shave

by Nylex

Summary

It's wintertime when she comes to him. He thinks it's because of the temperature—an empty house gets a lot colder when you're alone. But maybe it's because she senses how far she's fallen, just how much the Girl On Fire has been extinguished.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

It's wintertime when she comes to him.

He thinks it's because of the temperature—an empty house gets a lot colder when you're alone. But maybe it's because she senses how far she's fallen, just how much the Girl On Fire has been extinguished. Wintertime has a way of enhancing that. Or maybe she knows that the train comes more frequently in the wintertime, and there's a better chance of booze being at his place.

So she comes to him, and sometimes they just stay silent, just drink and watch the snowflakes come down on the ashy ground. Haymitch never knows what she's thinking when she comes over, because she's been different since coming back from the Capitol. He tries to keep his mind blank when the space between them gets smaller and smaller, and he's had quite a lot of practice with that over the years. The wine helps, sometimes.

But as the space between them gets smaller, so does his willpower.

Because of course she would be a woman, and a beautiful one at that, even branded and scarred
and mutilated. Somehow, no matter how many times the Capitol tortured her, they left her face intact. And it's her face that he can't keep his eyes off of, the way her eyebrows gather together when she's scowling or thinking or even just sitting still; the remarkable shade of brown in her eyes is almost a gold in the right light.

At first he tries to tell himself that she comes closer to him because it's freezing outside. And that makes a certain amount of sense to him—but the day she nestles against his side and drops her head against his chest, he stops writing it off as an accident. He almost doesn't breathe, but when she closes her eyes he takes a sip of his drink and relaxes, because he knows this means nothing. Just her way of rebranding herself, scraping the scab off her wounds to make herself feel something. He knows what it's like, to come out of an arena and discover they've lost everything.

So he doesn't make a move, and neither does she, but she comes over more and more often and stays close by him, until breathing together is a regular part of his afternoon. And that's all it is, really, is just breathing. He wonders if being with someone else makes the grief move a little off her chest, but then why him? Why not Peeta? He knows Peeta, knows how good that boy is, straight through to his core like a golden lance. And he knows that Peeta loves Katniss with a love that's deeper and more raw than any other kind of emotion in the world.

And yet...she doesn't seek this good, golden boy out for comfort. When she needs comfort, she goes to the old drunk who neglects his geese and hygiene to the point of being inhuman.

She bangs open the door and sets a brown bag of groceries down on the table. He looks up at her, questioning, and she begins unpacking things to fill the empty spaces in his cupboard. Flour. Sugar. Eggs. Bread. Even after sharing a bottle of wine last night she's surprisingly agile; she must be building up a tolerance for it.

"You smell," she tells him flatly, and he laughs, tilted his head back. Took a sip. Because after a month of not talking, of course that would be the first thing she said to him.

"Feeling better, sweetheart?" he drawls, opening one eye and peering at her. There was something different about her—cleaner. Sharper. Her hair was loose and down around her shoulders instead of being tucked back in a greasy braid. Had Peeta finally gotten her to clean herself up?

"Come on, you need to take a bath," she reprimands him, and leans down to pull his arm around her shoulders. He leans on her, sways a little, and then laughs again, deep in his chest, a slurry rumble. He's surprisingly heavy, his big frame holding a lot of weight, and it takes real effort to get him into the bathroom.

Wordlessly, she hands him a towel and a bar of soft soap, and then slams the door. He listens to her grab her jacket and then head outside, probably to take care of the geese he so often forgets about.

Despite his hangover and freshening drunkenness, he does a good job scrubbing himself. The water is hot and that helps wake him up, and when he's done the water pooling around his feet is dingy and grey. He shuts the shower off and towels of his hair just as Katniss slams the back door. He urgent to shout to her Don't crack the glass, sweetheart bubbles up but he represses it, and instead goes into his room to find a clean change of clothing. There are dirty clothes everywhere but he finds a mostly clean shirt and newly laundered pants and tugs them on.

In the kitchen, she's already started on the booze, standing by the sink and drinking it straight from the bottle. He comes up behind her and towers over her, eyeing the bottle. "Gonna share?" he asks, and she passes him the bottle. He drinks and then passes it back. They stand there for who knows how long, passing the bottle back and forth, watching the snow come down. Soon the
whole backyard is blanketed in white.

She seems to notice him, notice his nearness, and looks up at him with an intelligent thought pulsing in her eyes: Why am I here?

He grins crookedly down at her.

She breaks eye contact and looks at the bottle in her hand.

*That's why, sweetheart.*

Katniss sets the bottle aside resolutely and grabs the front of his shirt, tugging. She's clumsy, her eyes just the slightest bit unfocused, and Haymitch knows that whatever clarity she had a moment ago is gone. Replaced with something else, a spark, a kind of burning crazy which prickles the base of his scalp.

Those golden-brown eyes are alive for the first time in who knows how long, and she's not looking at him anymore. She's looking at the scar on his chest that disappears beneath the collar of his shirt, and as if in slow motion she reaches up to stroke it absently. He has scars too—but she knew that already. Haymitch catches her hand and pulls it away, his brow creasing.

"Katniss..."

He's doesn't call her by name. Not now. Not ever.

And then she attacks him, throwing both arms around his neck and kissing him hard. He stumbles backwards and catches himself; she's young and pleading and earnest and he raises a hand to push her away, but before he realizes what's happening his fist is tangled in her thick brown hair. Her nail dig into his back and she presses against him, her body thin and half-starved but the desperation is heady and for the first time Haymitch feels *wanted*. It's addicting, and he's kissing her back because this is what *she* wanted, not him, and he might as well give her what she wants anyway.

Breathing hard, her head drops to his chest and she stays there. He wonders if she's crying.

When she raises her head again he sees that her lips are a delicious bitten red colour, and the urge to kiss her again overwhelms him.

"If we're going to do that again," she breathes, "you need a shave."

And so she straddles his lap, surprisingly dexterous, holding a straight-edged razor in one hand. The room is dark but she doesn't seem to mind. Those beautiful golden brown eyes are steady and focused, scraping the lather off his jaw and wiping the flat of the razor against a towel. Haymitch tries to think of the last time he had a beautiful woman sitting in his lap, but then she leans close, tilting his head to one side and he stops thinking altogether, because this is so very wrong and he doesn't *want* it to be wrong. He just wants this to be right, and when she's pressed against him like this and he can smell the shampoo in her hair it feels all *kinds* of right.

She pushes his chin back with one finger and scrapes the razor along his throat. Inwardly she's trembling, but her hands are steady and she knows how to do this. It's just a shave, but it's a shave with the promise of a kiss, and judging from Haymitch's reaction earlier it's going to be more than that. She can feel it. And she wants it too, because she finally discovered someone who makes her scars feel shallower, and she found someone who's just as broken, just as burnt. They're both mutts and mutts deserve each other; they need to stay together so they won't breed with other, healthier, people.
He looks younger when the stubble is shaved off his face. There's a cleft in his chin she never noticed before, and he's absurdly focused on the cut of her blouse; but she doesn't mind. Peeta never looked at her like this, hungry and desperate and guilty, like a starving dog who's walking willingly into a trap for the food.

So she kisses him, softer this time, and his hands skim her hipbones, edging the seam of her shirt up. She's gentle with him because she needs him to be gentle with her—and in that wonderful silent way that only they can communicate, he knows what she means. They may be mutts, but they can be soft. The rest of their lives weren't, by god, they should be allowed one quiet moment.

"Don't," Haymitch rasps, but he doesn't move his hands from her hips. Katniss presses her forehead against his. "Don't do this to yourself."

Haymitch, the most selfish man in the world, thinks only of her when confronted like this.

"I want this," she whispers. "I deserve this."

"Peeta," he tells her, and this time he does let her go, as if saying his name makes her skin burn hot. "He needs you, and I..."

She pushes his blonde hair back, threads her fingers through it. There's something dreamy and unfocused in her eyes, and she nuzzles against his neck. "Please, Haymitch..."

Please...

She presses tiny kisses to the side of his neck, the shelf of his jaw, where his throat meets his shoulders. He flinches a little and then closes his eyes.

And she pretends not to hear his whispered apology to the boy who loves her.

They end up on the rug in front of the fireplace, because it's warmer and cleaner than his bed, and honestly he doesn't think they would have made it all the way to his bedroom. The flickering, dancing flames are a perfect backdrop against her honey-brown skin, and he wants to go slow, to make it last, because in the morning he's going to have to let her go. He runs a hand down her side, against the curve of her breast, and marvels that the patchwork of her skin comes together in perfect harmony. There's almost a symmetry to the jagged scars and burns, and he hears her gasp when he lowers his head to press a kiss against the scars.

She looks on the outside the way he feels on the inside. He takes that as a symbol.

They spend time just running fingers over each other's scars—her fingers find an especially deep one on the back of his neck, and for a while she curls next to him, her chin on his shoulder, stroking the nape of his neck. His fingers—blunt, calloused—scrape up her spine and send goosebumps across her skin. They're both warm, almost too warm, what with the fire and each other's body heat, but she doesn't mind. He kisses her again, bumping her nose with his and then drawling open-mouthed kisses against her neck, and further down.

They fit together, broken and burnt but in the most beautiful way, and as the fire burns lower their movements come quicker. There's a soft jingle of his belt coming off and the careful grind of the zipper of her pants; he flips her, and braces himself on his forearms, one knee between her legs. He's slow and his movements are so sure and smooth that Katniss begins to wonder exactly how drunk he was an hour ago. And even though she promised herself she wouldn't compare, his touches are so different from Gale or Peeta's. He knows exactly what to do and how to do it, but he's fighting himself.
He can't think straight, decides to turn his mind off and just concentrate on the woman beneath him. She's scared but those beautiful eyes are lowered, thick lashes hiding the color, and when she does meet his eyes again he can see the desire there written on her face.

The fire burns out as the two of them burn higher.

It's pitch back when they rock against each other, and even though Katniss bit her lip fiercely she's crying anyway. Not because of the pain, since that was brief and nothing compared to what she had experienced, but because this was Haymitch, and god even though they were mutts this felt so, so perfect. She crosses her arms behind his neck and pulls him down for a kiss, and the spark that had been building carefully inside her flickers into an open flame.

He's sweet. Such a contrast to his bitter exterior.

And even in this moment, this achingly beautiful moment, she knows that he's still too good for her. She has to go lower. Because she doesn't deserve even Haymitch.

He deserves someone better.

End Notes

Just a quick one-shot. I may do more later. -nylex

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