The Girl At The Coffee Shop

by District_7_Profanity

Summary

A College AU Joniss Prompt: Johanna works at a coffee shop, Katniss goes in every day to "try new drinks" aka flirt awkwardly with Johanna, until one of them gives in. Complete!

Prompt posted by beneath-the-rubble.tumblr.com
The Chocolaty Drink

Autumn was her favorite season. Katniss reveled in all things Fall: foliage, pumpkin-flavored beverages, hot drinks, thick scarves, thigh-high boots over jeans, brisk winds that ruffled the orange and red covered ground. Even now, six weeks into her first semester at college, she gleefully enjoyed the smell of autumn as it happened around her. She kicked the fallen leaves with the tip of her boot, strolling down the urban sidewalk near her dorm. Today she was supposed to meet her Physics partner and best friend Gale Hawthorne at a local coffee shop a few blocks from their dorm. Her roommate Madge had raved about the coffee and frequented their open mic nights on Saturdays. Madge raved about nearly everything but she did always have one of their environmentally conscious green cups on her desk in their room.

Katniss pushed the door open and heard the quaint chime of the bell above her head. She unwrapped her scarf from around her neck and tucked it into her messenger bag. The walls were painted a light orange, vintage movie and music posters adhered askew on the walls, giving the place a sense of hipster whimsy. Soft, soulful jazz blared unobtrusively from speakers set within the exposed vaulted ceilings.

The plentiful power outlets and tables meant a lot of Katniss's peers from Panem University were strewn about the place. They sat at tables along the walls and congregated in the corners with coffees, laptops, bean bag chairs and textbooks. Single studiers curled into overstuffed plush magenta armchairs in dimly lit corners. Katniss wondered how they got any studying done in the din of the room; she preferred the quiet, musty solitude of the library. Hidden within a few bookshelves, muted from the world by the volumes of ink and paper around her.

She spotted Gale in a far corner table, hovered over his book. She smiled as she approached, shrugging her suede jacket down from her shoulders. Gale sipped a hot beverage and looked up at her. "What's up Catnip?"

She slung her jacket around the wooden chair and frowned. "Sorry I'm late. Madge talked my ear off about her Aunt Maysilee coming to visit next week." Katniss rolled her gray eyes and set her things down next to their table. "I'm just going to grab something to drink. What did you get?"

"Tea," Gale answered simply, garnering a look of skepticism from his friend. "Don't judge me it's cold outside. And you know I don't like espresso." He gave her a grimace for good measure. Katniss rolled her eyes as she grabbed her wallet from her bag and went toward the counter.

As she waited behind three coeds she perused the menu. There was the typical coffee shop fare of lattes and espresso, plain brews and herbal teas. A small chalkboard menu had a few specials written in a flowery green chalk handwriting. They each had kitschy coffee pun names and Katniss smiled at a few of them. If she had to venture out of her literary hiding hole, an independent coffee shop wasn't a bad second place. She approached the counter, having made up her mind to just get a regular coffee.

She opened her mouth to order and was stopped as she saw the barista smiling politely at her. Black hair with red streaks pulled back into a messy ponytail tied with a blood red bandana and two pens sticking out like a geisha's hair sticks, deep amber brown eyes, a permanent smirk on ruddy brown lips, a tight forest green t shirt with a black apron emblazoned with the "HeavensBeans" logo wrapped tightly around her slim hips. She had cut the shirt straight down the collar to expose her cleavage, which Katniss was trying to avoid staring at.
The girl leaned in and cocked a darkened, manicured eyebrow. Abruptly the place felt too loud, too bright, too warm to Katniss. "You blinked, I won." _God, her voice._ Katniss was certain she had never heard anything so feminine and yet, so deeply rough. Katniss shook her head and met the girl's playful eyes. "Did you want something, gorgeous?"

If Katniss had thought of something she wanted to drink it was wiped clean from her memory by the girl drawling that compliment out of her lips. "I uh..."

"Need some help?" she asked. Katniss nodded wordlessly. She did not trust her voice. "Do you like chocolate?"

"Yes." She had reason not to trust her voice. Her answer came out strangled like a yelping dog.

"Do you like it hot?" The girl seemed to purposefully draw out her words, making the question sound impossibly risqué. Katniss coughed and watched the other girl's eyes twinkle with humor. "The coffee, brainless. Hot?"

"Y-yes." Katniss could feel the heat of her cheeks burning her face. Was the stupid heat in here on like 1000 degrees?

The dark-haired girl scribbled something on a tall paper cup, handing it over to a handsome blond man who took it and flipped it, catching it behind his back. "What's the name on this?" he asked, withdrawing a pen from his back pocket.

Katniss placed her palms on the counter and moved up on her toes. "Katniss." She had directed it toward the boy, but her eyes never left the magnetizing gaze of the girl behind the register.

The girl smiled at her and began tapping her fingers against the small computer monitor in front of her. "That'll be $3.56." Katniss began rummaging in her wallet and the girl spoke again. "Are you a student?" Katniss nodded, not trusting her voice again. "Okay," she said, punching a few more buttons, "then you get the discount. Lucky you. That'll be three dollars even."

Katniss produced three somewhat presentable bills from her wallet and handed them to the girl. "Sorry, I sort of cram everything in here." Almost as proof of her disorganization a small Chapstick and a brightly colored fake sugar packet fell on the counter. The girl smirked and took the money, leaving the paraphernalia. Katniss shoved it back into her wallet, blushing even deeper than before.

"It's okay _Katniss,"_ she replied, tucking the money away in the register. She hissed the "s" in Katniss's name and made her shudder. She closed the drawer with a shove and maintained a high eyebrow as Katniss stood there. "You can pick your drink up down there." She jabbed a finger to Katniss's right where a boy was waiting for his drink as well.

"Oh. Thank you." Katniss moved away from the counter, thoroughly embarrassed and clutching her wallet. Her fingernails tapped against the wooden counter as she awaited her drink. After a minute of dodging glances from the girl at the counter, her name was called and the attractive boy behind the espresso machine slid her drink toward her. The name tag affixed to his apron strap read "Finnick" in a blue print. _A name tag!_ Katniss hadn't even remembered to look at the girl's. "Thanks," she mumbled, cradling the drink and walking back to Gale.

The beverage was rich and chocolaty with just the slightest bitter tang of espresso. She'd have to tell the girl she enjoyed it. Yes, that would be a perfectly legitimate reason to go back and talk to her again. Maybe this time, talk like a normal person and not a bumbling idiot. With a sigh she turned to Gale and they began to work in their notebooks on their current Physics project. In spite of the fairly steady stream of customers she managed to keep her eye on the girl at the counter. At
some point within the hour she and the boy had switched positions and she was now crafting the drinks. Every so often her gaze would look out into the dining area and they would catch eyes. Katniss's heart would pound in her chest and she hurriedly looked back to her textbook.

"Katniss!" Gale said loudly, causing Katniss to whip her head in his direction, annoyed. He smiled at her, unaffected by her impatience. He was used to it by now. "I said your name like four times. What are you staring at?" His own pale grey eyes followed hers until he saw the barista behind the counter. "Johanna?"

"Johanna?" Katniss repeated in a faraway tone. Johanna.

Gale shook his head and put his hand on Katniss's chin, pulling her attention back to him. "She's the barista here. I've seen her a couple times around campus. I think she's a junior." Katniss was a freshman and Gale a junior. She was suddenly stung with jealousy that Gale knew her. Maybe they had classes together. He had probably seen her in the morning, hair disheveled from sleep in an oversized sweatshirt, napping through an early morning class. Maybe their paths had crossed at some upperclassmen party or a frat mixer. He would have seen her swaying her hips to some Top 40 music, tilting her head back in laughter. "She lives in the District Seven dorms."

The Panem University dorms were each named after districts, numbered one through twelve. There used to be thirteen but budget cuts had turned that dorm into a science wing a few years prior to Katniss's enrollment. She and Gale lived in District 12 on the fringes of campus. 7 was just a few blocks from the main library, nicknamed the Capitol because of the domed ceiling that mimicked the Capitol Building in Washington DC. Those dorms were nice, edged in a thicket of redwoods that muffled the campus from the neighboring towns.

"Earth to Katniss?" She hadn't realized she was still staring until Gale spoke again. She flushed a deep beet red and shifted in her seat so she could no longer see the attractive girl behind the machines. He hefted a sigh and closed their textbook, sliding it into his backpack. "Okay you are not going to be able to pay attention here. Not when you’ve been eye-fucking Johanna all night." His abrasive tone softened as he looked at his friend. "Just go talk to her."

Katniss sputtered out a loud scoff, gathering the attention of a few people around them. She lowered her voice and glared at Gale. "Yeah that'll be great. Hi, we just met and I can't stop staring at you. Wanna go out sometime?" Her head tilted to the side in disbelief. "No, that's fine. Besides I think we did enough for a Friday night."

Gale shrugged and stood up, tossing his denim jacket around his shoulders and gathering up his backpack. He slung the brown sack over his shoulder and looked down at his friend. "Whatever you say, Catnip. But the staring goes both ways." He looked over her shoulder and she turned her head to follow his eyes. The girl was wiping down the counter where they placed drinks, openly ogling at her. She smirked at the attention and tossed the rag over her shoulder, walking away and back toward the boy she worked with.

Gale said his goodbyes and walked out of the store, leaving Katniss alone at the table. She put her jacket and scarf back on, preparing herself for the bitter cold that awaited her outside. Night had fallen now which meant the temperatures would be at least ten degrees below what they had been when she entered. Her hands wrapped around the still warm cup of coffee and she stared at the lid. Did she dare go back up and compliment it? No, that sounded stupid. She didn't want to look desperate, even if she felt desperate.

She'd play it cool. Maybe Johanna would think she was some carefree passerby that she would want to see again. Yeah, that sounded right. She'd be the girl who totally was not thinking about her at all. Boosted by this thought she strutted out of the coffee shop and didn't even throw a glance toward the drink area. With a belly full of chocolate espresso and a mind full of a
chocolate-haired girl she nearly skipped back to campus. She had really nailed that exit. Totally *not* looking in the reflection of the glass to see if Johanna had watched her leave.

Madge was sitting at her desk when Katniss got back to her dorm, typing away at her computer. Katniss hung up her jacket on the coatrack along with her scarf, tossing her bookbag at the foot of her bed. She flopped down on the twin bed and let one of her legs dangle off the side, scraping the floor. The 12 dorms were not as nice as the dorms in 1 or 2; the walls and floors were mostly cement, unpainted and slightly cold. Usually it was a dorm just for freshmen but a few of the upperclassmen like Gale were stuck in those dorms as well.

Getting assigned a dorm was supposed to work like a lottery but it didn't take Katniss long to notice that the kids who didn't come on full ride scholarships, the kids whose parents made large donations to the university, *those* kids got the nice dorms. Katniss didn't mind though; it helped her make friends with more students who grew up in lower-middle class homes like herself.

"Hey Madge?" Katniss called from her bed, turning on to her side and propping her head up on her elbow.

Madge unplugged one earbud from her ear and turned around, smiling at Katniss. Her long blonde hair was plaited into two braids, looking somewhat like Katniss's little sister, Prim. Except in place of pale blue eyes like her mother, she had deep hazel eyes that looked like the forests from back home. Their friendship dated back to their finger-painting days, along with Gale and their other friend Peeta Mellark. Being from a small town meant that most of the kids went to the same university, especially one in the same state. The tuition was cheaper and the acceptance rate was high. All of them got accepted into Panem University and lived in the neglected 12 dorms.

"Do you know the people that work at the coffee place?" she asked, trying to keep her voice as even and unassuming as humanly possible.

Madge turned around in her chair, folding her elbow over the top and resting her small chin on her forearm. "Um yeah, I'm probably their most frequent customer." Her eyes lit up and Katniss looked alarmed. "Did you like it?"

"Yeah, sure," she replied noncommittally. "The latte I had was good."

"Who made it?"

"A blond guy. Finnick?"

Madge nodded enthusiastically. "Finnick is really good. Kind of a preening peacock, you know? Flipping cups, flirting with girls. But he's actually really nice. Sometimes I stay there late, you know, studying and everything, and this cute little girl with red hair comes in toward when they close. She seems a little off? She goes to school here, I don't know what she studies. Kind of quiet. But they have some kind of connection. He's always really sweet to her, sitting at her table until his boss yells at him. It's like a switch is turned and he goes from weird creep to sweet caring guy. It's super cute to watch."

Katniss didn't really care about this guy and his weird girlfriend. She was waiting for Madge to get around to Johanna, but she didn't want to show her cards just yet. "That's sweet."

"Totally sweet. Okay, so the owner's name is Plutarch. He's a nice guy, kind of older. You don't really see him much, he's kind of the behind-the-scenes guy. The manager's name is Cressida. She's really cool; she's got half her head shaved with these vine tattoos. All the guys want to bang her. There's usually only two other baristas. A girl named Emerson and another girl named
Johanna.” Katniss hoped that her ears didn't prick up like a cat when Madge said Johanna's name. She remembered Buttercup back home, his furry orange ears standing straight up if you said "food" or "Primrose." She hated that cat. She did not want to look like that cat.

She cleared her throat. "I think I saw ...what did you say her name was? Johanna?" Madge nodded. "Is she nice?"

Madge chuckled and shook her head. "No, she's kind of bitchy to everyone." Katniss tried not to look offended and stared over at her friend. Madge yawned and shrugged her shoulders. "She's an environmental science major I think? Something like that. Anyway she's a little bossy. And a lesbian. Not that it makes her a bad person," Madge quickly corrected with a shake of her head. "Just an observation."

A small thrill shot down Katniss's spine. Johanna was a lesbian. She liked girls. Maybe she liked girls like Katniss. "Oh, she seemed pretty cool to me."

In spite of the natural voice she used Madge's mouth spread in a sly grin. "Did she flirt with you? She flirts with all the girls she thinks are pretty." Katniss's treacherous cheeks flushed in embarrassment and she pulled her pillow over her face. Madge nearly knocked over her chair in excitement. "Ohmygoodnessyoulikeher!" Her words spilled out as fast as a faucet. "Did she say anything to you? Did you give her your number? Did she give you her number? Email?"

Katniss groaned and put the pillow on her scalp and pulled it toward her ears like a hat. "She didn't really say anything. I sort of bumbled through all our talking. I may or may not have stared at her." She peeked out through closed eyes. "I fucked it up. I was so nervous. There was sweat."

"Katniss. That's. Adorable." Madge squealed in happiness and clapped her hands. She yanked her other ear bud out and straddled the chair backward. "This is like a romantic comedy waiting to happen. Okay so what's the plan? We going tomorrow? I can introduce you guys because I go there because I go there like every day and then we can -"

"Whoa," Katniss interrupted, sitting up in the bed. Madge had a tendency to ramble on, her words coming out in a staccato flow that sounded like the constant clacking of a typewriter. "There is no plan. If she wants to see me again, she can ask around for me. I'm not gonna chase her." Katniss hoped she sounded confident in that plan. Yeah, she can ask for me! She knows my name now. It's not as if there's another Katniss enrolled at Panem.

"Ohhh, okay," Madge agreed, nodding her head. She began undoing the plaits in her hair, running her fingers through the loosening strands. "Playin' it low key. I see how it is, Everdeen." Katniss chuckled and laid back against her mattress, staring up at their cement ceiling. In truth, her plan was not to play it cool. Johanna had weaseled her way underneath Katniss's skin with just a few words and those brilliant brown eyes. There was no playing cool with her. She made her run too hot.

Environmental Science major. Barista. Junior. Lesbian. Flirt. Katniss began piecing those bits of information together to try and form a fully fleshed out version of this girl she saw. Whatever she came up with would not do her justice. She wanted to talk to her. Without any similar classes and two grades in between each other, Katniss knew what she had to do.

She had to go back and get more coffee. She had to see the girl at the coffee shop again.
The Iced Coffee

Maybe she wasn't working today.

Maybe she got fired.

Maybe she switched schools mid-semester.

Maybe she fell off the planet.

Katniss’s brain filed through all those possibilities as she sat in the back of the coffee shop, sipping on the water bottle she had brought from her dorm. Luckily none of the other workers had seen her sitting there for the past hour, sipping on a beverage she didn't purchase there, staring at the front door. She had sprawled books on her table in an effort to look like she was studying. Should Johanna walk in, she would bury her nose in her - she hazarded a glance toward the text - *Classical Literature textbook* and then slowly make her way to the counter.

She had rehearsed in her head 1000 times the conversation she wanted to have. A friendly hello, a flirty "Remember me?" type of thing, a request for her opinion on a beverage, drink said beverage, and hope that Johanna would come around to refill sugar packets or something and maybe ask her out.

Yes, Katniss decided, that was the master plan. Foolproof, really. If Johanna ever showed up to work.

With a backpack slung over both her shoulders Johanna finally breezed in, getting caught by a customer even before she got to the main part of the store. Johanna flashed a friendly - but Katniss could read *annoyed* - smile and spoke with the older gentleman who had caught her attention. Before long she was moving into the store, greeting the woman behind the counter. She was blonde with sparkling blue eyes and a pert nose, as well as being remarkably fit. Most striking about her was that half her head was shaved and all along the shaved part were intricate vines that curled around her scalp and below her ear. Several piercings adorned the ear that was exposed to the world. She wasn't wearing an apron like the others so Katniss assumed that was the manager.

"What up Cress?" Johanna reached over the coffee machine and slapped her manager a high-five, going toward the side of the counter. She went through the waist-high swing doors and had her back turned to Katniss. Katniss observed several patches and buttons on her backpack - the band Paramore, a worn Obama/Biden 2012 presidential campaign pin, a recycling symbol, four rectangles all together with the words "Black Flag" written above and below them, and a huge rainbow patch that extended almost the entire way across the front zipper. Her hair was down, for the moment, reaching just above her shoulders in a choppy cut.

She was wearing a flannel shirt, the sleeves rolled up to her elbows. Underneath was a faded gray t-shirt with the Sex Pistols' logo in very light print across her chest. So she was kind of punk. Katniss figured she should've guessed by the red streaks but she hadn't really thought about it. She also noticed something she hadn't seen yesterday - the thick black mark of a tattoo across her wrist. From the distance she couldn't tell what it was, but she wanted to. She imagined grasping Johanna's hand as she handed her change, running her thumb across the tattoo. She'd ask her what it was, when she got it, what it meant, keeping her thumb against the girl's pulse. She'd be listening, but also checking to see if the pulse was quickened by the touch or not.

For all that to happen, Katniss would have to leave her damn seat. She waited for Johanna to change into the HeavensBeans shirt and emerge into the room with her apron again. Her hair was
thrown up in a quick ponytail, little pieces sticking out from the hair scrunchy. Katniss decided to wait a few more minutes. She didn't want to run up to the counter and make it obvious that she had been waiting for her for two hours.

After about ten minutes of watching Johanna talk to her manager in between customers, Katniss drummed up the courage to approach her. Johanna had her back to the register, gesticulating wildly as she retold a story to her boss. The woman looked over Johanna's shoulder and spun her around. "Customers, Johanna!"

"A customer," Johanna corrected, before evidently realizing who it was. Her brown eyes widened and then narrowed as she smiled. "Oh hi." Her voice sounded unnaturally high. "Katniss, yeah?" It lowered again.

Katniss nodded her head. She noticed a tiny freckle about an inch or so away from the corner of Johanna's mouth that nearly disappeared as she smirked. Katniss determined she'd like to kiss that freckle. "And you're Johanna." Good one, Katniss. And you're Johanna. Fucking smooth. Katniss continued to berate herself as Johanna chuckled and nodded her head. Her hand reached for the stack of cups, black marker in hand.

"What can I do for you, Katniss?" Brown eyes sparkled as she leaned on the counter on her elbows, marker poised above her empty hand.

The way she was saying her name. Katniss felt like she had just walked into a sauna with all her clothes on. What did she want? Her eyes darted up to the menu board, and she decided on the first thing all the way on the left. "Iced coffee, please. A-a large."

Johanna grabbed a clear plastic cup and scribbled something on the side. "Any sweeteners? We have, well, just about any flavor you want. What's your pleasure?"

You, anywhere you want, any time. Katniss gripped the counter, unnerved at the girl's voice. The way she said everything, practically dripping with innuendo, was making her lightheaded. So much for her suave conversation starters. All she had done thus far was order a plain iced coffee and stutter. "Maybe cinnamon?"

Johanna pursed her lips and nodding, marking the drink appropriately and setting it on the counter next to her. Cressida grabbed the cup, presumably to make it, and read the scribbles Johanna had written. With a peculiar look she set the cup down and wiped her hands on her apron. "I'm gonna go ahead and refill the sugar packets out there. Can you handle this one?"

Johanna smiled and nodded politely at the blonde, who grabbed a box from underneath the machines and made her way out into the dining room. "Okay Katniss, that's $2.45 with your discount."

"The student discount?" Why did I ask that? Katniss regretted even setting foot in the coffee shop. She was no good at flirting. No matter how many times Madge said that things would go well, she knew they wouldn't. Talking to people was never her strong suit. Talking to such attractive people was even worse.

Johanna grinned and took Katniss's bills from her hand, making her change. As she handed it back she leaned in conspiratorially. "Well I'd give you the Gorgeous Eyes discount but they haven't made that button available yet." She gave Katniss a wink and grabbed the cup from the counter, whirling around on her heel. Katniss slid the change into the tip jar and moved around to the wooden bar where the drinks were presented.

She watched Johanna lean over and dig out some ice, trying her best not to stare at the tiny sliver
of pale skin that emerged between the hem of her shirt and the top of her jeans. When did she turn
into such an objectifying horn-dog? She quickly shook her head and stared at the wood grain,
following the black lines with her eyes. Johanna filled the cup with coffee, stopping about two-
thirds of the way from the top. "Did you want milk?"

Katniss's eyes went to the drink station where Cressida was leisurely filling the sugar packets.
There were tiny silver bullets on there as well, Katniss assumed those were filled with milk.
"Don't I like... do myself?" Her cheeks flushed deep red within seconds at the verbal slip up. Do
myself. Great. More like hang myself.

Johanna bit the side of her cheek. "You can do yourself if you want. Or I can do you." Katniss
wished she had the power to change states of matter and slowly melt into a liquid form, escaping
through the tiny holes in the floor beneath her. Johanna seemed to take pity on her and crouched
down. "What kind of milk do you drink?"

Katniss cleared her throat. "Whole milk is fine, thanks." She heard the opening and closing of a
small refrigerator, though she couldn't quite see over the bar.

Johanna appeared at the counter with a red container in hand, placing the cup of coffee in front of
Katniss. "Okay, tell me when you want me to stop." Johanna slowly poured the milk in, and
Katniss found herself watching Johanna instead of the coffee. Their eyes stayed locked as the
liquid poured out, and when Johanna's eyebrow raised Katniss suddenly realized she was nearing
the top of the cup.

"Stop." Johanna smiled and closed the milk container, shoving it back into the fridge. She capped
Katniss's drink and swirled it around, making sure to get the syrup, coffee and milk thoroughly
mixed. She set the cup on the bar, the liquid still churning around. "Thanks."

"Anytime." Katniss compressed her lips and nodded her head. Johanna's eyes moved down
toward her shirt, so Katniss followed her gaze. She was wearing the mockingjay pin Madge's
Aunt Maysilee had sent her. She was friends with Katniss's mother, who must've mentioned at
some point how much Katniss loved mockingjays. "Is that a mockingjay?"

"Yeah. They're my favorite animal."

Johanna smirked and raised her eyebrow. "Really? They're nearly extinct, you know. A lot of
people kept catching them and putting them in their homes for entertainment and didn't breed them
or keep them properly. I actually own a few. Well, my parents do. Back home we have a lot of
land that's a few acres with thick forests on it. My parents raise mockingjays there. I always loved
to hear them sing." She looked away wistfully, then back to Katniss. "You know, your eyes are
the same colors as their feathers. That wispy blue and gray."

Katniss smiled. "My dad used to say the same thing. I think that's what he would've named me
had he not weirdly decided on Katniss."

Johanna chuckled. "I'm named after my grandmother, if that makes you feel better. I'd rather be a
root than someone's grandma." Katniss laughed, lifting the drink from the bar and holding it
between her hands.

"Thanks again. For the...for the coffee."

"You're welcome." Katniss turned on her heel and began walking away. "Oh, and Mockingjay?"
Katniss looked over her shoulder at Johanna, who was grinning wickedly. "The sugar you can do
yourself."
After the disaster that was her first flirting attempt with Johanna, Katniss immediately had gathered her things and left the shop. She didn't want to further embarrass herself by dropping coffee everywhere or drooling on the floor, or something equally as probable and horrifying. She sat alone in her dorm; Madge was out with some of her friends. Back home they didn't technically run in the same social circles; Madge and Peeta were from a nicer part of town. However, Madge was pleasant enough and hated the other rich girls so they had become friends. Katniss also knew Madge had a crush on Gale, as hard as she tried to deny it. But all the girls back home had crushes on Gale. Katniss often found herself running interference for the attractive boy.

Madge burst in the door, letting in the sound of music and loud co-eds from the hallway. Katniss was sitting at her desk, miserably watching Netflix on her laptop. Immediately her friend came up behind her. "You went back!"

Katniss eyed the empty plastic cup on her desk, along with the small ring of condensation that had pooled beneath it. "Yeah."

"And?" Madge sat on the edge of Katniss's bed, bright eyes fixed on her. She grabbed the cup and began inspecting it. "Iced coffee. Boring, but a good choice. Ooh - and cinnamon."

Katniss paused her movie and sighed. She really didn't want to rehash the entire afternoon's embarrassment. It was playing enough in her mind's eye. "It went okay."

Madge raised a pale eyebrow in suspicion. "What does CB mean?" she asked, lifting the cup to show Katniss. There was a small CB written in Johanna's handwriting with a line crossed through it. Katniss hadn't noticed it. She had been too busy humiliating herself.

"You're the expert."

Madge shrugged. "I've never seen that. Hm. Anyway, what did she say? What did you say?"

Katniss put her arms on the desk, resting her forehead on her forearm. She could smell the combination of eraser dust and pine cleaner from her desk. "I used the phrase 'do myself.'"

Madge didn't even have the courtesy to look surprised. As Katniss eyed her from the corner of her eye she looked only perplexed. "In what context?"

"I asked if I had to do myself. In reference to milk. You know what? I don't want to talk about it."

Madge set the cup next to Katniss, who took it and tossed it in the trash. Madge frowned.

"Those are recyclable."

Katniss rolled her eyes and retrieved the cup from the trash. She placed it with a sarcastic amount of effort into the blue recycling bin in the corner of their room. "I can never show my face there again."

"I'm sure it wasn't that bad." She scooted back on Katniss's bed, placing her back against the wall. Her long legs dangled over the side, smacking against the metal of Katniss's cot. "How about we go together this weekend? I can be your wingman."

Katniss chuckled and pulled up her legs, sitting indian style on the rolling desk chair. She held on to her calves and looked down toward the floor and its thin, gray carpet. "Wingman insinuates you will be picking someone else up."

"Oh." Madge scrunched her nose. "Okay, I'll be your hype girl. Like those people who stand behind rappers and point at them? I'll be that, but, verbally. Like 'Oh, Katniss is the coolest.' 'She doesn't have any diseases.' 'You guys should go out.'"
Katniss pouted and looked over at her friend. "I don't have any diseases? That's my good quality?" She reached over and pinched Madge's knee. "You're a terrible hype girl. I formally request another."

Madge pretended to flip through an imaginary notebook. "Oh I'm so sorry Miss Everdeen, it looks like we're all booked up." She clapped her hands and slid off Katniss's bed. "We'll go this weekend. Johanna hosts the open mic nights. It'll be fun." Her eyes suddenly lit up and Katniss was afraid. An excited Madge was always a force to be reckoned with. "We'll have to pick out your outfit. Something that says, I'm available, but I want you to approach me because I'm acting aloof as a cover for how thoroughly socially inept I am."

"Can I also place a request for a new best friend?"

"Nope, sorry, booked," Madge replied flippantly, opening the door to their small, shared closet. Katniss leaned back in her chair and let out a long sigh. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if Madge was there. Couldn't possibly make that much of a fool of herself if Madge was there. Right?

As Katniss appraised herself in the mirror before leaving for the shop she had to admit Madge was right. She had made her put on a pair of navy skinny jeans that tucked into her ankle boots. She wore a thigh-length sweater that was so tight it barely left any room between she and the fabric. She pulled on her beige scarf, the same one she wore every day with every outfit, and followed Madge to the open mic night.

The air felt like it had dropped about ten degrees since Katniss's last class at five that afternoon. She shivered as they hurried to the shop. The show started at eight and now, at about half past, they were running late. Madge had insisted on doing Katniss's hair in an intricate ponytail that took her around three billion tries to get right. But when she was done, Katniss relented that it did make her cheekbones "pop."

She also had pinned her mockingjay pin on her sweater.

The lights were completely off inside the shop when they arrived, save for a few soft lamps above the audience and one spotlight above the stage. People were chatting amongst themselves at the tables and chairs that had been moved around to face a small stage set up in the corner of the room. Katniss didn't see Johanna, so they went to the long table near the corner where there were two large vats of coffee and a bunch of cups to serve yourself. They each fixed a coffee and made their way to an empty table near the back right side of the room.

Johanna suddenly appeared under the lights and Katniss found herself transfixed. Johanna was wearing a pair of jeans with the bottom cuffs rolled up, a plunging v-neck sweater with a cropped crimson biker jacket over it. She looked like she might kill you, but you'd let her. Her eyes were painted darker than usual, nearly black under the shadow the lights gave.

"Okay next up we have..." She withdrew a folded piece of paper from her pocket. "Dalton. Who is going to delight us with some slam poetry." Everyone politely clapped as a boy nervously got on stage. Johanna handed him a stool to sit on and patted his back, giving him a smile. Her eyes scanned the audience and Katniss's breath hitched when she thought they'd make eye contact. Johanna's expression didn't change so Katniss frowned. She hadn't seen her.

Katniss's eyes dropped to her coffee as she swirled the red tiny straw inside. Johanna was clearly going to be too busy to talk to her tonight anyway. Besides, Katniss had proven herself inept at holding a conversation. The night dragged on with only a few bright spots of talent in the show. Johanna seemed to have a natural gift for the hosting, cracking jokes in between acts, encouraging
applause when people really bombed, withholding judgement when people did something useless like stand there and not blink and call it "art."

Madge's phone vibrated and she frowned. "Sorry, I'll be right back." She grabbed her wallet and went outside with her phone. Katniss drained the rest of her coffee, giving her watch a quick glance. 10:14pm. In the hour and 45 minutes they'd been there Johanna hadn't come near her. She watched her leave the stage and sit stage right with the older man that Madge had identified as Plutarch, the owner.

Katniss began shoving her straw through the side of the cup, ignoring the sound of someone sitting in the seat next to her. She guessed Madge's phone call hadn't been that important. Tongue in her cheek she began twisting the straw to try and make a hole in the cup. "Enjoying the show, Katniss?"

She nearly dropped everything as she looked over, seeing the grinning Johanna in place of her friend. Katniss's eyes flicked to the stage where someone was reading a series of haikus, then back to Johanna. "Parts of it," she admitted with a smile.

Johanna nodded, leaning on the table with her eyes set on the stage. "Plutarch won't let me audition people first. He said he likes to watch everyone, even the big time losers." Katniss chuckled and looked over at Johanna, who was watching her now. Her eyes dropped to the table briefly before she looked up. "Haven't seen you here in a while." Dare Katniss think she heard a trace of disappointment in her tone?

Katniss smiled apologetically. "Sorry. You know how it is, mid-terms and everything."

Johanna shook her head in affirmation. "Right, right. I hear you." She ran her tongue along her teeth and nodded toward the stage. "So, you have any talents, Katniss?"

Madge suddenly plopped down the seat next to Katniss, looking across her to Johanna. She smiled. "Hi Johanna!"

Johanna looked very confused, eyes shifting between the two of them. "Hi..."

"Madge," the blonde girl filled in. She looked insulted. "I come here all the time," she said flatly.

Johanna's eyes flicked between them and she must have sensed Katniss's unease because she smiled politely. "Sorry. I see so many people come in and out. I don't often remember names. I'm good with faces."

Madge was miffed. "You remembered Katniss's name."

Katniss shot her a look that she hoped spelled "I will kill you later" and shifted in her chair. Johanna grinned. "I did, didn't I? Must be something memorable about it." Katniss's cheeks flushed and she was very grateful for the dim lighting. "I was just asking your friend here if she had any talents."

"Katniss? Oh sure, Katniss can sing," Madge revealed with an excited flourish. Katniss decided that Madge was not going to live through the night. What a shame.

Katniss pressed her fingers to her forehead. "I can't. Not..not in public. Not anywhere, really. Maybe the shower."

Johanna smirked. "The mockingjay can sing? No surprise there, I guess. And, since I'm not going to be in the shower with you - as far as I know - then I'd like to hear it."
Katniss ducked her gaze and fiddled with her scarf in her lap. Surely Johanna could feel the heat from her body. "Maybe, um, maybe some other time."

Brown eyes went to the stage where the boy was finishing up his haikus that had devolved into limericks. "I'm gonna hold you to that, Mockingjay." Johanna's hand reached out, lighting turning the pin in her fingers. It seemed to be ablaze in the lamp lights of the room. "See you around?" Katniss nodded in affirmation and Johanna smiled, dropping the pin from her grasp.

Madge waited until Johanna was safely back on stage to playfully slap Katniss's thighs over and over again with enthusiasm. Katniss tried to hide her own excitement by looking at the stage. As she watched Johanna introduce the next act - a girl who could play the violin - her heart skipped as this time they definitely made eye contact. She smiled and she saw Johanna smile back.

Okay, so maybe she could show her face again.
Katniss tapped her pencil against her notebook impatiently. It was Tuesday. The last Tuesday before classes were suspended for Thanksgiving break. If Katniss had remembered correctly, this was Johanna's last shift before she went home. Katniss had memorized Johanna's schedule over the last few weeks of trying their drinks; a feat she did without ever having too ask. Because that would've been more revealing than showing up almost every day. Tuesdays and Thursdays, Friday nights, the Saturday night open mic night, and sometimes Sunday mornings. ("If I'm not wasted" she had explained.)

Her class was running longer than usual as the professor felt it appropriate to add extra work to their holiday weekend. She knew she had only around thirty minutes before Johanna would be gone for the day and she wouldn't see her for another week. She had visited Johanna every day she worked, imbibing more caffeine and sugary drinks than one should drink in a lifetime. But each time she went she learned a little bit more about her so she dealt with the lack of sleep due to over-caffeination. When she walked in the shop and their eyes met, it made Johanna smile and that alone was worth any night of no sleep.

Finally the professor dismissed them and Katniss almost fell over her desk in an effort to get out of the classroom as quickly as possible. She struggled with her jacket and scarf mightily before tossing her messenger bag angrily on the ground in the crowded hallway. Quickly she shoved her jacket on and wrapped her scarf around her neck, grabbing her bag. Katniss grumbled curse words at herself as she ran down the staircase and into the chilly November wind.

She was glad to have worn her hunting boots because she could run in them. A quick glance at her watch confirmed her worst fear: she had ten minutes. Certainly not enough time to talk to Johanna. At least she'd get to see her before she left. An image to keep in her mind when she was home staring at her plate during Thanksgiving dinner. She sprinted down the sidewalks of the small college town, bypassing other students leisurely getting their things together before break. Not everyone had to leave during Thanksgiving but it looked like the majority of people were leaving. Not that Katniss could blame them. There was something lonely about staying on campus during a holiday.

A light snow began to fall and Katniss glared up at the gray clouds looming overhead. Of course it would snow. Another hinderance in her Herculean task of getting to Johanna before she left her shift. She quickly came upon the intersection near the shop, seeing the green awning on the side of the corner location. She whipped around the corner and nearly ran into someone also rounding the same corner in the opposite direction.

"Oh shit I'm sorry," Katniss apologized, seeing the girl holding up two cups of coffee. As she locked eyes with the girl her apologetic frown turned into a shy smile. Johanna. She was wearing the world's most adorable saggy green beanie, little spikes of her red and black hair peeking out on her forehead. Her lips were curled up into a crimson smirk, dimpling near the freckle Katniss liked on her cheek. Her leather jacket was open, showing her black work shirt tucked into her jeans, just the tiniest bit of plaid pointed out at the bottom. Katniss's eyes moved down to her hands, which had burgundy painted nails on ringed fingers poking out of gray knit half gloves that had little mitten ends hanging off. Could she be any cuter?

"Don't be." Katniss smiled, huffing out a breath that she had been holding in. She was slightly out of breath from jogging the last few blocks and Johanna watched her take deep breaths with narrowed eyes. She raised an eyebrow. "Did you run here?"

"No," Katniss replied, shifting her gaze to the ground. Johanna looked particularly pretty with the
snowflakes falling and sticking to her mascara-lined eyelashes and on her cheekbones. Johanna tilted her head ever so slightly to the side and Katniss blushed, heating her already exercise-reddened cheeks. "Yes. I wanted to say, um, goodbye before we went home for break."

Johanna broke eye contact for the first time, looking down at her coffees. She extended one toward Katniss. "Then the least I can do is walk with you to your dorm. And give you this coffee."

Katniss looked down at the hot cup and back up to her. "That's not for me, though."

"It is now." Katniss took the drink warily and Johanna rolled her deep brown eyes at her. "It was for my roommate but I think she's probably gone home by now anyway. So you can save me the extra calories. I won't be burning them off binging Orange is the New Black tonight."

They walked down the street together, watching the tufty snowflakes catch on the dying trees and cluster there. Katniss always enjoyed a snowfall. She liked combing the snowflakes from her hair when she came back in from being outside in the snow. She liked the way they kind of softened the noise of the world. Prim had always enjoyed making snowmen in their front yard, though now at sixteen she was more involved in house parties and Snapchat. Even though their interests were disparate, they were close. She was even a little excited to see her bright, blue-eyed sister again. Perhaps they'd even get to go sledding.

"Aren't you going home?" Katniss asked as they walked through the courtyard between dorms. Students were passing them by, offering smiles as they dragged rolling suitcases behind them. It was time to visit family, but also to do some laundry in a proper laundry room that wasn't shared by a hundred other people.

Johanna looked at her cup and shook her head. "No. Not, uh, not much to go home to." Johanna flashed her a small, closed-lip smile and took a long sip of her coffee. "Is it cool if I smoke?"

Johanna withdrew a colored box from her pocket and a clear lighter.

"Is it cool? Not really." Johanna rolled her eyes. "But if you're asking if it bothers me, no, go ahead." Johanna handed Katniss her drink and flicked the lighter and cupped her hands, igniting the short white stick. She inhaled a long drag and pushed it upward, watching it dissipate into the snowy air. Katniss stared down at Johanna's cup for a moment, smiling at the small little mark of lipstick around the spout. She almost envied the cup. As she looked over at Johanna she handed her back the beverage. "What do they do here for Thanksgiving?"

Johanna shrugged, holding the cigarette between her lips. "Hell if I know. I usually just take the time to watch an entire series of some television show. My sophomore year I took a trip to Cambodia. It was fucking epic. I went to the Ta Prohm temple? It's this abandoned temple that looks like something out of Tomb Raider. Ancient trees growing inside the ancient brick and mortar. It was pretty mind-blowing."

Katniss took a moment to imagine Johanna hiking along some abandoned trail in the jungle, discovering some temple. Probably giving a glance around and trespassing inside the ancient walls. Probably sweating. "What about your parents? Don't you want to go home to them? See your mockingjays?" she nudged Johanna's arm playfully and the girl offered a brief smile. Katniss realized that she was clearly stepping on some thin ice. The normally very at ease, very put together Johanna was becoming a little closed off.

"Nah. I've got three younger brothers. Nobody wants to see the family disappointment. I go home for Christmas but that's just to see my grandparents. And I guess my mockingjays." Johanna eyed her with a sly smile. "Of course, I've got my very own mockingjay right here." Katniss blushed and then very sadly realized they were in front of her own dorm building. They turned and faced
Katniss grinned, feeling the warmth of the regular Johanna seep into the moment. "And what do you do with your mockingjays?" Katniss wasn't sure from where that confidence had sprung. She looked down at the coffee as the culprit. Certainly it was the caffeine. The festive pumpkin beverage must surely be laced with something to have made that comment emerge from her mouth, in the suggestive tone that it did.

Johanna mirrored her grin and leaned forward only slightly. She tipped Katniss's chin upward with the tip of her index finger. Her voice took on a rasp that Katniss couldn't tell was natural or because of the abrasive nature of the smoke. Her breath was a mixture of ash and pumpkin spice and while not completely pleasant was unmistakably Johanna, and Katniss wanted to taste it. "I like to make them sing."

This was it. This was the moment. A perfect moment to kiss. Where did her coffee courage go? Instead Katniss fumbled and looked down at the ground. "I don't really sing, though."

Johanna ran her tongue along her lower lip, removing some of the lipstick that was on her lips. Katniss watched the action with a held breath, expelling it slowly as Johanna's one finger on her chin was met with two others. She drew a line up Katniss's jaw with her nails, tucking hair behind her ear. "A mockingjay only sings when it hears something it wants to sing back. Maybe you just haven't heard something you wanna sing. Maybe you haven't found something to sing for."

Or someone were the words Katniss heard in her head, the ones she thought she saw in Johanna's eyes. "Maybe." What a dumb thing to say. Katniss sighed inwardly. She had fucked up yet another moment of tension between them with her dumb words. One of these days... one of these days she was just going to kiss the daylights out of this girl instead of speaking and messing everything up.

"I'm sure you want to get to packing," Johanna said, removing her fingers from Katniss's ear and wrapping it around her coffee. Katniss thought of Johanna walking alone back to her dorm. Her roommate gone, her dorm a ghost town with everyone happily on their way back home. Home. A place Johanna clearly didn't think she belonged. This slightly deflated Johanna, even in her tough leather jacket and scuffed up boots, made Katniss's heart hurt.

"Do you want to come up for a bit? I'm actually not leaving until tomorrow morning. We could order a pizza or something." Katniss stared down at her boots. Johanna would probably have something better to do than hang out with her and eat pizza. She probably stayed on campus and did something cool; she had only said she would stay in so Katniss didn't feel like a child going home to her mommy.

Johanna cocked an eyebrow. "Got any booze?"

Katniss didn't think it was an appropriate moment to acknowledge that she was not technically old enough to drink. She nodded her head. "Lots."

"Then by all means, Mockingjay. Lead the way."

Katniss pressed the button on the elevator to her dorm, her mind now filing through everything in her room. Was there anything embarrassing in there? Not really. She had a few photos from home but nothing like her in a head brace or something. Madge had cleaned up before she left so she knew the beds were made. Was there take-out containers anywhere? She didn't need Johanna to
know how thoroughly terrible she was at cooking.

The elevator creaked noisily beneath their feet and groaned like a sewer monster as they inched upward. "Fuck I feel like I'm coming out of a coal mine or something. This is some Pink Floyd 'Brick In The Wall' shit." Johanna's wide brown eyes took in the elevator with distrust.

Katniss laughed but couldn't disagree. The 12 Dorms were pretty terrible. The elevator always looked and sounded like it was on the brink of collapse. Even though she and Madge were on the fifth floor, Katniss usually preferred to take the stairs for that reason. They arrived on her floor and she led her to her dorm room. For the first time since she had moved in there was relative silence on her floor. It was eerie, but kind of pleasant.

Katniss fumbled with the key and opened the door, pushing the door open for Johanna. The shorter girl slipped by her and entered the room, giving it a cursory inspection. There were the two small beds in an 'L' shape in the corner, each with a desk near the foot. Their two laundry hampers were in the unusable corner between the beds, as well as a garbage can. They shared the large dresser near the door in addition to the small television monitor next to the closet.

Madge's things were mostly gone except for her various decorations. Pink streamers and pictures of middle-aged heartthrobs adorned the wall above her desk. Katniss's desk held a few photos from her youth: one of herself and her father, she and Gale as kids, Prim on her birthday. She had no decorations up except for her old hunting bow that sat atop the desk.

"It's like the Spartans meeting the Athenians in here," Johanna said, smiling. She tossed her cup in their blue recycling bin and took off her gloves. She shoved the convertible mittens in each pocket of her jacket. She slipped the jacket off her shoulders, revealing her black shirt and plaid flannel that Katniss hadn't seen the entirety of before. Johanna seemed to really enjoy flannel. Though she had mentioned living where there was a lot of trees. That was probably why.

For a moment she imagined Johanna as a lithe little lumberjack, chopping down trees and resting an axe on her shoulder. It was meant to be a comical thought, but the image of Johanna swinging an axe down and chopping lumber, her muscles clenched and flexing with each chop, made her mouth dry. "You can put your jacket on Madge's chair," Katniss said, motioning to the desk opposite her own. "And you can sit ..wherever you want."

Katniss sat down at her desk, opening her laptop. As she looked at her desk her eyes widened in alarm. She had all her HeavensBeans cups on her desk, cleaned and organized by size and hot or cold in the back corner of her desk. She positioned her laptop so they weren't completely visible and ordered their pizza online. Johanna sat on her bed - oh god she's in my bed - and gave it a few bounces. "The digs here are all right. Way different than in Seven. Can't see shit out the windows because of the trees. The only other view is the One dorm and the Capitol. Neither of which I give a shit about. At least here you can see like, the edges of the earth."

"If you don't mind the dorm rooms looking like a prison cell." Katniss sighed and sent their order through, looking over at Johanna. "So, do you want to watch a movie or some shows? You said something about oranges?"

Johanna chuckled and smiled at Katniss. "Orange is the New Black? The Netflix show?" Katniss shrugged in ignorance. "Wait what? I've already watched both seasons like twenty times." Katniss still looked dumfounded. "Okay well then that settles it. Queue up some Netflix and put on Season One, Episode One. You're about to get an education in why every lesbian on the planet is now in love with Laura Prepon."

"The girl from That 70s Show?" Katniss questioned, typing in the address into her laptop. She looked at Johanna as the page loaded. "The redhead?"
"Oh, my dear sweet innocent Katniss. You are about to meet Alex Vause and your whole world is gonna change. Trust me." She patted the space next to her on the bed. "Come now, let's get drunk and dive into the debauched world of women's prisons."

Katniss grabbed a few bottles of liquor and her laptop, moving around the bed and sitting next to Johanna, settling the computer on her lap. Johanna took one of the bottles and twisted off the cap, scooting closer to Katniss to see the screen. Katniss watched intently on the screen, taking a swig from the bottle when Johanna handed it to her. As she swallowed the liquid, the black-haired Laura Prepon came on-screen, naked and wet and made out with the blonde girl. Katniss choked on her alcohol and Johanna let out a loud laugh.

"Aaaand that's Alex Vause." Johanna grinned and took another pull from the bottle. Katniss looked away from the screen to Johanna, finally being able to see her tattoo up close. When Johanna handed her the bottle she instead took her wrist gently, swiping over the ink with her thumb. It wasn't just a big black line. It looked like... almost like a sigil. Johanna looked down at their hands, then up toward Katniss. "You missed the bottle."

Katniss chuckled and took it from her. "What's your tattoo?"

"It's my family's crest." She turned over her wrist and held it out for Katniss to see. Katniss wedged the bottle of liquor between her legs and slowly traced the design with the tip of her finger. She hazarded a glance toward Johanna, who had briefly closed her eyes. She smiled. When she opened them, Katniss was staring down at the tattoo. "The helm here is well, a helmet. This fancy dude was higher up in the social status. The lion is rampant, up on his hind legs, and he symbolizes bravery, strength, honor. The little mermaid at the top is for eloquence. I guess somewhere in my family there might have been some writers."

Katniss traced the small print at the top. "And the words?"

"Dum spiro spero. While I breathe I have hope."

"That's beautiful." Johanna smiled shyly and reached toward Katniss's legs, pulling the liquor bottle from between them. "Do you have any others?"

Johanna raised an eyebrow as she took a swig. After she swallowed, she smirked. "None that are visible without me taking my clothes off."

"O-oh." Katniss diverted her attention back to the screen, but in the corner of her periphery, she saw Johanna still smirking at her. "Maybe some other time then." Katniss smiled smugly as it was Johanna's turn to cough and sputter with her liquor.

Katniss found out a few things that night. One, that Johanna considered herself a "Nicky Nichols," but Katniss insisted she was "an Alex." Two, she was apparently "a Piper." Three, Johanna's love of pizza nearly rivaled her own. Between them they had finished an entire large pie and two bottles of liquor. Four, Johanna's shoulder was the most comfortable place on Earth to lean your head. They had only gotten through nine episodes before Katniss passed out on it.

And five, she was alone when she woke up the next morning. Her head pounded from the night's incessant drinking, but she quickly sat up in her bed. How had she ended up laying in her own bed under her blankets? The last thing she remembered was telling Johanna that she was "definitely an Alex" and then feeling the warmth of her shoulder against her cheek. She looked down and realized...I'm wearing her shirt. Johanna's plaid shirt was on her. Wearing Johanna's shirt. When had this happened?
Oh right. Somewhere between episode four and five she had complained about being cold and Johanna had offered her shirt. She had accepted. Katniss lifted one side and brought it to her face. It smelled like pine and fire and a little like coffee. It smelled like Johanna.

On her desk sat a bottle of water and two white pills as well as a scribbled note on a ripped piece of paper. Katniss rubbed her head as she picked up the piece of paper.

*Hey kid,*

*You did pretty well, almost made it to daybreak. You have to promise to watch the rest of Orange on your break and let me know what you think. Tell me if you still think I'm Alex. Thanks for keeping me company. Have a nice trip home.*

*See you at the shop soon,*

*Johanna*

*PS - The cups are recyclable, you don't have to hoard them on your desk. ;)*

Katniss sunk into her chair and groaned loudly into her hands. Her cup from yesterday sat on her desk, washed and shining, on top of her laptop.

Katniss sometimes waited nearly an hour to say hello to Johanna. The line would be to the door, like it was today, and she would wait until it was only two people long to approach. She hated feeling rushed in the single interaction they had. While she hated the waiting, she did enjoy to watch Johanna work, especially when the raven-haired girl didn't know she was there.

Her seat was only a few feet from door, which was constantly shrouded in a cloud of coeds entering and shaking snow off their coats. Everyone had just come back from break the day before, so they were clearly either socializing or doing the work they had blown off all week. Once the line died down some Katniss left her seat and waited behind two others.

She could see a girl in a baseball cap leaning on the counter, watching Johanna work. Her gaze narrowed as she tried to hone in on their conversation. Katniss didn't remember what she ordered - whatever was next on the menu - as she stalked this girl with fire in her eyes. "So what's your major?"

Katniss finally saw a glimpse of Johanna, who was focused down on her drink. She smiled as she saw Johanna roll her eyes. "Physics."

"Cool, cool." Okay this girl had to go. Katniss approached the counter, leaning up and into the girl's view to see Johanna. She heard the huff of annoyance and ignored it.

"Hey Johanna," she called, and Johanna's head whipped up from her task and she smiled. Katniss gave the girl a glance out of the corner of her eye. "So listen, you forgot your shirt in my dorm over break." She watched as brown eyes widened, looking from the annoying girl on her right,
back to Katniss. "I washed it for you. Didn't think you'd mind. I left it at my dorm though, so if you want to come by later and pick it up, I can thank you properly for the other night." Katniss put on what she hoped was a seductive tone. By the pretty blush she saw creeping up from Johanna's cleavage, she guessed correctly.

Katniss thought Johanna's eyes were going to pop from her head and skitter across the floor. Slowly, though, her slight embarrassment gave way to realization. "Oh, right. Thanks, babe." Babe. Katniss couldn't help but chuckle at the word. It sounded so natural, as if they'd been calling each other that pet name forever. She normally hated the way "babe" sounded in her ears. Usually because it was grunted out by meaty frat guys. But out of Johanna's mouth, it sounded good.

"Oh I'm sorry, am I in your way? Did you get your drink?" Katniss asked sweetly, looking over at the girl who very obviously had her drink. The girl rolled her eyes and walked away from the counter. Katniss took her spot, watching Johanna put together her drink.

"Thank you," Johanna said, capping the lid on to her cup. "That girl is relentless. She comes in here like every day and never shuts the fuck up. I have to be polite because I'm working but I just want to slap her."

"I come in here every day," Katniss offered glumly, taking the drink from Johanna. The girl kept her fingers around the cup, then placed her hand over Katniss's own.

"Yeah, but I like seeing you." She let go of Katniss's hand and placed her hands in the back pockets of her jeans. "Did you really wash my shirt?" No was Katniss's honest answer. She hadn't because it smelled like Johanna and she had worn it when she went home. It was sitting on her bed in her dorm, folded neatly.

"Yeah."

Johanna ran her tongue across the tops of her teeth and smiled. "Well you can keep it if you want. It did look cute on you." The red-haired girl she worked with, Emerson, shoveled a cup at Johanna who diverted her gaze and began making the drink. Katniss dreamily walked back toward her table, heaving a contented sigh. She didn't know how long she and Johanna were going to go keep up this flirting charade, but she was bent on enjoying every single moment of it.
The Peppermint Latte

This was not supposed to happen. It was one thing to see Johanna at HeavensBeans. It was safe. It was cozy. It was also a.. thing.. to see Johanna in her room, on her bed. That was not as safe but it was pretty cozy. Waking up with the knowledge that Johanna had tucked her in and left her a note had been confidence-boosting. She had seen Johanna at the open mic nights enough, out of her typical black shirt attire. That was okay. That was safe.

But this was not supposed to happen.

Madge had practically begged Katniss to take her to the Training Center in the middle of campus where the athletes or other fitness-minded alums would make use of the swimming pool, track, gymnastics and other fitness machines. Rows of treadmills against the wall next to stationary bikes and other contraptions that looked to Katniss like medieval torture devices. Donning her ill-fitting sweatpants rolled below her knee and long high school t-shirt, she and Madge had walked the cold distance between their dorm to the center. It was fairly late at night, around 8pm, so they had assumed the place would be deserted.

It wasn't.

Johanna was there. Not only was Johanna there, Katniss thought as she stood dumbly in the doorway, but she was ...fighting. She stood in the center of a boxing ring, clad in some tiny shorts that just had to be illegal and a sports bra that criss-crossed behind her back. Her hair was tied up messily behind her, her boxing gloves held tightly to her face. Katniss didn't recognize the man in the ring with her, but he didn't matter. She gulped as she watched Johanna bounce back and forth on the balls of her feet, dodging swipes by her opponent.

"C'mon, lightweight. Actually try to hit me. God, it's like sparring with my grandfather."

Johanna's swing made contact with the man's jaw and he stumbled back toward the ropes.

"Scratch that. My grandfather would've seen that right hook coming and he went blind in his left eye sixty fucking years ago."

The man stumbled toward the corner of the ring, smacking his glove against the bell. Evidently that meant the match was over because Johanna pouted and dropped her gloves to her sides. The guy grabbed a towel, wiping his face and around the back of his neck. He had auburn hair to match an auburn beard, looking around the same age as Johanna. "You win, Jesus H. Christ."

"You're damn right I won." Johanna grabbed her own towel and wrapped it around her neck, crawling out from between the ropes and hopping down from the ring. She grabbed a nearby water bottle and shot the liquid into her mouth, then some along her face. She wiped it off with the towel and began shaking out her arms. Madge had long moved on to the treadmills, but Katniss stood firmly in the doorway. Johanna's body was ...incredible. Slim legs with muscles that Katniss could practically feel pulsing. An abdomen with just the faintest hint of defined muscles. Katniss saw the peek of a tattoo just above the rolled waistband of her shorts. Another small tattoo was partially obscured by her bra.

She turned around and stretched to her toes, giving Katniss a spectacular view that dried her throat. There was a small tattoo on the back of her thigh that Katniss could just make out the design. It was a set of dates and two atoms. Even if she was up close she wouldn't be able to tell those atoms from any other. How was this even fair? Johanna couldn't be kind of nerdy and hot and witty and sweaty and fit. You don't get to be all of those things. Nobody actually gets to be Alex Vause.
Indignant about her own staring she wandered off toward the sections of the center. Everything was fairly high tech, what with Panem's collegiate athletic record being what it was, so it was no surprise that the money from the school got funneled here instead of, say, her prison-like dorm. Giddily she saw that were was an archery range. Gale had told her that Panem had an archery team but Katniss had refused to participate. Archery was something she hadn't done since her father died.

She grabbed an appropriately sized bow and set up obstacles for herself with the small glass computer monitor. The doors closed behind her and she took her stance in the middle of the room. It had been a long time since she had hit any targets with an arrow, but it was sort of like riding a bicycle. The targets began falling from the ceiling, moving up and down like a shotgun practice range.

With deliberate precision she fired off the arrows and hit the targets one by one. With one arrow she hit two of the targets, the arrow having sailed through the first one. The targets changed, morphing into orange cube animals that began coming at her. She moved around the room with ease, rolling on her shoulder and taking down what looked like an 8-bit bengal tiger.

She lost track of time in there. When the machine finally powered down, sweat was dripping from her forehead and making her forearms glisten. She returned the bow to the stand and as she got to the glass sliding doors, saw Johanna standing there, arms crossed over her chest. The doors opened for her and she stepped out toward Johanna, who didn't move out of her way.

"Nice shootin' there Robin Hood."

Katniss blushed and smiled shyly, giving a glance back to the glass-enclosed space. Her eyes returned to Johanna, whose hands were still wrapped from her boxing. Her body still glistened with sweat, making the ink of her tattoos appear like fresh pen on paper. "Thanks. I used to go hunting with my dad as a kid."

Johanna made an impressed gesture with her mouth and then returned her lips to their usual smirk. Even here, face devoid of make-up and sweating, she was incredibly sexy. Not that women needed make-up to be sexy, but Johanna's darkened eyelids always added to her femme fatale look, but evidently she didn't need it. "You gotta come on laser tag night. I think it's Wednesday nights? They even have a bow. You can do your little Merida routine there."

"Merida?"

"You never saw Brave?" Katniss shook her head. "Oh my God! Katniss, Merida is like your spirit animal. I can't believe you've never watched it."

Katniss blushed and looked up from beneath hooded lids. "Maybe you can fix that for me, then."

"Is that so?" Johanna stepped forward, tilting her head to the side. A little droplet of sweat fell from her forehead and Katniss watched it fall to the floor, very slowly bringing her eyes to meet the intense brown gaze that was being leveled at her. "Will do, Mockingjay. Will do."

Katniss ducked her gaze and took a tiny step back. "So tell me how do you have the stamina for all this when you smoke?"

Johanna rolled her yes. "Still on about my smoking?"

"Yes I'm still on about it. You're killing yourself." Katniss had made mention of Johanna's smoking once or twice since they day they had walked to her dorm. It's not that it made Johanna less attractive, it simply hurt Katniss's feelings that she would want to harm herself. She perked up
and smirked at Johanna. "How about this. If you start to quit smoking, I will sing at one of the open mic nights when we get back to school next semester."

Johanna raised an eyebrow and mused upon Katniss's offer. She licked along her lips and nodded. "Okay, you've got a deal." She held out her hand and the two women exchanged a firm handshake. Johanna used that as leverage to pull Katniss forward and lean into her ear. "I can't wait to make you sing, Mockingjay." She pulled back, her face close as she winked at Katniss before turning and walking away.

Katniss expelled a breath she had been holding, then broke it into a wide smile.

"So let me get this straight."

"Yes."

"You come here nearly every other day and get a drink."

"Yes."

"You talk to her like every day."

"Yes."

"And yet, neither one of you has had the confidence to ask the other out? What are you waiting for, a rolled out red carpet and a bunch of bright lights leading you to her pants?"

Katniss slapped Gale's arm returned her hands to clasp around her latte. Having gone through all the regular menu items, she was now on to ordering what the specials were for the day. Today's was "Peppermint Butler" - complete with a drawing on the board of the Adventure Time character. It was a peppermint latte with a small drizzle of chocolate and a few white chocolate shavings on the top.

"It's not..." Gale rolled his eyes and Katniss sighed. "I'm waiting for her to make a move! She's so much better at words than me. I have that problem where she looks at me and I just... with words..." Katniss's voice trailed off as she caught Johanna's gaze from across the shop, and the other girl winked in her direction.

"Yeah, I've noticed." Gale smiled at his friend and shook his head with a soft chuckle. "Look, you both clearly like each other. Just ask her out. What's the worst that could happen?"

Katniss's gray eyes enlarged as she looked back to Gale. Surely he was kidding. "The worst that could happen? She could say no!" Gale didn't react. Guys could be so unbearably dense. Especially handsome guys like Gale who never got turned down. "And then I can't come here anymore. And...and she'll date someone else and I'll die alone with Buttercup."

Gale ran his fingers through his hair, taking a long sip of his tea. "First of all, you won't die alone. Second of all, Buttercup doesn't like you." Katniss frowned sourly as Gale shifted his weight in the seat. "And she won't say no. She's done nothing but stare at you for the," he glanced down at his phone, "three hours we've been here."

"Okay but obviously she thinks I'm some kind of weirdo since she hasn't asked me out and I've been stalking her at her job for four months." Katniss heaved a dramatic sigh and sat back in her chair. Johanna was chatting up some girl at the bar. Katniss's eyes narrowed considerably as she watched the girl giggle nervously. What was Johanna saying? Was she flirting with her?
"Listen." Katniss wasn't listening. She was trying to hear the conversation over the din of the shop, which was an impossibility. "Katniss." Katniss begrudgingly turned her attention to Gale, who looked more than exasperated at her dramatics. "The BKP frat is holding a party this weekend. I happen to know for a fact that Johanna will be there. Why don't we go? Bring Madge if you want."

"How do you know she'll be there?"

"Because everyone who is anyone will be there. It's a big deal on campus." Katniss didn't know Johanna was an "anyone" but she was interested in this party. Maybe the flow of alcohol would bring one of them the confidence they needed to ask out the other. Maybe it would be like in all those college movies where they would dance and the sexual tension would be too much and they'd stumble into an unused bedroom. She'd press Johanna against the door, kissing her madly and tasting the alcohol the faint cigarette taste of her mouth. Johanna would take the lead, grabbing Katniss under her ass and wrapping her legs around her waist, leading them both to the bed. She'd grin wickedly as she shrugged off her leather jacket and bit her lip.

"I literally don't even want to know what you're thinking about because you just went beet red." Gale flipped the hood up on his sweatshirt and grabbed his backpack, hefting it over his shoulder and shaking his head with disdain. "It's at the BKP frat house over on Maple Street. Eleven on Saturday night. I'll see you there, Catnip."

Katniss watched as Johanna bit her lip in the same manner we had just imagined, but at something the girl had said. What did this girl have that Katniss didn't have? Clearly she could hold a conversation. Her hair and make-up looked professionally done, but she was probably just one of those girls that knew how to do her make-up. Unlike Katniss who had to watch YouTube tutorials and had been wearing the same braid since she was six years old. Her shirt was low-cut, more than necessary in the cold December weather.

December had creeped up slowly. Finals were winding down and the campus would be deserted soon, everyone going home for break. Katniss was looking forward to spending the extended holiday with her family, but she was nervous about Johanna. They wouldn't see each other for weeks. What if Johanna forgot all about her? What if she hooked up with this cleavagey slut bomb with her cute face and her social graces? Katniss stared miserably down at her drink, feeling more out of her league than before.

Madge had been so thrilled that Katniss wanted to go to a party. Katniss never wanted to go to parties and she was thrilled to finally be able to accompany her. She deliberated what to wear for about three hours before they went to the party. Maple Street was very close to their dorm so they opted for light jackets over their sweaters. Katniss had decided on a very dark wash of blue jeans with heels, a dangling belt to match the long mockingjay necklace she had on.

The party was louder than Katniss had imagined. The music could be heard clearly a block away, a pounding house beat that Katniss could feel in her heart. Madge seemed to be excited by the noise and began jumping up and down as they neared the front door. Katniss already began regretting her decision to come to the party. Two couples were making out on the porch, loudly slobbering all over each other.

Katniss grimaced as they entered the front door. A burly frat guy in a sweater approached them drunkenly. "Ladies! Welcome to ..the party! The keg is over here, help yourselves." He smelled sour like stale beer and milk. Madge nodded and got them both cups from the tap, handing the red solo cup to Katniss.

"I know you wanna find Johanna," Madge yelled into Katniss's ear, "I'm gonna go find Gale.
Have fun!" She quickly hugged Katniss, who did not return the hug, and weaved her small form through the pulsing throng of bodies in the main room of the converted home. Katniss sighed and sipped the beer, grimacing at the taste. So much for getting drunk tonight; the beer tasted like cold urine.

She heard some commotion in the kitchen so she made her way there. It also seemed to be the farthest from the speakers that felt like they were going to shake the picture frames from the walls. When she arrived in the oddly quaint looking kitchen, she was surprised to see Johanna, surrounded by a group of people. On the table was a bizarre pile of things all being balanced on their edges. A solo cup, two forks, a toothpick, a knife, someone's smart phone, two shot glasses and she was currently trying to place a salt shaker at the very top. It was like kitchen accessories jenga, but all very precise. Everyone in the room became quiet as she finally found the right location.

"All about weight distribution..." Finally she let her hands go and everything balanced perfectly. The group around her all clapped and cheered wildly; someone handed Johanna a shot. "Physics, bitch!" she cheered as she raised up the shot and knocked it back. Through the excited coeds she caught Katniss's eye and looked incredibly surprised to see her. But happy.

Before Katniss could approach a large guy stepped into her view. He was sort of classically attractive in the face with dusty blond hair and bright green eyes, chiseled cheekbones. He was overly muscled in just about every area, his biceps seeming to look for escape from his shirt. "What's up?"

Katniss flared her nostrils in response. "Nothing."

"Oh yeah? That's cool, that's cool." He took a sip from his cup, furthering the stinking beer breath he had working for him that nearly made Katniss vomit. "Haven't seen you at these parties before. You a Frosh?"

"Frosh." Katniss groaned and rolled her eyes. "Can we not? This," she motioned between them with her cup, "is not going anywhere. I am not interested. I'm sure there's some drunk girl you can chat up with your crazy nice bone structure and huge muscles."

The boy smirked, flexing his arm as he took another sip from his cup. "You uh, noticed my muscles?" He took a step into Katniss's personal bubble and she gripped her drink tightly. "People think it's about the gains, you know. The proteins. I tell 'em it's just about liftin' a lot of weight. I could probably lift you up with one arm. Wanna see?"

"Gloss, how about you go try to find a couple of your brain cells somewhere, hm?" Johanna asked from the right side of the boy, canting her head to the side. Her black and red streaked hair fell over her face as she stared up at the imposing figure. She came around to Katniss's side, throwing her arm over Katniss's shoulder. The taller girl looked briefly toward Johanna whose intense gaze was settled on Gloss. Katniss got lost in the scent of Johanna's sweat and her body wash. It smelled kinda masculine like pine. Maybe Irish Spring or something.

Gloss rolled his eyes and scoffed. "Shouldda figured she was a dyke."

Katniss felt Johanna's entire body go rigid. Something told her that those words were not okay to be spoken in front of Johanna. "What did you say?" Johanna asked in the lowest, raspiest, most threatening tone Katniss thought she had ever heard. It perversely turned her on. Great.

"You heard me." He tilted his head for emphasis. "Dyke."

"Katniss, do you mind?" Johanna handed Katniss her drink and the girl took it without question.
"For the record?" Johanna slid her palms up Gloss's chest, pressing against his pectorals. "I'm fucking bisexual you dumb fucking inbred doucecanoe." Her fist shot back and forth with such quickness Katniss could barely blink before Gloss stumbled backwards and the sound of bone cracking was heard even over the music.

"Hey Cash. Why don't you get your brother an ice pack? And maybe a new fucking brain because his isn't working so well tonight." An equally attractive blonde girl with long curly hair scrambled over toward the boy, physically restraining him from retaliating. Johanna laughed in his face and took her drink from Katniss. "C'mon kid. Join me outside for a second."

Katniss followed her instructions, going outside through a side door she hadn't seen through the many people admiring Johanna's physics feat in the kitchen. The cold night air hit her like a slap in the face. Her decision to wear a light jacket was pretty stupid. Johanna opened her pocket and removed a piece of gum from a packet, popping it in her mouth.

"You didn't have to do that, you know. I'm capable of handling a drunken dude hitting on me."

Johanna raised her eyebrow and crossed her arms, hugging herself from the cold. "I know you can. I just..." Her voice trailed off as she stared down at her boots. "I didn't like it, is all." She took another piece of gum out and faced the white and red packaging toward Katniss. "See? Quitting." The gum was not even nicotine-based. It was a cinnamon gum. Katniss smiled. "Well I've gotta do something with my mouth. This makes me irritable as fuck."

I can think of about one thousand things you can do with that mouth. As she pocketed the gum Katniss's eyes went down toward her hand. She grasped it from Johanna with a gasp. "Oh no. You're bleeding." Her fingers brushed over the reddened wounds on Johanna's hand and the girl jerked her hand but Katniss held firmly on to her palm. "You should clean this up. Put some ice on it." Her sisterly instincts took over. "Come on."

She practically dragged Johanna back inside the house, ignoring the people who called Johanna's name. No, this was her time. Her night. Her last chance to do something, say something to Johanna to make sure they didn't forget each other over break. She wandered around until she found a bathroom. They waited patiently outside the door. "This isn't necessary, Katniss. I'm fine."

Katniss flicked her eyes toward Johanna with a short-tempered glare. "Your hand is bleeding because of me. At least let me help you." Johanna huffed and Katniss squeezed her palm. "Please? It'll make me feel better."

She pouted her lips a little and it seemed to win Johanna over, clearly to her annoyance. "Fine." The girl in the bathroom finally emerged and Katniss shot her a look of disdain before pulling Johanna in behind her. The older girl locked the door and as she turned around, saw Katniss holding up some antibiotic cream and some white gauze. Her face flashed surprise. "Wow, you were serious."

"Of course I was serious. Why else would I have pulled you in here?" Katniss rolled her gray eyes and took Johanna's hand, running it under the faucet. She dabbed it with a nearby towel, wiping the excess blood. Johanna had amazing hands - strong, but feminine. A little roughness to her fingertips and palm but still soft enough to be pliable under pressure. "Doesn't look too bad."

"Thanks, Dr. Katniss Everdeen." Katniss shot her a look and began applying the salve. Johanna's hand tensed under the touch but to her credit, she didn't wince. Katniss slowly wrapped her hand in the white gauze, using her teeth to pull it apart and tucked it underneath the wrapping. Without any tape or pins, that would have to do. Besides, it was just a scrape. "Good as new."
Katniss sighed and put the things she had taken out back inside the medicine cabinet. "At least you'll have something to remember me by," she mumbled under her breath, unable to face the other girl. Johanna's gauzed hand came up to her chin and gently moved her head to the side so they were facing each other. She moved her body in accordance, seeing the smirk on Johanna's face.

"And what should I give you to remember me by? Other than a fairly impressive stack of cups?" Katniss blushed and darted her gaze to the ugly yellow shower curtain to the right. What a putrid color. Johanna's fingers squeezed her chin a little and she brought her attention back.

"Oh I know." Katniss could've sworn it was a dream. Though if it was a dream, they wouldn't be in the vaguely vomit-smelling bathroom of a crowded frat house. But that didn't matter. As Johanna leaned her face in close and very tenderly placed her lips on Katniss's, all she could hear and smell was Johanna. The taste of cinnamon on her lips as they moved against her own, the smell of pine coming from within her shirt, the faint smell of vanilla and alcohol in her hair.

The hand that was on her chin snaked around her neck, deepening the kiss with a swipe of her cinnamon tongue. The other hand slowly traced down her back until she got to Katniss's backside, squeezing it and pulling their bodies flush. Katniss groaned wantonly into the kiss, running both her hands through Johanna's hair and then gripping her shoulders. Like magic Johanna's hands were underneath her knees, grabbing her and lifting her off the ground until she sat on the edge of the porcelain sink. Johanna's fingernails dragged under the back of her shirt, grazing her skin as her lips moved down her jaw to her neck.

It was only then that Katniss realized what Johanna was going to give her. Not just this amazing kiss. She felt teeth on her neck and the pressure of lips just where her neck met her shoulders. Johanna sucked hard, then gently ran her tongue over the small wound in an attempt to appease the enflamed skin. Then she gripped the back of Katniss's neck and sucked hard once more, pushing a rather unladylike moan from Katniss's throat. Who knew something so painful could feel so good?

Johanna kissed the bruise - the hickey - and then brought her magical lips back to Katniss's, kissing her again slowly with a less frenzied purpose. The kisses were long and passionate, punctuating with small licks and the tugging of teeth. Katniss heard Johanna breathe her name in between kisses, her voice somewhere between a whisper and a moan. It was beautiful.

Johanna moved away from her, still standing between Katniss's thigh on the sink. "Think you'll remember me now, Mockingjay?"

Katniss panted out a short laugh and nodded. "I think so. But I might need a reminder when we get back."

Johanna cocked an eyebrow and leaned in close. Katniss's breath hitched in her throat in anticipation of another kiss. "Count on it." There was no kiss. Just a licking of her lips and a breeze out the door. Katniss sighed happily and rested her head against the mirror. She already wanted the winter break to be over.
Katniss groaned as her phone vibrated against the wooden top of her childhood dresser. She should have put it on silent. Looking at her clock - an embarrassing pink princess clock she had in her possession since she was five - revealed the time to be six a.m. Who in the world would text her at six in the morning on Christmas? She hadn't woken up this early since ...probably the year she got the princess clock.

She looked at her phone and saw the Snapchat notification from Johanna. Groggily she swiped her phone open, launching the app and waiting patiently for it to load. She held her finger down and revealed a selfie of Johanna with a mug of coffee to her lips, her eyes alight with mischief. Behind her was a giant Christmas tree - it looked about twenty feet high - lit up in reds and greens with an enormous pile of presents. The text "Merry Christmas Brainless" ran across the bottom.

Katniss quickly took a picture of the snap and then opened her messaging app. More awake now that she had seen a cutely disheveled Johanna with a Grinch coffee mug, she used both her hands to type out a message.

- In what world is 6 an ok time to send someone a message? Why are you awake?

Katniss waited patiently with her phone in her lap, propping herself up on her headboard and awaiting Johanna's response. Instead of a text she saw another notification appear at the top of her screen. With a roll of her eyes she opened the app again and pressed her finger down for another picture from Johanna. It was a picture of what looked like a forest, but the deck in the foreground indicated this was probably Johanna's backyard. It was covered in snow. The message "WHITE CHRISTMAS!" on the bottom made Katniss smile.

Katniss again opened her messaging and typed out another text.

- I understand that. I too have a window. That doesn't answer why you're awake at such a terrible hour?

Instead of a response she got another picture. This time it was Johanna in a Santa hat, giving Katniss the most adorable pout she had ever seen. In the background was the giant Christmas tree, and the surroundings looked to Katniss like one of those Aspen cabin homes. The message "...I really like Christmas..." was on the bottom and Katniss smiled.

A text popped up and she returned to the messaging.

Sorry. I thought with a little sister you'd be awake.

- My sister is 16. She stopped caring about Christmas like four years ago.


Of all the things she thought Johanna was, Christmas enthusiast was not among them. Though she had mentioned only going home for Christmas to see her grandparents. If anything, it endeared Katniss more. Which was not necessary as she was already infatuated with the older girl to near super stalker levels.

- I'm with you, I like Christmas. I liked that peppermint mocha thing with the orange you made me. What is that called again?
There was a long pause before Katniss received a response.

*We can call it whatever you want. I made it up.*

Katniss raised her eyebrow down at her phone. Typically, once she had ran out of the menu items, she would just ask for Johanna’s suggestions. She had assumed Johanna was making her things from a secret menu, or specials on the board Katniss had failed to notice in her tunnel vision to see Johanna.

- *You made it up? Like you invented that drink?*

*Yeah.*

- *Why?*

Again another long pause. Katniss had enough time to pad to the bathroom to brush her teeth, the warm smell of waffles invading her nose. Her mother was awake. Waffles with whipped cream and strawberries was their Christmas tradition. With a smile she went back into her room and picked up her phone. The response she saw made her smile even more.

*Maybe I liked seeing you.*

Feeling giddy she fell back on to her bed as she typed her response back.

- *Maybe? I have a hickey on my neck that says otherwise.*

*Hahaha oh yeah.*

- *You forgot? How many girls did you give hickeys that night?*

*Why Mockingjay? Would that bother you?*

Of course it would fucking bother me, Katniss thought to herself. She had drank more coffee and espresso in the four months since she met Johanna than she had in her entire life. Probably several people's rations of coffee. Johanna had to know very well that it would bother her. That kiss they had shared, no one had ever kissed her like that, like she was truly desirable.

- *Maybe.*

*I remember a kiss that means more than maybe. Katniss blushed. Enjoy your x-mas, gorgeous.*

- *You too Santa's Lil Helper.*

Katniss put her phone down and stretched off of her bed. She placed her palms on her dresser and began doing some standing push-ups to get the blood circulating in her body. Her phone vibrated once more and Katniss rolled her eyes as she picked it up, opening up the Snapchat app again. She nearly fell as her hand slipped out that was gripping the dresser and she had to prevent herself from faceplanting into the furniture. Johanna was most definitely topless, but both her hands were in front of her boobs giving Katniss two middle fingers. She was still in her Santa hat. How did she even take this?!

Katniss quickly fumbled with her phone and took a picture before it disappeared, then opened up her photos app to stare at it again. Her body. The tattoo above her breast was more visible now - it was some Chinese symbol. How cliched. Katniss was almost disappointed. From what she knew of Johanna it seemed like the least likely thing she'd have on her.
Unable to resist, she rattled off a text.

- A chinese symbol? Really?

Stared at my boob, huh?
If you must know I got that tattoo in Shanghai by this badass bald chick. It's the Chinese character for fire.

- It looks like a K.

It's supposed to look like a fire. But you're right. It is kind of a K. K for Katniss. You on fire, Mockingjay?

- After that picture you sent me...

;) If I knew you'd be this easy I'd have shown you my boobs way earlier in the game.

- I am not easy, tyvm. I just.. noticed is all. And I couldn't see your boobs.

Disappointed? I've still got more tats you haven't seen, Mockingjay. Maybe one day if you're lucky.

Lucky is right, Katniss thought to herself as she slowly changed into her clothes for the day. Katniss wanted to count all of Johanna’s tattoos with her mouth. This was far too much physical stimulation for this early in the morning. She pocketed her phone and left her room in favor of the kitchen with her mother. The blonde woman was mixing a bowl of batter, ready to do another batch of waffles.

"This smells amazing," Katniss commented as she gave her mother a small hug. Her mother smiled at her and continued mixing, pushing out the clumps of flour. Katniss sat at the breakfast nook, leafing through the local paper her mother had left out. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas to you too." Her mother hummed to herself as she poked at the batter. "So tell me, how did the semester go?" Her mother turned to her, holding the bowl against her abdomen as she stirred.

Katniss shrugged. "It went okay." Her eyes scanned the counter behind her mother. "Do we have any coffee?"

Her mother raised her eyebrow. "We do," she said slowly. She turned and turned on the stove, igniting the blue flames beneath her kettle. "I'll put the water on. Since when do you drink coffee? Is this a new college thing?"

Katniss couldn't hide the blush on her cheeks and her mother stopped stirring and looked at her with a peculiar expression. "No, it's... I mean I guess. There's a coffee shop really close to campus that I go to sometimes to... study... and stuff. With Gale. Or alone."

Her mother poured the batter over the greased waffle iron, closing the appliance and turned to face her. "Katniss Everdeen. You are lying by omission. You know, when you came back for Thanksgiving you really wanted coffee then, too." She licked some of the batter on the wooden spoon and leaned on the counter in front of Katniss. Her blue eyes were bright with playfulness. "Is there someone there you like to see?" Katniss's ever-deepening blush was the dead giveaway. "A boy?" Katniss lifted one nostril. Her mother knew she was gay, she just enjoyed to tease her. "Ah, a girl. Even better, you won't get pregnant. What's her name?"

"I won't get pregnant? Geez Mom what do you think I do? Hop into bed with baristas? I do have
to study, you know. It's school. It's college. Very demanding work and all that."

Her mother rolled her eyes, casting a glance back toward the waffle iron to make sure nothing was leaking. She turned her attention back to Katniss and pointed the wooden spoon at her. "Spill the beans." Her mother giggled at her own pun.

Katniss placed the newspaper on top of her head and put her chin on the counter. "Her name is Johanna. She's a Physics major at my school in the same grade as Gale. Third year. She's really smart and super funny. She's got these brown eyes that look like...that look like..."

"Coffee?" her mother supplied, wiggling her eyebrows.

Katniss groaned. "Okay yes, kind of. Like a hot fresh cup of coffee. She's beautiful, Mom."

Her mother smiled and lifted the newspaper to peek at her daughter. "Do you have any pictures of this beautiful, coffee-making vixen who has seduced my daughter into the caffeinated world of lattes?"

Katniss's mind briefly flashed to the Santa hat photo and she shook her head with such quickness the newspaper flew off and scattered across the counter. "Um no, no. No pictures. We aren't exactly dating or anything."

The waffle iron made a small ding and her mother moved over to it to release the waffle from its cast iron prison. She scooped it out and put it in the oven to keep it warm until Primrose was awake. "Okay," she said over her shoulder, "then paint me a picture of her! With words."

Katniss sighed and began collecting the newspaper as she spoke. "Fine. She's...she's a little shorter than me. Her eyes are about to my nose. She's got black hair that comes around to her shoulders, kind of a choppy cut. She's got these bright red streaks in the front. Her skin is...pale...but not too pale. Like the night after a harvest moon when it almost goes back to being paper white again. She's kinda thin but...keeps herself in shape. She's got some tattoos. Not really many you can see. One on her wrist, one on her thigh...one on her..." Katniss's eyes widened. "Um, on her upper body. Her eyes are dark and deep, always kind of intense. Even when she's smiling her eyes are like...really focused, you know? She's got this tiny freckle on the corner of her mouth that almost disappears when she smiles. When she smiles..." Katniss trailed off, her own delirious smile on her face. "When she smiles it feels like getting let in on the world's biggest secret."

Her mother grinned at her. She walked behind Katniss and enveloped her in a hug from behind, kissing her cheek. "And you still haven't been on a date? What is she waiting for?"

"I know, right?" Katniss agreed with a fervent shake of her head. "I mean we kissed once at a party but that was it."

Her mother smirked and released her from the hug. "Must've been some kiss."

"What? What do you mean?"

Her mother smirked as she turned off the stove and went to retrieve the instant coffee mix. "I mean, my darling daughter, that you're still bearing a little reminder of that 'one kiss.'" Her mother tapped the area on her own neck where Katniss was still sporting a fading bruise from Johanna's little love bite. "Maybe go put some concealer on that before your grandma gets here, okay? I don't want her having a heart attack if she sees a hickey some tattooed older girl gave you at a party."

Katniss hadn't heard from Johanna since Christmas, other than a brief Happy New Years text with
a photo of Johanna very drunk with a blower in her mouth and those huge number sunglasses with the new year on them. It was now January 3rd, only a few more days until they'd both be going back to school to begin the next semester.

She laid stomach-down on her bed, scrolling through her laptop disinterestedly. Her phone rang loudly, almost startling her off of her bed. "Holy shit!" Quickly she grabbed the phone and swiped it unlocked, placing it to her ear. "Hello?"

"What up Mockingjay?" Katniss smiled at the voice and the term of address. Johanna had never called her before. They had exchanged numbers before leaving school but she had never called; she just blew up her phone with texts and hilarious SnapChats. "You gotta turn on - wait, fuck, what channel is this?" Katniss heard grumbling on the other line and then she returned. "Okay the Disney channel, that makes sense. Put on the Disney channel."

Katniss reached over for her remote, flicking on her television. She scrolled through the channels until coming upon the Disney channel, where it was clearly that Brave film Johanna had wanted her to see. "Is this Merida? That girl with the bow and arrow?"

"No it's Pulp Fiction. Yeah, brainless, it's Brave. And me and you are watching this together over the phone so get comfy." Katniss rolled her eyes and moved so she was sitting back against her pillows, leaving the phone on top of her chest. She smiled as Johanna chatted through the film, yelling out things like "Did you see that?" and "Wasn't that cute?" and "I bet you can't shoot like that!" every so often.

After the film ended they continued to talk, with Katniss snuggled on her side into her pillow, the phone resting near her head. Johanna's disembodied voice floated into her ears, warming her heart as she told cute anecdotes from her trips around the world. Katniss began falling asleep, forcing herself to stay awake to hear Johanna's voice.

"You there, Mockingjay?"

Katniss yawned. "I'm here."

She heard Johanna's low chuckle on the other line and she smiled. "You're getting sleepy, huh? I'll let you get your beauty rest." There was a short pause on the other line. "Thanks for talking with me. I uh, I don't exactly love coming back to visit and you gave me a legitimate reason to be up in my room away from everyone."

Katniss suddenly felt more sober as she listened to Johanna's voice get softer. She wanted to reach through the phone and touch her, show her the care she felt brimming inside her heart. "Anytime. I love listening to you talk."

Was that too much? Katniss couldn't tell because, as always, Johanna kind of laughed her off. "Sure you do, Mockingjay. That's why you come to my shop every day, right? For my titillating conversations."

Katniss let out a hoarse laugh, snuggling deeper into her pillow. She felt the strong pull of sleep inside her brain. "No I come there because you make good coffee and I think you're really pretty. Actually I told my mom you're beautiful."

Now she was certain she had said to much. Her sleep-induced delirium was making her frightfully honest. Johanna didn't answer for a few beats and Katniss's heart began to palpitate with worry. "You talked to your mom about me?"

"She asked why I started drinking so much coffee. I told her about you."
Katniss could feel the drunkenness of sleep overcoming her as Johanna fell into silence on the other end. "Good night, Mockingjay."

"Good night, Johanna."

Katniss wrapped her tight black jacket around her as she and Madge strolled through the cross winter air toward the coffee shop. They had resettled into their dorm over the past week, getting situated in their new classes. The following Tuesday she finally got to go back to the shop. Johanna hadn't texted her since she had fallen asleep on the phone with her and Katniss was slightly nervous.

She smiled as the familiar wave of the coffee scent filled her nostrils. It was now so intrinsically tied with Johanna she felt the warmth in her heart as she smelled it. She and her blonde friend made their way to the counter, which was uncharacteristically deserted. They approached together, much to Katniss's annoyance, and Johanna smiled.

"What can I get you ladies?" Johanna looked from one girl to the other. Katniss watched her try and keep her gaze off of her and narrowed her eyes in confusion.

"I'll have a cappuccino please," Madge ordered. "A large." Johanna wrote a few things on the side of the cup and handed it to Cressida.

Katniss fumbled over her words, her confidence that she had from breezing in the door were now dashed under Johanna's eyes. She didn't look at her with the same warm familiarity. Something was off. "Oh, um, I don't know. Just a ...um..."

"Why don't you try the new hazelnut latte we have?" Cressida interjected, giving Johanna a long stare. She moved her blue eyes to Katniss. "Okay?"

"Um, sure, yeah," Katniss replied, looking down toward the counter. Johanna's normally intense, inquisitive stare was more vacant than Katniss remembered. She and Madge rummaged for their money as Johanna rang them up.

"How was your break, Johanna?" Madge asked brightly, oblivious to the weird tension between Katniss and Johanna. More acutely, the disheartening stare Katniss was giving Johanna.

Johanna raised her eyebrow toward Madge and snorted a laugh. "It was fine blondie. Thanks for asking." Johanna handed them back their change and greeted the person behind them.

"What the hell is her problem?" Madge asked from behind Katniss, watching her as she stared longingly toward the offensive black-haired girl. "She acted like she barely knew you."

"I know," Katniss said softly. "Everything was fine over break. She kept texting me. I mean, she kissed me at that party. She kissed me. I don't ...I don't know what I did wrong."

Madge smiled sympathetically at her friend, handing her the latte and walking away from the counter. "Maybe she's just having a bad day. She is a little, you know..." Katniss shot her a glare and Madge pressed her lips together. "Nothing. Anyway, let's just enjoy our coffee and we'll see about this girl when we're done."

They sat in their seat near the back of the shop, chatting idly as Katniss kept her eyes on Johanna. She seemed to move around the same, the same sparkle in her eyes when attractive coeds walked in the shop, the same flirty grin when a girl was shy on her advances. Katniss felt her heart breaking inside her chest. Johanna had forgotten about her.
Johanna took off her apron, saying something to Cressida who nodded. Johanna and the red-haired girl whose name she didn't remember with the bright green eyes and foxlike features left through the back of the store. Katniss saw Johanna grab her leather jacket, casting a glance her way before disappearing into the darkness of the back room.

Katniss stood up abruptly in the middle of Madge's talking and, without her own jacket, followed Johanna out the back exit of the coffee shop. As she found Johanna she was chuckling and conversing with her coworker, blowing smoke high up into the air. The sound of the door closing behind her distracted the girls from their conversation. The redhead looked at Katniss, then Johanna, with a giggle she stepped away from her. They looked cozy, Katniss thought to herself.

"Katniss Everdeen." Katniss hated the way her body shuddered as Johanna said her name. Katniss's eyes dropped to the white stick in Johanna's mouth that Johanna was keeping between her lips in a smirk. "Oh this?" Johanna took the stick out of her mouth and pushed the smoke out. "Not a cigarette. Pot. Not technically cheating, right?"

"I guess not."

Katniss watched as Johanna looked at the other girl and nodded her head toward the door. The girl rolled her eyes and stubbed out her blunt, giving Katniss a - was that a glare? - before going back inside. Johanna approached Katniss, her boots thumping against the loose gravel of the parking lot. Katniss's breath held in her throat as Johanna's eyes regained that wild, intense focus they had. She took the blunt from her mouth and raised her eyebrow. "Want some?"

Katniss nodded, not trusting her words again. Instead of handing Katniss the stick but instead she inhaled another hit and tipped Katniss's chin with her finger. She pressed their lips together, opening Katniss's mouth with her tongue against her lips and blew the smoke inside her. She held her face firm until Katniss had gotten the hit, then pulled away with a smirk.

Katniss looked up at her from beneath hooded lids, tasting the mix of cinnamon and weed on her tongue. "You know I may not have watched Orange is the New Black but I have seen Skins."

Johanna chuckled, running her fingers through Katniss's hair affectionately, curling it around her ear. "The one thing you've seen, huh? Well then you know how this scene ends." Johanna flicked the blunt into the snow, placing her hands on either side of Katniss's face and pulling her in for a kiss. Johanna nearly swooned beneath her touch, thankful for her back being pressed against the building for support. The coldness that had started to seep into her skin was suddenly pushed out by Johanna's insistent warmth.

Abruptly she felt some weight on her shoulders and she broke away, realizing Johanna had placed her jacket over her arms. "Wait what? What are you doing?" Why aren't you still kissing me?" Johanna rolled her eyes. "What does it look like, brainless? Giving you my jacket. You're shivering."

That's because you were kissing me. Katniss shook the thought from her head and looked at Johanna, now clad in only her HeavensBeans t-shirt. "You're going to get sick without your jacket on out here."

Johanna cocked an eyebrow, wrapping her arms around Katniss's waist. "I don't get sick."

Katniss furrowed her brows and got slightly closer to Johanna, looking down into her eyes. "Nobody just doesn't get sick. You're not like a superhuman."
Johanna shrugged, taking a step back from Katniss and crossing her arms over her chest. "Nah, I don't get sick. Good immunity and all that."

The pair of them stood outside, watching as the twinkling stars above them became clouded over by thick gray puffs that threatened snow. Katniss leveled her gaze at Johanna, her eyes narrowing slightly. "What are we doing, Johanna?" Johanna looked to her, and for the first time since meeting her, Katniss saw uncertainty in her eyes. "You kiss me at that party...you push away that guy. Text me all during break, kiss me again. Then act like I'm invisible when I see you? I don't get it."

Johanna looked at the ground, running her fingers through her soft mess of black and red hair. "Look Katniss, I um, I'm good at like a few things. Flirting, fucking, Physics, and sometimes if I'm good and drunk, karaoke. None of those things are being with girls that make me feel the way you do." Katniss smiled at Johanna but the other girl shook her head. "No, no, that's not a good thing. I can't get attached like this. I don't do this thing this dating thing."

"How do you not date? It's just a part of life. You meet someone you like and you want to get to know them. There's nothing scary about that." Katniss took a tentative step forward but Johanna took an identical step back.

"I'm not scared," she spat out. "I just don't do it, okay? We'll go out, have a great time, we'll have sex, I'll never call you again and I'll hurt your feelings." Her brown eyes came up to look at Katniss, who knew she looked wounded. But that didn't last long. "I don't want to hurt you." Sadness was quickly usurped by anger.

"You don't want to get hurt, Johanna, that's different. Everyone who pushes people away does it for their own good. Because if you were doing it for me, you'd give me a choice." Katniss shook her head sadly, unimpressed with Johanna's theatrics. "When were you gonna let me down, huh? After I slept with you? Is that what you wanted? Coward."

"Excuse me?"

Katniss felt emboldened by her words and stood up straighter. "You're a coward. You've been flirting with me for weeks and now you realize you have feelings for me and I have feelings for you. And you're bailing."

Johanna expelled a short laugh. "Who said I had feelings for you?" She took a step toward Katniss who stood firm in her position, her gray eyes never leaving Johanna's. "Yes, I've enjoyed flirting with you. Yes, I want to fuck you. I want to make your eyes roll back and make words come out of your mouth you didn't even know you knew." Katniss shivered at her words, closing her eyes for a brief second before opening them again. "But you don't know me. You can't possibly have feelings for me because you don't know a fucking thing about me. You have a crush."

"You're so full of shit." Katniss took Johanna's jacket off and handed it to her gruffly, shoving it in the other girl's hands. "I didn't imagine all the things I felt in that kiss. I didn't imagine the way you look at me. I really, really fucking like you. I want to get to know you. I want to know what all your tattoos mean. I want to know how you actually like your coffee. I want to know what your favorite book was as a kid. I want to know the stupid things you think at three a.m. that you're afraid to tell anyone else. I want to know your weird family drama and I want to tell you mine so we can talk about how fucked up our lives are and how grateful we are to have each other." Katniss rubbed her own arms to ward off the cold. "But if you're too scared to do that? Then maybe you're not the person I want to know these things about."

She turned around and went back inside, leaving Johanna by herself. Without a word to Madge,
who was spouting enough questions for them both, she grabbed her jacket and drink and stormed toward the exit. She tossed the cup in the garbage on the way out.

Katniss didn't go back to the coffee shop for a while. Instead she buried her nose in her work, ignoring Madge's pleas to "forget about that bitch and party." She didn't want to forget about Johanna, she just wanted to forget how worthless she had made her feel. She had felt so foolish, looking so earnestly into Johanna's eyes as the girl smacked her down with words.

She wanted to believe that Johanna's attitude was a front. She couldn't possibly be that cruel. There was no way that Johanna only wanted to hook up. No matter how many times Madge told her about the other girls Johanna had seduced, Katniss felt she was different. Somehow, she was special. They shared something Katniss knew Johanna couldn't have felt for those girls. But maybe she was deluding herself. Maybe Johanna was a cad who had only been stringing her along for sex. Who knew? Maybe she was part of some Cruel Intentions plot to seduce her and win a bet with her coworkers or her roommate. Johanna was right about one thing: she clearly didn't know her very well.

Outside her window the snow was coming down harder than it had all winter. Madge had gone to another dorm for a party and, with the weather like it was, probably not returning that night. It was for the best. It was a Wednesday, typically Johanna's day off. Her traitorous mind began to wander to what Johanna was doing. Maybe some homework, working late on a project with some friends, maybe fucking one of her many conquests.

A pounding at her door broke her from the sad path she had begun to travel down in her mind and she rolled her eyes. If stupid Madge had forgotten her key again...

Katniss got up from her desk and opened the door, surprised to see a shivering Johanna covered in snow. She had on a knit newsboy cap that had a small pile of snow on top, her hair tucked into a large knitted scarf. Her leather jacket had splotches of snow all over it, her boots also caked with the white stuff. In her hands were two cups of coffee, with her convertible mittens now adorably on completely, her fingers inside the knit cocoon.

"Black with one Splenda."

Katniss shook her head, shocked at Johanna's presence, her appearance, and her words. "What?"

Johanna handed Katniss a coffee which she took reluctantly. "Black with one Splenda. That's how I actually like my coffee. My favorite book as a kid was Hatchet. Still is, actually. At three a.m. sometimes I think about how big the planets are and I get scared. And I think about how I don't know what the fuck I'm doing with my life and how scary it is that one day I'll just die." Her eyes gazed into Katniss's with a small smile. "But for the last four months the only thing I've thought about at three a.m. is you."

Katniss stepped back from the doorway, allowing Johanna to come in. She took a sip of the coffee, hiding a grin at the taste. It was exactly how she liked her coffee: whole milk and three sugars. "You should take off your boots, you'll catch a cold."

"I don't get sick, remember?" Johanna smirked and placed her coffee on the desk, taking off her hat and kicking off her boots. She grabbed her drink again and moved to the middle of the room. She finally turned and faced Katniss, sucking in a deep breath. "You scare the shit out of me, Katniss. You were right, I was bailing. But over the past week, not seeing you has been...

Cressida let me know in no uncertain terms that I'm an asshole and a coward, like you said. Basically she threatened to fire me if I didn't 'man up' and ask you out." Katniss chuckled but made a mental note to send Cressida a fruit basket or her first born for her advice. "I've never felt
like this about anybody. It sucks."

Katniss laughed, sipping her coffee. "If this is your version of an apology, you truly suck."

Johanna glared at her. "Shut up. Look, what I'm trying to say is... Will you go on a date with me?"

Katniss stepped to Johanna, taking her coffee and placing both their drinks on Madge's desk. She draped her wrists over her shoulders and pressed their foreheads together. "Yeah, I'll go on a date with you, you big idiot." Johanna leaned up and captured her lips in a kiss, wrapping her arms tightly around Katniss's waist. Katniss pulled off Johanna's jacket and scarf, tossing them behind her as she ran her fingers along Johanna's soft sweater. Somehow they moved in tandem toward the bed, falling on it gracelessly as Johanna continued to share her air, swiping her tongue in and out of her mouth with deftness. When she felt nimble fingers snaking up her back she pulled away, panting out a "Whoa stop" and causing Johanna to pause.

The older girl looked down at her actions and removed her hand, grinning. "Sorry. Old habits die hard." Katniss slapped her bicep and Johanna moved next to her, snuggling into Katniss's side. Katniss enjoyed how comfortable Johanna seemed curled into her. She had a feeling that level of comfort was not something Johanna shared with everyone. "So how about this Saturday night? Plutarch isn't doing an open mic so I have the night off. Sound good?"

"Sounds perfect," Katniss replied, pecking the tip of Johanna's nose with a kiss.

Katniss grinned as she saw a faint blush appear on Johanna's cheeks. "What do you want to do now?"

Katniss reached down on the floor and picked up the remote, flicking on her shared television. She found some show that she figured she wouldn't be interested on and placed the remote back on the floor. "Now we pretend to watch this dumb show and instead make out until we fall asleep. Sounds good?"

Johanna wrapped her fingers around Katniss's hips and pulled her closer, teasing her lips with a gentle kiss. "Sounds perfect."
Katniss stood in the middle of her dorm surrounded by clothes in rumpled piles on the ground. Madge was at her desk sitting backwards in her chair, making a motion with her finger for Katniss to twirl. Katniss spun in her skirt, rolling her eyes at her friend. She was supposed to meet Johanna in less than twenty minutes at her dorm and Madge had made her change about thirty trillion times.

"Okay. Now that's perfect." The decided upon outfit was a pleated black shirt and a mauve sweater that Madge said "brought out her eyes." Katniss didn't think that was possible, seeing as how her eyes were so pale they didn't ever really pop. Johanna had said only to dress warmly so she made sure to wear her leggings in her boots and her black winter coat. "Johanna's gonna die you look so cute."

"I doubt it," Katniss replied, brushing the very bottom of her braid. Johanna had made an off-hand comment about how much she liked Katniss's plait so she could "run her fingers through and untangle it." So Katniss wore it that way almost every day since then, hoping that she'd be able to feel Johanna's fingers combing through her hair as they kissed.

Madge got up and turned Katniss around, picking a piece of sweater lint from her. She smiled at her friend affectionately. "Katniss, you're like, super hot. Johanna's cute too, if you're into that punk look, but you are really hot. So you go on this date and you make Johanna forget that she ever even saw other girls. The second she sees you, that's what she's gonna think. She's gonna think, 'Oh God, where did all the other women in the world go? Oh well, who cares?'

Katniss smiled shyly and hugged her friend. "Thank you."

"And, as a bonus, I happen to be going out to study with Johanna's roommate and some people so, you know, if you guys end up going back to her dorm... You'll be alone." Madge wiggled her eyebrows suggestively and Katniss couldn't help the deep red blush that spread across her cheeks. Madge buttoned Katniss's jacket and turned her around to face the door. "Okay lady, get out of here. Go have fun with your girl."

Katniss left her dorm in a hurry, not wanting to be late. She was perpetually late, especially if she had to interact with Madge first. The walk to the D7 dorms wasn't that long but it was long enough to begin freezing the end of Katniss's nose. Luckily it wasn't snowing, though she didn't know what Johanna had in mind. All she had said was to dress warmly and be up for whatever. That was no issue for Katniss; if Johanna was there, she'd do just about anything. And she probably wouldn't be cold.

The D7 dorms were much nicer than the ones in 12. The facade was brick and wood with high glass windows that faced the woods in the back. A few kids were outside playing frisbee - why? Katniss thought, it's so cold! - and Katniss pulled the door handle and realized she couldn't get in. She sighed in disappointment with herself as she turned away. You needed a swipe card to get inside the dorms and hers wouldn't work here. Katniss pulled out her phone to send Johanna a text when she caught glimpse of a girl leaving.

"Oh hey, can you hold the door?" Katniss called to the girl who was looking down at her phone. As the girl looked up Katniss recognized her as Johanna's coworker with the red hair. Fuck, what was her name?! Katniss had started calling her Foxface to Madge in a jealous rant after seeing them together outside that night. Emily? Emma? Shit.

The girl did hold the door, standing directly in the doorway as Katniss tried to get inside. "You
here to see Johanna?"

*What a stupid question, Katniss thought to herself, you see me every day. *"Yeah."

The girl - Emerson! - laughed, dragging her eyes up and down Katniss's form. She herself was wearing a furry red coat that made her look even more foxlike than she did normally, her red hair tied neatly in two buns on top of her head. Her make-up was impeccable, complimenting her pale features perfectly. Katniss suddenly felt underdressed and unattractive. "She talks about you a lot." Katniss wasn't sure how to take that. She didn't seem to say it as a compliment, just a statement of a fact. "But Jo's like a puppy that way. Always obsessing over the newest little chew toy."

Now Katniss knew how to take it - as an insult. Her initial intuition about this girl had been right, she was clearly jealous. Was she sleeping with Johanna? Or maybe they had slept together in the past. Either way Katniss didn't want anything to do with her. "Thanks for holding the door."

Katniss brushed passed the girl and entered the dorm, not looking over her shoulder. She jogged up the two flights of stairs to Johanna's floor, moving down the hallway until she found her room.

She knocked and heard some swearing behind the door and she smiled. When Johanna opened the door, Katniss was taken aback at her appearance. She was dressed in a pair of dark wash blue jeans, little black-socked feet poking out at the bottom. Her shirt was an adorable button-down blouse that was rolled up halfway from her forearms and untucked on one side. While she was wearing some mascara and eyeliner, her eyes were bloodshot and her nose was probably as red as Katniss's from being outside. The rest of her face was flush as well.

Katniss would've laughed had it not been so unfortunate. "You're sick," she stated flatly.

"No," Johanna said, opening the door and letting Katniss inside. The dorm was a little bigger than hers but there was a clear separation between the two sides. A privacy curtain was up between the beds and extended halfway across the room. Johanna's side - evident by the apron over the chair and the giant poster of Angelina Jolie from *Wanted* on the wall next to a huge poster of Marie Curie - was pretty neat, except for the trash can that was overflowing with used tissues. "I am not sick."

Katniss giggled and closed the door behind her. Johanna sniffed loudly and averted her gaze to the ground. "Johanna, you're clearly sick. You could have just told me."

"But I'm not sick," Johanna whined, in a voice made muffled by the mucus in her nose. Katniss bit her lip to keep from smiling at how adorably stubborn she was. "I drank like an entire bottle of Nyquil or Theraflu or something. I'll be fine in like thirty minutes. Besides, I don't get sick. It's just a cold."

Katniss pursed her lips and moved toward Johanna, placing the back of her hand on Johanna's forehead. She was burning up. "You have a fever. Have you taken your temperature?"

Johanna squinted at her, her brown eyes looking drunk. "What? D'you think I just keep thermometers in here?"

Katniss rolled her eyes. "Right, because you don't get sick. That pile of nasty tissues in the garbage speaks otherwise." She moved Johanna's hair behind her ear and tilted her head. "How long ago did you drink all that medicine?"

Johanna looked at the clock next to her bed. "Um, like twenty minutes ago." Katniss went around to Johanna's desk and picked up the Nyquil bottle. It was nearly empty. She looked at Johanna who was managing to look slightly guilty even though her pupils were huge.
"Did you really drink this whole bottle?" Johanna nodded. "That is fantastically dumb." Johanna pouted, sitting down on the edge of her bed. Katniss walked over to her with the bottle still in her hand. "First of all, that's more than enough for like several nights. Second of all, you're gonna pass out soon."

Johanna waved her hand dismissively. "No, no I'll be fine. I'll be great just um, let's just sit here for a minute and let that stuff do its work." Johanna patted her bed and Katniss sat down on the plush mattress. These were much more comfortable than the ones in Twelve. Johanna looked over at her and Katniss could see how widely dilated her pupils were. She was definitely going to pass out soon. "You look ...so fucking beautiful. I can't wait to ...to go on a date with you..."

Katniss stood up to take off her jacket, unbuttoning her winter coat. It wasn't at all to hide the crazy blush spreading across her cheeks. Johanna might be out of it but she still rendered Katniss unable to respond. She placed her jacket over Johanna's desk chair, eyeing the things on her desk. A pile of textbooks, a huge calculator that looked like a tablet, an iPad, a laptop, three empty bottles of Jack Daniels balancing on top of one another at an angle that looked absolutely unearthly.

Above her desk was a wide print of a photograph of a tree full of mockingjays. It was so vivid, with the light streaming through the trees, the mockingjays perched on the branches, Katniss could almost hear their birdsong. She turned to ask Johanna if the photo was hers, only to find the girl completely passed out on her bed, her mouth open for breathing since her nose was clearly stuffed. "Don't get sick my ass."

"I'm not asleep, Everdeen," Johanna mumbled into her pillow. "It's just really hot in here but also really cold? So I'm just gonna... the medicine is working. I'll be ...I'll be up in no time," she slurred, waving her hand in the vague direction of Katniss. "Just hang on."

Katniss rolled her eyes and went to the bed, picking up the crumpled up comforter that was shoved in a corner and placing it over Johanna. The girl snuggled into the fabric and Katniss sat near her chest on the edge of the bed, smoothing back her hair. Little peaks were sticking to her forehead from the slight sheen of sweat. "You are sick. You clearly have a fever. We'll put the date on hold, okay?"

Johanna groaned into her pillow and blinked a few times, adjusting her eyes on Katniss. She looked so completely adorable in this vulnerable, sick state. Katniss wanted to scoop her in her arms. "I'm sorry. I was gonna take you to this... this restaurant? It's not far. Walking distance. You can..." She yawned and closed her eyes. "You can eat on the dock that overlooks the lake. It's glass enclosed in the winter but it's so clear. You can... you can see all the stars. And the food.. the food is so good. Then I was gonna.. I was gonna..." Johanna reached blindly for her tissues and Katniss handed the box to her as Johanna sneezed - even her sneezes are cute - into the tissue and wiped her nose. She tissue fell out of her hand into the overflowing garbage. "I was gonna walk with you along the pier. It's really..s'really nice at night. Calm. And I was gonna kiss you. I was gonna kiss you a lot. You're a really good kisser."

Katniss smiled widely and stroked Johanna's hair. "Am I? Of all the many girls you've kissed?"

Johanna nodded. "Firsslly, I haven't kissed that many girls. Like...twenty..or so. Tops. And secondly, yeah. You're the best. I mean I asked you on a date, didn't I? You think I jus' date all the girls I've kissed?" Johanna struggled to keep her eyes open but it was clearly a fruitless endeavor. "I don't date any of them. Jus' you. I'll make the exception jus' for you, Ka'niiss Eberdee."

And she was out. Katniss watched her eyes droop and close, her breathing steady and just the slightest vibration of a snore coming from her mouth. She chuckled and got up from the bed, grabbing her jacket from the chair. So much for being nervous for their first date. Johanna was so
drunk on Nyquil she probably wouldn't even remember her being there. She gathered her things and slipped out the door quietly, turning off the light on her way out.

The following morning she went down to the coffee shop, knowing fully well Johanna would not be there. There was no way with how sick she was that the girl would be working. It was just Cressida and Finnick when Katniss went in, both of whom greeted her with a big hello. "Katniss! How was the date?" Cressida asked, nearly leaping over the counter as Katniss approached.

Katniss smiled and shook her head. "Johanna is sick, actually."

Cressida raised an eyebrow. "I'll be honest when she called out sick this morning I assumed she was in bed with you." Katniss felt the heat of her blush across her cheeks for what felt like the bazillionth time in that coffee shop. "Damn. Did she not even ask? Because I pretty much told her she was out of a job if she didn't."

"No, no, she did. I went over there last night but she was really sick. I'm actually here to get us both some green tea. And um, two orange-cranberry muffins, please." Cressida nodded and retrieved the pastries as Finnick began preparing the tea. Katniss waited patiently at the counter for them both as they appeared almost simultaneously in front of her. "Thank you. Both."

Cressida held Katniss's hand as she went to take the cup tray. "Listen it's not really my business but um, you like Johanna, right? Like you really like her?"

"Yeah?"

"Good. Because - and I swear I will drown you in coffee grounds if you tell her - Johanna is obsessed with you." Katniss shook her head in surprise, pulling her chin in and widening her gaze. "You haven't noticed? Since that first day you came in here she has talked non stop about you. You know we ran out of drinks you hadn't tried in like November. Johanna made you one every day from scratch just so you'd keep coming in. She wouldn't ever let us make her drinks. Didn't you notice?"

Finnick leaned forward and picked up a cup. "Look at the cups she gave you. Ever notice the little 'CB' written on it?" Katniss nodded. Every so often, especially if someone else was making the drinks, Johanna would write a CB on the drink and cross it out. "It's our little code for cock block. If someone is flirting with us and we don't like it, we write a CB on the cup so the person kinda deflects the attention. If we cross it out, that means we want to flirt with that customer and you better not cock block us."

Cressida grinned. "And Johanna never did it for anyone as much as she did it for you. We weren't even allowed to touch your cup." Katniss reached for her wallet but Cressida waved her off. "Tell Jo we said hi. And hey, listen, I know we're joking but..." Her bright blue gaze turned serious as she leaned forward on the counter. "Jo's like a little sister to me. She is really, crazy into you. I've never seen her this into anyone before. So, you know, try not to break her heart, okay?"

Katniss eyed Cressida warily, taking the bag and the cups. "Um, sure. I'll...I'll try." Katniss turned to leave, then whipped back around. "Hey, um, that other girl that works here. The one with the red hair?" Cressida nodded. "Are she and Johanna like... did they ever... I mean..."

Cressida and Finnick broke into laughter, startling Katniss. She wasn't sure she had said anything funny but they were both tickled. Once they settled down Cressida shook her head. "They've been roommates for like two years. Em thinks she's got some sort of hold on Jo but she's never been more than a random hook-up. As far as I know that hasn't happened in a while. Probably since last summer. Trust me, she's only got eyes for you."
Katniss happily knocked on Johanna's door, armed with the knowledge that not only were Johanna and her roommate definitely not a thing, but that Johanna was secretly crazy about her. How had she missed all the signs? Probably because she had no idea how to interpret signs and Johanna was a flirt with everyone.

Johanna opened it, looking remarkably better than the night before. Katniss blinked rapidly in surprise. "Wow. You look...much better." She was in a pair of plaid pajamas pants and a long-sleeved henley that was unbuttoned to a degree that Katniss could see the sides of both of her breasts. A bit of her stomach was peeking out, a tiny splash of black ink on her skin above the hem of her pants. She was still clearly disheveled from sleep but looked overall leaps and bounds better than the night before.

Johanna smiled her megawatt grin and stepped backward, eyeing the drinks in Katniss's hands. "I told you I don't get sick."

Katniss handed her the cup and walked inside, setting the bag and her own cup on Johanna's desk. She shrugged off her coat and draped it over the chair along with her messenger bag. She looked over at Johanna who was still sniffling, but did look much better. Her fever had clearly broken, her voice was clearer, her eyes not puffy or reddened. "Yeah, tell that to last night's Johanna who could barely keep her eyes open. Or correctly pronounce a 'd.'"

Johanna sipped the tea and grimaced, nearly spitting it out. "I thought this was coffee! This is like toilet water!"

"It's tea, Jo," Katniss corrected. "You remember tea? Hot water mixed with herbs to create an elixir to help those who are ill? Or, you know, what more than half the world drinks every day?"

"Well they're stupid! Coffee is key." Johanna took another sip, keeping her glare on Katniss as she did so.

Katniss sighed and smiled, handing Johanna the paper bag with the muffins. "I also got you muffins. Drink the tea, eat the muffin, and explain to me how you got over being sick in less than twelve hours."

Johanna took the muffin out and handed the bag back to Katniss, smiling at the treat. She bit into it, dropping crumbs on her floor and eyeing them with a shrug of her shoulders. She took another sip of her tea and grimaced at the taste, prompting Katniss to roll her eyes. "Well I told you I don't get sick. I have ...temporary health-related setbacks but I don't get sick. I just have a good immunity."

"Or you just ignore obvious symptoms of obvious illness until you get really sick."

Johanna shrugged. "Six of one, half dozen of the other. Either way, I'm all better! And I think I owe you a date." Katniss smiled and took a bite of the muffin from the bag, careful to get the crumbs back into the brown paper. Johanna walked toward Katniss, biting her lip as she approached the other girl. She traced her fingers along Katniss's sweater and leaned in for a kiss. Katniss stepped to the side and looked at her indignantly. "What?"

"You're still sick, Johanna!"

Johanna stomped her foot. "I am not!" As if on cue she coughed hard into her forearm, pressing her lips tightly together. Katniss crossed her arms and tilted her head as Johanna poorly suppressed two more coughs before exploding with a few hard ones into her sleeve. "This - Cough. - Proves nothing!"
"Get into bed, Mason."

"Now we're talking." Johanna went to grab Katniss's hips and she ducked her advances, cocking her head to the side and pointing to the bed. Johanna pouted and got into bed, fluffing her pillow and placing it against the wall. She sat up and pulled her blanket over her, huffing as she thumped her arms against the material. "This is no fun."

Katniss rummaged in her backpack, removing a little bottle of pills and a small blue jar. "Yeah, well, next time you try to blow me off, don't stand outside without a jacket." Katniss sat next to Johanna, handing her two of the pills and her tea. "I got you some cold and flu medicine. Pretty tame stuff but it always helps me." Johanna dutifully took the pills, an indifferent pout still on her features. "And this," she said, unscrewing the neon green top, "is going to help you breathe better."

Katniss scooped some of the gel on to her fingers and placed her fingertips on Johanna's chest. Johanna winked at her and Katniss blushed but continued her actions anyway. She rubbed the gel in a circular fashion along Johanna's clavicle, smiling as Johanna tipped her head back and relaxed into the touch. Katniss felt Johanna's heart speed up beneath her touch and she smiled at the girl as she rubbed her chest.

"This smells like mouthwash." Katniss laughed as Johanna smiled at her. "You don't have to do this, you know." Katniss raised an eyebrow. "Take care of me? You don't have to."

"You're right, I don't." Katniss withdrew her hand and wiped the small excess on her jeans. She screwed the cap back on and put the jar next to Johanna's bed. She smiled at the disappointment in Johanna's eyes until she took her hand. "But I want to."

Johanna's smile slowly disappeared from her face as she stared into Katniss's eyes. "I don't want to take you on a date."

Katniss frowned. "What?"

"I don't want to take you on a date. Cress insisted but I just... I don't want to." Katniss felt her face fall and Johanna quickly grabbed her hands and smiled. "I want to skip it. I don't want to take you out and wait for you to call me. I don't want to think every day that you'll run into someone else and they'll be prettier or smarter or cooler than me and there'll be nothing I can do because we're 'just dating.'" Johanna sucked in a deep breath. "I want to be your girlfriend. I wanna know what your favorite childhood book was. But I also wanna know what you look like when you wake up in the morning. I wanna see your embarrassing childhood photos from your house. I wanna kiss you whenever the hell I want. I want to make you come a million times in a million ways and learn the difference between all your moans." Katniss blushed even further. "I don't want to worry about someone trying to chat you up because I just... I want you to be mine." Johanna coughed into her elbow and rolled her eyes at her own sickness. Katniss smiled. "And I wanna be yours. Is that cool? Can we just... can we just skip this whole awkward song and dance?"

Katniss bit her lip before responding. She had no anticipated this. It felt like only yesterday that Johanna's "you scare me" speech had slapped her in the face. Now here she was, sniffling and smiling, wanting to be her girlfriend. "I really wanna kiss you."

Johanna raised her eyebrow and attempted to make a come-hither gesture but it was interrupted by another cough. Johanna frowned sourly and pouted her bottom lip. "You're not going to kiss me though, are you?"

"Not on the mouth." Johanna wiggled her eyebrows and Katniss pinched her side. "Pervert." She
leaned forward and kissed Johanna's forehead, then her nose. She moved to her cheek, her ear, her neck, before pulling away. "That's what you really want?"

"You're what I really want."

"Cheesy."

"Just fucking answer me, Everdeen. I don't have all day, you know."

Katniss raised both her eyebrows to her hairline. "Oh really? Going somewhere in your pajamas?" Johanna shot her a deadly glare and Katniss smoothed her hair with her fingers. "I think that... I agree. I wanna be yours, too."

Katniss watched as Johanna tried to hide an excited smile by averting her gaze to the other side of the room. They sat there in silence, Katniss rubbing her thumb against Johanna's hand slowly.

"Wanna watch Game of Thrones with me?"

"What's Game of Thrones?"

Johanna's eyes shot wide open. "Are you fucking kidding?"

Katniss nodded and laughed at Johanna's expense. She kicked off her boots and crawled into the bed with her, grabbing the remote from Johanna. "Of course I'm kidding. But I wanna watch the ones with Margaery. She's my favorite."

Johanna scoffed from in front of her, turning over so they were spooning and facing the television. "Not even Daenerys? With her dragons and shit?"

Katniss shook her head as Johanna turned on her Xbox so they could queue up the show. "Nope. I like the episodes where Margaery is nice to the little Stark girl." Katniss paused. "Do you think they're kinda gay together?"

"Katniss I think everyone is kinda gay together."

"Good point."
"Where did you get this one?" Katniss traced the ink of a tattoo along Johanna's spine with the pad of her finger. It was an eight-pointed star with a lot of intricate lettering and swirly symbols around a large circle. Katniss didn't recognize the type but it looked like some kind of Asian language.

Johanna groaned sleepily, her back muscles flexing as she turned her head to look over at Katniss. The brunette smiled down at her girlfriend, kissing her temple through the pile of messy black hair. "Baby girl you know I love you, but it is way too early for questions."

Katniss pouted and laid down her head next to Johanna's, watching her blink the sleep from her eyes. She had been watching Johanna laze in and out of sleep for almost an hour. Last night she had promised to go apple picking, but Johanna tended to make a lot of promises after sex. They had stumbled in from the Halloween party still clad in their costumes - Katniss had gone as Hermione and Johanna had gone as Lara Croft - and they had barely gotten into Johanna's dorm before Katniss's back was against the door and her Gryffindor sweater nearly torn off her body.

"Is this some kind of latent Hermione kink you have?" Katniss asked as Johanna lavished kisses on her neck. Her fingers were quickly unbuttoning the blouse and she was tugging hard at the red-and-yellow tie around Katniss's neck.

"Yes," Johanna hissed into Katniss's ear as she finally pulled the tie apart and moved her head away from Katniss's. Her eyes roamed over Katniss's face, her curly brunette locks tightly wound to mimic the Harry Potter heroine, down to her chest which was now exposed from Johanna's insistent fingers. Johanna had a singular way of making her feel beautiful with her stare, and made her feel desirable with just her raised eyebrow and the licking of her lips. Johanna swung the tie over Katniss's head and pulled her in for another kiss. "You're so hot and nerdy right now."

Sometime after they had exhausted each other she had murmured to Johanna that she'd like to go apple-picking in the morning; Johanna of course agreed, smiling deliriously from the rush of dopamine after her orgasm. Fall had settled on Panem once more, the new semester of Johanna's senior year and her sophomore. Johanna's sick confession months ago had turned into a relationship rather quickly. They did end up going on a few dates but there was no nervousness. There was hand-holding and kissing and a very close brush with public indecency when Johanna had snaked her hand beneath Katniss's skirt on an escalator in the nearby shopping center. Johanna drove the four hours to Katniss's house every weekend over the summer, and had even brought her home once so she could meet the mockingjays.

Johanna also introduced her to her parents and her three rough-and-tumble brothers and she saw why Johanna considered herself the "disappointment." Her parents were highly successful surgeons who just happened to also be world class musicians and, evidently, mockingjay enthusiasts. Her brothers, while identical to Johanna with their messy black hair and tough exteriors, were also brilliant and well-spoken. Katniss finally found the word for Johanna's jaw that she had been searching for every time she placed a kiss on it - proud. Her father had the same proud jaw, the face that demanded respect.

Johanna was the outcast - the tattooed, bisexual, nomadic physics student and coffee barista with the altruistic dream of using her degree to better the world instead of going into medicine or law or something equally as WASP-y. Those days only made her want to hold Johanna tighter, appreciate her more. She wanted to protect Johanna from the harsh stares of her parens and guard her from their expectations. She wanted to tell her every day how wonderful and smart and sexy
"Johanna," Katniss whined, but her girlfriend didn't move. Katniss raised an eyebrow in challenge and set to work. She pulled the sheets off Johanna, exposing her nakedness to the slightly chilly dorm air. Johanna groaned but didn't even bother to turn over or even grab the blankets. Katniss allowed herself a moment to stare down at Johanna's pale skin. The small atom tattoos on the back of her thighs she knew now were above the birth and death dates of Marie Curie, themselves the representations for Radium and Polonium. Nerd, she thought affectionately.

On her back was the eight-pointed star Katniss had asked about, as well as two lines of lyrics on her shoulder blade. Each of Johanna's tattoos represented a place she had gone in her life and had wanted to commemorate - the lyrics: *I'm drinkin' TNT, I'm smokin' dynamite* were from a trip to New Orleans, Louisiana where she had stayed with a family of black jazz musicians for six weeks, indulging herself in the blues and jazz culture. Katniss straddled her thighs and leaned over her back, taking small parts of Johanna's skin between her teeth. Johanna groaned into the pillow, trying to turn over but Katniss placed her hands on either of Johanna's shoulder blades and held her down.

"Ugh, fine. It's a sak yant." Katniss ceased biting Johanna's back in favor of placing small, closed-mouth kisses along her skin. "I got it in Cambodia from a monk. It's the Paed Tidt. It's supposed to protect you in all eight directions of the universe. Like wherever you travel, you are protected. North, South, East, West, and the variations thereof."

"It's beautiful," Katniss murmured against the skin of her back, giving the black ink a kiss and smiling. She finally allowed Johanna to turn over, and the girl sat up, propping herself up on her elbows. Though she had seen Johanna naked (or topless) plenty of times by now, it still sent a thrill into her stomach. Johanna's promise of making her "come a million times a million ways" had not been just talk.

But of course, their first time had been terribly romantic. Not in any sort of fairy tale sense. It was passionate and rough, Katniss recalled knocking over Johanna's lamp next to her bed. But just as Johanna was about to slide inside her, she paused. Their eyes met and Johanna placed an impossibly soft kiss on her lips. Her eyes were magnanimous and loving in their deep brown gaze. "Are you okay? I'll stop if you want me to." Katniss had never felt so cared for and adored than she did in that split second it took her to reach down and push Johanna inside her.

"Not as beautiful as you, baby girl." Johanna took Katniss by the sides of her shirt and brought her down on top of her, kissing her deeply and trying to move her shirt off. Katniss giggled into the kiss and sat back up, swatting Johanna's hands away. "Aw, come on. Em is gone for the entire weekend. I'd like to take advantage of her absence by taking advantage of you."

Katniss hadn't ever considered herself a sexual person but Johanna had awakened a part of her she didn't know existed. She could just shoot her a look from across a room and her entire body would be warm, all her thoughts cloudy and muddled until she could get her hands over Johanna's skin. So to look this girl in the eye and refuse her was taking all the willpower she had. "I wanted to go pick apples with you."

"What are we going to do with a big bag of apples?"

"Eat them?"

Johanna cocked her head to the side. "Really?" she asked flatly. "That's what we'll live on: coffee and apples." Johanna leered at her. "Though I could live on coffee and something else."

Katniss kissed her on the lips and rolled off of Johanna's body and placed her feet on the floor.
She opened Johanna's closet and began rummaging for her clothes. "You promised me last night. And considering what I did for you," Katniss cast a look over her shoulder and Johanna at least had the dignity to blush, "you kinda owe me one."

"You win." Johanna got out of bed, picking through her dresser for her undergarments. "You always do," Katniss heard her mumble from behind. She pulled on some underwear and fastened her bra. Katniss held out a pair of jeans, a t-shirt, and a long-sleeved shirt toward her. Johanna grabbed the small basket behind her filled with toiletries and raised an eyebrow. "I'm just gonna go brush my teeth really quick, okay?"

Katniss shook her head. "In your bra and underwear? In public?"

Johanna shrugged. "I've done it naked before. These people don't care."

"But that's... you're... it's not for everyone to see," Katniss replied with a small pout. Johanna's body was not for all these horny college guys' eyes to be staring at. And the girls. She was sure Johanna had slept with some of these girls, and probably some of the guys, and she didn't want them glimpsing what she now felt was hers.

Johanna tilted her head and stepped toward Katniss, heaving the clothes on to the floor. "Why is that?" she asked playfully, running her fingers along Katniss's jaw. In spite of their relationship not being new any longer, Johanna still managed to make her blush and stammer like a fool.

"Because..." she trailed off, looking down at the ground. Johanna tipped her head up and looked at her expectantly. Where there used to be just challenge and playfulness, now there was also love and indulgence. "Because you're mine and I don't want everyone looking at you."

Johanna smiled and leaned forward, cupping Katniss's face and giving her a small kiss. "Okay baby." Johanna went back to the bed and found Katniss's hoodie from the night before and pulled it on, giving Katniss a wink as she took her basket and left the dorm. Katniss wondered if the image of Johanna in her clothes would ever cease to make her heart skip a beat.

There was a lot to love about Johanna. She could prattle on about physics or science or the oppressive patriarchy of the Nobel Prize system for hours. She could sing every lyric of every song of nearly any Disney musical. She could call mockingjays, climb trees, kiss, fuck, make love, and do almost anything with a natural ease and a smirk that would make even the most pious monk break his creed. But what Katniss loved most was the way Johanna's arm wrapped around her shoulder when they were out.

It didn't matter where they were or what they were doing. Johanna's arm, in spite of her being a tad shorter, would snake over her shoulder and hang there, loosening and tightening depending on the moment. She would be wrapped in the smell of Johanna's leather jacket, the vanilla-scented shampoo she used and the pine-scented body wash, protected by her grip. It was Johanna's way of saying she was hers, that they were one. It made Katniss feel important and loved and most wonderful of all - it never seemed like Johanna understood how profound the effect it had on her was. She wasn't doing it to be visibly aggressive or to show her off; she was doing it just for the touch. And possibly for the small smidgen of possessiveness.

She was doing it now as they traversed the neat rows of apple trees in the orchard not far outside of Panem. Finnick and Annie had come along but they were off somewhere eating apple cider donuts and gazing adoringly into each other's eyes. Not that Katniss hated them for it; she often did it to Johanna. The warmth of Johanna's arm was gone and as her gray eyes finally found her, Johanna was high up in one of the trees. Of course it was one of the trees with the giant "NO CLIMBING" sign affixed to the trunk. A few stray apples thumped on to the grass as Johanna
expertly snaked through the branches.

"Katniss, catch!" A perfectly shiny red apple came hurling out of the tree and Katniss luckily caught it, otherwise she would've taken an apple to the dome. Johanna came leaping out of the tree and landed in front of a very frightened family. She mumbled a brief apology and then reattached herself to Katniss's side. "Do we have enough apples now?" Johanna whined. In spite of her whining, Johanna had seemed to enjoy climbing the trees and retrieving the "perfect apple" from the branches at random. "Can I take you home and ravish you yet?"

Katniss rolled her eyes at Johanna's impatience and led them back toward the barn where they could purchase autumnal decorations and homemade baked goods. Johanna picked up a liter of apple cider and Katniss a small bag of donuts and they headed toward the cash register. "Soon, I promise." Katniss leaned over and kissed her sweetly on the lips and looked her in the eyes. She'd never get tired of the way Johanna's eyelids fluttered after they kissed.

Their eye contact only broke as a woman in front of them cleared her throat loudly. Katniss knew immediately that Johanna sensed the same thing she did as she felt Johanna's muscles tense. "Something stuck in your throat?" Johanna asked, raising her eyebrow.

The woman turned completely around and gave them a glare. "This is a family establishment. There are children here."

"Sweet observation Galileo," Johanna retorted, looking around at the few children skipping on the hay-strewn ground. She leaned in conspiratorially. "If you haven't noticed, none of them seemed bothered by anything. Only you. So maybe let's not project our old lady homophobia on to the youngins? Unless of course, you're the public display of affection police? If so, I mean, I'm so sorry. I didn't see your badge or anything."

The woman harumphed and turned around, but Katniss was sure her silverly curls were going to light on fire with how hard Johanna was still staring into the back of her head. She was impressed with how cool and collected Johanna had been; she was certain Johanna would've lashed out, but this even response was impressive. It was also disheartening because it seemed almost rehearsed, as if this was not the first time this had happened to her.

After they paid for their things and began back toward the car, Johanna detached herself from Katniss and began peering around the parking lot. "What are you looking for?"

"That dumb fucking bitch's car. I'm gonna slash her fucking tires." There was the anger Katniss had thought was missing from before. It was just simmering beneath the surface. "Or I'm gonna break into her car and fuck you in it. Steam up her fucking old lady windows."

Katniss moved in front of Johanna and placed a hand on her chest, rubbing her sternum in soft circles. "It's okay, Jo. She was just some ignorant elderly woman."

"Hopefully she'll die before the next election," Johanna grumbled, finally looking up at Katniss instead of around the grass parking lot. "You know what really insulted me? That she insinuated that we should be ashamed of ourselves. Like I should be ashamed that the most beautiful woman I've ever seen is my girlfriend. Fuck that."

Katniss blushed and moved her hand up Johanna's chest to her neck, pulling her down for a kiss. A kiss meant to placate and also to show appreciation for the way Johanna had, in her small way, stood up for her. For them both. She pulled away, her eyes searching her girlfriend's, whose own eyes had calmed down some. "How did you manage to turn an unfortunate event into a way to flirt with me?"
Johanna grinned, bending her arm and tossing the bag of apples over her shoulder. "It's very easy to flirt with you. You're the most gorgeous thing in the world. I'll turn the fucking Titanic sinking into a way to tell you how amazing you are."

Katniss's eyes flashed with desire and she let out a short, harsh breath. "Okay we need to find Finnick and Annie because I need to take you home. Now."

Johanna emerged from the coffee shop with the two green cups in her hands, smiling widely at Katniss. She handed one of the cups to her and looped their arms together. While she did enjoy Johanna's arm wrapped around her, feeling Johanna sort of curl herself into her side was a close second. "What's this one?" Katniss asked before taking a sip.

"Guess. You're the connoisseur now right?" Johanna ribbed gently, squeezing Katniss's arm with her fingertips.

Katniss shot her a look and took a sip of the hot beverage. A flood of flavors filled her mouth and spilled over her tongue. It was fruity and sweet with slightly citrusy after taste. "Chocolate with...raspberry and orange?"

Johanna gave her an impressed smile. "Cressida is calling it 'Tooth Decay' but I don't think Plutarch will let that stand."

Katniss shuddered as the warm drink filled her belly. "She's not wrong." It was delicious but sickly sweet.

They walked around the small downtown area of Panem kicking the crunching leaves beneath their feet. Katniss looked over at Johanna, taking a moment to admire her beauty whilst Johanna wasn't paying attention. Her hair was a little shorter than last year, only barely able to be put up in a ponytail. Her sweatshirt's hood folded over the top of her leather jacket, the worn material hugging tightly to her slim frame.

Autumn was still Katniss's favorite season but now it sadly reminded her that in a few months they'd separate for Christmas, and then Johanna would be graduating in four months. Johanna had made vague mentions of doing her graduate work abroad but it always sounded noncommittal. It didn't seem fair; they had only just begun dating. Johanna led them both to a park bench and settled down on it, leaning her head on Katniss's shoulder. They looked out at the park's massive lake, watching the joggers make their rounds passed them.

"So I'm going on two trips," Johanna began with a small hint of nervousness in her voice. "Over Thanksgiving I'm going to New Zealand. For Christmas I'm going to Berlin for three weeks."

Katniss felt her chest seize. She had been trying to mentally prepare herself for Johanna to be gone; admittedly only seeing her on the weekends during the summer had been hellish. She had spent the entire time waiting for her between visits. "Oh. That sounds cool." Katniss kept her voice as even and uninterested as possible. Johanna looked over at her slyly and grinned. "What?"

"You can say what you're thinking. It's written pretty clearly on your face," Johanna informed, amused.

*No reason not to be honest.* "I'm going to miss you."

Johanna brushed hair from Katniss's neck and nuzzled in between her neck and her scarf, pecking gentle kisses against her skin. "Come with me to Berlin," she whispered into her ear.

Katniss blinked a few times and turned her head, causing Johanna to pout without access to her
Johanna there and pulled her leg up on to the bench between them. "New Zealand is for school. And for fun, but I won't be there long. But Berlin is so I can take a tour of universities there and do some sightseeing. I've never taken anyone on a trip with me before but..." Johanna looked down at her shoe. "I want you to come. I'm going to miss you too fucking much." Katniss didn't give Johanna an immediate response and the girl bit her lip. "You don't have to. It'll be Christmas and I'm sure your family would want you home and I wou-

Katniss leaned forward and captured Johanna's moving lips with her own. She placed a leather gloved hand on the side of Johanna's face as she swiped her tongue very briefly along Johanna's lower lip. Part of her almost missed the slightly ashy taste Johanna used to have but she was very glad she quit smoking. All it had cost her was one night of singing at the coffee shop, which had gone well because Johanna had gotten so turned on she had excused herself and taken Katniss on the break room's table in the back.

"I would love to come. I'd love to spend time with you anywhere." Nothing could have been truer. Johanna made everything a little bit better with her presence. And going to a foreign country with her sounded like a dream.

"I'm glad you think so, gorgeous." Johanna put her leg back down on the ground and settled in next to Katniss again, holding her arm tightly. Katniss didn't want to worry about if Johanna liked the universities there; that seemed like a problem for another day. Today she was going to enjoy the brisk wind, the smell of pine and the feeling of her girlfriend wrapped in her embrace.

"Do you think they have coffee shops in Berlin?"

Johanna looked over at her and smiled affectionately. "Yeah, I think they do."

Katniss grinned and placed her temple on Johanna's head, scooting closer to her. "I think we'll have to compare."

"Fine, but don't you fall in love with another charming barista okay?"

Katniss nudged her in the side as she placed a small kiss on the top of Johanna's head. "I wouldn't dream of it."

Author's Note: FIN! Thank you guys so fucking much for how much support you gave this story. I didn't even intend it to be this long. Anyway, thanks again! I'll be popping up to do a few one-shots based on some AU ideas I've seen. As well as obvs continuing Burn It Down and You and I. ...And a Game of Thrones Sansaery fic.
The Christmas Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Katniss always enjoyed autumn most of all the seasons, but being with Johanna all these years meant she was slowly starting to love winter as well. Like Johanna, winter begins as abrasive and unyielding, but underneath the layers of frozen earth and blustery cold is a warmth that is not available any other time of year. Summer is a constant heat, spring a constant rain. But winter... winter is cold so that the moment you got a touch of warmth, you appreciate it. Every little moment of heat - a crackling fire, a warm blast of the car heater, the warmth of Johanna's body snuggled against her own, the heat of her breath against her skin - was precious and wonderful. Johanna's warmth always came unexpectedly in the form of rather public displays of affection, warm compliments whispered in her ear, dazzling smiles and predatory smirks.

Katniss loved winter now. And she loved Johanna more.

Johanna had been accepted to TU Munchen in Germany upon graduation and though it broke both their hearts, they committed to being long-distance until Johanna finished her degree. Johanna returned as much as she could during the school year, but always came back for the winter to celebrate Christmas. Johanna was so excited about Christmas from Thanksgiving forward that it was hard not to catch her contagious and adorably childish enthusiasm. It didn't hurt, of course, that each year Johanna did something special for Christmas to make it even more enjoyable.

There was the year she met the Everdeens.

"Promise?"

Mrs. Everdeen sighed. "Katniss, I promise I will not show Johanna any photos of you from before college. Other than those that are present in the house already." Her mother motioned around the room at the various photos of Katniss at different ages. Katniss gave the pictures a look and her mother shook her head. "Oh no. Don't you think about redecorating now, young lady. I asked you to check on the bread like ten minutes ago."

Prim bounced into the room, phone in hand, staring down at the screen. "I can't believe we're finally going to meet Johanna. I friended her on Facebook like months ago."

"What?" Katniss asked, whirling around to face her sister. A pair of sky blue eyes peered up at her. "Why would you..? You don't even know her!"

Prim rolled her eyes but the expression on her face was soft and sweet. "Kat, you talk about her non stop. You've been dating like what, almost two years?" Katniss paused. They hadn't celebrated any anniversaries. Johanna had asked her out her sophomore year, and Katniss was graduating in the spring. She smiled a little as the past few years sailed slowly by her eyes. Their trip to Berlin. The late-night Skyping. The surprise trips home. The agonizing airport goodbyes. "Earth to Katniss?"

"Hm?" Katniss smiled lazily and shrugged. "Something like that. I just didn't know you were going to be a stalker."

Prim smirked. "Oh like how you stalked her for months before she finally gave in and asked you
"What works, she seems pretty cool to me." Nearly on cue the doorbell rang and Prim slid her phone in her pocket and went to answer it. Katniss looked around. She wanted to appear casual, but she was so overwhelmed with the prospect of seeing Johanna and her meeting her family that all she managed to do was trip over Buttercup. "Hi Jo!"

"Hey," Johanna greeted, smiling at Prim. Katniss could see her over Prim's shoulder and couldn't help her reflexive smile. Johanna caught her eye and her grin grew even wider. Her eyes darted back down to the younger girl. "You're Prim?" She extended her hand. "Nice to finally meet you. Sick photos on Instagram, by the way."

Prim shook her hand and motioned for her to come in, closing the door behind her. "You like them? I'm only just starting to get into photography. I'm chronicling my time at the medical examiner's office." Johanna nodded.

"They're very cool. I dig it." Katniss's mother moved across the room and took Johanna's coat that she was holding awkwardly in her hands. "Thank you. It's great to finally meet you, too, Mrs. Everdeen."

Mrs. Everdeen smirked and nodded her head. "Likewise. Katniss has told us so much about you."

Johanna raised her eyebrow. "Has she now?" Katniss slid her arm around Johanna's waist and leaned into her embrace. "At least some good things, I hope."

Prim rolled her eyes. "Don't worry about it, all she does is go on and on about you." Katniss shot her sister an embarrassed glare, which she completely ignored. "So what's Germany like? Drink a lot of beer? Can you speak German now?"

Johanna chuckled. "There is a lot of beer. I have imbibed more than my fair share. And I can speak some German. Not fluently, but decently enough to get around. Find the bathrooms, avoid the sex dungeons." Katniss slowly turned to head to face her girlfriend in surprise. Had she really just said the phrase 'sex dungeons' in front of her mother? The small flush of red on Johanna's cheeks proved that she had.

Mrs. Everdeen looked down at Johanna's duffel bag that was slung over her shoulder, unruffled by Johanna's verbal slip up. "Why don't I show you the room while Katniss checks on the bread in the oven?" Katniss met her mother's gaze, and her mother smiled. "And I'll allow Prim to interrogate you later, if you don't mind."

Katniss narrowed her eyes at her. "I can show Johanna my own room, Mom."

"I asked you to check on the bread, dear," she directed with a hand stretched outward toward the kitchen. Katniss scowled but obliged her, giving Johanna an apologetic look as her mother took Johanna upstairs. Begrudgingly she went into the kitchen to check on the bread, which was finished. She turned off the oven and removed it, placing it on top of the stove. Prim came up beside her, smiling slyly.

"You know Mom is probably up there giving Jo the third degree." Katniss looked over at her sister and nodded. She had never brought a girl home - she hadn't really dated anyway, and not anywhere close to seriously enough to bring a girl home - but her mother knew almost everything there was to know about their relationship. She knew about how they met, how they had agreed not to live together until Johanna was done with school, how their long-distance relationship was going. "But she seems cool. You guys gonna get married?"

Katniss's eyes nearly fell out of her sockets when she looked at her sister's impassive expression.
Shaking off the first feeling of surprise she mused on that thought. "Johanna's kind of ...against the idea of marriage," Katniss explained slowly. "I'm not sure why; her parents' marriage is solid." From what Katniss could remember, having only met them the one time. They seemed close enough, pleasant to one another. She looked back to her sister. "I think the commitment just scares her a little."

Prim snorted. "Scares her? Did she like, climb mountains and wrestle alligators or tigers or something?" Katniss chuckled and sat on the edge of their kitchen table, leaning back on her palms. Prim picked up a piece of Christmas candy that had been left out and popped it in her mouth. "She likes to be scared. She needs to do... whatever the female equivalent to manning up is. You like her, she likes you. You've been dating a while, you're both crazy for one another."

"Yeah but we haven't lived together, haven't done any of that beginning stuff. She's been gone so much."

Prim shrugged. "I'm not saying get married tomorrow. I just think she should be open to the idea. But hey, it's your lesbian love affair," Prim teased, poking her sister in the ribs. Katniss slapped her hand away and nodded in agreement. The few times they had brought up marriage - in an abstract way not relating to them - Johanna would clam up. Though she was committed to her, it seemed she would never shake the wanderlust from Johanna's bones.

The rest of the holiday went smoothly; Johanna was a sight to behold. She seamlessly wove in and out of conversations with her little sister, her mother, her grandmother, her cousins. She fell into easy rapport with Gale, she even chatted up one of their neighbors who had come over. Johanna was always enrapturing with her sexual aura and confident demeanor. But her studious side, her sensitive side, her uncanny ability to talk to anyone about anything made Katniss even more hopeless for her. And when they caught eyes from across the room, Katniss's heart still skipped a beat.

Then there was the year Johanna proposed.

They had been living together for less than a year. Johanna had returned home in April following that Christmas and they had begun renting an apartment just a few miles from where the Everdeens lived. It was a small loft, furnished simply with rustic touches and pictures of them on the walls. They hadn't spoken about marriage, focusing instead of finding jobs within their fields, and making most of the time they had now that Johanna was home more working on her dissertation.

Which meant a lot of staying in bed. A lot of trips to the coffee shop back at the university to fuel Johanna's late night bursts of inspiration.

Katniss learned a lot about Johanna during those months they spent together. Johanna took up most of the bed at night, and she was a blanket hog. She was excellent at calming Katniss down from her random fitful nightmares. She was careless with where she left things - pencils and pens everywhere, more of her 'look what I can balance!' experiments, shirts and clothes tossed around whenever she disrobed to either entice or distract Katniss - but was obsessively neat in all other respects. She didn't like to cook but didn't mind to clean afterward.

When she was studying she played music obnoxiously loud and when she cleaned the dishes she did so without her top on. Katniss lost track of how many times she had taken her on the kitchen table because Johanna just refused to put on clothes. She loved every single minute of it.

But Christmas came around again and Johanna declined an invitation to go to her parents' to instead go with Katniss to the Everdeen's. She was nervous the entire night, obsessively running
her hand across her sternum and giving herself small talks when she was alone. Katniss hadn't remembered any of that in the moment, but upon reflecting on the night later, she would recall those things in detail. It was one of the only times she had ever seen Johanna nervous about anything.

By the night's end the family was sitting in the main room, sipping on tea and cocoa, chatting quietly. Johanna downed the rest of her egg nog and placed the glass on the coaster next to her. She sucked in a deep breath. In the Johanna way that she would, she slid on to the floor, landing unceremoniously on one knee. She pulled the ring from her cleavage, no box, and stared up into Katniss's wide, surprised eyes. Johanna didn't say anything. No one said anything. She just sat there, on one knee, staring up. Katniss nearly laughed at the hopeful, confused, and scared look in her eyes.

Finally, from across the room, her grandmother sighed. "Well just ask her already!"

Johanna chuckled and shook her head embarrassedly. "You scare the shit out of me, Katniss," she began, echoing her statement she had made the day she had asked Katniss out for the first time. "But I want nothing more, for the rest of my life, than to be scared every day by you. To be honest, I-I don't even want my heart to beat if you aren't going to be here making it skip in my chest every time you look at me." She looked down, confidence wavering. "So, um, will you...?"

Katniss stared down at her expectantly, not allowing the tears in her eyes to fall just yet. She wanted Johanna to say it. Johanna sighed at the defiant look in Katniss's wet eyes. "Will you marry me?"

Katniss, when she would remember this moment days, months, years later, didn't remember saying yes. But her sister, surreptitiously capturing the moment on video, would remind her that she did. Her exact words were: "Yeah I'll marry you, you big idiot."

She said yes. She thought she said yes but Johanna leapt into her arms so fast she wasn't sure she had said anything at all. But it didn't matter. Her heart, her mind, her body had said yes even before Johanna had asked. She would've said yes the first day they met.

Somewhere in the background, over Johanna's muffled excitement, she heard her grandmother say, "They certainly do it differently, the lesbians. My Bernie said, 'Hey will ya? And I said, 'Yeah sure why not?'"

"I think they might do it better," Mrs. Everdeen replied, watching as Prim went over to hug both her her sister and Johanna. Gale intercepted Johanna and Katniss walked over to her mother who smiled down at her. "Certainly been a merry Christmas, huh?"

Katniss raised her eyebrow at her mother's sly expression. Slowly, her eyes widened. "You knew."

Her mother nodded and wrapped her arms around her, holding her tightly. "Of course I knew. Johanna asked me last Christmas for my permission, not that she needed it. I was endeared by the mentality. I told her that it was okay with me, but I wanted you to see more of each other first. I suggested that perhaps you live together for a bit. But I could tell, from the moment she walked in here and looked at you, that she loves you."

Katniss looked across the room at Johanna who was knocking back a celebratory shot with Gale. She smiled as Johanna shook her head and grimaced at the taste, but wiped her mouth on her forearm and glanced at Katniss. She winked at her and Katniss felt the familiar pull inside her stomach and flush on her cheeks. She suddenly wished no one else was in the room because the desire to thank Johanna in the most carnal way she could think of was all she could think as her elderly grandmother congratulated her.
"Katniss."

Silence.

"Kat, baby, I said I'm sorry."

Silence.

"Come on. You can't be mad at me this whole trip."

Silence.

"It's fucking Christmas! You can't be mad at me. Look how cute I am in my hat." Katniss tore her eyes from the road to look at her fiancée who did, infuriatingly enough, look adorable in her lopsided Santa hat. She looked back out the window. Her eyes widened as Johanna's car veered off the main road on to the shoulder and she nearly threw it into park. The raven-haired girl turned to her, the soft strain of "Silver Bells" playing from the radio. "Katniss look at me. This trip is going to be shitty enough, I can't deal if you're not going to talk to me."

Johanna shot her a glare. She let them both sit in quiet, other cars whizzing by them on the main thoroughfare. A very light snow had begun to fall across the highway as they drove toward Johanna's childhood home. "You promised."

Again the other girl narrowed her gray eyes in anger. The one thing she had made Johanna promise was that the next time she got a tattoo, Katniss wanted to come with her. Johanna had been discussing the idea, even having a classmate of hers at TU Munchen sketch it for her. It was beautiful, Katniss mused disdainfully. A black mockingjay in a circle, made to look like a watercolor painting on the inside of her right forearm. It was for Katniss. But she had promised.

I asked you to do one thing. You're really shit at following directions." Katniss crossed her arms over her chest and stared out her window at the thick pine trees that edged the forest. They must be getting closer to where Johanna lived as the trees for thicker and the area much wealthier.

Johanna reached her hand over and took Katniss gently by the chin with two fingers, moving her gaze. "I know. I suck." She traced up the side of Katniss's face to her hair, running her fingers down her scalp. Katniss hated her traitorous body for giving an involuntary tremble. Years into their relationship and Johanna still had the power to reduce her to shivers with a touch or a look. Sometimes she'd even find herself stumbling over her words like she did when they met. "Tell me what I can do to fix this." Johanna's voice was becoming a little tighter. She knew how much Johanna loathed to go home and felt slightly guilty. But she had a point to make.

"I don't know. But when I do I will let you know." Katniss grinned at the wide-eyed reaction she has gotten from her fiancée. There was a slyness to her tone that she knew would make Johanna nervous. "Until then, you're forgiven." She leaned over and kissed Johanna on the cheek and nodded toward the road. "Let's go Jo."

Warily Johanna moved the car back into drive and got back on the road. Katniss took her free hand and entwined their fingers, using her other hand to turn up The Bangles' "Hazy Shade of
Katniss had never been to the Mason's home for any holiday. Johanna liked seeing the Everdeens instead so they spent the last few with her mother and Prim. And each Christmas they did something fun, so Katniss couldn't complain. Johanna was so enthusiastic about Christmas each year that Katniss found it incredibly difficult to deny her anything. Her favorite Christmas, of course, was last year, but they had all been amazing so far.

This year Johanna's parents insisted they both join them because of the engagement, in spite of Johanna's heated protests. Their home was huge, Katniss had remembered from meeting them one summer. It was a spacious cabin set in the woods with a long, winding driveway that began with a ponderous black wrought iron gate. The gate opened automatically as they got to the house, and Johanna drove toward the home. The circular driveway that surrounded a fountain, dormant now in winter, left them right at the front door. Johanna parked the car behind some large luxury vehicle and turned off the engine.

Johanna's mother was out the door before they could even get their belongings from the trunk. She embraced Katniss tightly in her cashmere sweater, smelling of potpourri and expensive perfume. "Katniss, dear! It's so good to see you."

"You can even see her because you're strangling her." Johanna raised an eyebrow from the trunk, hefting their bags out and hoisting them over her shoulder. Dr. Mason pulled back from Katniss and shot her daughter a sour look.

"You look lovely! How I do adore this braid." Johanna rolled her eyes as her mother fondled Katniss's braid in her hand. "Let's get you inside you must be starving." Katniss followed her inside the home, greeted by the smell of food cooking and the sound of music coming from nearly everywhere. The other Dr. Mason emerged in an apron that mimicked a Santa outfit over his dockers and neatly pressed button down shirt. "Charles, Katniss is here."

"The Mockingjay!" Charles exclaimed, hugging Katniss and giving her a big smile. He looked like Johanna. And as much as she hotly denied it, they were very similar. The last time she had visited he had convinced Katniss to sing in the forest and a very large chorus of mockingjays had sung back. He had been so tickled he had begun calling her Mockingjay, just like Johanna did. "My little girl." Katniss grinned as Charles hugged Johanna and lifted her off the ground, much to her chagrin. Though Katniss could tell Johanna was secretly pleased.

"Johanna have you heard back from the institute?" Katniss looked at Johanna, whose jaw clenched tightly as her father put her down. She had recently applied to NASA to join on one of their most recent endeavors in environmental protection out in California.

Johanna rolled her eyes again. "Wow, haven't even been in the house five minutes. That's like a new record. For the sixth time no. It will be a few weeks."

Her mother puckered her lips as her father took their bags and handed them off to one of Johanna's brothers. "Michael please take the girls' bags to Johanna's old room." She turned back to Johanna, who was hanging her coat in the closet. With her sleeves pushed up she had exposed the bandage over her tattoo and her mother seized her wrist. "Johanna. Another? How can you expect to find a proper job - with the American government no less - covered in these marks?"

Johanna wrenched her arm away. "If I don't get hired because of my tattoos then they are the ones making a mistake. Because I'm a brilliant scientist with or without them."

"Michelle, honey," Johanna's father began in a warning tone. "Why don't we let the girls get
settled in upstairs?" He looked over to them with a tight grin. "Your other brothers are on their way. Dinner will be another hour I think."

Johanna took Katniss by the hand and almost dragged her up the large wooden staircase to the second floor. They went down the hallway to the end where Johanna's room was, and her brother Michael was waiting out front. "What do you want?"

"Can't a guy just say hi to his sister?" Katniss didn't like Michael. Johanna's other brothers, Charlie Jr and Lucas, were both pretty pleasant but Michael was sort of lecherous. Almost like what Johanna would be if she wasn't also female and charming. "And her beautiful girlfriend?"

"Fiancée." Johanna gripped Katniss tighter and Katniss knew, she just knew what Johanna was thinking. "Where's your wife, Mikey? Still not getting any since you knocked her up?" Michael clenched his fists and Johanna pouted mockingly. "Luke told me."

He scoffed at her and pushed off the wall. He was handsome, with the strong Mason jaw and jet black hair. He had their mother's eyes, a deep green, and an athletic build. "I get plenty of pussy, Hanna."

Johanna snorted. "Sure ya do, kid." She tilted her head to the side. "Your plate has been full of my sloppy seconds since middle school. Including your wife."

Michael chuckled and looked at Katniss. "You know what that means right? You and me in a couple of months when Johanna does her typical 'I'm afraid of commitment' routine."

Katniss wanted to intervene but Johanna was too quick. Within a blink of an eye she had slapped him and pressed her forearm against his neck, pinning him to the wall. A young Mason family portrait shuddered against the plaster. "I don't care if your wife's pregnant I will rip your throat out."

"Go to hell."

"You first." Johanna went inside her room and slammed the door behind her and Katniss. She turned to Katniss, scowl on her features. "I'm sorry about his entire fucking existence. I clearly didn't kick his ass enough when we were kids."

Katniss smirked and shrugged her shoulders. "He doesn't bother me." She giggled as Johanna threw another narrowed glance at the closed door. "Jo," she called softly as Johanna turned her head back. Katniss leaned down and placed a gentle kiss on her lips, then one on her forehead. "It's okay. I'm happy to be here with you."

Johanna squinted. "Even though you're secretly still mad at me?" Johanna clasped her hands around the back of Katniss's waist. It was a little thrilling for Katniss to have some power over Johanna. She usually didn't hold the upper hand in most situations but there was one place in which Johanna could be reduced: In the bedroom.

"I'm not mad, first of all." Katniss traced her fingers along the neckline of Johanna's shirt. "Disappointed. And your punishment for that is coming. In time." Her eyes, hooded with desire, flicked up to Johanna. "Tis the season though right baby?"

Johanna gulped and nodded. "Yes."

"So I will be jolly. I'll be Father fucking Christmas." She dragged her fingertips down the length of Johanna's arms and laced their fingers together. With two steps she backed them against the door and leaned her lips against Johanna's ear. "But you will be in a lot of trouble later, baby girl."
She felt Johanna shiver and pulled back to grin, dodging Johanna's attempt at a kiss. Her fiancée pouted and then took the pouted bottom lip into her mouth. "What kind of trouble?"

"You'll see."

If Johanna was like her father, she was identical to her grandmother. It was like looking into the future, Katniss thought amusedly. "Grammie!" Johanna exclaimed as she embraced the elder version of herself. Katniss smiled politely as the woman pulled back to inspect Johanna. The dinner was insanely formal, at Johanna's mother's request, so Johanna was in a deep crimson button-down shirt with an emerald bow tie, tucked into black slacks and a slim black belt that were fit so snugly Katniss was sure she'd bust a button before the night was over. She had chosen a crimson dress that matched Johanna's shirt and relatively sensible heels.

"Well you're certainly too skinny still," she admonished. She looked right past Johanna to her mother. "Michelle, darling, why aren't you feeding this girl?" She looked over Johanna's shoulder at Katniss, who fidgeted nervously under her stare. Her grandmother carried a presence about her that demanded she be taken as the matriarch. Even Michelle, who was such a presence even Johanna seemed to cower a little, kowtowed to her. "And this must be the lovely Katniss Everdeen."

"Nice to meet you, Mrs. Mason," Katniss greeted timidly, but the woman took her in her arms, still wearing her fur coat, and hugged her tightly. She smelled like lavender and old lady perfume, but it was comforting and pleasant.

"Oh there's no need for such formalities, young lady. You can call me Johanna." She raised her eyebrow and looked back at Johanna. "Or perhaps that makes you uncomfortable, seeing as how your betrothed is my namesake granddaughter and I'm sure the name you call in her the bedroom is not one you want associated with me."

Johanna chuckled hard, nearly choking on the glass of wine her father had brought her. "O-oh. I, um, I call her Jo, usually." Katniss stammered, blushing deeply. "Not in the - I mean, um, everywhere." Another thing Johanna had in common with her grandmother: the ability to make her blush.

"All right then darling, Johanna it is." Johanna's father took her coat and hung it up behind them. She took Katniss's hand and inspected her ring, smiling fondly. "When my husband gave me this ring, you know what he said to me?" Katniss shook her head, staring down at the woman's wrinkled but moisturized and well-manicured fingers. "He said, 'Well, whattaya say, dollface?'" Katniss chuckled hard placing her hand on her mouth to prevent herself from laughing right in the woman's face. "I do hope my granddaughter was slightly more romantic than that."

Katniss nodded. "She was." Johanna came around Katniss's side and slid her arm around her waist. "She was perfect." Johanna placed a kiss on her temple and her grandmother grinned.

"I am certainly glad she stopped whoring around." Johanna's smile quickly dropped and a deep blush invaded her cheeks. "I mean my word, Johanna dear, it was like there was a revolving door on your bedroom in high school. Girls, boys, all coming in and out all times of the day and night."

"Grammie please," Johanna pleaded, nudging her grandmother on the shoulder.

"You're going to marry this girl, I'm sure she knows all about it. And I'm not trying to embarrass you; a healthy sex life is a wonderful thing. We didn't burn our bras in the seventies so you could stay a virgin until marriage." She took Johanna's hand and patted it. "I'm just glad you've settled down, sweetling. And with a beautiful young woman, no less."
"Thank you," Johanna replied, her voice still low and wary. Her grandmother nodded and took off toward the kitchen, grumbling something about how the food better be ready. Johanna placed her forehead on Katniss's shoulder and they both chuckled. "I'm ...so sorry about that."

"Don't be. She reminds me of you." Johanna kissed the side of Katniss's neck before pulling away and wrapping her other arm around her waist, holding her from the side. "She was ...refreshing."

"Good. Because I'm not that sorry, she's super awesome."

"Agreed." Katniss took Johanna's wine glass that she had placed behind them and took a deep sip, looking over at Johanna. "So how does your grandmother know about your 'revolving door'?

Johanna groaned and rolled her eyes, brushing some of her hair out of her face. "For about a year she and my grandfather lived here while I was in high school. They were having their house remodeled." Katniss raised an eyebrow. "Anyway, my bedroom is right against theirs and, well, some of my partners were..." Johanna's gaze dropped. "Loud."

"Is that right?" Katniss pecked Johanna close-mouthed on the lips and walked away from her and into their large great room where the rest of her family was. "Good to know."

Katniss had learned a few things that night. Johanna had, indeed, dated Michael's wife before they met. "More like hit it and quit it, but whatever," Johanna had clarified unnecessarily. Her grandmother was an absolute riot and her grandfather barely spoke. Her brothers were a little dry, but they were pleasant enough and had told Katniss a few entertaining anecdotes about Johanna as a little girl. It was interesting to hear Johanna's past get filled in by others, as opposed to Johanna's self-deprecating view. She had a tempestuous relationship with her parents, but the night had revealed that it was mostly her mother who created the tension. Her father was amiable if a bit dorky, but Katniss found him endearing.

And Johanna was quite a singer. Her youngest brother Lucas played the piano beautifully and Johanna sat on the edge, crooning along with whatever Christmas ditty he came up with. It was mesmerizing to watch her sing; her eyes were unfocused and far away, and her voice was high with a slight twang, but rich and beautiful. Her brothers could sing too, and joined in periodically. Having grown up with only Prim it was like an alien experience for Katniss to watch a large family group together like something out of a hot chocolate commercial. Even though Johanna disliked her siblings there was an undercurrent of care, of love, of annoyance but patience, that highlighted everything they did. Katniss felt swelled with pride to be at least marginally involved in the family.

They played a spirited and all-too-competitive game of Monopoly that ended with Johanna flipping the board and accusing her brothers of "insider trading" as she stalked off to fix herself another spiked egg nog. Johanna's mother explained that Christmas Monopoly was a tradition in their home, and that Johanna had lost almost every year she was present with the same result. It was adorable.

One by one the Masons by birth and Masons by marriage made their way to their bedrooms as they night came to a close. Michelle insisted no one was to drive home so everyone was forced to stay in for the night. She and Johanna had planned on staying for a long weekend anyway, but not with so much company. Katniss waved to Johanna's grandparents as they shut the door to their bedroom. She followed Johanna inside her room next door and sighed.

"Can't believe I fucking lost Monopoly again," Johanna muttered under her breath as she loosened her bow tie. Katniss kicked off her heels and padded across the room to her fiancée,
untangling the bow for her. She kissed Johanna softly, running just the tip of her tongue across her lips. Katniss tossed the bow tie on the dresser behind them and deepened her kiss, drawing a soft groan from Johanna.

"How about I make it up to you?" Katniss asked in a drawl as she pulled away, pleased at the way Johanna's eyes were still closed. Johanna raised a questioning eyebrow in response and Katniss slowly began undoing the buttons of her shirt. "You go in and take your shower," she directed with a nod toward Johanna's bathroom, "and I will be out here waiting for you."

Johanna's eyes lit up like a kid in a candy store and she quickly scampered into the bathroom. Katniss rolled her eyes at her fiancée's exuberance and began undressing. What she had planned was, well, something she had been planning for a few days. She didn't know Johanna was going to get a tattoo without her, and it had presented her with the perfect opportunity to get back at her. Johanna had dogged her for months, probably longer than that, to do what she was preparing to do. She didn't feel comfortable wielding an... instrument in a sexual manner, she thought as she pulled on the apparatus. It required a bit of finesse, a bit of confidence Katniss wasn't sure she had. But Johanna's insolence had ignited something inside her that she was aching to let out.

Johanna emerged from the shower in a small billow of steam and absolutely no clothing. Katniss openly gawked at her from beneath the blankets, biting her lower lip. She had seen Johanna naked plenty of times; probably hundreds due to Johanna's insatiable appetite and penchant for nudity, if she dared to count. Each time it made her stomach flip with arousal and her center tighten. She drank in the athletic build, her pale and creamy skin, the intricate beauty of her tattoos, the way her hair hung in wet tendrils around her face. She beckoned Johanna to the bed and the older girl slid beneath the blankets.

She immediately went to kiss her and Katniss placed a hand on her shoulder. "Nope." Johanna's eyebrows knitted together in adorable confusion. "I'm going to make it up to you, honey, but on my terms. Lay back." Johanna eyed her but followed her instructions, laying on her back. Katniss carefully straddled over her, leaning down to capture her lips in a deep kiss. Her tongue swirled around inside Johanna's mouth, and she placed her hands on either side of her face. Johanna's hands tangled in her hair and pulled her even closer. Katniss kissed along her jawline to her ear, then licked a long stripe down her neck. She grabbed Johanna's hands and pinned them aggressively on each side of her head. "Grip the pillow. And don't let go. And be quiet."

Johanna did as she was told and grabbed each side of her pillow. Katniss smiled approvingly and placed hot kisses down her clavicle, down to her pert breasts that were already straining to be touched. She obliged them with small sucks, eliciting short gasps from her lover. Lazily she traced her tongue across Johanna's sternum to her other breast, biting at her ribs with her front teeth. Her fingers dug into each of Johanna's flanks and dragged downward as her tongue moved in a straight line right passed her belly button. Johanna hissed but said nothing, jerking her pelvis up for some friction. Katniss placed small kisses just above her center, then slid her tongue directly downward to Johanna's freshly-shaven lips.

She moved her tongue slowly in and out of Johanna, clenching her thighs in her hands. While the task was enjoyable, she was mostly feeling anxious about what she was going to do. That was, however, until Johanna finally spoke up after several long, tormenting minutes of her going in agonizingly deliberate movements with her tongue. "Oh for fuck's sake, Katniss, just fuck me already."

Katniss raised an eyebrow and shifted upward. She positioned herself directly over Johanna and without any preamble thrust directly inside her. Johanna cried out a "Holy shit" and Katniss smirked. "Oh no no no," Katniss whispered, shaking her head as she hovered over Johanna. She stilled inside her and she could feel Johanna trembling beneath her and the power was both
intoxicating and arousing in equal measure. "Didn't I tell you to be quiet?" Johanna raised an eyebrow but her lips were shut. She nodded. "This is your punishment. I'm going to fuck you right here, ten feet from the bedroom of your adorable fucking grandparents. I'm going to make you want to scream. But you can't make a single. Fucking. Noise." Johanna's eyes rolled back in what Katniss assumed was pleasure, but what also looked like annoyance. For what seemed like sass, she thrust a little harder inside her. Johanna bit down hard on her lip, only the tiniest mewl escaping her lips.Katniss grinned. "Good girl."

Johanna whimpered and Katniss smothered her small sounds with a harsh kiss as she pulled out and slowly entered her again. She wasn't sure how long she was going to hold out between the hilt of the strap on hitting her center and the fact that she had full control over the whimpering, tormented mess beneath her. And what a beautiful mess she was, hair splayed on the pillow and her lip firmly between her teeth. Katniss decided to test Johanna's ability to listen with a stronger thrust, and Johanna bucked her hips and swore. "Fuck."

Katniss pulled out entirely, bracing her weight on her left hand and using her right hand to grasp Johanna's chin. "Oh baby, now what did I just say?" she asked condescendingly, tilting her head to the side. She placed her hand next to Johanna's head and dipped near her ear. "Shhhh. Every time you make a noise, I'm going to stop. I'm not going to let you come if you can't be good for me. Do you understand?" Johanna's eyes were a flame with defiance but she nodded her head. Katniss positioned herself at her entrance again and slowly moved inside her. Johanna's hips moved at a frantic pace to try and quicken Katniss but she steadfastly refused. Each time she pulled completely out and went back inside her as deeply as possible. Her hands moved down to Johanna's hips and she dug her nails into them and began directing the speed and movement of Johanna's body against her. She forced her down onto the strap-on aggressively several times in a row as fast as she could, and Johanna swore under her breath.

Katniss stopped, removing herself from inside her and Johanna whimpered in protest. Johanna opened her mouth to say something but quickly clamped it shut. Katniss nodded. "You can whisper."

Johanna's throat bobbed as she looked up at Katniss with wild, desire-filled brown eyes. "Please," she croaked out in a small whisper. "Please don't stop."

Katniss leaned down and kissed her softly. "You said the magic word, baby girl." She grabbed Johanna's hands that were tightly gripping the pillow and entwined their fingers, pinning her hands above her head as she moved inside her once again. She picked up her pace and while she couldn't feel it, she knew Johanna was close. Her breaths puffed out in short gasps, her thighs were trembling out of control. Katniss was beginning to have an ache in her abs that she knew she'd regret in the morning. But it was worth it to see Johanna completely at her mercy below her. Unexpectedly Katniss was rocked with her own orgasm, and her hips twitched arrhythmically against Johanna's. She clenched her teeth around the side of Johanna's neck as her body pulsed in a wave of climax.

Gathering any strength she had left she doubled her pace inside her lover, determined to make her come now as well. Suddenly Johanna's hips jerked up against her and her eyes rolled back in her head. She held on tighter to Johanna's hands, smothering her lips in wet kisses as she rode out her orgasm. Johanna's breathing slowly came back to normal but Katniss stayed inside her, moving ever so gently in the slick folds of her fiancée. Johanna made small noises in the back of her throat in pleasure, letting out a groan when Katniss completely pulled out. With a few awkward movements she undid the harness and pushed it over the edge of the bed, letting it tumble to the floor.

She collapsed next to Johanna, and the older girl immediately gathered her up in her arms and
entangled their limbs. For a few sweet moments they laid there together, with Katniss's ear against Johanna's chest, listening to her quickened heartbeat. Johanna placed a kiss on the crown of her head and smiled.

"Katniss Everdeen I am gonna wife you so hard." Katniss looked up at Johanna and laughed, getting another kiss on her forehead. Johanna's fingers stroked down her spine in calm movements that, despite her still pulsing libido, was making her sleepy. She was very glad Johanna was going to 'wife her so hard.' If being Johanna's wife was even half as good as being her fiancée, then she would be content for the rest of her life.

It was totally worth the coffee addiction she could never quite shake.

Chapter End Notes

A Christmas gift to all! :)

"I am not serving that awful toilet water at my wedding."

Katniss heaved an exasperated sigh. "As I've said thirty times before, Jo, it's tea. It gets served with coffee. Tea and coffee."

Effie Trinket, their effervescent wedding planner, perched on the arm of the couch behind Johanna. "It will be expected, Johanna. Tea and cake!" As if that was the most obvious thing in the world. Katniss rolled her eyes but, as usual, she was in agreement with Effie and Johanna was being needlessly stubborn.

Johanna shrugged her shoulders, digging a spoon into her pint of ice cream. She dangled the spoon from her lips as she spoke. "I don't really give a fuck what they expect. It's my wedding and people can drink coffee with their cake or they can suck my balls."

"Charming," Effie derided with a roll of her eyes.

"Indeed," Katniss mused, stealing Johanna's spoon from her mouth and taking a bite of the ice cream for herself. Johanna pouted at her but Katniss continued to carve out some of the dessert.

"And it's our wedding, bridezilla." The older girl's lips contorted into an offended little circle and Katniss grinned at her cheekily. "Oh come on. You have been an absolute nightmare about the wedding since the day we started planning it."

"Oh this behavior is not just for my benefit?" Effie asked rhetorically, using her long, painted nails to primp her hair.

"I have not!" Johanna protested and placed her hands on her hips. Their apartment was littered with wedding plans - color schemes, seating charts, RSVPs, a tower of envelopes Johanna stacked into the shape of a house - and Johanna had argued over every detail. They'd hired Effie to be their wedding planner, and she had an immense talent for scheduling and almost zero patience for Johanna's stubborn theatrics. There were few people on the planet equipped to deal with Johanna when she was focused on a task. Katniss was proud to be among the few. Effie had come to drop off the seating charts for their approval and somehow they'd gotten on the subject of the menu. Again.

Katniss crawled over the couch cushions and rested her palms on Johanna's thighs, placing gentle kisses on her neck to mollify her. "But you're my little bridezilla," she crooned into her ear, surreptitiously giving her earlobe a small lick. Johanna shuddered at her touch and dug her fingers into the flesh of Katniss's hips. She launched them forward and pinned Katniss on her back, startling the younger girl and making her bite her lip to quell a groan. Katniss looked up at Johanna's big brown eyes, squinting in challenge. "What, don't want anyone to know that big bad Johanna Mason is a little cutie who wants everything for her wedding to be just so?" Johanna abruptly leaned down and gripped her teeth around Katniss's shoulder. Katniss gasped and her hips rolled against Johanna's pelvis involuntarily. "That she's more her mother's daughter than she'll ever admit?" she managed to squeak out in a strangled falsetto.

Johanna pulled backward to level her eyes at Katniss. One eyebrow slowly raised in question and her eyes were absolutely on fire. "You are treading on thin ice, Everdeen." Katniss shivered at the tone of her voice.
Katniss grinned up at her and looped her arms around Johanna's neck. "Is that what I'm going to call you once we're married?" They hadn't touched on the subject of last names much, but Johanna's desire was to take Katniss's since, as she put it, 'Never felt much like a Mason.' Katniss didn't mind. There was something alluring about the traditional concept of ownership that came with having Johanna take her last name. Johanna would be hers in all ways, including legally. Johanna Everdeen. Katniss smiled inwardly.

"No," Johanna replied, squishing one knee between Katniss and the couch, and the other on the edge of the cushion. She pulled Katniss upward to meet her and wrapped her arms around her middle. "You'll call me the luckiest person on the planet."

Elsewhere in the room there was a groan and Katniss looked over to her right, a blush spreading on her cheeks. Cressida had her hand on her forehead and a grimace on her face. "You guys are actually disgusting," Cressida announced, motioning for her cameraman and assistant Messalla to stop rolling. "Can you ever get in an argument without resorting to fucking or saying something so saccharine I nearly barf?"

Johanna shrugged her shoulders. "You're the one that wanted to shoot this documentary. It's not my fault my future wife is the hottest thing walking the planet." Katniss slid out from underneath Johanna and padded to their kitchen to put away the ice cream. "And that ass just won't quit," she enunciated, practically moaning. Katniss shot her a look over her shoulder, but her smile was wide.

Cressida, a filmmaker in her time not managing Plutarch's coffee shop back at the university, had approached them before they started planning their wedding to ask if she could film the process. The natural exhibitionist in Johanna agreed immediately, but Katniss was less sure. Their relationship was not something she wanted to project to the world. Not because it wasn't good, because it was amazing, but because it was private. Cressida convinced them it was important to show the world the realities of a lesbian couple preparing for a wedding. Katniss couldn't argue that. She had read horror stories online of people who couldn't find vendors due to homophobia, families who didn't show up for the ceremony, and other discriminatory tales.

So far the process had been painless. While Johanna was oddly petulant about random issues of their wedding, it caused no problems for them. They rarely fought to begin with - their fights were petty and short, hot and quick like a drop of oil in a pan - and this didn't add much extra stress, other than the disorganization of their apartment and running interference between Effie and Johanna.

"Katniss's ass aside," Cressida began, "do you have any plans today?"

Katniss nodded her head as she walked back into the room. Messalla made himself comfortable on their armchair and looked over the footage on his hand-held video camera. Katniss decided to like Messalla after meeting him, even though Johanna mentioned they used to sleep together, back during college when Cressida would throw parties at her apartment. He was a nice guy, though, and very respectful. Similar to Johanna in that his appearance - tattoos, piercings - gives people the impression that he's some sort of deviant. Instead, Johanna's a brilliant scientist and Messalla's a soft-spoken cameraman. Poster children for not judging a book by its cover. Cressida was poised on the arm of the chair, legs crossed, eyeing the footage over his shoulder. Cressida and Johanna's friendship continued even after they moved away, and Johanna had chosen the blonde as her maid of honor. It was easier than choosing one of her three brothers to be a best man.

"They are going to meet the Beaufort Park people to see if they can have the wedding and reception there," Effie chirped from the side of the couch, looking down at her phone that seemed to hold all the information on their wedding inside of it. The blonde was almost never without it.
Beaufort Park was a beautiful public park with rolling hills, a placid lake and tall thickets of trees that backed the property. It was one of their favorite places to go near their apartment and seemed the most perfect, picturesque place to hold a wedding. Johanna steadfastly refused to go near a church and insisted their non-denominational wedding be outdoors. Katniss didn't care; she would've married Johanna in the back of an apple cart.

"And tomorrow we're going to the bakery to get them to do our cake," Johanna filled in, stretching languidly on the couch.

Effie frowned sourly. "That was not on the schedule. Did you make an appointment without me?"

"Sorry, Mom," Johanna replied with an eye roll. "Katniss's old pal from home, Peeta Mellark, runs a bakery in her hometown. He said he would give us a great deal." She leveled her gaze at Katniss. "He's very fond of you. 'Oh for Katniss Everdeen? Why shucks!?'" Johanna mocked in an absurdly high tone. She scowled in distaste.

Katniss grinned and folded her knee to sit next to Johanna's outstretched legs. For someone so tiny Johanna insisted on taking up a lot of space. "You can't possibly be jealous of Peeta Mellark. We were kids," Johanna looked unimpressed. "And he's married now, Jo."

"Doesn't mean I don't need to protect my interests," she responded, lifting up her arms in a stretch. Katniss bit her lip as she watched Johanna's shirt ride up and reveal her stomach and the little 'v' shape of her pelvis. Johanna caught her eye and gave her an exaggerated wink.

Cressida rolled her eyes. "Cut it out for like five seconds, please. I'd like to keep my lunch down." Messalla smirked and shook his head. Cressida shot him a glare. "You know they're gross, you only tolerate it because you're hoping Katniss will agree to a threesome."

Effie placed her hand over her heart. "Oh my."

"Not gonna happen," Katniss immediately interjected.

"I don't play well with others," Johanna said disinterestedly. "And you'd never be able to keep up with this one," she added, jerking her thumb toward Katniss. "She's got stamina you wouldn't believe. Like a fucking stevedore in the sack." Katniss smacked Johanna's leg, her cheeks burning hard. "What?" It was a point of pride for Katniss that she could exhaust Johanna sexually, but it wasn't something she wanted everyone to know. Or anyone, for that matter.

"Oh my!" Effie gasped under her breath.

Messalla rolled his eyes as he looked between all the women. "I never said that," he protested with an indignant pout. "I'm all set if you guys want to roll to the park."

Effie cleared her throat and stood from her position next to Johanna, smoothing out her frilly turquoise skirt. "Very well. I expect an e-mail about the cake as soon as you have the information. Perhaps I'll stop by there today." She focused her blue-green eyes at Johanna. "Send me the name and address, please, Johanna?"

"Sure thing, ET." Effie bristled at the nickname and flitted out of their apartment, her heels clicking down the hallway.

Katniss held out her hand and helped Johanna up off the couch. In one swift movement Johanna put her arm around Katniss's back and dipped her, giving her a deep kiss. Cressida groaned from behind them and swiftly walked out of their apartment, tossing her hands in the air. "I am so fucking done with you nerds."
Cressida mounted a camera on the passenger side dashboard of Johanna's car in addition to the one Messalla was carrying in his hand. They sat in the backseat as Johanna drove them all to the park. Cressida leaned forward, placing a hand on the back of Katniss's seat. "So even though I know the story, tell the viewers how you met."

"What viewers?" Johanna demanded, narrowing her eyes at Cressida in the rear-view mirror. "No one's gonna watch this except maybe our parents."

The blonde groaned. "Shut up, Jo." She smiled and looked at Katniss. "Why don't you tell us, since I already know Jo's side of the story?"

Katniss glanced back at Cressida, an evil grin on her features. "I don't think I've ever heard Johanna's side of the story, you know," Katniss began, firmly planting her tongue between her teeth and her lips. She looked at Johanna, who was staring straight ahead at the road with her fingers wrapped tightly around the steering wheel.

"That's because she'd never have the balls to admit how into you she was," Cressida responded, sitting back in her seat with smug satisfaction. Katniss understood Cressida was essentially daring her to disclose. Johanna never backed down from a dare.

Katniss knew Johanna liked her before they became anything official, Cressida had basically told her the time she came to pick up tea when Jo was sick. But they never discussed what was going through Johanna's mind when Katniss came to the coffee shop almost every day. Johanna heaved a deep sigh and pulled into the gravel parking lot of the large park, cutting the engine. "There's nothing to admit. I liked Katniss, obviously, otherwise I wouldn't have asked her out, asked her to be my girlfriend, asked her to be my wife, and we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Briskly Johanna unbuckled her seat belt and got out of the car, slamming the door behind her. Katniss and Cressida shared a puzzled look and followed behind. Messalla held the camera on Katniss as they strolled toward the parks building. "Go ahead, Katniss, tell us the story."

Katniss cleared her throat, running her fingers through her hair. "Um, well, I went into the coffee shop near our university to meet my friend Gale." She looked down at her feet while they walked, a wistful smile upon her face. "I had never been there before. I wasn't into coffee then." They crossed the field toward the main building and Katniss looked out on the lake. She gazed at Johanna, a few paces ahead of them. "Johanna was working and I saw her and I just... I've never been so attracted to someone so fast. It was like being hit by a truck."

Johanna slowed her trot and Katniss caught up with her, taking her by the hand. Johanna leaned up and kissed her on the cheek. "Same."

Katniss blushed. "I didn't think you were into me. I guess I thought you thought maybe I was cute, but I couldn't even say anything. Remember when I said I would 'do myself'?" Katniss cringed at the memory. That was not one of her finer moments. None of her attempts to woo Johanna were particularly fine. By some stroke of insane luck it worked.

Johanna laughed softly and nodded. "You have no idea, the effect you can have," she whispered, looking away from the group. The breeze was lifting her hair, which now fell below her shoulders and waved in the wind. Katniss ran her thumb along Johanna's knuckles as they walked together. The younger girl couldn't help the fluttering of her heart in her chest; she wasn't sure she'd ever get used to Johanna being hers.

Figuring Johanna wasn't going to explain further, Katniss looked back toward the camera. "I went there almost every day for weeks," she admitted. "Sometime before Christmas at some frat mixer,
"I ran into Johanna-"

"More like stalked me," Johanna interjected with a grin. "And it was December 8th."

Katniss nudged her. "Gale told me you would be there. Not my fault you were there drinking and -" Katniss cut herself off and brought her gray eyes up to Johanna's. "You remember the date?"

"Of our first kiss? Yeah. That was a week after I quit smoking, to the day." The large slate building that held the Parks Department for the town came up in front of them with two large columns framing the wooden double doors. "Traded one addiction for another."

Katniss let out a dramatic gasp. "You liked me," she sang to her, kissing her on the cheek. "You wanted to kiss me." Johanna snarled quietly at her as they entered the wood-paneled office building. Cressida and Messalla trailed silently until they got to the door of the office.

Behind the desk was a short, olive-complected woman with black hair that tapered into red at the ends. She looked up with wide honey brown eyes as the four of them entered the room, Messalla with his video camera in hand. "Can I help you?" she asked cordially, then she narrowed her eyes at Johanna, and a smile curled on her lips as her eyes lit up in recognition. "Mason?"

Johanna's grip on Katniss's hand tightened. "Kathryn." She wasn't sure whether or not to attribute it to jealousy, but Katniss didn't like the look on the other girl's face. Living near the Everdeen's house, it was rare that they ran into someone Johanna knew. They lived seven hours downstate from Johanna's parents, three from the university. Katniss was glad to never run into more of Johanna's trail of conquests. Until now, it seemed. "I didn't know you worked for the Parks Department."

"I started a few years ago," she explained in a voice that sounded put on, low and sultry. It grated on Katniss's nerves and she found herself clenching Johanna's hand even harder. "I'm actually running the region at the moment."

"That's impressive," Johanna remarked. "No Physics?"

Kathryn chuckled and shook her head. "Not exactly. I can use some of that knowledge here, but not as much as I'd like." She looked up at Johanna through hooded lids. "Are you still doing it?"

Johanna nodded. "I majored in it," she said sheepishly. "And I consult for NASA now. We're moving out to California next year and I'll be working there full time."

"Now that's impressive, Mason. I had no idea you'd continue Physics. You were so very good at it, though. Must've been all that extra credit." She winked at Johanna and Katniss felt Johanna's hand even harder. "I'm actually running the region at the moment."

"That's impressive," Johanna remarked. "No Physics?"

"You're damn right she looks great, Katniss thought to herself. She's also mine." Thanks," Johanna replied, scratching the back of her neck with her free hand. "So do you." No she doesn't, Katniss mused internally. She looks like a teenager with a bad dye job. She didn't, though. Sourly and silently, Katniss acknowledged that this woman was gorgeous. It didn't take a scientist to determine how she and Johanna knew each other. "Ah, so listen, we um, we need to... I mean, we were wondering how we'd go about reserving an area of the park on a certain date."

The woman's eyes scrutinized Johanna and Katniss could feel Johanna's palm getting clammy. "For what kind of event?"

"A wedding," Katniss interjected forcefully. "Ours," she emphasized, relinquishing Johanna's death grip on her hand in favor of sliding her arm around her waist. Kathryn raised an bemused
"You're getting married?" Kathryn balked, moving her eyes to Johanna. Katniss could tell the woman was biting back a laugh and she had to stop herself from growling out loud. "I never thought I'd see the day. Johanna Mason getting married." The dark-haired woman tapped a pencil against her desk, tugging on her bottom lip with her teeth. Her makeup was similar to Johanna's - dark eyeliner, crimson lips, smoky eyeshadow. She looked significantly older than Johanna, however. "You always were a romantic." She directed her gaze to Katniss, who met it with a heated glare. "And this is your fiancée. Aren't you adorable?" Katniss clenched her jaw. "A little young for you, Mason."

Expecting Johanna to defend her, Katniss stayed silent. Unfortunately, Johanna didn't even try. "Look 'Ryn, I just need to know if there's a form we have to sign or - or something like that." Katniss eyed Johanna curiously out of her peripheral vision and realized, shockingly, Johanna was nervous. Johanna was never nervous.

This woman was enjoying lording some power over Johanna and bit the inside of her cheek coyly. "The Parks Department doesn't reserve areas," she explained. "You can feel free to set up whatever you need to, as long as other people have reasonable access to the park. No giant displays, no blocking off areas. You can set up tents and chairs, all that. Is it going to be a big event?" Kathryn paused. "Are your brothers married yet? And you've got those cousins from Canada, I'm sure Michelle's invited every Mason on the planet. That woman does love pomp and circumstance."

Katniss felt Johanna's entire body go rigid like a statue. How in the hell did this woman know so much about Johanna? Putting aside her hurt and confusion, Katniss rolled her eyes and placed her palm on the desk. "Is that relevant?" she asked hotly, raising an eyebrow at the woman.

Kathryn snorted and leveled her gaze at Katniss. "Just making conversation, fiancée." She drew out the moniker like an insult and Katniss took it as one.

"Katniss," she stated, holding out her hand. "Katniss Everdeen."

The woman took her hand and shook it firmly. "Kathryn Price."

Katniss put on her best facade of indifference. "I take it we don't need any permission from the town or the state, that's what you're saying? Because, as I'm sure you realize, this is not the only thing we need to do in preparation for our wedding. I wouldn't want to waste your time. Or ours."

Katniss kept her face impassive as Kathryn sized her up, then her pretty crimson lips split into a smirk. "It's not a problem, Miss Everdeen. No, you do not need permission. And since it's for 'Hanna, I will personally make sure the area is clear for you. What part of the park do you need?"

_Hanna?_ Katniss pressed the soles of her feet into the ground to prevent herself from leaping over the counter and strangling this woman. "Right near the lake. And enough room for about three tents. We have around 100, maybe 150 guests." Johanna's mother insisted they invite just about every single member of the Mason family; Kathryn's observation had been correct. Katniss's own contribution to the wedding guest list was small.

Kathryn smiled sweetly at her. "Shouldn't be a problem. When's the date?"

"October 2nd." Finally Johanna broke from the wide-eyed shock she was in and looked to Katniss, a smile waverong on her lips. The date seemed trivial, but Johanna was insistent on that being the day they get married. Katniss was unsure of why but since it seemed important to Johanna, she agreed.
"Wonderful. I'll leave a note in the system to make sure they don't give you any problems." Her eyes went back to Johanna and she seemed to be gazing straight through her. Katniss had never seen Johanna look so thoroughly opaque. Kathryn scribbled something on a post-it note and handed it over the desk to her. "We should have lunch sometime, Mason. Catch up."

"Uh, sure," Johanna agreed reluctantly, taking the slip of paper and shoving it in her pocket. "Thanks for your help. It was uh, it was nice seeing you."

"That vice is plenty versa." She winked at Johanna and Katniss turned around, practically pulling Johanna out of the office. Cressida frowned as they passed by, but Messalla kept filming them. Katniss stormed down the hallway and back outside, arms rigidly at her sides. Johanna jogged lightly to catch up with her and took one of her hands to spin her around.

"Whoa, slow down. What the hell is your problem?"

"My problem?" Katniss asked, wrenching her hand away from Johanna's grip. She pointed over her back. "Who the hell was that, 'Hanna'? How did some random fucking slut behind a desk know all about your family? I didn't even know you had cousins in Canada!"

Johanna huffed and crossed her arms over her chest. "First of all, you shouldn't call her a slut. That's a misogynist term and you know I don't like it." Katniss rolled her eyes. "Second of all, that was Kathryn. She ...she and I..." Johanna stuttered and it only managed to make Katniss even angrier. She clenched her fists at her sides. "We dated. For a while. Back when I was in high school."

"What?" Katniss screeched, bewildered. "How did you even meet? Ew, was she your babysitter? Please tell me you didn't fuck your babysitter."

"I was taking an accelerated Physics class my freshman year. She was in that class." Katniss mirrored Johanna's crossed arms and waited for the shoe to drop. There was no way this woman was in high school with Johanna. Johanna sighed and relented. "She was a substitute teacher for my class because the regular teacher left on maternity leave." Johanna rubbed the back of her neck and lowered her gaze to the ground. "I really don't want to talk about it." When she raised her eyes to meet Katniss's, the younger girl saw the torment in them. It almost made her release her anger. Almost.

"No, fuck you." Johanna's eyes widened in surprise. "We are getting married and you keep this from me? You never told me you had a serious girlfriend before, never mind one who is almost twice your fucking age."

"I said I don't want to talk about it," Johanna seethed at Katniss through gritted teeth. Katniss felt the anger in Johanna's eyes and, though in a depraved way it turned her on, she couldn't let this go. It was one thing to know that Johanna had slept with a bunch of people before her, but to know she had loved someone else was a different issue entirely. "Just fucking drop it. Please."

"Why? We've always been honest with one another. Why is this different? Why is she different?"

"It just is!"

"I don't accept that," Katniss clipped in a voice that felt entirely unlike her own. Katniss stepped forward, prodding her fingers into Johanna's ribcage. "You know everything about me. I've never loved anyone else. And I know I don't have the storied sexual history you do, but-"

"Is that what this is about? You want a fuck history?" Johanna grilled, firmly standing her ground. "Go ahead! Sow your wild oats, Katniss. Even out the score." While Johanna tried to keep the
malice in her tone, Katniss could hear the hurt that strained her vocal chords. A small shiver of fear shook her as Johanna leaned in close. "I didn't keep this from you because I don't love you. I kept it to myself because it's really fucking painful. And if you don't trust me enough to respect my judgment? Then... I don't know."

Johanna exhaled and turned around, taking a few steps away from her. Katniss gazed at the back of Johanna's head, backlit by the sun that was beginning to set, the breeze still moving her dark, wild hair. She was insufferably beautiful. Katniss's instinct was to go to Johanna, comfort her, but she couldn't. Her deep-seated misgivings made her immobile. Johanna whirled around and rummaged in her pocket, tossing her keys to Katniss. "Drive them home. I can't be around you right now."

Through her anger, Katniss felt the immediate pangs of guilt and sadness. It was one thing to see an angry Johanna, she had seen that on multiple occasions. But a sad, defeated Johanna? Rarely, if ever. And never was that disappointment aimed at her. "I - what? Where are you going?"

"For a walk."

Katniss swallowed. "Are you going to see her?" There was no use in trying to deny the hurt in her voice. Kathryn managed to drudge up the one lingering insecurity Katniss had about her relationship: that she wasn't enough for Johanna. "I don't mean right now," Katniss clarified off the look on Johanna's face, "I mean... ever?"

"No," Johanna replied slowly. "Maybe." Katniss's throat tightened. "I don't know. That's not the fucking point. The point is you don't respect me."

"Yes I do!" Katniss protested, feeling the creep of desperation swell up inside her. "I do respect you. I just don't know why you'd hide something from me. You know I'd never judge you."

"It's my secret to hide! Mine!" Johanna blurted out, running her fingers through her hair in frustration. "You think because we're getting married you're entitled to know everything about me?" She clenched her fist and pointed her finger at Katniss. "That's bullshit. Marriage is about partnership, not ownership. Fuck you for trying to use our engagement as leverage to get information about me. And double fuck you for not trusting me. So what if I go see her? She's someone who was important to me in my past. I get to keep my past, you know."

"I never said I didn't trust you," Katniss replied weakly.

Johanna raised an eyebrow. "Oh no? So all this jealousy about a woman I loved is not because you think I'm gonna fuck her?"

Katniss winced at Johanna's words, at both the tone and the truthfulness of them. Did she really think Johanna would cheat on her? No, not if she was honest with herself. "I trust you."

"It sure as shit doesn't feel like it."

Katniss bit her lower lip, blinking a few times to stop the tears she could feel pooling in her eyes. "Well I'm sorry for thinking that my girlfriend would want to tell me things about her life. Excuse me for thinking I had earned your trust. I guess I was wrong."

"I do trust you," Johanna insisted, her voice softer. "But marrying me does not mean you get to own all of my past. It means you're a fixture of my future."

Johanna stood still for a few beats and Katniss turned her eyes to the grass. "Will I see you at home?"
"I don't know," Johanna answered. As Katniss looked up she saw the walls go up in Johanna's eyes like she hadn't seen since before they started dating. Her voice turned ice cold. "Don't wait up."

Katniss turned to Cressida and Messalla, a flush of embarrassment reddening her cheeks, as well as wetness in her eyes. Messalla's camera was down at his side and his eyes were on the ground. She didn't know when they stopped filming but she couldn't quite stand the pity in their eyes.

The blonde woman approached Katniss and threw her arm over her shoulder. "I'll go after her. Help straighten this out. That's what maids of honor do, yeah? Chase after brides? C'mon Messy." Messalla shot Katniss a sympathetic look and began walking briskly in the direction Johanna had gone.

She looked after them but Johanna had disappeared into the distance already. In all their years together, Johanna had never walked away from her. Johanna was confrontational and if they had issues, they always faced them together. Normally if something upset her, she'd call Johanna and they'd talk it out. But without Johanna to talk to she had to hold all her sadness inside her and make the lonely trip back to their apartment.

She couldn't go back there. It would be too depressing to be there alone. Katniss walked slowly back toward the car, dragging her feet through the grass. How had this day turned on itself so fast? One moment she was blissfully remembering the day she met the love of her life, the next she was watching her walk away.

Once she tucked herself into the driver's seat she took out her cell phone, staring at the picture that was her lock screen. A selfie of herself and Johanna at the Marie Curie Museum in Paris stared back at her. She smiled fondly at the picture as she ran her thumb across the screen. Of all the wonderful historical and aesthetically beautiful places in Paris, Johanna had been childishly ecstatic about seeing the Marie Curie Museum. The look on her face in that photo was pure, genuine happiness. Something that's rare among anyone, and especially rare for Johanna.

She unlocked the phone and pulled up Madge's number, swallowing down the lump in her throat. After a few rings her best friend's bubbly voice came through the line. "Katniss! What's up, girl?"

"I fucked up," Katniss croaked, a short sob coming from her lips. "I fucked up and Jo's really mad at me."

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Madge expelled a sigh into the receiver. "Want to come by my place?"

"Do you have alcohol?"

Madge snorted. "Girl you know I've got the hookups. We'll pick a poison and go over just how badly you fucked up." Madge paused on the other line. "How bad did you fuck up? Beer fucked up? Vodka cranberry juice fucked up? Or wine straight from the bottle until we puke fucked up?"

"I don't know. I'll let you decide. I'll be there in a few. Bye."

"Bye Kat."

Katniss turned the engine over and took off toward Madge's place. Like Katniss, Madge moved back near home after graduation. She began work at the local hospital as an on-staff psychiatrist, a perfect occupation for a girl that loved to listen to other people's problems.

Katniss arrived a few minutes later and let herself into Madge's small home. The blonde girl was waiting for her in the kitchen, two glasses of white wine poured into oversized coffee mugs. Katniss let out a short laugh at the pathetic sight, but her laughter quickly devolved into sobbing
and Madge collected her into a hug.

"Let it out. Mama Madge is here." Katniss chuckled in spite of her tears and held tightly to her friend. She buried her nose in Madge's wispy blonde tresses. Madge ran a hand soothingly up and down Katniss's shuddering back, as if to absorb her friend's anguish as her own. Katniss pulled away, wiping her face with the back of her hand. Madge eyed her sympathetically. "Oh, honey. Sit down."

Katniss nodded and slumped down in Madge's kitchen chair. A few photos of them were stuck to the fridge with magnets, along with photos of Madge and her family. Katniss sucked in a trembling breath and looked at the wide, inviting blue eyes of her best friend. "We ran into someone from Johanna's past when we were booking the park for the wedding."

"Someone important?"

"An ex," Katniss replied miserably. "Like, The Big One. She never told me about her."

"Really?" Madge questioned, genuine surprise in her eyes. She took her time in digesting that information, then placed her hand on Katniss's own. "It went badly, I presume?"

Katniss released her held breath and took a long sip of Madge's proffered wine. "Yes," she confirmed glumly. "She was ridiculously flirtatious with Johanna, who was totally shocked. I mean, she was nervous. Johanna. Johanna Mason. Nervous at some ex she hasn't seen in years."

"I imagine it was shocking for her. Did their relationship end badly?"

Katniss shrugged. "I have no idea. I asked her who it was and she refused to talk to me about. Just said it was some substitute teacher she fucked in high school."

Madge nearly spit her wine back into her cup. "Hold on. What? A sub in her school? How old was Johanna?" Madge quickly shook her head. "Never mind, it doesn't matter. That's against the law." Katniss scrunched her face and Madge raised an eyebrow. "Did that not occur to you once she said that?"

"No," Katniss admitted. "I was too busy turning green."

"Johanna couldn't have been old enough to consent. When did they start seeing each other?"

Slowly, Katniss began to come to the conclusion Madge was getting at. "Freshman year," she said, revealing it to both of them. Madge's bright blue eyes widened. "Oh my god. Johanna was only like 14." The jealousy and sadness that had been simmering inside her chest began to boil over into anger. "How could this woman do that to her?"

"I don't know but at least you know part of the reason she was hiding it from you." Madge sighed and took another gulp of her wine. "You two need to straighten this out. I know Johanna is moody but she also doesn't sit and let things fester."

"She doesn't want to talk to me," Katniss lamented, drawing a small circle on the table with her fingertip. "She said she didn't want to be around me." Katniss gulped. "She kept saying how I don't get to own her. That her past is her own. That just because we're getting married, doesn't mean I'm entitled to know everything about her."

Madge leaned back in her chair. "Okay, then, we'll wait it out. This is not the first Hurricane Johanna that's blown through these parts." She smiled knowingly and shrugged her shoulders. "All couples fight, at least a little. Considering how stubborn you both can be, I'm surprised that this is the first big one." Katniss gave her a droll look. "I'm serious! Johanna's a hothead but you
are just as stubborn sometimes. She's right that you don't get to own her, but it sounds to me like that little speech is more about her being nervous about the wedding."

"About the wedding, why?"

Madge shrugged. "I don't know, jitters I guess. Marriage can seem daunting to people. I mean Johanna turned into a mega-bitch right before you started dating, she was so offended by the concept of monogamy or commitment."

"If she was afraid of commitment, why ask me to marry her?"

"You're so oblivious," Madge commented, shaking her head. Katniss stayed silent. "Because she loves you, dummy. People do lots of things they're scared of for love, including marriage. Johanna probably feels nervous, but she doesn't want you to think she doesn't wanna get married, so this rather shocking reunion with her ex brought up all her old feelings of insecurity and fear."

Katniss nodded and tipped her mug back, swallowing the rest of the wine. Madge immediately refilled her cup from the wine on the table. "What if she doesn't call me?"

Madge placed her hand on Katniss's. "Katniss, she'll call. Or you'll call her. Maybe you spend the night here and you talk it over in the morning but..." Madge stopped herself short and heaved a sigh. "I was waiting for the wedding to make this speech but you need it now." She took Katniss's hand in both of hers, squeezing it. "I've never seen two people so made for each other. And not just in that destined, sickeningly romantic kind of way. In the way that you're both ...putty around each other." Katniss raised her eyebrow. "Let me finish, skeptic. Geez. One of the main problems in relationships is rigidity. People fall in love with someone and when they start to flex out of the person they were, their partner cannot change. Same thing happens when people fall in love with an idealized version of their partner, which happens a lot."

"This was gonna be your speech?" Katniss asked.

"Hush." Katniss obliged and pretended to zip her mouth shut with her free hand. "Thank you. You and Jo, you're not like that. You've both changed over the years, because of each other's influence and because that's how life is, but you allow that change in each other. You encourage it. I look at you two and I see two people who would do anything for the other person, including change a little bit. You don't sacrifice who you are, but you form to each other like putty."

"We're putty," Katniss stated. "Good putty."

"The best kind of putty." Madge smiled. "So she'll call. And you'll talk it out. And you'll apologize for being a big jealous asshole, and she'll apologize for taking out her massive insecurity on you. And, knowing you guys, you'll go lock yourselves in a bedroom somewhere and not return my calls."

Katniss chuckled and leaned her head down, placing her cheek on their clasped hands. "But we'll be putty again?"

"Yeah brainless," Madge replied, nudging Katniss.

"Hey, that's our word," Katniss protested. "Her word, at least. For me."

Madge smirked. "Yeah, I know, and sometimes it's fitting."

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Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who is still reading this story! There will be a part 2...

Thanks to Johanna-Motivational-Insults for her beta and for consistently understanding my Buffy references.
When Katniss got back to her apartment there was a familiar looking redhead outside smoking a cigarette, gazing out into the street. They caught eyes and the girl managed a smile and turned to face her. Katniss approached her warily. The girl recognized her uneasiness and held up her hands in a gesture of surrender. "I come in peace. Jo asked me to bring over some of my playlist ideas for the wedding. My brother is your DJ."

"Oh." Katniss fiddled with her keys in her hand. "Jo isn't here."

Emerson tossed her cigarette on the sidewalk and stubbed it out with her foot. She eyed Katniss up and down, narrowing a set of green eyes at her. "You don't look so great. Is something wrong?" She laughed a little, awkwardly. "To be honest, seeing you without Jo is strange, so I know something's up."

Katniss really didn't want to confide in one of Johanna's many ex-lovers, especially since Emerson had been particularly rude to her. But she was emotionally exhausted and unable to censor herself. "It's fine. We went to Beaufort Park to see if we could hold the wedding there. Ran into someone from Jo's past I've never heard of."

Emerson smirked. "Kathryn?"

Katniss blinked a few times. "How - how did you know that?"

Emerson cackled and ran her fingers through her long, red hair. "Because that's the only person in Jo's past that means anything."

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Katniss opened the door to their building and ushered Emerson inside. They walked up the two flights of stairs to the apartment and Katniss let her in, tossing her keys on the kitchen table. Emerson placed her laptop bag on the counter and sat on one of the bar stools. "She didn't tell me what happened. Only that they dated."

The redhead nodded knowingly. "To be frank, I'm surprised she never told you."

"I'm more surprised she told you."

Emerson chuckled and nodded. "That's because a few times when we got drunk Johanna told me bits and pieces of the story." She hesitated for a moment. "If she didn't tell you it was probably for good reason. I'm not even sure she remembers telling me. We never mentioned it again."

Katniss sighed and rubbed her temples with her fingers. After talking with Madge, it seemed unimportant to know all the details. It wasn't about Kathryn, it was about Johanna's reaction to her. But she needed to know. In spite of that, she didn't want to ruin one of Jo's friendships, even if it was with this girl she never liked. "If you don't want to tell me, I understand."

Emerson shrugged. "It's not like she told me in confidence, I guess. Just inebriated. Have a seat." Katniss sat across from her, swinging her legs on the bar stool. "When Jo was a freshman in high school, Kathryn was the long-term sub for her science class."

"Physics," Katniss interrupted.
"Right, Physics. Jo was like, immediately infatuated with this woman. Idolized her. Doing extra
credit, staying after class, going to this chick's apartment to help with projects and grading papers.
And you know Jo, if she wants something, she goes for it. Evidently, so does Kathryn. I mean,
one day they're doing equations, the next day, they're fucking. As far as I can remember, it took
less than two months."

Katniss nearly swallowed her tongue. Her stomach knotted and dropped, stinging with pain. "She
- she what?"

"Exactly like it sounds, Katniss. Their relationship became very physical, very intense, very fast.
This chick's like 21, 22? Johanna was 14. She was sure that Kathryn was the woman she was
going to be with forever, or least that's how she tells it. She'd sneak away and see her for long
weekends, they'd hang out over the summers. Jo lied to her mother and said Kathryn was a
student this way she could even hang around the house. Got to know the family, went on vacation
with them once, too." Emerson sighed and rubbed at an invisible spot on her jeans. "I genuinely
think they were in love. They dated for three years."

Katniss braced herself with one hand on the counter. All of this history and Johanna never
mentioned it. Not once. "I don't understand why she wouldn't tell me this." Katniss knew she
possessed quite a jealous streak, but so did Johanna. It never overflowed into anger or resentment,
only into little pockets of possessiveness and some impulsive passionate embraces.

Emerson looked at her sympathetically. "It ended badly. Jo's senior year Kathryn cheated on her.
And I mean like, full-on dramatic, soap opera cheating. Jo walked in on them having sex. It
destroyed her." Katniss's heart ached for her Johanna. Poor, teenaged Johanna with her heart open
getting crushed. "So you gotta understand, that messed her up. She put all her trust into that
woman and had her heart ripped out. Granted she should be over it by now, but everyone's
different. Some people never get over that first big heartbreak. Because we're never really the
same after that, are we?"

Johanna was her first love, Katniss realized. If the same thing were to happen to them - and she
nearly threw up at the thought - she would be damaged too. "She totally shut down when we saw
her. It was eerie."

"Yeah no shit," Emerson mused, nodding her head. "I don't think Jo's seen her since that day.
Walked out of that apartment and never looked back. A lot of who Jo is now, Kathryn made.
Including, of course, the girl who swore she'd never commit to anyone ever again." Emerson met
Katniss's eyes. "Until you came along." Katniss took in this information in silence, staring down at
the tile of their kitchen floor. "And let's be real, this girl took advantage of Johanna something
fierce. That whole relationship was statutory. Not that it wasn't consensual, but Jo was too young
to know better. This woman took her virginity, took her heart, and then fucking tossed her out. So
then, you know the rest. Jo explores her sexuality with anyone willing to lay down and is
emotionally unavailable to nearly anyone who tries to reach her."

Katniss hadn't thought of that. This woman was not just some ex, she was Johanna's only ex. And
her only ex was a woman who took advantage of a young girl who adored her. "That's why she
doesn't talk about it. Because it makes her look weak."

Emerson nodded. "Among other things. But yeah, the whole Kathryn debacle brings up a part of
Jo she doesn't like people to know about. The part of her that's still some idealistic 14 year old
with her heart on her sleeve." Katniss met Emerson's bright eyes, fuzzy now since her own were
welled with tears.

"But she told me none of this."
"Because she doesn't want your pity, Katniss. You know her well enough by now to understand she hates pity. Jo's only allowed two people into her heart. Kathryn, and you. And you're telling me she saw the woman who emotionally raped her while she's planning the wedding to the woman, who despite all her efforts to the contrary, she fell hopelessly in love with?"

Katniss frowned. "I made it worse by demanding she tell me everything, instead of just being there for her and letting her tell me on her own."

"Ding ding ding." Katniss shot Emerson a look and the redhead smirked. "Look, I wouldn't worry about it. Johanna's fucking crazy about you. You have no idea." Katniss quirked an eyebrow. "You guys got any good liquor? If I know Jo she's probably got some awful Canadian beer in here. Her family loves that crap."

"Ugh, I know," Katniss lamented, sliding off the stool. They did, in fact, have a six pack of some terrible stout with a French name in the fridge, but Katniss preferred something lighter. She withdrew some hard cider from the cabinet and poured each of them a glass. Never in her life did she expect to get helpful advice from Johanna's formerly nasty roommate. "Thank you," Katniss said finally after a few sips of the cider. "For talking to me. And telling me Jo's story, though I'm positive she's going to chop your head off for it."

Emerson shrugged her bony shoulders, sipping the cider. "She can try. If she wants a DJ on the cheap who will bend to her every musical whim, of which she has many, she'll keep her axes in the closet."

Katniss nodded, holding the glass of the amber liquid between her hands. The pair drank together for over an hour, chatting idly about what they'd been up to for the past few years. Without seeing each other as threats, Katniss realized that they had a great deal in common. Similar childhoods - they both lost fathers young and had to grow up fast for their younger siblings. Katniss wondered why Johanna never took to her - Emerson was smart, witty, and definitely not unattractive. Katniss was glad Johanna didn't reciprocate, though. Even though Emerson and Johanna's relationship was basically just a friends-with-benefits deal, Katniss knew the redhead harbored some feelings that were not returned.

The door behind them opened and closed and Katniss whipped her head around to see Johanna. Her big brown eyes were wide as she looked between the two women. Finally, they narrowed in suspicion. Her shoulders sagged. "You told her."

Emerson placed her cup on the counter and slid off the stool, hauling her laptop bag over her shoulder. "Yes. Which you should've done already, doofus." Johanna flared her nostrils but didn't respond. "I'll e-mail you the playlists we put together. Now's not a great time. You have some explaining to do."


"Later Jo. Bye, Katniss. It was nice seeing you. Hopefully I'll see you again before the wedding," she called, patting Jo on the back as she left. She closed the door behind her and Katniss gulped the remaining few sips of her drink.

"Hi," she said shyly, looking down at her wringing hands.

"Hey," Johanna replied, raising an eyebrow. Johanna's lips pursed as she chewed on the inside of her cheek nervously. Her eyes closed and it looked to Katniss like she was hardening her resolve. When her eyes flew open, they were more determined. "I owe you an explanation."

"And I owe you an apology."
"Yes, you do," Johanna stated, sitting on the stool Emerson had just sat on. She took Katniss's hands in her own and let out a deep, full-body sigh. "I'm sorry I walked away from you. I know that's not how we do things. I haven't seen Kathryn in ages. I never expected, or wanted, to see her again."

Katniss nodded. Johanna seemed to look much younger in that moment, not at all like the sultry older coed who had unknowingly seduced her. She looked more like the 14-year-old Johanna she had just learned of. "Okay."

"Assuming Emerson told you everything I told her, you know what happened. I let someone in and she broke my heart." Katniss's own heart ached painfully at Johanna's admission. "She was the only person who understood me. She didn't think I was weird or different like my parents and brothers did. Still do, I guess. Whatever."

"She took advantage of you."

Johanna rolled her eyes. "I was 14 but I wasn't stupid, Katniss. I knew what we were doing was illegal, but I was in love with her. As much in love as I could be." Johanna paused thoughtfully and brought her eyes to Katniss's. "I'm sorry I kept this from you. I shouldn't have. Not just because we're honest with each other, but because it gives me an opportunity to tell you how much I love you." Katniss tightened her hands around Johanna's. "You, Katniss." Johanna smiled. "You're my touchstone. And that... that is frightening to me. That's why I stormed off. Not because of Kathryn, she can get sucked into a cement mixer and made into a sidewalk for all I care."

"Wow, okay, that's intense and specific." *But I don't disagree,* Katniss mused internally.

Johanna sighed. "I just never imagined myself getting married, not after leaving 'Ryn. I'm a nomad, you know? Emotionally and, um, geographically. This is the longest I've been in one place since college. I guess seeing her just shook up these feelings I've had, that it's scary to settle down because I could get hurt again. When you're a moving target, no one can hit you."

Katniss withdrew her hand from Johanna's to dab at her tears. "If you were having doubts about getting married, you could have told me."

Johanna shook her head. "I wasn't having doubts. I can't imagine life with anyone else. Seeing her made me realize I had felt like this once and it turned out so shitty. But this time it's different. It's scary because... because I know this is it. You're the only person I want to get married to. If this doesn't work out, I'm done, you know?" Katniss opened her mouth and Johanna placed her hand on her cheek. "You're my Haley's Comet. Once in a lifetime."

Katniss grinned widely. "I don't want you to feel like I wanna own you. I mean, I do, but I don't want to own you, own you." The brunette placed her hand over Johanna's on her cheek. "You're still you. You get to own everything Johanna Mason was and is. Just because we're married doesn't mean we're not gonna go on crazy adventures or that we're not gonna quit our jobs one day and live in a villa in Thailand. It just means that we're sharing it."
Johanna brightened. "I know! That's what I realized, especially after getting a talking to from Cress. She can be really scary when she's angry. And also very right and kind of irritating when she's right." Katniss smiled. Cressida interfering on her behalf has had a very good track record. She seriously considered naming their first kid after her. "I gave you shit about not trusting me, but clearly I didn't trust you with my past. I won't make that mistake again."

"And I won't force you to."

Johanna smiled shyly. "We're good at this thing. This relationship thing. We fucking kick ass at it, babe."

Katniss smirked as Johanna wiped the tears from her eyes and cupped her face. "Softie," Katniss replied, laughing and crying in one breath. She leaned into Johanna's hands, kissing the inside of her palm.

"Shut up," Johanna sassed, leaning in to kiss Katniss lightly on the lips. Katniss pulled away and narrowed her gray eyes at her soon-to-be-wife. "What?"

"You smell like smoke," she accused. Though it made her nostalgic for the beginning of their courtship, Katniss was surprised. And disappointed. Johanna's eyes fell to the floor. "You smoked?"

"I got stressed!" Johanna looked just about everywhere in the room except Katniss's face. "I only had one." Katniss took Johanna firmly by the chin and forced her to make eye contact. "Just one." She pouted. "And it made me sick," she confessed begrudgingly.

Katniss huffed out a few short laughs and shook her head. "Oh, baby, come here." Katniss drew Johanna into her arms and nestled into Johanna's thick black hair. "I love you, you big idiot."

"I love you too, brainless."

Johanna scowled in the back of the rows of seats that were neatly lined up for the upcoming nuptials, Converse-clad feet planted firmly on the tile floor. Effie had asked them to come dressed somewhat like what they'd be wearing for the wedding, so Johanna put on a tailored suit and Katniss wore a white sundress. They both stood in the back of the rented hall as Effie pushed and prodded their wedding party. Katniss nudged her gently. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know why we have to practice," she spat out, crossing her arms over her chest. "It's getting married. Idiots do this drunk in Vegas all the time."

"It's not practice," Katniss reminded, "it's rehearsal. And it's not just for you. It's for everyone." They had a lot of practicing to do, since they weren't having a traditional wedding in any sense. Johanna didn't want a long processional, just a short walk for all the bridesmaids and bridesmen? Katniss didn't know what to call Johanna's brothers, or Gale. They weren't groomsmen, for sure. They preferred the term bridesmaids, and Johanna referred to them as such. In any case, they needed practice because, like Johanna, their attention spans were short and they liked to fool around.

So they practiced walking up the aisle; Madge taking Katniss' bouquet and Cressida pretending to fumble with the rings. Johanna had a point, though, they were doing the same routine ad nauseam. Effie was fluttering around, adjusting seats and telling everyone where to stand to create the perfect photos. Even Primrose, the pinnacle of patience, was beginning to tire of Effie's perfectionism. Katniss grinned at Prim when she caught her yawning. Effie was running everyone ragged.
Katniss, Johanna, and Johanna's father all waited in the back until Effie got Johanna's brothers to stand in height order and at "just the perfect angle." She flittered down the aisle toward the girls. "Now, we've made sure the aisle is wide enough for all three of you to walk down together. Johanna on the right arm, Katniss on the left arm." They each linked arms with Johanna's proud father. "Remember, chins up, smiles on!"

She weaved in and out of the rows to make sure that anyone, who sat anywhere, had a perfect view of the ceremony. Effie was high-maintenance, but no one could say she was bad at her job. "Isn't this exciting?" Charles pitched in a high tone, squeezing each of their arms. "Both my girls getting married. My baby and my Mockingjay. It's like only yesterday I was changing your diaper. Well, not Katniss's diaper, though I would have had I been there. I bet you were an adorable baby."

"I know, Dad," Johanna responded with a roll of her eyes. But despite her protestation, she was smiling. Katniss was happy to see their relationship improve; Johanna's parents were overbearing, yes, but also very loving. Besides, it was Michelle that gave Johanna a hard time, and even on that end she had let up considerably. Katniss liked to think it was her mediating influence. She softened Johanna's rough edges, at least a bit.

They reached the makeshift altar and Charles grinned. "I love you both very much. And I couldn't be putting either of you into better hands." He kissed each of them on the top of their hands and took their hands and hooked them together. Katniss smiled as she watched him wipe a tear from his eye and take his seat next to his wife.

They went through the procedure a few more times before Johanna's loud sighs of impatience finally wore on Effie, and they were allowed to excuse themselves to dinner. Katniss stood near the dessert table afterward, munching on a cheese danish by herself. Johanna was having an arm-wrestling match with her youngest brother, and the rest of the wedding party were chatting amongst themselves.

Charles came up beside her and pinched her in the side, nabbing her pastry with a grin. "Nervous?" he inquired, mouth full of the flaky dough.

"A little," Katniss admitted, snatching the pastry back from the man.

Charles shrugged his shoulders. "You shouldn't be. The getting married isn't the hard part. It's the staying married that seems to trip people up."

Katniss hummed in agreement. "Not for you and Michelle, though," she noted, nodding toward the woman who was talking with Katniss's own mother.

His lips spread wide, his smile identical to Johanna's. "We've tripped plenty of times, believe me. We disagreed on how many kids to have, how to raise them, even what kind of car we should drive. Painting the living room? Forget it. I have an easier time doing heart bypass graft surgery than picking out a paint color with Michelle." Katniss chuckled and swallowed the last bite of the pastry. "Bringing up Johanna almost caused a meltdown between us. Then there's three damn boys."

"Not exactly an encouraging speech, Dr. Mason."

"Charlie, please, and I know, it's not what I meant to say." He cleared his throat and his broad chest heaved in breath. "Marriage is a job. You have to work at it to make it stronger, to get better at it. Michelle and I disagree, but at the end of the day, we love each other and we support each other. We never disagreed in front of the kids. You've got to be a team. I know Jo is as stubborn as a mule. Which, if you haven't noticed, she gets from her mother." Charles grinned
conspiratorially. "But you two are a great team."

"Thanks," Katniss replied, and Charles brought her into a tight hug. For a fleeting second, it was almost like being hugged by her own father. Katniss swallowed the lump in her throat and held on to him for a moment longer.

"No, thank you," Charles said, pulling back from Katniss. "Johanna drifted from us for a long time. Michelle and I were so caught up in raising the perfect kid that we pushed Jo away. But you've brought her back to us, and I am grateful for that. You've helped bring her back into the fold." He turned to face her, his brown eyes boring into hers. "I know she's taking your last name, and I want you to know I support that one hundred percent."

"Really?" Johanna's mother had called her incessantly to try and change her mind. "Michelle seems pretty upset."

"Michelle gets upset about everything at first," Charles dismissed. "Johanna's emotional impulsivity is also Michelle's fault," he teased. "But I think it's perfect. It'll be her own identity, which she's always been searching for. And you're both part of the family regardless. Christmas Monopoly games have gone much smoother since you've been around," he joked. Katniss hoped her naturally darker skin tone hid her blush. "I'm very proud to have you both in the family. And, pardon me if this is over-stepping my boundaries, but your father would be very proud of you. He and your mother raised a fine young woman."

"I think so too," Katniss agreed in a small voice. Charles wrapped his arm over her shoulder.

"And, like I think of you as another daughter, I want you to think of me as another dad. Not to replace yours, of course, but just another guy who can make terrible jokes and embarrass you publicly." He grinned widely and Katniss chuckled.

"I like that idea." Johanna strode up to them, rubbing her hands together. The sour look on her face, plus how gingerly she was holding her hands, made the outcome of her arm wrestling obvious. "I hope you didn't hurt yourself."

Johanna shrugged. "I gave Luke dead arm after he beat me." Charles made a sound of disapproval and Johanna looked up at him. "He started it."

He shared a look with Katniss and released his hold on her. "I better go check on his pride," he said. His brown eyes narrowed at Johanna. "And his arm."

Once he was out of earshot, Johanna wrapped her arms around Katniss's waist and leaned up for a kiss. "Can we ditch this?" Johanna whispered against her lips, her eyes wide and desperate.

"Our own rehearsal dinner?" Katniss replied with a raised eyebrow. "I doubt it."

"But I wanna go home," Johanna whined petulantly. Her pouty expression gave way to her extremely persuasive bedroom eyes. "I want to ravish you one last time before we get hitched."

"Oh yeah? No wild oats to sow?" Katniss teased, prodding Johanna in the ribs.

"Nah, I did that all during the bachelorette party." Katniss gaped at Johanna, who merely smirked in response. "You were the one who insisted we go!"

Cressida planned a huge joint bachelorette party for them, which began at a bowling alley, and ended in drunk 4am karaoke in a Japanese bar. Somewhere in between they had gone to a burlesque show and a strip club, and at the latter Johanna had gotten nearly naked after "taking over" for one of the girls working there. Katniss initially had been angry, but watching Johanna
strip around the pole had actually been one of the hottest things she'd ever seen. "No regrets," Katniss replied with a wistful smile.

"No, as I remember you thoroughly enjoyed my little show," Johanna remarked with a sly grin. "So did a lot of other women, and men, as a matter of fact."

Katniss captured Johanna's lips in a kiss that was just a touch on the possessive side. "But none of them got to go home with you, did they?"

"Nope. Unfortunately for them, I sow my wild oats with one lady only." Johanna pecked her on the nose with a small kiss. "But seriously, we need to get out of here."

"If we can get out of here, I'll put on one last pre-marriage show for you." Katniss's head whipped to the side to see Johanna's salacious grin. "Music, stripping, but this time I'll go full monty. And, if you're lucky, a happy ending for you."

Katniss had never said goodbye so fast in her life.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Katniss stood inside the small tents she and Johanna had set up for them to change into their dresses in. She could see the sun peeking through the small slit in between the fabric doors and she smiled. The weather was holding up for their wedding, thankfully. Katniss thought Effie would've had a heart attack if it had rained. "Isn't it bad luck?"

She heard Johanna's impatient sigh from the other side of the fabric and her lips moved up into an endeared smile. She could practically picture Johanna's wide brown eyes rolling in her head. "Do you know why they say it's bad luck to see the bride before the wedding?"

Katniss rolled her eyes. "No, but you're going to tell me."

"Because they thought grooms would get cold feet, or not like what their bride looked like, and bail. Especially in arranged marriages. So they made up this bullshit about it being bad luck. It's as asinine as astrology," she scoffed.

Katniss smirked. Johanna hated astrology. It 'flew in the face of science' as she put it. She felt very strongly about the subject. "So you're not gonna Runaway Bride it?"

Johanna chuckled. "Where would I go, brainless?" Katniss steeled herself. She was wearing her mother's wedding dress and she felt good in it. It was a little bit of her mother, a little bit of her father, but wholly her own. Hopefully Johanna would think it looked good as well. With a deep breath she stepped out into the sunlight and her breath caught in her throat.

Johanna was wearing a dress! They hadn't talked about their outfits ahead of time, but she was certain Johanna was going with a suit. Instead, she was wearing a beautiful off-white dress with no straps that hugged her slim figure and tapered just above her feet. "Holy shit," Johanna breathed softly.

Katniss looked up to see Johanna's eyes welling with tears. She could count on one hand the amount of times she had ever seen Johanna cry. Even when they watched moving films, Johanna rarely shed a tear. "Don't cry, you'll make me cry. And Madge'll kill me for ruining the make-up she so painstakingly applied."

"I'm not crying," Johanna denied hotly, pressing her fingers to her eyes. "You look incredible. Fuck."

"So do you," Katniss replied, stepping forward to take Johanna's hands in hers. "You're beautiful, Johanna."

"It's my grandmother's dress," Johanna explained with her eyes on the ground. "My mother
refused to wear it for her wedding but Grammie really wanted me to wear it. And you know how she is."

"Relentless, like you?" Johanna bit her lip and nodded her head in agreement. She still looked somewhat insecure, which was not an emotion Johanna wore typically. "You're stunning, Jo, truly."

Johanna smirked. "You don't have to compliment me, brainless, I'm already going to marry you."
Katniss chuckled softly and threw her arms around Johanna's neck and pressed her forehead against hers. "I don't know why you want to marry me, but I'm not going to ask and jinx it."

Katniss leaned down and kissed her gently on the lips. "Oh, so you don't believe in bad luck or astrology, but you believe in jinxes?"

Johanna laughed with mirth, circling her arms around Katniss's waist. "I believe in the capricious nature of the human condition."

"Nerd."

"Your nerd," Johanna added.

"Mm," Katniss hummed against Johanna's lips. "And a hot one."

"Damn right."

Katniss had to admit: Johanna and Effie knew how to plan a wedding. The sun was twinkling off the surface of the lake, the brilliant white tents ruffled gently in the wind, and the altar Johanna's father built was beautiful. It was a bright white podium with a mockingjay carved in relief on the front. Johanna's father gave them both away at the same time, giving them each a kiss on the crown of their heads and linked their hands before taking his seat. Even though they had practiced that exact move the night before, actually taking Johanna's hands from her father in front of the officiant was more moving than she imagined.

She gazed down into Johanna's big brown eyes. Her hair was down, as it always was, with a tiny white headband wrapped around her head and under her hair. Her own hair was down in a very loose braid, tapering at the center of her back. "You ready?" Johanna asked in a low whisper.

Katniss grinned. "Very."

Primrose, Gale, and Madge stood behind Katniss in succession. Madge and Prim's golden hair were pulled up into similar ponytails, their dresses a deep forest green. Gale's brown locks were slicked back, his bowtie and handkerchief matching the girls' verdigris dresses. Behind Johanna stood Cressida and Johanna's three brothers, looking like large, male Johannas in suits. But Katniss couldn't keep her eyes anywhere but on Johanna. The officiant's words were all a blur. Her eyes moved to the seats where she saw a mingling of both their families on both sides of the aisles. There was a tiny ache in her chest that her father was not there, but she felt him in the little arrows Johanna's father had whittled from wood and placed in her bouquet. She felt him in the mockingjays they had in gilded cages across the field, ready to be released once they had finished their vows.

For now it didn't quite matter that she had little family of her own to contribute. Families are not only born, families are also made. And between her own small portion, and the league of Masons that had descended upon them for the wedding, she had made quite a large family.

She could barely remember her vows. They each had written their own - at Johanna's insistence -
but Katniss knew she would never have done their relationship justice. But she recited them from the small, worn square of paper she kept in her dress pocket, and even got Johanna to shed one tear from her beautiful, earnest brown eyes.

Johanna's vows she knew she'd never forget. The older girl didn't even have a piece of paper to read from. She just took Katniss's hands in her own and sucked in a deep breath. "Katniss. Back when Cress was first filming our wedding preparation, you asked me my story about how I felt when we first met. I will tell you now, because you promised to marry me and there's no turning back." The guests laughed softly and Katniss took one of her hands away to wipe her tears, then brought it back down to Johanna's trembling fingers. "It was this exact day, in what feels like a lifetime ago, that I watched you walk into the coffee shop. And I wanted you to be mine from that second forward. For a minute, for a year, forever. For however long I could manage to hold on to you. I basically begged Madge to bring you to the open mic night. I made sure Emerson had left for home early before Thanksgiving so we could be alone. I practically promised Gale my firstborn to get you to go to that frat party. While it seems like some kinda cosmic event that you and I met, I actually tried really hard to make our paths cross. Because even then, just like now, you were the first thing on my mind when I woke up, and the last thing I thought about before I went to sleep."

Katniss looked over her shoulder at Madge who grinned devilishly. Gale purposefully avoided her gaze. Johanna cleared her throat and continued. "It was, and am, kind of obsessed with you. With your voice, your laugh, your eyes, your amazing mind, with everything you are, you have taken hold of everything I am." Johanna's voice broke a little toward the end of her sentence and Katniss squeezed her hands in support. "So thank you, for marrying me. For not only being my partner in crime, but my best friend. And honestly, for the greatest sex I've ever had." Brown eyes enlarged in alarm and never broke from Katniss's gray hues. "I forgot anyone else was here just now and I'm really sorry I just mentioned how great the sex is in front of our families."

Katniss's eyes widened and she looked briefly to her mother and grandmother in the front row, then back to Johanna. "Jo!" she admonished, her face turning a deep shade of beetroot.

"I'm so glad we're filming this," Cressida whispered, giggling behind Johanna.

Johanna shot her a glare over her shoulder and returned her attention to Katniss. "But seriously, it's the greatest."

"Johanna Elizabeth Mason," came Johanna's mother's warning voice from the front row of seats.

"It's the 21st century, get over it." Katniss gave Johanna an impatient look and Johanna's severe expression softened. "Sorry. I'm done."

The officiant hid her smirk and continued with the services. "The rings, please." Cressida pretending to panic, checking her dress for them, then grinned cheekily and took them out of her pocket. They had chosen little silver bands that were made of meteorite (Johanna's choice) and some silver metallic putty that was magnetic. When their rings got close to one another, they'd automatically connect. "Do you -"

"Yeah, yeah," Johanna said, waving off the officiant with her free hand. "I take her. She takes me. I just told everybody how great it is," she cracked with a grin. She slid the ring on Katniss's finger, and Katniss returned the gesture as quickly as she could.

"With these rings, in witness of your friends and family, I now declare you lawfully and faithfully married. You may now kiss the bride." Before Johanna could move in, the officiant placed a hand on her bicep. "But only kiss, okay?" Johanna rolled her eyes, but her cheeks flushed with embarrassment.
Katniss held her breath as they leaned in toward one another, Johanna's hand gently cradling the side of her face. She pressed their lips together in a chaste, but passionate kiss to the sound of cheers and applause and the flap of newly freed mockingjay wings. When Johanna pulled back, Katniss couldn't help the goofy grin on her face. This was her wife now. The beautiful girl who had stolen her heart over the counter of a coffee shop was hers forever.

Cressida tapped her spoon against her wine glass impatiently, waiting for the tent of people to come to attention. After a few moments everyone settled down and the blonde smiled. "Thank you. When I met Johanna, she was a doe-eyed freshman at the university, looking for a job. She was irritable and flirtatious, much like she is now. When I introduced myself and gave her my name, her exact words were, 'If your name's that beautiful, what's your phone number sound like?'" Cressida paused for the room's laughter, and Katniss looked to her left at Johanna. Her head was buried in her hands, little groans coming through her fingers.

"I hate you," Johanna mumbled into her palms.

Cressida patted her on the back. "No you don't, dear. Anyway, it was a good line and if I were gay, I'd probably have gone for it. Fortunately for us all, I'm not, and I didn't. But I did give her a job. And for the next three years, she worked beneath me, though not in the biblical sense, and we grew into great friends. Through those years we worked together, I watched her plod through her life, unable and unwilling to give her heart to anyone. And that was such a shame to me, because she's got this huge, beautiful heart that she lets nobody see. She mended my heart after it was broken, supported my interest in filmmaking when everyone said it was pointless, and she always spoke from the heart. Johanna will always give you the truth, and tell you what you need to hear, whether you want it or not. It's her greatest flaw and her greatest strength. She worked hard, and played hard, and all of that came to a halt the second Katniss walked in our coffee shop. Johanna talked about nothing else but 'that gorgeous girl with the gray eyes' for days, weeks even, after she came in there. It was nauseating and frankly, rather annoying."

"I'm honestly going to murder you," Johanna glared up at Cressida, who blatantly ignored her. "It was interesting to me, because I had never seen what someone with an arrow through their heart actually looked like, metaphorically speaking. Maybe some of you have never seen that look. It's this faraway, stars-in-the-eyes, glossed-over expression? Those of you that know Johanna are probably wondering what that looks like on her, considering she's such a goddamn pain in the ass most of the time." Cressida grinned. "Look no further than right here, right now. Because the most extraordinary thing about Katniss and Johanna is not that Jo found someone patient enough to deal with her, or that they get along so irritatingly well. It's that they both still have that look in their eyes like they did when they met. Every time I see them, they look at each other and I want to tell them to get a room, and they're not even doing anything." Johanna looked over at Katniss and smirked. "Most people don't find a love like that, never mind able to keep it. I'm thrilled to not only be able to call Johanna my friend, but to now call Katniss one as well, and witness this amazing spectacle they will now call a marriage. So if you'll raise your glasses, please." Cressida waited as everyone brought their glasses up. "To Katniss and Johanna, may their love forever make me want to puke in its earnest fervor. May they someday learn to get a damn room."

Their guests toasted to their union and Johanna got up, giving Cressida a quick hug. Though she and Johanna did have an incredible bond, Katniss knew that the people at their wedding table were very responsible for the success of their relationship. Gale for choosing their meeting spot and always being a patient, kind ear to her troubles. Madge for encouraging her to go after Johanna. Cressida for steadfastly offering her advice and guidance. Each of them she'd been able to touch upon to help keep them together. This was her family.
One of the few things Katniss had chosen for the wedding was the song for their first dance. She
had chosen "We Found Each Other In The Dark" by City and Colour. The slow tune picked up
as Johanna led Katniss on to the dance floor, drawing her into her arms as closely as she could be
held. Their foreheads pressed together as they swayed in their dresses, arms looped around each
other's shoulders.

"Did you really orchestrate all of that just to see me? Back in college?" Katniss asked in a
whisper, drawing Johanna's attention back into the present.

Johanna grinned and kissed her lightly. "Maybe."

"I thought it was just me," Katniss confessed. "You were so aloof. Playing hard to get when
secretly you were going behind my back to try and see me."

Johanna shrugged. "It was much more subtle than your showing up to my job every day like a
little lovesick puppy." Katniss pretended to look offended and balked.

"Whatever, you married me. I win."

"So competitive," Johanna murmured, threading her fingers in Katniss's hair. "It's sexy when you
get competitive."

Katniss blushed under Johanna's salacious stare and looked down at their feet. "Don't hit on me in
front of my family! I think you've done enough of making me blush for one wedding."

"It's your fault," Johanna derided, "for being so fucking hot."

Katniss gave an indignant huff. "This is our first dance as a married couple. It's meant to be
romantic. And now all I can think about is getting you to the hotel and out of this dress."

"Patience, baby girl," Johanna cooed, brushing her lips against Katniss's again. "I'll make it worth
your while tonight, I promise." Katniss grinned against Johanna's lips and captured them in a
searing kiss. She didn't care if all eyes were on them now. All that mattered was Johanna, in her
arms, kissing her. Being hers, always.

Somewhere in the back of the room, she could hear Cressida's voice. "Didn't I just tell everyone
about them getting a room?"

The reception got rowdy pretty fast. Johanna and her brothers obliterated themselves at the bar,
engaging in drinking contests that nobody ever seemed to win. It was, however, one of the first
times Katniss ever saw Johanna really enjoy her siblings. They had cut the cake and served the
coffee (no tea), and they had each taken a shot of espresso instead of a slice of cake in honor of
how they met.

Then, the dancing. Johanna changed out of her grandmother's dress after pictures and into a suit,
which, a few hours in, she was down to just her button-down shirt with her sleeves rolled up, her
tie hanging loosely down her chest. She had opened a few of the top buttons just to the top of her
lace bra, and it was all Katniss could do not to take her in the kitchen. Instead she danced with Jo
and Gale and all their other guests, imbibing drinks as she was offered throughout the night.

Katniss watched as Johanna bent down and scooped up her nephew, tickling his bulging toddler
belly and making him giggle out of control. They had casually discussed kids, and Johanna never
really expressed a desire to have any, but she was rather effortless with children, her baby nephew
included. Katniss leaned over to Gale, using his strong shoulder for support. Perhaps she had too
many drinks. "I'm gonna - hic!" Katniss hiccuped mid-sentence, drawing Gale's attention. "I'm gonna put a baby in her," she confessed drunkenly, with a small nod.

Gale chuckled and looked down at his friend. "Oh yeah?"

Katniss nodded. "Mhm. I'm puttin' a baby in my wife." Gale wrapped his arm around Katniss's shoulder and held her close, and steady. "I don' care, I want a hundred lil' baby Johannas. Everywhere," she motioned around her feet, "a litter of Johannas. Boy Johannas, girl Johannas."

"That's some pretty big talk from a girl that couldn't even speak to Johanna when she first met her." Gale's handsome features lit up with a grin as Katniss glared at him indignantly.

"Whatever, you heard her, she was crazy 'bout me." Katniss smiled proudly as she gazed up at Gale. "All these years, I had no idea. How did you all keep that from me?"

Gale shrugged. "To be honest, I completely forgot. After she made her speech I remembered. She basically cornered me in class and said that she was going to be at this frat party and I had to get you to go. She can be kinda intimidating."

Katniss scoffed. "Maybe to you." Gale quirked an eyebrow at Katniss and she rolled her eyes. "Okay maybe at first, but now, not so much."

"Nope," Gale agreed. "Now you're gonna 'put a baby in her.'"

Katniss nodded her head, leaning against Gale's strong arm for support. The liquor was making her head spin, and the only thing in focus was Johanna. "I'm gonna get her so pregnant. And she's gonna have the cutest little baby bump and she's going to be so insanely irritable for nine months and I'm gonna love every second of it."

Gale chuckled and patted Katniss on the head as he held her closely to him. "Maybe let's just work on getting you both through tonight, okay?"

Katniss made a small noise of agreement and kept her eyes on Johanna, who was somehow still lively and dancing with Prim. Even through the haze of alcohol in her system, each time they caught eyes it shot a spike of arousal straight through her, as if she were stone sober. She made a vow to herself not to drink for the rest of the reception, because she wanted to be very aware when she and Johanna were finally alone at the end of the night.

And somehow, it was better than she imagined. Every moment played so clearly in her mind, she knew she would be able to dream of it for years to come. The look of pure adoration in Johanna's eyes when she got her out of her dress. She was free from the hungry expression Johanna usually had when she saw her naked. There was hunger, of course, but more affection than just arousal. Tumbling into their hotel bed, plush and inviting, ignoring the bucket of champagne in favor of drinking from each other's lips. Besides, they didn't need any alcoholic lubricant to get things going between them. They never did.

It felt like Johanna's lips never left hers as they moved together, inside and all over each other. She reveled in making Johanna cry out in pleasure, screaming her name until her voice was hoarse. Johanna reciprocated, bringing her to orgasm as many times as her body was capable, until they were both exhausted. Their lips touched, unless otherwise occupied in more interesting places, near constantly until she wasn't sure she had any breath left in her lungs. Johanna's breathless, scratchy voice was in her ear, grunting and swearing, but also gentle and reverent. Katniss had lost track of how many times she heard "I love you," but it never failed to make her swoon.

Hot, sweating, and exhausted, Johanna curled into Katniss's embrace, swinging her leg over
Katniss's own. She sighed and stroked Johanna's hair, smiling into the crown of her head. "You know when I was little, I never dreamed about getting married. Never fantasized about a wedding, never really cared. So I never bought into your wedding day being the greatest day of your life."

Johanna murmured something that sounded like she agreed. "But I gotta tell you, today was close to the greatest day I've ever had."

"Every day with you is the greatest," Johanna mumbled against her skin. "Yesterday, today, tomorrow." Johanna let out a loud yawn and snuggled into her closer. "But you're right, today was one of the best."

Katniss drifted off into a near sleep listening to her new wife's little breaths getting shallow and feeling her skin pressed against her own. It was just as fulfilling as any night of passion that they had shared in the past, and would share in the future. There was the honeymoon to look forward to, of course. And, knowing Johanna, nearly every day of the rest of their lives.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Joniss Wedding! *tosses confetti* This is not the last for this story, though it may be a while for another update. I mean, Katniss has to get Johanna pregnant, right?

Thanks to Johannas-Motivational-Insults for her continued beta-reading and her very helpful suggestion that markedly improved this chapter.

And a thank you to everyone still reading and enjoying this story. :) You guys rock.

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