Snow Princess

by DreamTillDawn

Summary

She makes her first kill at ten years old. Her soft heart hardens into a game maker beloved by the Capitol, holding the fates of children her own age in her hands. Whatever fire once flared in her soul grows cold.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
She makes her first kill at ten years old. She doesn’t know what she’s doing— not really. Her grandfather brings her into a big round room full of workers in white busying away like bees over their panels. He points to a hologram screen covered in pictures of strange looking animals. Mutts, he calls them, made to bring entertainment to all the people of the Capitol.

Their pictures are small but the mutts will be much larger as she understands it. Some look like dogs, others like cats, others still like horses and others like birds and others fish. She picks one of the birds with razors on their wings that shine prettily. She thinks they’ll be beautiful in the tropical environment set in the arena where the sun will glint and glow from their metal feathers.

It’s not her first time seeing mutts. She has a mutt for a pet, a simpler one than all her friends, but a pet indeed. It’s a cat, black like her hair with silvery eyes like hers. She’d wanted it to be buttery yellow – fat and fluffy like cats in picture books. Instead the cat is slim and agile and intelligent, a deadly creature in a small manageable form, like she is and one day will be still. It has wings on its back that don’t fly, black with white tips.

She names her mutt Griffin from one of her fairy tale books, because her grandfather scoffs that Mockingjay is too long a name. The frown on his lips when he thinks she’s not looking makes her think there are other reasons. Later in life she’ll look up Mockingjays and learn they’re a hybrid that shouldn’t exist; a defiance of the Capitol’s well planned order.

These mutts are not her feline companion.

The bird mutts are fast; they swoop down and kill a tribute by cutting his throat open. The blood pours out on the sand and her grandfather smiles whilst patting her on the shoulder fondly even as she fights the urge to scream out in shock. It’s the first time she learns the true meaning cause and effect. It’s the first time she learns that she can kill a living human being with only a word or a point of her finger. She’s a killer already and she can barely grasp the concept of death.

The coming years will find she receives the best rewards when she does something cunning or brutal, even better when it’s both. The conditioning will make her as deadly as one of the mutt birds whose shadows dance above the pools of blood as their wings shine in the sunlight just as she predicted.

Her eyes stay trained on the birds, resisting looking anymore at the dead boy whose family is sobbing in ten because he almost had a chance to return to them. He was in the final ten. His district will one day rebel with the planned irony a fiery point of rage in their hearts that the Capitol citizens had giggled and cheered over when one of them pointed out what a fantastic symbol of the games it was for a ten to die in tenth place.

She saves her first life at ten years old. She doesn’t know what she’s doing then either – setting one small bit of the stage for the future that will destroy everything she knows. Her grandfather shows her the remaining tributes – she knows them all from watching the games. He tells her to pick her very favorite out of them all.

There’s a girl among them, one from twelve who could have won. The twelve girl looks like her and she almost picks her. But there’s a boy from four with blonde hair and sea-green eyes – though she prefers blue – who is so beautiful and deadly. He sets snares with nets, but his way of killing his opponents is crude and unimpressive. He stabs them with spears, but he deserves a better weapon to wield with a smile that pretty. It makes all the girls in her classes sigh with puppy love crushes as they wear colors matching his eyes in support of him.
“Him,” She says, pointing to him on the screen.

Her grandfather nods, “He is the favorite for this year… none more imaginative catch your eye?”

She frowns at him, wondering why he doesn’t see what she sees. She remembers a picture from one of her books of a prince of the sea who defended his kingdom with a mighty trident and won himself a beautiful princess to match his own handsomeness. The boy from four looks like a prince to her, so she shakes her head at her grandfather and says, “He needs a trident. Then he will be a victor.” Then he will be a prince, she thinks.

That sparks something bright in her grandfather’s eyes. “I do believe you’re right, my dear. What a wonderful idea.”

A few hours later she’s watching her television and the boy from four receives a trident fit not for a prince of the sea, but for a king. He’s glorious to watch, wielding it like a hero from a story as he kills all who stand in his way. In the end it comes down to him and the girl from twelve.

The girl knows how to avoid his snares after watching him for days. She’s almost tempted to tell her grandfather she’s changed her mind. This girl from twelve deserves to win, deserves to go home to her family. The girl from twelve had yet to kill anyone. She watches as the girl raises her bow, arrows fully stocked, aim perfect. She watches with baited breath because the sea prince has no idea he’s about to die.

The girl from twelve never fires. Her bow lowers with a look on her face the capital raised girl watching can’t quite understand yet. Then the girl takes five steps forward and falls into a trap that she knows the girl knows was there after having avoided it only minutes ago. The sea prince turns fast on heel at the sound of his prey being caught unexpectedly and throws his trident the moment he sees the girl caught in his net. The net and girl and trident fall all at once as the sea prince comes to stand over the fallen girl from twelve.

The camera focuses on their faces. Her screen is split in half, viewing both at once. She knows from experience that other people don’t get to see both angles. But she has access to all angles and all parts of the arena except the few times something is cut off or restricted from her viewing for what her grandfather says will have to wait till she’s older. As if there’s anything worse than gruesome death that she’s not allowed seeing yet.

When the recap plays later she knows for sure that no one she’ll talk about the games to sees the same thing she sees, because it’s cut off from a normal viewers broadcast. As he stands over the coal miner’s daughter, the sea prince’s triumphant grin falters. The girl stares up at him peacefully and mouths a silent thank you to him with a wavering smile from the obvious pain the grey eyed girl must be in. The sea prince looks devastated, as if he’s just coming to terms with all the lives he’s taken and on the other side of the screen she is too. The playback of the games afterwards shows only the archer’s paling face and his victorious grin.

Her screen shows pain, loss, silent goodbyes and a sobbed “I’m sorry” repeated over and over again until the canon sounds and for several minutes after. They play another version of his victory over the death from a previous tribute, she later realizes, from unused footage for the normal broadcast. When she stares into the mirror that night she wonders at how much she looks like the girl from twelve. She wonders what it would have been like to grow up in a place like the one she’s seen from the reaping in twelve.

It looks cold and sad, she thinks. There’s no possibility anyone can be happy there. There’s no possibility there are any places like those in her story books outside of the Capitol. She thinks she lives in a wonderful place where anything is possible even as doubt lingers in her mind.
She is Katniss Snow, a child of the Capital. She shares no blood with the coal miners of Twelve.

The next days are full of celebration. Katniss gets to meet the boy from four whose life she has saved unbeknownst to him. He looks down at her with a smile that she knows is fake, because she’s been taught to know a liar’s expressions when she sees them. He gives a mocking bow and calls her a princess. He compliments her beautiful castle in her glorious kingdom and Katniss feels sick to her stomach knowing that he’s mocking her with sweet words and smiles. They even share a dance. It’s an opportunity the Capitol won’t miss sighing over at how cute a sight it is to see the handsome young victor and the President’s tiny beauty of a granddaughter.

He grips her hand too tight at first and Katniss silently wishes she weren’t so tall so that they wouldn’t be matched to dance due to the awkwardness overruling the adorableness. Or maybe that would make it worse, she considers as she thinks people might find the awkwardness even more adorable.

It’s the first time she’s ever danced with a victor.

Katniss is already learning that much of her life in public is a show to be put on. She figures he’s learning that too when he pecks her on the cheek and thanks her for the dance despite how much she knows he hates this entire party. She can tell from the tremors in his hands he lets take over when he thinks she’s the one person who won’t know how much he’s faking once his grip loosens in hers during their dance. He’s a better actor than Katniss first assumed and she figures the girl from twelve would have been too genuine to survive this world of lies had she won.

That night Katniss curls in bed with her cat bird mutt and wishes she were a coal miner’s daughter in twelve instead of a princess in a castle where people say pretty things but think of poisoning her with word and substance both. In another room in another building in the same city, Finnick Odair climbs in bed with his first suitor and wishes he were a prince of the sea where he’d never have to walk among these mortals who send children to kill and die.

She dreams of a better home, and so does he.
Chapter 2

She begins designing arenas officially when she’s fifteen. Her first is the 70th Hunger Games. Katniss starts planning it two years in advance. When she finally presents it to her grandfather, he’s more than pleased. She’s being cunning and brutal, and that gets the better of the best rewards. He lets her pick another winner.

Katniss can’t decide that year, but her arena is a tribute to the first she got a say in. The 70th Hunger Games is designed for a district four winner from the rivers, ponds and lakes of varying and unpredictable depth – some salt water and some fresh – to the collapsing dam that will leave only the best swimmers alive.

In the end she decides to pick the girl, because she’s already picked the boy after all. When her grandfather questions her favor to district four she promises that it’s merely because she wants a matching set. She thinks the sea prince will like the red haired mermaid she’s picked out for him. Katniss has watched them from the video feeds, and knows that the victor already has a sweet spot for the sweet tempered tribute. He’ll be trying extra hard to keep her alive.

Katniss deems herself a matchmaker that year, rather than a gamemaker. It sounds a prettier title to the fifteen year old, though her grandfather calls her a gamemaker in the making. She laughs along with the alliteration, grinning even as the boy from four is beheaded and her tribute goes into hiding. Katniss feels bad for only a moment before she’s being congratulated once more on the designs she thought up for new mutts.

The half human half fish creatures are hardly original, but she’s added her own flair, and made them more horrifying by covering the human like half with scales and adding razor teeth, black eyes and tentacle hair. They’re sea monsters, she tells herself as she convinces herself that she is not a human monster. The Capitol commentators shower her with praise; the citizens think she could be a gamemaker for a few years between her political studies.

It’s not like anyone but she could have a remote possibility of being President. The Capitol loves their dear darling Katniss Snow who dresses in colors of fire and coal beside her icy grandfather. Fire and Ice, they are called. He is cold and precise, she is warm and passionate. He keeps the whole of Panem under control with a firm hand, and she makes them fall at her feet with kind smiles. At least that’s how it goes in the Capitol.

Katniss hasn’t left her grand kingdom’s central city in years. The Capitol is her home, and the very few times she ever asks to leave it are always shot down with harsh coldness that doesn’t thaw for days as punishment. Eventually she stops asking and instead watches the reports and video feeds with increasing worry.

The districts get worse over the years. Katniss worries about the state they will be in when she governs over them one day. How will she fix their starvation? How will she gain their trust? How will she keep this growing rage under control? She knows better than to question her grandfather, but sometimes Katniss wishes he were kinder to his people – and not just those in the Capitol.

Sometimes she wonders if he realizes that those living in the districts are also his people. Soon she realizes that he doesn’t consider them much of people at all. They’re hardly human to him – no thought given of their lives, their feelings, or their rights. Katniss wonders how she ever made the mistake of thinking he believed otherwise. She never voices her thoughts on the matter to anyone, not even her closest friends. No one must know that she wants better for Panem than what her grandfather brings.
For the time being, she throws herself into the Hunger Games. Katniss plans to show her worth, her hard work and dedication, skill and cunning, through what she can do in planning Games. She’ll help them be better, show how wonderfully smart she is – how loyal to Panem. When she realizes how blind she is she has barely begun her work and Katniss has already convinced herself that it doesn’t matter anyways. The Capital will never cease loving her, but the districts will only grow in their hatred. She’s giving them two dozen reasons a year to hate her all the more.

The districts will never love her. She’s the reason the girl from district four is a victor, and the reason the girl has been driven to insanity. For all the pain Katniss caused poor Annie Cresta she’d barely blinked an eye at decapitating the girl’s district partner.

The next year she gives district seven the gift of a strong female victor to give them hope. She’s only a year older than Katniss is, but they’re so different it’s hard to believe the age range is so small. Katniss feels much older wielding so many lives in her hands. The gamemakers let her do as he wishes, and though the title isn’t official and someone else holds the place, she’s Head Gamemaker at sixteen.

Katniss picked out Johanna Mason from the start. The girl trembled like a frightened mouse, commentators joking about her fear making her probable for a fast runner and sponsors laughing at the prospect of supporting such an easy kill. Katniss see’s through the act. It’s not fear, but well disguised anger. Johanna is a girl with fury packed in tight to every available space in her body. In the arena Katniss knows the girl from eight will put that anger to good use.

She turns out to be more than right. Johanna Mason is a natural killer, wickedly so. Katniss has given her an axe, a poorly sharpened one that sponsors soon are scrambling over each other to be the first to help give the future victor a true weapon of mass murder. Johanna is as sly and cunning as Katniss is. The gamemaker can’t wait to meet her in person and see if she keeps this newer fiery Johanna or resorts back to trembling mouse.

When Johanna chops her final opponents head in half with a might swing, burying the axe halfway in the ground with smashed brain and skull embedded around it, the current Head Gamemaker quits and tells her she might as well take his spot anyways. She becomes the youngest Head Gamemaker ever, and one of the few females to hold the spot.

When the news is announced they add credit to the 70th Hunger Games to her title as well as the 71st.

At the party celebrating Johanna’s victory, Katniss waits with well concealed anticipation until she gets to meet her victor. She hadn’t gotten to meet Annie in person, being far too busy at the last year’s celebration, with congratulations on her brilliance going around, to hunt down the unstable victor who was barely held together by her mentors through each night and day. When she gets to meet Johanna the first thing the victor does is let out a startled laugh before she can compose herself.

“I must say, I’m impressed that the person trying to kill me was my own age all along.” Johanna laughs nervously after, obviously rethinking her words in her startled state. It’s the truth though; Katniss is old enough to compete in the games herself were she from a district. Katniss is the only competitor of the games who will win every single year without fail.

“A year younger actually,” Katniss replies with a kind smile. She reaches out and pulls the girl in for a hug, ignoring the way Johanna stiffens as she whispers into the girl’s hair by her ear. “I don’t think it will be much comfort to know I picked you to win from the start. I’m sorry.” She pulls back with a wide grin on her face as if she’s shared some grand secret and winks with a nod to a few of the other victors ambling about, the few from eight well drunk with congratulatory drinks.
“Careful with the drink, it’s stronger than you think.”

It’s only because Johanna is so well practiced at concealing her anger, Katniss thinks, that she covers it up faster despite the added shock. Katniss thinks there is grief in her eyes for a moment, survivor’s guilt perhaps. But she has chosen a fine victor, not just a killer but an actress.

Johanna’s eyes flicker to the victors. “I bet you love your victors most of all.”

“Well I only have three I claim as mine, so I have plenty of affection to split between all three of you.” She glances to where Finnick and Annie are standing huddled together as he pulls in an older woman closer to them, motioning between the two women as the elder takes over comfort of red haired Annie. Katniss’s eyes follow Finnick for a moment before looking back to Johanna.

The older girl has followed her gaze and looks a combination of awed and horrified. Her face is neutral when she looks back to Katniss and grins with a tiny bow rather than curtsy. “If I were a man I’d ask you to dance Princess Snow, but as I’m not I’m going to find me a male worth my time if you don’t mind.”

“Of course,” Katniss replies with a grin. “Stay away from the Capitol men, they’re all trouble.”

She throws in another wink after to the nearby eavesdroppers who laugh good naturedly and the men of the group make a quick effort to begin taking up all Katniss’s time dancing with Capitol men as partners.

At one point she thinks she sees the sea prince staring at her blatantly, his easy going grin fallen as Johanna murmurs words at him from behind a champagne glass. By the time her dance partner has spun her back around again the victor is already preoccupied flirting with the Capitol women fluttering about a grouchy Johanna.

Katniss goes to bed that night dreaming of bloody axes and mermaids screaming as they drown without fins. She doesn’t make a sound. If she does she fears she’ll die.
Chapter 3

The 72nd Hunger Games are sure to be more entertaining than both her previous games combined. Her chosen victor is from District Nine. Katniss spent hours going over the options with her grandfather, eventually convincing him that the grain district was in dire need of a victory. Their victors were getting old. The only other districts in such bad shape were the bottom three. But the bottom three districts often have tributes that last a few days. District Nine tributes seem to have a tradition of dying on the first day. It leaves the people there with little motivation, no one to cheer on for any length of time whatsoever.

There’s a concession of course. She has to handpick the actual tributes that will get selected. Katniss knows this is often done, the best way to pick a good batch of twenty four tributes, but she’s never taken part in this part of the selection process.

In the end he makes her choose them all to teach her a lesson. Katniss spends months watching footage, almost neglecting her schoolwork she insists on doing herself just to prove the gossips wrong about her having servants do her work. Katniss always does her own work, so she sits for hours finding the perfect tributes from each district. Some are strong, others fast, none of them weak. The sponsors would be beside themselves trying to decide who to pick, the games will be receiving more cash flow than ever as people try to support their favorites. And out of all these glorious picks, the underdog would arise.

District Nine was going to be so happy with their victor that they’d feel pride for their district for all of the coming year. Katniss could feel it in her bones. The second smallest district it may be, but for the 72nd Hunger Games it would be mighty.

Her chosen victor is a seventeen year old boy, just a single day shy of eighteen. He was born on the day after the reaping in the early hours of the morning. His name is Chance. Katniss forces herself to watch when his family collapses screaming in the crowd, all of them, even his little siblings who run to him as he walks to the stage and try to cling to his legs to keep him from going. Chance is crying as he stands stone faced beside Farro, his district partner. Farro stares at him the entire time, she’s crying for him as well, and grabs his hand to squeeze it as they walk away. She’s strong, broad shouldered and tall. If they work together they can survive longer before Katniss has to kill her and crown him.

Katniss has a small cake sent the next day to District Nine’s floor and watches on the video feed as Chance cries over the pastry before eating a single bite and never touching it again, ripping the note attached into pieces. Katniss feels guilt painfully deep in her gut, but pushes it aside. Soon Chance will be a victor and will have money to support his family for the rest of his life happily and with little worry that his siblings will join him as victors. Katniss is undecided about choosing any of his siblings in the coming years but makes a note to think about it.

The games are fought on flat fields where victors can see each other for miles. There are few water sources and the ground is mostly dry and brittle. The arena is almost a desert except for the green everywhere. There’s plants and in some places high grass like wheat fields. Her mutts are more prized ideas. They are small, unexpected, and kill slowly with tiny bites or pricking needles that mostly go unnoticed as the tributes try to use the foliage to hide.

Most never get the chance to learn what is killing them is only where they are hiding. Tributes out in the open are safe. Those in the high grass have a different problem, snakes. She keeps them away from Chance, but after a few days of the two hiding, she’s done letting them have so little action. They’ve only fought other tributes, all four – three different district tributes, and one career
coward – running away after facing down both Chance and Farro. They’re even stronger a team than anticipated.

Katniss waits as they hover at the edge of the grass. There is water only feet away and they have a pack that provided an empty water bottle and the means to purify whatever they can find. Chance just has to be the one to go for it. He does, and she sighs with relief.

He’s moving fast, nervous that any moment something is about to kill him. Katniss sends a swarm of her deadly snakes onto Farro. The girl’s screams drive so much fear into any nearby tribute that they run away rather than towards despite all the remaining tributes being determined to win.

Farro’s death drives Chance mad with rage. He kills with a vengeance, he hunts the other tributes and nothing can stop him. But they all put up grand fights. None go down without a fight that has everyone in Panem holding their breath to see who will win. Even against the careers no one can tell who will win. In those moments it’s truly out of Katniss’s hands.

But she knows Chance will win.

The story that year plays upon his near miss at being a victor. It was “chance” he had the luck of getting drawn just before missing his opportunity, the Capitol citizens tell him. They laugh and joke and drink themselves silly with their cleverness. Katniss rolls her eyes at them all, she came up with all their jokes first. She smiles warmly down at the victor as he goes about his celebration party, the end of his victory tour at the President’s mansion as all the others, with a smile that’s probably taken months to perfect after losing his tribute partner right before his eyes. He’s holding up better than Annie at the least. Katniss had been angry with herself when she hadn’t thought of the risk of another crazed victor at the time.

People are still talking about her brilliance months later as the tour ends. It was the best in years, so much drama and action and violence. They’ve never had so many nail biting, breathtaking moments of edge of the seat worthy tension before. Not since the first Hunger Games, everyone keeps insisting. She’s a genius gamemaker, none could do better.

Katniss feels eyes on her all the time, but whenever she catches some of the victor’s staring at her, her first three in particular, she feels strange. There is something contemplative about the way they look at her, as if they can’t decide if she’s a girl pretending to be a monster or a monster pretending to be a girl. Katniss thinks they’re better off thinking the latter. She’ll only disappoint them otherwise.

When she meets Chance she congratulates him with genuineness. “Congratulations, you should be proud to take this victory back to your district and your family. Both have surely needed this lifting of spirits and hope that you will bring, a promising of brighter days ahead where peace and prosperity will keep all of Panem united.”

The latter half is harder for her to believe, harder to say and swallow. Yet, she truly does believe that one day, when she rules, things will be better. The games are only practice.

The 73rd Hunger Games are unremarkable in comparison to the previous. It ends grandly enough. The victor is a boy from District 2 who bashes in the skull of the District 10 male he’s up against with a brick. The arena is one of her best and a favorite of Caesar Flickerman and Claudius Templesmith, the tributes competing in the ruins of buildings that look ancient. It’s a castle where all the true knights have long since fallen.

There are so many places to hide, so many attack points, that they have to keep careful track of who is where in case they miss any building action. Katniss’s chosen victor dies in the final five, fifth place, and she throws a tantrum that has the other gamemakers ducking for cover. Katniss
yells at them for a good hour once the tributes have settled without any promising action for a while as recaps of her favorite’s death play. It was supposed to be a girl from eleven; a starving little orphan that would have showed even the weakest and loneliest could survive through hard times. They just had to try harder. The girl had died when her alliance partner turned on her instead of parting ways as they were supposed to. The girl had been stabbed in the back and Katniss mourned a twelve year old girl who would never see her family again in stone faced silence for the rest of the game.

When she greeted the victor for congratulations Katniss felt more eyes on her than ever before. Uncaring of what they would think, she stared down the District 2 victor with clear indifference if not distaste. “Your strength was notable. I congratulate you on besting me in my games.”

She has no quarrel in letting her grandfather deal with this one however he wishes. Her grandfather thinks of her favored victors as her playthings. She’s put so much hard work into them that he allows her to convince him to leave them be most of the time. Katniss acts as if they are prized pets, like her mutt cat Griffin who seems to never die despite growing age that doesn’t show. She dotes on them when they are around and plays up the act with her grandfather. Katniss knows she has him fooled about the tributes as she has him fooled with so many other things.

The victor looks shocked, clearly expecting more warmth from her as his mentors have likely told him how this new young gamemaker gives favor to her victors. Katniss’ dismisses him without another thought, thinking of her poor young victor who never made it past tribute, becoming little more than a sacrifice.

Next year she’ll do better, Katniss thinks. She won’t make any mistakes. She starts planning the next day. The 74th Hunger Games will be her best yet.

She fails miserably.
Katniss chooses another perfect batch. The careers are some of the most vicious in years. They are bloodthirsty, the district 1 boy especially despite the dim wits of his partner. There’s a girl from district 5 who is cunning and foxlike. A boy from 6 who is already skilled with knives. The boy from 3 already works in factories, he knows his craft and she throws in a toolbox to the Cornucopia just to see how creative he gets if he survives. Her favorites are the lower district tributes.

The 74th Hunger Games will be the perfect balance of heartbreak and brutality. It’s the kind of games she’s coming to be known for being best at. Most of the tributes are either older or younger than their few mid age range tributes. There are little girls, two twelve year olds in particular from 11 and 12 and a thirteen year old from 8. Katniss knows that everyone watching will be heartbroken for the sweet girls Rue and Primrose who their stylists will dress up and mentors will coach to be as endearing and innocent as possible. Her warriors are strong and deadly, but her little girls are tiny princesses – gems stolen from the districts for their beauty and untapped potential.

Rue is a climber. Primrose is a healer. Katniss hopes they make an alliance.

Their male counterparts are even stronger than her careers, with hearts of pure gold. She picks Thresh, a towering mass off muscle with morals and an aging grandmother who he strives to care for. Then she picks Peeta, the baker’s boy who lifts hundred pound flour bags with ease. He has compassion and charisma. Katniss thinks the audiences will fall all over him if he’s able to be as smooth with his words as she thinks he will.

The two are like knights to guard her princesses. Though Katniss is too old for her once beloved fairy tales, she stills likes to make her games into stories about them. It helps her forget what she’s really doing. Rue and Primrose are not princesses with knights at their sides, they are lambs going to slaughter and she holds the knife that will cut their throats to bleed them out on live broadcast. There is no real happy ending to the stories she creates, but at least Katniss can pretend that inside her heart is not completely hardened by corruption and lies.

Her kingdom is a dark place despite all the pretty colors and bright lights. She sees monsters in the streets who disguise themselves with fantasy and flair. She sees a monster in her mirror who looks like a Twelve girl in a place where she doesn’t belong, surrounded by mirrors and crystal instead of rock and coal.

Katniss is nineteen years old when Peeta Mellark and Primrose Everdeen win the 74th Hunger Games together.

It was supposed to be Primrose. The knight is supposed to sacrifice himself for her when they are the last two standing. He did so well during the interviews and training. He kept hidden, showed his strength only once at the prodding of his district partner. He gained the career’s interest and joined their pack. He had the audience women swooning as he talked about the girl he wanted to impress, the one he loved so dearly. He was so handsome when he spoke that even Katniss found herself nearly believing him.

Except she’s been watching him for months, just like her other tributes, and she would know if he had some secret love.

It starts when Rue and Prim made an alliance just as Katniss thought. Rue showed Prim how to
They dropped a tracker jacker nest on the careers, and while Peeta got away alive – he was still supposed to be on watch that night. Peeta had seen the nest in the trees, known what Rue was doing as she sawed at the branch, but said nothing. The careers turned on Peeta, Cato slashing his leg open in revenge.

Prim healed Rue’s bites and Peeta camouflaged himself to hide as a rock. When Rue and Prim go to destroy the career pack’s supplies Katniss is on the edge of her seat. She doesn’t know what the little bird is thinking, but she doesn’t like it. Rue turns to where Prim hides in the bushes and waves a goodbye before stepping backwards onto a mine. The supplies explode and so does the tribute from 11. That night Katniss cries herself to sleep and Primrose sings a song for her lost friend that makes the rest of the Capitol cry with her.

But the death of one little bird and the mourning song of the other sends district 11 into rebellion.

That’s when she really made her first mistake.

Haymitch Abernathy, the victor from the 50th hunger games before she was born, comes to speak with her. He’s sober, which surprises her. It’s the first thing she notices since he’s notorious for being drunk at all waking hours.

“Listen, I know you’ve got a plan in your head about how this is all going to turn out, but I think I’ve got an idea that even you can get on board with, okay?”

He’s being careful not to speak to her like a child but he’s failing miserably. Katniss thinks he might be at his best when he’s got at least a little alcohol in his system. Withdrawal is making him slow.

“I’m listening Abernathy, but you’d better talk fast. The President isn’t happy with what’s happening in district 11.”

Haymitch winces at that. “I know, I know… but before you go killing the little songbird, think about how you could turn all that anger into hope – for someone else. Give them something to root for! You’ve got the sweet little girl and the baker’s boy still and they’re… they’re…”

“A princess and a knight in shining camouflage?”

“Exactly! You –,” He stumbles for a moment realizing she seems to be on the same track as him. He’s underestimated how much she really puts into the making of these games. She’s not just a placeholder, she’s a true gamemaker. Katniss Snow is a woman to be feared and respected. “You can play on that, make the story and give the districts hope that they can save each other and both come out as victors defeating the evils of the higher districts they hate!”

Katniss raised a questioning brow that had Haymitch stumbling before sighing in defeat. “Look, you know what I mean. Do I really have to explain it?”

“Do I have to remind you I’m just as deadly as my grandfather and we’re both standing in the Capitol still?” He shakes his head slowly at her words but keeps his eyes on hers until she sighs. “You want me to change the rules so two victors can win.”

“No just two victors,” He corrects, “Two victors from the same district. You’ve got more than one district with multiple tributes remaining. You’d have all attention back on the screens instead of thinking of rebelling.”

It’s not a horrible idea, but she’ll have to run it by her grandfather and the idea of that kind of terrifies her. “I’ll think about it. Just keep the girl alive for a few more hours while I work on it. I
don’t need my victor dying again because of someone else’s stupidity.”

The victor’s eyes widen for only a moment as he processes her slip of words before he’s nodding seriously. “Of course, I can do that.”

“Good, may the odds be ever in your favor Abernathy.”

Her grandfather takes convincing, but Katniss plays up the whimsy of it with a tale straight from her childhood story books so bright and happy that he has no choice but to indulge her. His only soft spot is for her, and she knows it. Katniss can play the perfect granddaughter better than anyone else in the world, she’s sure of it. She does love her grandfather; he’s the only family she has since her parent’s died when she was very young. Katniss can barely remember their faces.

The announcement is made and Prim goes looking for Peeta. They hide in a cave with Prim treating his wound with plants found in the forest, skills of a natural healer like her mother. He tells her about the girl he loves. They’ve never met, and he tells Prim he knows it’s just a childhood crush. But he says everyone in his family falls in love young and it’s always been true love. One night he tells her about how his father loved Prim’s mother, but she chose a miner with a voice that made the songbirds go silent over the merchant class baker with a kind heart.

Prim tells him about how she had an older sister who died young, how she wishes the girl would have lived so she could have had a sister growing up. Her mother fell into depression after the girl died, and their father had to stay home occasionally on really bad days to make sure that her mother was okay. Prim says it was one of those days that saved his life.

“When I got reaped, I half hoped that she’d suddenly be there. She’d be alive and beautiful and brave and stand to take my place because she loved me so much that she’d never want me to get hurt. She’d have been a huntress, like the stories my father tells of my grandmother, with a bow and arrows all her own. She’d have come to this arena, this big forest, and she’d have won. Then she’d come back to me and we’d live in a pretty house and never be hungry or scared again.”

Peeta had told her it was a pretty story, and he bets the whole world would have loved her sister, fallen for her the moment she took Prim’s place in the reaping. She would have been the favorite to win by all those with soft hearts and all others would have fallen for her strength and bravery in the arena taking out her opponents. He tells her when they get out that he’ll paint her a picture of her sister – the victor from 12.

Katniss feels an ache splitting her chest she can barely hold together as it wishes to tear her in half.

When the two from 12 and the boys from 1 and 11 are the last standing, her grandfather appears. He tells her that if Peeta and Prim survive that she’ll have to change the rules back to what they were. Katniss is immediately terrified. She can’t do that, the districts will rebel in rage – not just 11 this time, but 12 as well. She pleads with her grandfather, tries to show him that making them kill each other will not keep the districts under control.

He tells her too much hope is poisonous to the order. She tells him giving hope and then crushing it is even more dangerous.

Her grandfather has never hit her before, but the slap stings harder than it really does as it hurt not just her face but her heart. The worker bees pretend not to notice and Katniss straightens proudly and holds her ground. President Snow holds his own, but he gives as Katniss orders her new mutts out into the arena without breaking eye contact. The mutts are wolf like with fur and eyes to match the district tributes they represent. It will give the victors nightmares they will never recover from. Her grandfather is pleased enough, and they pretend the slap never happened.
Katniss gets to keep her victors, but she forgets to repeal her grandfather’s order in time. The announcement is made and her victors lift poison to their lips. Katniss scrambles to change things, but it’s already too late. Peeta Mellark and Primrose Everdeen have defied the Capitol even as they drop the berries from their hands and hug each other with wide grins of joy and relief.

Katniss feels her grandfather’s eyes burning into her back as she stares in horror at the scene that has played out before her. She asks if they can cut that out of the broadcast, use the delay, but it’s too late by the time she thinks of it.

She goes to the first celebration party for the victors instead of waiting till the end of the victory tour when they’ll come to the mansion. Her eyes seek out Haymitch in the crowd, wanting to warn him even though he likely already knows what will befall his victors.

“Head Gamemaker Everdeen, it’s a pleasure to meet you.” She spins to face the stranger she knows so well.

“Peeta Mellark, you make a fine victor. How is your leg?”

His injury from Cato was bad, but Prim is a fine healer and the Capitol doctors seem to have successfully saved his leg upon his return. “It’s good, thanks to my partner and the help of the Capitol.”

The music begins and Katniss stares at the hand offered to her. “Dance with me, Princess Snow?” Katniss scowls too quickly to hide it. “I’m not a princess.”

“That’s what all the mentors whisper about you.” Peeta tells her, giving her a small spin that almost brings a playful smile to her face. She’s hired the district 12 designers to start making her outfits for her, and though they keep their stylist jobs, they agree to her wishes. “You’re the Snow Princess who sits in her ice castle and sculpts her victors with her own bare hands.”

“How poetic,” Katniss replies distastefully. “They’ve obviously told you I pick my victors from the start,” that part is whispered in his ear as he dips her with dancing skill Effie Trinket must have taught him in a rushed lesson before the party. He’s a natural even with a newly healed leg. As they straighten she whispers, “I had picked Prim.”

He only stumbles slightly.

“Your mentor was convincing, presenting a story that could save you both, but then you screwed it up.” He stumbles again but less so this time. Peeta’s gaze has turned worried, flitting around as if watching for whatever is about to kill him for his defiance. She pulls him away when the dance ends, moving fast to take him somewhere she knows no one will hear them talk. “Play up your connection, the bond that you feel like siblings after your parents were so nearly together. She’s your little sister, you’d do anything to protect her. Neither of you would be able to live with yourselves if you killed your new adopted siblings. You have to calm the districts.”

“If you hadn’t changed the rules back on us –,” His quickness to turn to defiance is dangerous. She wants to tell him she didn’t, but there’s no time. They can’t be missing for long. “Calm the districts, convince them not to rebel. They just need to wait.”

“Wait for what?”

They’re out of time; she pulls them out fast, slipping into a passing crowd of people who immediately fawn over them both. Katniss splits off as quickly as she can, searching out Prim in the crowd.
When she finds the girl she receives a kind curtsy and sweet but guarded words. Prim looks at her with wide, awed eyes. She thinks Katniss is beautiful, and reminds her of district 12. Katniss only smiles at that despite the ache it causes her inside to hear those words.

Peeta and Prim try their best, but Katniss sees how angry her grandfather is becoming. The districts keep rebelling. Things are only getting worse.

Katniss begins to change her plans for the third Quarter Quell. She needs something that will inspire peace.

Then Plutarch Heavensbee ruins everything by planting the idea in her grandfather’s head of choosing the tributes from the victors. Heavensbee is a smooth talker, and Katniss hates him the moment he ruins her plans. She tries to convince her grandfather not to go with Plutarch’s idea.

The decision is already finalized. They make the announcement broadcast soon after Katniss is forced to go down to switch out the card for the 3rd Quarter Quell.

She doesn’t watch the announcement. Instead she watched the video feed from the victor’s houses in twelve. Haymitch throws a glass at the wall that shatters. Peeta goes pale and still with terror. Primrose curls up with her parents on the floor, all of them crying and sobbing because she is the only girl. Katniss has never felt guiltier that she didn’t pick the girl from twelve when she was ten years old.

End Notes

Katniss as Snow's granddaughter. Katniss's age is changed, added up a few years.

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