, trying to wear her down. But this was Effie, and if there was one person who could be more stubborn than him it was her.

"Fine." He relented, turning and walking back to the porch.

"And you can clean the floor later!" Effie called after him.

He shook his head, but he was smiling as he did so.
If Effie would have once laughed at the idea of being in the woods to cut down a Christmas tree, she would have been in absolute hysterics if someone had suggested she collect chestnuts. Crouching down close to the ground to find the spiky pods and then prising them open... the very idea was ludicrous.

And yet she had just spent a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon carefully brushing through the leaves to find the pods the squirrels had not yet got hold of and gently prising them open with the toes of her boots – she had initially been trying to open them with her fingers, and getting mercilessly spiked in the process, until Katniss showed her a different way.

Katniss and Haymitch had ended up turning the whole thing into a competition, racing to see who could fill their basket first. Effie and Peeta had rolled their eyes, shaking their heads at the antics of the other two. Between the four of them, they had filled the woods with laughter.

Now they were all sat around the fireplace in Katniss and Peeta's house, the warm smell of roasted chestnuts filling the air as Haymitch held them over the fire in an old roasting pan.
"So… who's cleaning up?" Katniss asked, glancing around the kitchen.

Peeta had announced that morning his plans to do some Christmassy baking, and for some reason everyone had thought it would be a good idea to join in. Perhaps they had just been doing so much together lately due to the holiday season that they figured they should help Peeta bake. After all, they had all joined in to help Katniss and Haymitch bring in Christmas trees and chestnuts, and they had, if somewhat reluctantly, participated in Effie's Christmas photos.

Of course, none of them knew the first thing about baking. Katniss hadn't ever had the time what with hunting, Haymitch had also been a hunter until he was reaped and became a drunk after surviving the Arena, and Effie had grown up in the Capitol where if you wanted any baked goods you could buy them.

In hindsight, maybe it wasn't such a good idea. They had certainly had fun, but they were definitely more of a hindrance than a help to Peeta.

Haymitch had managed to shake the flour too enthusiastically into the bowl, ending up with most of it covering him, and had proceeded to throw a handful at each of the others when they laughed at him.

Effie had squealed when she felt the cookie mix get under her fingernails as she was splitting the dough, subsequently managing to drop the dough ball on the floor.

And Katniss had taken the phrase "beat the eggs" a little too literally, resulting in a fair amount of the mixture being spilled over the side of the bowl and onto the counter.

Peeta, to his credit, had remained calm and in good spirits throughout this ordeal. He had shown Haymitch how to sieve the flour properly, using small movements against the sides of the bowl. He had re-made the cookie dough with no fuss, and shown Effie how to use the tips of her fingers to break the dough into sections rather than her nails. And he had shown Katniss how to gently use the whisk to beat the eggs less violently.

Now the air in the kitchen was filled with delicious smells of gingerbread, cookies and cakes as they baked in the oven.

The kitchen itself, however, was covered in flour and eggs from floor to ceiling – how egg had ended up on the ceiling was a mystery that no one was owning up to, and the four people who stood in the kitchen didn't look much better.

They looked around sheepishly, taking in the mess they had made. Then they glanced at each other, and burst out laughing. So it may not have been the most efficient baking session in the world, but they would be willing to bet it was the most fun.

And, they thought as they sat down after dinner that evening with their freshly baked goods, it had been pretty darn successful.
Visitors

It was just after noon when the doorbell rang. Effie, who had been hurrying around the house all morning cleaning invisible specs of dust from the surfaces and generally making sure everything looked perfect, jumped up from the armchair she had finally taken a seat in. She looked down at what she was wearing; a simple forest green knee length dress with subtle silver embellishments around the hem. It was plain in comparison to her old Capitol dresses, but it suited her perfectly.

"You look lovely." Haymitch assured her, silently thinking to himself just how lucky he was to have Effie in his life, and how stupid he was for not realising how amazing she was straight away.

She smiled at him, then left the room to answer the door.

As Haymitch sat back down, he noticed Peeta reach over and take Katniss' hand. She was biting her lower lip, and Haymitch wasn't surprised she was anxious.

With there still being so few people living in District 12, the four of them had decided it might be nice to invite some friends over for a day before Christmas. Katniss' mother had been the first person they had called, but understandably she didn't feel she could return to 12 after everything that had happened.

Beetee had also declined their invitation, owing to the fact that his wheelchair made getting around rather difficult and that he was also incredibly busy with work.

Their next call had been to Annie, who was thrilled and accepted immediately. She couldn't wait for them all to meet her son, Finn, who she said was looking more and more like his father every day.

They had also called Johanna. Still as sarcastic as ever, Haymitch could almost hear her rolling her eyes as he asked her over, but she had accepted nonetheless. He had come to know the young woman well enough by now that he knew she was secretly delighted, but she liked to hide herself behind a mask of cool indifference. Perhaps that was all the more true since she was tortured during the rebellion.

The final person coming to their little gathering was Gale. This was why Katniss was on edge. She had not spoken properly to him since leaving the Capitol. Peeta, Haymitch and Effie had all asked her over and over again whether she was ok with him being invited, but she had always nodded resolutely, saying that she needed to do this. He had been her best friend once, after all.

Haymitch heard the sounds of the door opening and the cheerful greetings passed between Effie and the others, and then the group entered the living room. Haymitch stood, greeting Gale with a firm handshake and the two ladies with friendly kisses on their cheeks. He stooped then, picking up young Finn who indeed resembled a younger version of Finnick. The young boy laughed, and Haymitch couldn't help but grin at him.

"You're a natural," Effie said softly, coming to stand at his side, also smiling at the child. Haymitch passed him to her, then glanced around the room, his eyes immediately settling on Katniss and Gale.

The pair were standing, saying very little – at least in terms of words. Having been hunting partners as well as best friends for so long, Haymitch knew they could say as much with their eyes as they could their words, if not more. Finally, Katniss smiled, shaking her head, and the pair embraced.
After a delicious lunch, caught by Katniss and prepared by Effie and Peeta, the group settled into the living room.

Katniss, Peeta, Gale and Johanna promptly sat on the floor, surrounding the low table upon which the biscuits and cakes made during the baking mayhem of the previous day were displayed on plates. Haymitch, ever observant, didn't fail to notice how close Gale and Jo sat to each other, their splayed fingers touching ever so lightly.

Effie and Annie took a seat on one of the sofas, with Finn sitting on Effie's lap. Haymitch perched himself on the armrest behind Effie. Finn looked up at him, laughing in the way only a small child can. Haymitch chuckled.

It was a lovely afternoon, filled with much laughter as everyone caught up on what they had been doing since the end of the rebellion as well as recalling some of the not-so-terrible times from before, such as the many times Haymitch had got more than a little drunk at a party. It was rather amusing for him to hear these stories, as he had little to no memory of most of them occurring!

There were, of course, some sombre moments as they remembered all the people they had lost over the past couple of years. Finnick's absence was perhaps the most notable, especially with Finn running around.

As dusk fell and the visitors left to catch the train back to their homes, the four hosts stood at the door to wave them off, Haymitch and Peeta with their arms around Effie and Katniss respectively. The younger woman was smiling, and Haymitch was pleased to see it. He knew the relationship between her and Gale would never be the same as it was, but today they had come a long way in repairing some of the damage that the rebellion had done to them.

And that, Haymitch thought, was what Christmas was all about; friends and family coming together.
Having visitors over the previous day had been lovely, though it had also been somewhat tiring as it always is when hosts a gathering.

Haymitch and Katniss had gone up to the woods shortly before midday, and Peeta had decided to do some sketching. Effie stayed home, reading.

She finished the novel around mid-afternoon, smiling at the happily ever after it ended with. Replacing the book on the shelf, she was about to choose another when she spotted something on the shelf that she hadn't touched in a very long time. She hesitated for a moment, but then picked it up and leafed through the pages. Despite not having played in years, the notes in the piano book were still familiar to her.

She carried the book through into the drawing room, placing it on the music stand as she lifted the lid on the piano and sat down. Her fingers brushed over the keys, and she played a few simple tunes to reacquaint herself with the instrument.

Turning some of the pages in the book, she found a piece that seemed rather appropriate – 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas'. It was an old song, dating much further back than even her great grandparents, but it was a classic that had endured the tests of time.

Effie started slowly, but soon enough her fingers remembered the chords of the song and she was able to play almost from memory. She hummed as she played, and as she came to the chorus she began to sing softly.

She was so engrossed in what she was doing that she didn't realise the door open.

Haymitch heard the music playing as soon as he opened the door, the sound halting him in his tracks. He furrowed his brows, then stepped inside, closing the door quietly behind him and taking off his coat and boots before following the noise. As he came to the doorway of the drawing room, he stopped again. Now he could hear the lyrics being sung over the music, quiet but confident. He leaned against the doorframe, one side of his mouth twisted up into a smile. He had never known Effie could play the piano, let alone that she could also sing. It was rather amazing to see her sitting there, so lost in the music she was oblivious to everything around her.

As the song came to a finish, Haymitch started to clap. Effie jumped, turning round.

"When did you get back?"

"About two choruses ago." He grinned. She smiled, but the way she bit her lower lip showed that she wasn't sure how she felt about having an audience. "That was incredible." He said softly, crossing the room to take a seat on the piano stool beside her. "I never knew you could play."

Effie shrugged.

"I started learning when I was younger. One of my friends had a pianist for a father, and whenever I'd go round he would be sat there playing. I showed an interest, and he taught me the basics. My parents, of course, didn't encourage me to continue. They wanted me to be a socialite, and according to them socialites should listen to music, not make it." She shook her head. "As soon as I moved into my own apartment, I bought a piano. I remembered what I had been taught, and then it was just a matter of spending the time practicing."

"You're an amazing woman, Effie. You know that?" Haymitch smiled at her, wrapping an arm
around her shoulders. She looked down.

"How about another one?" Haymitch asked, and she looked back up at him. He nodded encouragingly, and she nodded in response before flicking through the music book, coming to stop on another classic Christmas song – 'White Christmas'.

Haymitch watched on as Effie played, singing the song. Towards the end, he amazed even himself by joining in.
The Nutcracker

Chapter Summary

Slightly late updating because I wrote the chapters on my work computer at lunch on Friday due to a busy weekend... and then I forgot to e-mail them to myself!

Early morning found Haymitch and Effie getting ready and packing overnight bags.

Haymitch had surprised Effie last night by revealing that he had bought tickets for them both to see The Nutcracker ballet that was being performed in the Capitol by the Panem Ballet Company. He had remembered overhearing Effie and Cressida talking last Christmas when they had all been in District 13. They had mentioned how it was almost a tradition in their families to go and see the ballet at Christmas, and Effie recalled how her favourite one when she was younger was The Nutcracker. It was almost like fate, then, that when Haymitch called up Plutarch to ask about the ballet that this year's performance was, in fact, The Nutcracker.

In all honesty Haymitch himself wasn't too enthused by the idea, but he knew it would please Effie. He had been right on that count. She may have left her Capitol roots in the past, but the ballet was neither here nor there, and the joyful surprise on her face last night when he pulled out the tickets was more than enough to make it all worth it.

It was dark by the time the train pulled into the Capitol. A car was waiting for them as they disembarked, kindly provided for them by President Paylor herself. They were taken first to a hotel, where they were warmly welcomed before being shown to the suite Haymitch had booked.

Shortly before they were due to leave, Haymitch was sat in a light grey suit on the edge of the bed, waiting for Effie to come out of the bathroom. When she did, he could only stare at her. The long, strapless silver dress fell to the floor, fitting Effie's figure perfectly. The sparkles it was adorned with caught the light every time Effie moved. She had left her blonde hair loose, the ends teased into loose curls.

"Do I look ok?" She asked anxiously when Haymitch continued to just stare.

"Ok?" He said slowly, shaking his head. "Effie, you're bloody beautiful."

She blushed then, dropping her eyes.

"The dress." Haymitch asked, taking in the way the skirt had gold accents to it. "Was it…"

"Cinna." Effie nodded, smiling sadly. The stylist had created the dress for her whilst in the process of designing the wedding dresses President Snow had ordered he prepare for Katniss. It was nothing like the sort of dresses Effie wore back then – though it was certainly glittry enough, the style was far too simple. But Cinna had always had vision, and perhaps even then he could see the simpler style Effie would slip into after the rebellion. Of course, she had never had the occasion to wear such a dress in District 12.

Haymitch stood, crossing the room to wrap an arm around Effie. He placed a light kiss on her forehead, smiling understandingly at her. She and Cinna had grown to be close friends during the
year between the 74th and 75th Hunger Games, confiding in each other when their thoughts were too dangerous to speak to anyone else.

"Shall we go?" Haymitch asked gently, and Effie looked up, nodding, the excitement returning to her eyes.

The car took them directly to the theatre where the ballet would be performed, stopping at the bottom of the steps to let them out. Haymitch acted the perfect gentleman, getting out of the car first and then offering a hand to assist Effie.

Arm in arm they entered the theatre lobby, Haymitch showing the tickets to the usher who pointed them in the right direction.

Effie looked around, taking in everything. She hadn't been to the Capitol since she left for District 12 after President Paylor was sworn in. On the surface, little had changed. The clothing worn by the citizens was as flamboyant as ever, though the makeup did seem to be a little more subtle than it once was. She glanced down at her own dress again, and smiled. She felt far more comfortable in this than she had in any of her Capitol Couture gowns.

The ballet was as beautiful as Effie remembered. Seated in the front row of the royal circle, she and Haymitch could see everything. She watched, enthralled as the dancers performed, the story of the Nutcracker unfolding.

Haymitch, despite his earlier reservations, found himself not having too terrible a time. The story was a little cliché for his liking, but there was no faulting the dancers. He glanced at Effie every so often, smiling to himself as he saw how captivated she was.
Christmas Shopping

The day after the ballet, Effie persuaded Haymitch that they simply had to visit the Capitol Christmas Market. She had gone every year since before she could remember, first with her parents and in later years with her friends.

It was held in the City Circle, with tradestands set up all around the huge Christmas tree. This year, for the first time, the traders were not just from the Capitol, but had been invited from each and every district. Thus there were more stalls than ever before.

There was always a lovely atmosphere surrounding the market, with various Christmas songs being played over the loudspeakers normally used for the President to convey important messages to citizens.

Haymitch had been reluctant, but had agreed. He was here for Effie, after all. Besides, he had been stuck for ideas on what to buy her for Christmas. Perhaps he would find something on the market.

They shopped together for the first couple of hours, successfully managing to find presents for their friends and family. As they paid for a gorgeous cake display stand for Peeta, they spotted Plutarch. He grinned when he saw them, and came over. The three greeted each other, then started to catch up.

"Effie?" A familiar voice called out. Effie turned, eyes widening as she caught sight of Wistalia Valentine.

"Stalia!" She gasped as the other woman approached. She was easy to recognise, with her trademark silver wig decorated with gold stars. She had been Effie's closest friend growing up and even during more recent years. Of course, as Effie opened her eyes to the reality of the Games she had felt more and more distant from her friend, unable to confide in her the way she could Cinna, but she still cared about her friend.

"You look… different." Stalia said as she kissed Effie on the cheek. "I almost didn't recognise you."

"I'll take that as a compliment." Effie laughed, raising an eyebrow.

"Oh don't get me wrong," Stalia said quickly. "You look great, it's just… well I don't think I've ever seen you without a wig or lots of makeup. Or dressed so simply, for that matter." She added, looking down at the simple purple dress Effie had chosen to wear.

"It was time for a change." Effie stated with a smile.

"Well you look good."

"So do you. You haven't changed a bit!"

"Fashion hasn't really changed here." Stalia shrugged. "I don't know if it will, but for now I'm happy to keep my wigs on. Though I am letting my hair grow again, just in case." She laughed. "I bet you're glad you never shaved yours off."

Effie laughed, recalling a hundred different arguments she had had with her mother. She had never liked the idea of getting rid of her own hair, even if she wasn't going to let other people see it.
Haymitch and Effie parted ways then. They needed to get each other some presents anyway, so it was useful that they had found Plutarch and Wistalia to keep them company.

Effie laughed as she and her old friend talked, both about the past and the present. It turned out that Stalia was actually rather close to Caesar Flickerman these days, the ex-Hunger Games Host having been tried and found innocent of any crime. It turned out President Snow had threatened his family in order to get the popular TV personality to host the Games.

"So, you and Haymitch." Stalia said, finally bringing up the subject.

"What about us?" Effie asked innocently, picking up a glass snowglobe to examine it.

"Don't give me that." Stalia laughed. "I know you too well." Effie joined her friend laughing.

"I don't know what to say." She shrugged. "It just sort of happened. I suppose we just came to depend on each other, in some strange way. Whatever happened to the tributes, we could always guarantee that each other would be there to keep things normal. I could count on him to distract me by drinking himself into a stupor, and he knew I would always chastise him for doing so." Effie shook her head, smiling a little at the memory. "We came to understand each other during Katniss and Peeta's Games, and then… I don't know. Somehow we found comfort and strength from each other when things got tough. I can't imagine not having him in my life now."

"I can't say I'm completely surprised." Stalia said gently after a silent moment passed, a smile on her face. "I mean, it is quite unexpected but there was always some sort of chemistry between you both. Even when you were arguing."

Effie laughed again. It was true that she and Haymitch had argued more than a few times over the years they had known each other, but perhaps that had been down to the nature of what they were doing, and their ways of coping with the situation. Whatever the reason, even before the 74th Games, there had been an unspoken bond between them. Effie would never report Haymitch for the slanderous things he said against the Capitol, and he would never tell anyone how she would down a glass of whiskey when things got too much for her. When it came down to it, they had always been there for each other, even if neither of them realised it for a long time.
They stayed one more night in the Capitol, and boarded the train home early the following morning. Plutarch, Wistalia and even President Paylor were amongst those who came to bid them farewell as their bags were taken from the car and loaded onto the train.

It had been a lovely couple of days, and Effie smiled as she thought back. The ballet had been a wonderful surprise and had been just as beautiful to watch as she remembered. Shopping, too, had been thoroughly enjoyable and it was delightful to see so many new traders on the Christmas Market now that the restrictions that had once prevented travel between the Districts had been lifted. Seeing Stalia again had been unexpected but Effie had enjoyed catching up with her old friend. Then, last night, she and Haymitch had been invited to attend dinner with President Paylor at the palace.

Still, it was nice to be on the way back to District 12. Though the Capitol appeared unchanged at first glance, with the elaborate fashions still very much a part of life, the atmosphere was completely different. It was a better place, thanks to everyone who had been brave enough to fight for this future, but this visit had only proven to Effie what she already knew; the Capitol was no longer home for her. Though it had changed, so had she. And she no longer cared for the glitz and glamour that she once lived for. Oh it was nice on the odd occasion, and she had loved having the opportunity to wear the dress Cinna had made her, but she preferred the simpler life she now led. She didn’t need the fancy clothes or jewellery. All she needed was to be with the people she loved, and if they were in District 12 then that was where she belonged.

It was strange to think that there had been a time when she had pursed her lips and look around in disgust as she disembarked the train in District 12. Had someone suggested to her back then that she would one day be living there, and with Haymitch Abernathy no less, she would have suggested they see a therapist because they were clearly insane.

Yet now, as the train slowed to a halt in the District 12 station, she smiled. This was where she belonged. Here, she was home.
If anyone had been watching that day, they would have been unable to keep themselves from laughing. Haymitch Abernathy, who had once presented himself in such a way that he appeared uninterested in anything other than the next drink, was acting like a big kid.

He had softened over the past year, love having re-entered his heart, and it was plainly obvious to see just how much had had changed at that moment. Effie had left in the morning to spend some time with Katniss and Peeta, and the moment he heard the door shut Haymitch had leaped from his chair and started to search for his Christmas present.

He checked in all the cupboards and drawers, in every room of the house. He even dared to look in Effie’s wardrobe, though he was careful to not disturb anything too much in there. It wasn’t until he remembered the loose floorboard under which he used to store bottles of whiskey that he found something. He grinned to himself as he reached down and pulled out the item wrapped in layers of tissue paper. It was cylindrical and rather solid. A flask, maybe? Carefully he unwrapped it, making sure he didn’t rip the paper and thankful that Effie hadn’t yet wrapped it properly with tape. As he removed the final layer, letting the paper fall to the floor, he stared at the thing in his hand for a moment, before bursting out laughing. It seemed Effie knew him too well, for what he had found was not a present at all but a roll of dustbin bags. What really made him laugh though was the note stuck on the top.

*At least tidy up after yourself.*

He was still laughing when Effie came home later, and she simply raised an eyebrow in response, the corners of her lips twitching. Oh yes, she knew him too well. That was why she had hidden his presents in the house next door. There were definite perks to having so many empty houses in the Victors Village, especially when you were trying to hide things from a very clever and curious man!
Frost

It was definitely winter now, Effie thought as she stepped outside and felt the cold air hit her. Dusk was only just beginning to settle, but already things were starting to glisten with frost. Things had never been this cold in the Capitol; perhaps it was simply the location, or maybe there had been some special technology in place designed to override natural weather in extreme circumstances.

Not that you could really call this extreme. It was actually rather beautiful, the frost shining like silver in the low light. Curious, Effie walked down the steps and onto the grass, her eyes shining in an almost childlike excitement as she both felt and heard it crunch underfoot.

Haymitch was at the window when he noticed Effie investigating the frost, first walking on the grass and then stooping to feel it with her fingers. He smiled fondly as he watched.

A moment later, he opened the door and stepped outside, taking a seat on the cold marble steps. It didn't take long for Effie to sense his presence, and she turned. She had a smile on her face, though she was biting her lower lip as if she couldn't believe she was acting in such a way over something so natural. So normal.

But to her it wasn't normal. She had never seen frost before, only in the pictures. Even when she had come to District 12 two winters back to start off the Victory Tour, it had already been a slushy snow on the ground as opposed to frost.

She made her way back over to Haymitch, sitting beside him on the steps. Almost immediately, he pulled a blanket out from behind him and wrapped it around her shoulders. He smiled at her, his eyes telling her that he understood her excitement, without him needing to say the words. Truth be told, he found her wide eyed wonder to be more than a little adorable.

They turned back to gaze across the Victors Village, sitting in a comfortable silence as the night grew darker, the frost turning more and more silver as the moonlight claimed the clear night sky.

"I think it's going to snow tonight." Haymitch said softly, putting an arm around Effie. In response, she smiled, before leaning into him, her head resting against his shoulder.
Snow

Just as Haymitch had suspected, they awoke the next morning to a blanket of white snow covering the entirety of District 12.

Always an early riser, Katniss was already outside, her father's hunting jacket pulled on over her thick pyjamas. She had dragged Peeta outside too, and Effie laughed as she watched the young couple throw snow at each other. Haymitch came to join her at the window, then laughed before going downstairs, throwing on a coat and boots, and going outside to join in.

Effie went to make a move towards her wardrobe, intending to get dressed before going outside, but then stopped herself. She was embracing District 12 life, and if everyone else was outside with just pyjamas, boots and a coat then that's what she would do.

So it was that she found herself wrapped in a thick coat, standing outside the door of the house as she watched her family throw balls of snow at each other. Despite the chill in the air, she was filled with warmth.

Suddenly a cold, wet mass hit her hand, and she gasped, quickly looking in the direction it had come from. It didn't surprise her in the least to see Haymitch there, a far too innocent expression on his face. Effie narrowed her eyes at him, though she couldn't keep the corners of her mouth from twisting up.

She walked slowly down the steps, pretending to use the railing for balance but instead secretly gathering snow in her hand. She hid her hands behind her on the way towards Haymitch, looking to him as if her hands were simply clasped there as she feigned being prim and proper the way she used to. On reaching him, she stood there for a moment, lips pursed, before she went to wrap her arms around his neck. Perhaps if it had been Katniss or Peeta, Haymitch would have been more aware. But this side of Effie was still as new to him as it was to her, and so he was shocked when he felt the cold snow on the back of his neck and Effie ran away, laughing.

They lost track of how long they spent outside, throwing snowballs at each other. At some point they split into teams, Katniss and Effie against Peeta and Haymitch. It was great fun, and Effie couldn't remember the last time she had laughed so much her sides hurt.

Effie was lined up to throw a snowball at Peeta when she was suddenly tackled from the side. She shrieked as she fell, though Haymitch had thankfully planned things well enough that Effie fell on top of him as opposed to the other way around. She pushed herself slightly up with her arms, mock glaring down at him as he smirked up at her. Then he lifted his head, pressing a short but sweet kiss to her lips. She raised an eyebrow as they parted, but her eyes were sparkling.

She pushed herself up properly then, standing and brushing as much of the snow off herself as she could.

"Who fancies some breakfast then?" she asked, glancing across to where Katniss had her arms around Peeta from behind as she tried to shove a fistful of snow into his face. They broke apart, laughing, whilst Haymitch got to his feet.

Then, cold but exhilarated, the family made their way inside Haymitch and Effie's place, laughter still echoing around them.
More snow fell overnight, so when Haymitch and Effie woke the following morning they found that all tracks made from the previous day had been well and truly covered.

It was after lunch when they decided to venture outside, and Katniss and Peeta joined them soon after. Having already had a snowball fight the previous day, they didn’t feel the need to repeat those particular antics – though that's not to say no snow was thrown at all!

Instead, they decided to build a snowman.

Haymitch started to roll the large ball for the base, with Peeta creating the middle section. Effie went inside in search of an old scarf and hat, whilst Katniss headed off to find some decent branches for arms.

When Effie came back outside, she couldn't help but laugh. It seemed Haymitch had gone rather overboard and the first ball for the snowman was huge! Peeta was working hard to try and increase the size of the middle section he was making so that the snowman didn't seem quite so out of proportion.

Katniss had a similar reaction when she returned. By that point, they had managed to get the second snowball on top of the first and were starting to form the head.

When it came time to put the head on, Haymitch and Peeta had to lift up Katniss in order to get the height necessary for the task! It was quite difficult considering they were all laughing, but eventually Katniss managed to place the final snowball on top. Effie passed up the scarf and hat to her, as well as a carrot and few lumps of she had fetched to make a nose, eyes and mouth.

Once Katniss was back on the ground, she and Peeta pushed in the branches on either side of the snowman's middle section so that he had arms, whilst Haymitch and Effie used the rest of the coal lumps to make the traditional black buttons.

Without a doubt it was an impressive sight to behold when it was done. The snowman stood at least 8ft tall, towering over all of them.

As dusk fell, the family were to be found sitting outside on the marble steps of Katniss and Peeta's house, equipped with blankets and mugs of hot chocolate, admiring the view. Despite the grand height of their snowman, there was still a thick layer of snow on the ground which seemed to almost glow as it reflected the moonlight.

It was such a simple moment, and yet so perfect. Old Christmas songs that had been remembered through the years mentioned peace on Earth, but this was the first time any of them had really felt what that was like.
Mulled Wine

When it comes to chasing away the chill of a winter's evening, there is nothing better than a glass of mulled wine.

It was a traditional drink to have around this festive season in all the Districts as well as the Capitol, and it was said that the tradition dated back to a time long before Panem was even thought of. So it was only natural that, as everyone sat in the living room of Haymitch and Effie's house, Effie decided to make some mulled wine.

The sweet smell of the drink filled the house as it heated up, the mix of spices creating a mouth-watering scent.

When it was done, Effie filled the glasses and handed them out, though there was the slightest flicker of concern on her face as she handed Haymitch his glass. He didn't miss it, and more than that he understood why it was there.

He had been a drunk for longer than they had known each other, only reducing his drinking to stay sober enough to help Katniss and Peeta during the 74th Games. He had been forced to give it up entirely when they arrived in District 13, however, and Effie still remembered the way he looked after he was released from the special unit they had kept him in whilst he went through withdrawal. He couldn't, and didn't, blame her for worrying about him now.

But this wasn't the first alcoholic beverage he had consumed since the war ended and he was able to leave District 13 and their prohibition behind. In fact, there had been one occasion after arriving back in District 12 with Katniss when he had very nearly got himself into a state again, but by reminding himself that he was here to look after the girl he had managed to keep control of his actions. He only drank enough to keep the nightmares at bay.

Then Effie had arrived on his doorstep, and he no longer needed the alcohol. With Effie wrapped in his arms each night, the nightmares no longer plagued him. He didn't need to drink when he had her.
Ice Skating

The sound of laughter rang through the otherwise still woods as Haymitch once again lost his balance and fell.

Katniss had been up in the woods hunting early that morning, and on returning had informed the others that the lake had frozen over. Knowing District 12’s woodland as well as she did, she knew how thick the ice would be and suggested that it would be great for ice skating.

Effie was the first to agree. She had enjoyed ice skating back in the Capitol, though that had always been on a specially created rink that was set up for the month of December. The thought of ice skating on a real frozen lake was one that both terrified her and excited her at the same time.

Her enthusiasm was contagious, and both Peeta and Haymitch found themselves nodding in agreement.

Neither of them had skated before. Peeta had always been a quiet stay-at-home baker’s boy who had never even ventured into the woods until after the war, whilst Haymitch had been a hunter in his youth but had been more focused on getting the food than any recreational activities the woods offered. He supposed that things would have been different if he’d had a hunting partner, like Katniss had in Gale, but he had always hunted alone.

Katniss and Effie dug out their own skates, and Katniss found a couple of old pairs which had belonged to Gale and her father. Her father’s old pair fitted Haymitch surprisingly well, and whilst Gale’s were slightly too big for Peeta they fitted him well enough with a pair of thick socks.

Once she got over her nerves about being on a real frozen lake, Effie was easily the best skater out of the four of them. She glided around almost effortlessly, even putting in a few little jumps and spins at times.

Katniss, whilst not as proficient as Effie in terms of style, held her own well. She and Gale had spent many winters out skating on this lake, letting themselves temporarily forget the issues that they faced back at home. Naturally the two had been extremely competitive.

Peeta did surprisingly well considering he had never skated before. He fell a few times to begin with, but after a few laps of the lake holding Katniss' hand he was able to make his way round on his own, staying upright albeit a little wobbly.

Haymitch, on the other hand, had possibly spend more time sitting or lying on the ice than he had standing. Each time he fell the others laughed at him, whilst he grumbled about the ridiculousness of it all.

Effie, recovering after her most recent bout of laughter, skated over and offered her hand to help Haymitch up. He took it, but then instead of pulling himself up, he pulled her down. She shrieked as she fell, landing next to him on the ice. She glared at him, though there was an amused twinkle in her eyes that she couldn't quite hide, and she gave up trying to act angry. Instead she gave his shoulder a shove before she stood back up. Haymitch stood up beside her, though he was up for barely a second before he fell again.

Once more everyone laughed. Then Katniss and Peeta skated over, and both Effie and Katniss helped Haymitch to his feet. Then they slowly started to skate, each keeping hold of his hands. Peeta stayed behind his old mentor, gently pushing him forwards whenever his weight got too far back.
It took a while, but eventually Peeta and then Katniss moved further away from Haymitch, who managed to stay upright without their help. Only Effie continued to hold his hand, and he wouldn't let go, but it wasn't because he needed her help anymore.
"Haymitch, you're not helping." Effie sighed, frustrated. "Now will you please give me the scissors back?"

She had been wrapping presents when Haymitch returned from spending a day hunting with Katniss. Thankfully she had already wrapped his first, not wanting to risk him seeing them, and they were tucked under the tree.

Having been brought up in a very particular way, Effie always made sure her presents were perfectly wrapped, with the paper folded in all the right places and a little ribbon on top, which she curled the tails of by running the ribbon along the edge of the scissor blades.

"How do you do it?" Haymitch asked, as Effie wrapped the present they had brought for Peeta. He hadn't waited for an answer as he picked up the scissors and the roll of ribbon, swiping it along the edge of the blades as he had watched Effie do. Of course, he didn't quite have the right technique and had only succeeded in causing the ribbon to fray at the end.

By this time, Effie was ready to use the ribbon to finish Peeta's present. Haymitch, however, wasn't going to give up his attempts at curling it, ignoring Effie's outstretched hand.

"It's really not that difficult," she rolled her eyes. "If you give it back to me, I can show you."

"If it's not that difficult, how comes I can't do it?"

"There's a technique to it." Effie shook her head. "It's not hard, you just have to do it the right way."

"Well what's that, then?"

"If you give it back to me, I can show you."

Haymitch paused then, before reluctantly handing the ribbon and scissors back to Effie. Quickly, she wrapped it around the parcel, tying it a bow on the top before cutting the ribbon roll free.

Then she showed Haymitch how to curl the ribbon, holding the scissors wide open and running the sharpened side of one of the blades along the lengths of ribbon that formed the tails of the bow.

"See? It's really not that difficult." She shrugged, placing the present under the tree as Haymitch picked the scissors and ribbon back up, attempting to do the same as Effie had just done. The ribbon curled slightly, but not as much as it had done for Effie. He held it up, frowning.

"You just need to add more pressure." Effie told him as she started to wrap the next present. "It just takes a bit of practice."

Later, she would regret saying that when Haymitch refused to give her the ribbon or scissors back, insisting that he needed to keep practicing.
Perhaps one of the most common traditions at Christmas is to bring out all the old board games that spend the rest of the year locked in a cupboard somewhere, out of sight and out of mind. Scrabble, Cluedo, Monopoly... games that people love and hate in equal measure.

Perhaps it's because of the often poor weather over the festive season, something for friends and family to do together inside. Even if such games do tend to cause as many arguments as they do laughs.

It was certainly for this reason that Haymitch, Effie, Katniss and Peeta were currently sitting inside the living room of Katniss and Peeta's house. It was snowing again outside, the flakes coming down so thick and fast that it was impossible to see more than a few feet ahead. So Haymitch and Effie had managed to make their way over to the younger couple's house where the four sat at the window, watching the white blizzard, until Peeta suggested getting out some board games. The response had been a mix of groans and laughs, but all agreed to the plan and soon they were sat playing a game of monopoly.

They played with an old fashioned version of the game, none of them having ever liked the modern version which included Justice Buildings and Hunger Games Arenas in the list of properties that could be purchased.

Effie was voted as banker by the others, owing to the fact that she was probably the most responsible out of them all (and therefore the least likely to cheat!), and so she counted out the starting money for each player and made sure the rest of the money was neatly sorted so that it could be dealt with efficiently. It was also the job of the banker to keep the cards for the properties until they are purchased, and so these too were organised into colour groups so that they were easy to locate as and when they were needed.

Katniss rolled first, moving the small silver arrow she had selected as her token the five squares forwards, buying the property she landed on with no hesitation.

Peeta was next, using the artist's palette token, followed by Effie and then Haymitch, playing with the shoe and goose tokens respectively.

Haymitch was the first to be sent to jail on the board, courtesy of a "go to jail" card from the chance card pile, which he grumbled good naturedly about whilst the others laughed at his misfortune.

Effie employed the tactic of collecting the four transport properties, a move which worked rather well for her as she quickly became the richest player on the board and meant she was able to afford the more expensive properties.

Katniss also did rather well, having been the first player to build houses and subsequently hotels on a collection of properties.

Peeta, whilst not being the first to go to jail, did end up being the player who went there the most due to both landing on the go to jail square and rolling a six three times in a row. Unable to roll the six to free himself most of the time, this resulted in him being the poorest player on the board. Still, being Peeta, he took all of this in good humour.

As so often happens when playing board games, none of them noticed the time passing, and it was only when Peeta got up to light the fire that they realised how late it had got. Still, the weather...
remained poor and so the game was only paused for a brief intermission whilst they prepared some food. Then the laughter and frustration resumed as they continued their game.
It had hardly been warm in District 12 these past few weeks, but overnight the temperature had dropped even further. It was just about bearable during the day if you layered up, but as the sun set and the moon rose to take its place, the only place to be was in front of the fire.

Effie and Haymitch sat there now, a large woollen blanket wrapped around them. Like this, it was actually rather cosy and pleasant enough that they forgot all about the bitter temperature. They talked at length about everything and nothing, realising that it had been a while since they had spent an evening just the two of them. Naturally they loved spending time with Katniss and Peeta as any parents, or parental figures, do, but it was nice to have time to themselves, and nicer still that they didn't have to worry about anyone or anything else.

That was something they had yet to get used to, really. Of course they had spent plenty of time over the past just the two of them, when their tributes were in the arenas, but they were hardly blissful moments. The fact that they spent most of their time in the early days arguing or ignoring each other aside, how could anyone be at ease when there were children killing and being killed?

Even in more recent years, as they somehow grew to tolerate and even like each other, the time they spent together was hardly comparable to the moment they now shared. Worry, fear and anxiety plagued their minds as they fought to keep Katniss and Peeta alive, and to bring down Snow and his regime.

Now the rebellion was over. Snow, and Coin, were dead. Katniss and Peeta were safe. There was nothing left for them to worry about.

So as the evening wore on and they slipped into silence, it was a comfortable and welcome one. Sitting together in silence with no worries may seem like such a simple thing to some people, but after everything Haymitch and Effie had been through, this moment was perfect.
Mistletoe

It was Christmas Eve. The presents were all wrapped and under the tree, ready to be opened the next day, and everyone was in good spirits.

Katniss and Haymitch had gone up to the woods early that morning, and Effie had joined Peeta to do some baking. Despite her first poor attempt at it two weeks previously, Effie had shown an interest and Peeta had willingly become her tutor. Now they baked together in harmony, each knowing their tasks and operating smoothly as they baked.

It was shortly after midday when Haymitch and Katniss returned, baskets laden with fruits and berries for Christmas Lunch, and plenty of bright green holly leaves to add some final decoration around their houses.

As Peeta and Katniss put away the food ready for tomorrow, Haymitch put the basket of holly on the table. Effie came over, a pair of scissors in hand, and carefully sorted through the prickly leaves. Finding a nice one with plenty of leaves, she cut it into four small sections, each just a few inches shorter than the length of a placemat. She planned to put these at the top of everyone's place tomorrow to give the table a Christmassy feel.

As she sorted through the remainder of the leaves, planning in her mind's eye where they should go, Haymitch came up behind her, sneaking an arm around her waist. She turned to face him, raising an eyebrow in response to the mischievous look on his face. He gestured up with his eyes, and Effie followed his gaze, laughing as she saw the mistletoe he held over their heads.

"Remind you of last year?" He asked, eyes twinkling.

Effie laughed again as both of them glanced over at Katniss, who was busy helping Peeta prepare lunch. Then they looked back at each other, smiling.

"How could I forget?" She replied, before Haymitch dipped his head and their lips met.

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