One Night Off

by Nanyoky

Summary

Early in his life as a Victor, Finnick is given a night off by an unexpected benefactor.

Notes

Written because all the Victors were young, but Finnick was fourteen and that's something I'll never get over. And because for all her flaws, Effie is the one person who treats the tributes like children. For all that Mags loves and protects Finnick, their relationship is somewhat dark in that she is the woman who taught him to kill, and to a certain extent, treated him like an adult. I think if I was traumatized and used at fourteen, I would have had the biggest mom-crush on just about anyone who treated me like a kid again. Thematically fits in with my multi-chapter Annie fic, Just Us, but there is no need to read both if you don't want to.

Finnick's stomach twisted when he turned from the door to find he recognized the woman waiting for him. It was the flighty young escort from Twelve. He couldn't do it. He couldn't be here with her if he knew he would see her again every year. He had to make an excuse. He could make himself sick, but experience had taught him that would do little good.

Something in his face must have given away his thoughts, as the smile dropped from her painted mouth.
"Oh nononononononono!" She twittered it out so fast, it sounded like a bird call. "Angel, no! I could never hurt a child! Haymitch sent me."

Haymitch sent her. Haymitch sent her to pay for him? That couldn't be right. Haymitch was a sour old drunk, but he was a Victor. He had looked genuinely sorry when Finnick was called to see Snow. He wouldn't send more clients his way.

"For what?"

She beckoned him into the room. "To let you rest a night in peace. When was the last time you slept, dear one?"

He didn't even know, so he shrugged and followed her to the wide, plush bed.

"Well you just don't worry about a thing, not for a moment. You just get your sleep and I'll just be here to be sure no one disturbs you, alright?"

He stared at her a moment. "I can't."

"Can't what, dear?" She asked as she turned down the covers with all the grace and flourish of a dance.

"Sleep. They give me pills."

She seemed to struggle with the impulse to cry, exclaim and hug him all at once. She fought each off and pulled back her brisk smile.

"Well! That IS unfortunate, isn't it? I suppose then we will just have to fill the time with riveting conversation then."

She bustled around the room some more, digging several pastel colored boxes and a few clothing catalogs out of her bag. Finnick watched her, trying to decide just what he thought of her over effected speech and actions. He didn't know if he could trust her, but Haymitch had warned him about Snow never bluffing, so maybe the two from Twelve really were just trying to help. At last she stuck out a surprisingly firm hand.

"I do apologize for my alarming manners. Effie Trinket, Hunger Games escort for district Twelve. How do you do?"

He shook her hand and had to remind himself that he was supposed to say something in return.

"Finnick Odair, Hunger Games Victor from district Four."

"Well it is just lovely to finally meet you, Finnick. We have the whole night together, just us. I hope you won't find me too much of a bore, but I was just planning to catch up on my literature while you slept, so..."

She sat up against the headboard over the covers on one side of the bed with a catalog and he perched cross-legged on the other, unsure what he was supposed to be doing.

"Sweet?" She offered him one of the open boxes. Inside, there was a rainbow of beautiful sugar dusted candies. Finnick's mouth watered. He looked up and gave her his best smile, the one Mags said would get him anything he wanted from sponsors.

"Can I have all of them?"
She didn't even bat an eye.

"Of course, Angel! I hear they have you all on the strictest of diets. Better get your fill of sweetness while you can."

"You all." She meant the ones that were sold. Or maybe she just meant Careers. Both were true, and there was significant overlap between the two. Careers had a look. They were likable. They weren't just trained physically. Finnick wondered how many of his trainers knew what was in store for popular tributes. Mags knew, but she was Mags. She had to have her reasons not to tell him.

He pushed those thoughts away and bit into the first candy. It was better than he remembered from his childhood.

"Thank you, Effie."

She beamed as though he had said something truly unique and touching.

"Quite alright, Finnick. Would you like something to read? A music chip?"

He shook his head. "I'm okay."

"Well you just let me know if you need anything. Anything in the world. Taking care of you is my job tonight."

He ate the candy quietly, and she flipped through her catalog. After awhile, the cocktail of drugs they had given him on the ride to the hotel made him dizzy and he had to lie down. It took him a few moments to realize that he was staring at the tops of Effie's shoes, his head rested just above her knee. He didn't dare move for almost an hour, scared that she would notice and ask him to get off. Awhile later, her hand wandered into his hair, her long capital nails making gentle motions against his scalp. He hated those long Capital nails, but here they didn't seem so bad, as opposed to on the rest of his body.

"Effie?" He didn't want to disturb the peace they had found, so his voice came out softer than he'd used it in a long time.

"Yes?"

"How did you become an escort?"

"Well I-" she stumbled and actually laughed. "You know, no one has ever asked me before! Let me see... I actually grew up in district Eight, believe it or not. My father was a very ambitious man. Not for himself, mind you, but for me. He wanted me to have better than a factory management position- not that management is anything to sneeze at in the districts, as I'm sure you know. But he wanted me to WEAR those beautiful fabrics that we made. He had connections, and he made deals, until suddenly someone had agreed to take me on as a prep assistant in the Games. He thought it was for a career district, but-"she gave a theatrical sigh. "Everyone had to start somewhere. And I was only nineteen, after all. He wanted me to be a Career district stylist one day. But I had a plan too. I was going to work my hardest to be the most beautiful stylist at the Games, catch the eye of some handsome young Victor, then marry him and live the rest of my life basking in his shared fame and success and caring for at least six adorable little children. It didn't matter what district he was from, just so long as I got to live in a Victor's Village."

She stopped, as though that were the end of her story. Finnick frowned at her shoes.

"What happened?"
"I fell ill." She said each word separately, like they took specialized effort. "They kept me working as long as they could, but after the Games that year, it could no longer be ignored. I needed treatment and fast. They were able to save my lungs but I will never be a mother."

Finnick turned to face her, careful not to put too much pressure on her leg with the motion. "So you gave up on marrying a Victor because you couldn't have kids?"

She gave him a wry smile. "Would you like to know a secret, Finnick?"

He nodded.

"I had the most beautiful red hair you have ever seen. Not the orange or auburn that most people call red. But red like-"

"Blood?"

"Like a strawberry sweet," she corrected, popping one of the candies in question into her mouth. "And now..."

She reached up and gave her towering violet curls a tug. Without them, she was completely bald.

"Now I ask you," she went on quietly, fiddling with the wig in her lap. "What strapping young man would want a silly, skinny bald woman like me?"

Mags had always told him the best path was to always tell the truth, even in part because people will always know when you're lying on some level. "That goes double for flattery. Never make up a compliment."It had worked for him so far, and he had never had to reach so little.

"You still have the prettiest smile out of anyone at the Capital."

She blinked, then darted her eyes around the room, hands still tight on the wig. He wondered how many people had seen her without one. The pills were starting to wear off and he had to fight to keep his eyes open.

"Thank you, Finnick."

"You would have been a good mom. I'm sorry you never got to have kids."

"Oh Angel," she sighed heavily and gave him a sad smile. "I get two more every year. And not one of them has lived."

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