Can't Pretend

by Odestaholyship

Summary

Basically Annie's journey in her games from the moment she steps on the train that takes her away from everything she knows. When Finnick meets her, he has no idea that it will be this girl that will ruin him for good.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
An inviting brush of warm air brushed across Annie's face when she took one final step inside the train, and even though her thoughts were blank and her feelings felt numb, she couldn't help the angered sound escaping her lips when she felt a gentle push on her lower back, encouraging her to take more steps. Annie didn't want any of them touching her - not the peacekeepers, not the photographers. But she did walk forward, and with a silent click that somehow felt so eternal, she heard the automatic door closing behind her. "Go on," the voice behind her was not familiar, but yet somehow Annie found herself obeying it, taking unsteady steps to the glass door that lead to a luxurious dining wagon. The door opened automatically before Annie, and she had to force an admiring gasp down her throat: the drinking glasses were crystal, the armchairs were beautifully upholstered and there were drinks, food and sweets on every stand she could possibly set her eyes on. The brightly colored pastries looked delicious, and Annie could only wonder what they tasted like, even though the idea of eating anything right now felt impossible. The constant fear made her stomach turn upside down every ten seconds, every time she remembered why exactly she was surrounded by these luxuries that all of sudden felt so unreal, yet painfully real at the same time.

When Annie felt the train jerk slightly, she realized they were moving. A pinch of horror stung her heart, spreading through her veins all over her body. She pressed her hands against the window, trying to hold on something that felt somewhat real. The glass was cold under her palms, but Annie didn't jerk away. It felt good to feel something besides the grief, homesickness and horror. The cold made another set of shivers run down her spine, made her skin get goosebumps. Behind the window Annie could see her district, her home, slipping away, and before the train dove into a tunnel, Annie could catch one last glimpse of the sea glimmering in the sunlight.

"Better sit down, little one. Don't want you to faint on that floor and get scratches on your pretty little head," the voice was oddly familiar, and somehow Annie was no surprised to see Finnick Odair sitting in one of the plump armchairs. Annie gave him a bitter smile, turning around to face the victor. Finnick Odair was one of the most famous victors around the country, not only because of his talents with the trident: he was also ridiculously good-looking. Always a slight grin playing with his lips, and there was certain confidence in his figure. His hair was always an organized mess, almost as if he'd just gotten out of bed - someone else's bed, to be exact. This time was no different.

"Does it really matter? I could be on fire and they'd still dump me on that arena, wouldn't they?" Annie answered, the same bitterness in her voice that had been glowing from her facial expression just a few seconds earlier. It was ridiculous to act like an angered child towards Finnick, but Annie felt like she really needed someone to blame for the sickness of the Games, of the fact that she and 23 other children were ripped from their roots for pure entertainment. Sick, murderous entertainment, that is. For the people in the Capitol, these innocent children from the districts were nothing more than pieces in their little annual games.

Something in Annie's words made Finnick smile. "Hm. Touché, little one," he answered, leaning back in his chair and gesturing for Annie to sit down to the armchair in front of him. With only slight hesitation, she took a few unsure steps and slowly sat on the ridiculously soft armchair, turning her gaze to the window and trying to get a hold of where exactly they were. The speed was overwhelming, and the sight of the unfamiliar landscapes passing by made Annie sigh with longing and close her eyes for a few short seconds. Few short seconds of pure weakness and longing for the district she left behind, the home she was forced to abandon.

"You're Annie, aren't you? And the boy's name is Noah," Finnick voice was slightly softer when he mentioned her name, clearly trying to get her out of her misery with the slightest pinch of
sympathy he could offer. Annie opened her eyes and faced his gaze, giving a slight nod to answer his question. The mention of the other tribute made Annie sweep her gaze around the room to see if the boy was in there. He wasn't. Had he already stormed into his own room? For a short second Annie envied him - she would rather be alone with her thoughts in a dark room than sit here, having small-talk with the scandalous Finnick Odair.

"You're 17 years old," Finnick broke the silence again, now clearly trying to get a word out of the girl in front of him. Annie only looked at him, not even bothering to nod to confirm his words - she was 17 years old, but Finnick seemed to know that fairly well already. "And you aren't crying."

Finnick's words made Annie bring her gaze up to meet his, giving him a slight shrug. It felt so ridiculous, considering how hard she was pushing the tears in, not allowing them to run down her cheeks. If she would let them, they'd probably never stop. "I guess so," Annie said, earning a chuckle from Finnick - he seemed to be fascinated by the girl's sea-green eyes that still somehow weren't wet with tears that would eventually, in private, roll down. Annie could only hold on to the hope of her own room and the following night - she'd have her time to cry out all her feelings, and at dawn she could was off all the evidence of weakness.

"Trust me, little one, many cry at this point," Finnick said, now staring at the changing views out the window, "so you must have some guts. Bravery is a thing you need in the Games, Annie, and you have it." Annie wasn't sure if he actually meant what he said, or if the words were just a way to make her feel better. Maybe it was both? One thing was sure, though - if Annie felt something, it sure as hell was not bravery. Anger, perhaps. Sickness, definitely. Sickness for the Capitol, for the Games, for the people that decided that it was okay to do this to innocent children. Children that had had their whole life in front of them, but were now doomed to be nothing more than entertainment in a play of life and death. 24 went in, one came out heavily traumatized and with blood on their hands that had taken too many lives.

"Did you? Did you cry?" Annie forced the words out, and she was surprised how tight her throat felt. Her eyes were tingling, but she didn't give the feeling a thought. By Annie's words, Finnick seemed to get thrown into a mess of unwanted feelings: sadness, longing, anger, sickness. He gave a silent chuckle, possibly to disguise the moment of weakness he had accidentally allowed himself in front of the younger girl. Moments passed in silence, and after 20 seconds Annie was sure he was not going on to answer - it was fine, maybe they'd spend the moment in silence, sinking in to their own misery. Finnick's misery of his past, and Annie's misery of her future that she might not even have.

It took two minutes for Finnick to gather up himself and clear his throat - he sure as hell hadn't expected this girl to make him fall apart with three words that brought his entire past in front of his eyes. Every detail he'd gladly erase, every memory he'd like to forget. "I did cry, you know. In the train, when I was alone. Looked like death the next morning, but atleast I got it out before it got too heavy for me to handle," Finnick finally confessed, running his fingers through his hair and giving Annie a strange smile she had never seen before - it was not his usual, wild grin he presented to the cameras. And the little expression made Annie feel the slightest pinch of sympathy for this man that had gone through a hell - the same hell she'd eventually go through. It was still hard for Annie to wrap her head around the piece of his past Finnick had presented to him. Hell, it was hard to remember that Finnick, too, had been only 14 when he had been reaped to the Games. Of course he had been scared, of course he had cried - he had been just a child! Now he was just a man with a past that kept haunting him.

Finnick cleared out his throat again, forcing some words out: "You can use that in the interview, you know. The bravery. Where some are charming," he gestured to himself, "some are sly. Some are great talkers, some are witty. There's always room for the brave ones, Annie." His eyes were
now hard on hers, and Annie wrapped her arms around herself when she realized he was staring at her. "We have plenty of time, Annie, and I'll help you the best I can." His words fade into the silence, and he had to turn his gaze away when Annie's bright, sea-green eyes started reminding him of home. Of the sea.

And right there, right then, Finnick realized that he couldn't let her die, this strange little girl with the sea locked behind her teary eyes.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Annie's first night in the Capitol after the Parade.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Annie’s eyes wouldn’t close. They wouldn’t close, even though she knew she needed the rest: tomorrow was the first training day. The first chance to face her opponents without the flashy costumes they had had to wear for the Tribute’s Parade: Annie barely remembered anything of the event. The crowds, maybe. The noise, definitely.

One thing Annie knew she remembered was Finnick’s eyes on hers when she had stepped on to the chariot: something had sparked up behind his stern eyes when he looked at her, something so quickly disguised Annie wasn’t even sure if it had really been there. He had given her an encouraging nod, his fingers brushing hers in passing. And it kept her awake. The thought of him, the thought of his eyes on hers, the feeling of his fingers touching her trembling hands.

She groaned at herself, turning on the ridiculously soft mattress. Annie could hear the noises of the traffic and faint music outside her window, and for a moment she felt bewildered. What where these people? These people, who so eagerly chanted for children as they suffered a long way to an agonizing death: didn’t they feel anything? A spark of sadness? A little pity? Perhaps, but never rage for the Capitol. For them, this was just how it worked, how the nation worked.

It was deception, absolute self-betrayal for her to pretend she could sleep in this strange room that kept haunting her. How many tributes had slept in this bed before her? How many of them were now dead? Annie shook her head in attempt to shake away her thoughts, slowly standing up on her bare feet. The floor felt cool under her skin, and the feeling sent small shivers running down her spine.

Annie didn’t bother to cover herself with something warm, even when the cool air made her skin become goose-pimpled. The soft pajama shorts and the grey t-shirt she had borrowed from the wardrobe in her room, were surprisingly comfy - it felt absurd to actually picture any Capitol-born person wearing anything so normal.

Annie wrapped her arms around herself when she opened the door slowly and quietly, not wanting to wake up anyone, quickly slipping into the dimness of the apartment. One of the walls was entirely made of glass, and she could see colorful light flashing outside on the streets, she could see the colorful figures walking, running, dancing.

With an uneasy feeling of disgust in her stomach Annie approached the transparent wall, wanting to see the city better. Was it like this every night? Parades, celebrations, parties - were the streets ever quiet? Annie sighed and pressed her burning forehead against the cool glass, closing her eyes.

“Falling asleep standing? Not a good idea, little one.” The voice was nearly a whisper, but Annie could hear the amusement behind it: her eyes snapped open, and she turned her gaze slightly to greet Finnick Odair. His hair was messy - as always - and his lips curved into a slight grin. He was
barefoot, slowly approaching the younger girl.

Annie felt herself tensing slightly as Finnick started leaning against the window with his left shoulder, gazing the redheaded girl with slight interest. “Couldn’t sleep?” He asked, the amusement suddenly gone: now, there was just concern mixed with sympathy. Annie shook her head.

“No, I just,” she said, falling silent for a few seconds, not wanting to be too specific on the thoughts that were keeping her awake - of the one particular person that kept her awake, “kind of had stuff in my mind.”

But Finnick didn’t look curious. His eyes were fixed on Annie’s own, the look on his face strange - almost pained, slightly desperate. His mouth opened slightly, but no words came out for a few seconds. “Yeah I know… How that feels,” he answered, his voice breaking hardly noticeably in the end. Finnick tore his gaze off Annie’s eyes and pretended to be fascinated by the streets below them.

“Have you thought about the private sessions with the Gamemakers? About what talent you’ll be showing? I mean, you’re really brave but-” Annie cut Finnick off with a short laugh, then finishing for him: “but I can’t exactly go in there, tell them I’m brave and then expect them to give me high scores.”

Finnick felt himself slipping, his lips curving into a real smile without his own permission. “And you’re also very sarcastic, gotta add that to my list,” he answered and continued, rolling his eyes: “I swear, if words could cut like knives…” He finished his thought with a low whistle of appreciation. Annie looked down at her feet, wrapping her arms tighter around herself.

“I’m good at knots,” she said, gazing up to Finnick, “you know. Fishing nets and that sort of stuff, mom and dad started teaching me when I was barely 5.” Finnick nodded a few times - knots were useful. Knots meant nets, knots meant traps, traps meant easy targets and food.

“Good. We can use that. The Gamemakers appreciated not only lethal talents, but also practical abilities.” His words made Annie feel slightly more confident about what’s to come - if there was any hope the arena had a lake, even a pond, with fishes, she could use nets. Traps weren’t her strength, but she knew how to make them work.

“We still have time, Annie,” Finnick said suddenly, his voice strangely breathless. His eyes pinned their sea-green gaze to her face. “Just promise to get focused on the training. Learn new skills, avoid trouble and listen to the mentors,” Finnick didn’t stop looking at her even when he finished talking, and slowly, slowly, Annie nodded.

“I’ll do that,” she promised. She nearly gasped when she saw the familiar spark of something - possibly a thought, an emotion - build up behind his eyes. Brighter the longer he stared at her. Annie felt breathless, and she could feel her cheeks heating up under his eyes. The moment that felt like an eternity - that lasted less than seven seconds - was over when Annie forced herself to speak up. “I should get back to bed. Don’t wanna be half-dead tomorrow,” she forced out, taking a few steps backwards. Could she even sleep after this? After the way Finnick had stared her down, the street light illuminating his edgy features, a strange something sparking up his eyes…

“You should get some sleep, too, Finnick,” Annie advised with a quiet voice, giving the colorful streets - now nearly deserted of people - one last glance. Finnick ran his fingers through his hair, the bright street lights illuminating his face but leaving his expression into the twilight.

“Yeah, I’ll… I’ll do that,” he answered, mirroring back her own earlier words. But by the roughness of his voice and the way his eyes sparked up yet again when he heard her say his name,
Annie knew he was lying.

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to comment your opinions! xx
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

During Annie's interview, Haymitch and Finnick have a chat and Finnick realizes how much he truly cares for her.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“I can’t do it,” Annie breathed out, closing her sea-green eyes. She tried to take deep breaths, like Mags instructed, but it felt like every breath only fed her anxiety. It felt like there was a tight knot in her chest that just kept making her breathless and shaking. “I can’t. It’s too much,” she repeated, opening her eyes and trying to catch Mags’ or Finnick’s gaze: she had to make them understand that she couldn’t do this, she had to stop this. She had to get out, she had to go home.

“Annie, Annie, calm down,” Finnick’s voice was stern, and somehow she understood that he must’ve grabbed her hand in his, because she felt tingles of warmth spreading through her right arm. “Annie, look at me,” Finnick tried again, staring Annie down. But she didn’t react, just stared at her hands - it felt like she wasn’t in control of her brain anymore. Annie wanted look at Finnick, she really did, but she wasn’t sure if she wanted face the truth in his eyes.

“You’re brave, Annie, remember? You’re braver than me. Hell, you’re probably one of the bravest people I’ve ever met. Please don’t let that slip away now, when you need it the most. Please,” Finnick lowered his voice, barely holding himself from saying that he needed for her to be brave right now. If she would fall apart, Finnick wasn’t sure if he could keep himself together anymore, either.

But Annie knew that she couldn’t possibly fall apart now, not at this point, not here. She could do that later, in private. For now, she had to pretend to be the brave, witty girl with the sea-green eyes, the one that couldn’t think of better honor than to participate in the Games. “I’m…” Annie breathed out, slowly gazing Finnick in the eyes. “I’ll go up there,” she finally said, and Finnick could see how absolutely, positively terrified she was. Of the Games, of these people, these crowds, who chanted her name but wanted nothing more than just to see her get slaughtered.

And she did get up there. When it was Annie’s time to step on the pedestal that lifted her up on the stage, she got up with shaky legs, gripping the hem of Finnick’s shirt like she had trouble with maintaining her balance. “I… Thanks. About the bravery comment,” she said, slowly letting go of him. For a brief moment her fingers - accidentally - brushed across his arm, sending shivers down his spine. And then she was gone, and Finnick was left there, almost breathless. He could still smell the salty scent of sea that she always left behind, and with a heavy sigh Finnick drew his fingers through his hair.

The interview had barely started when Finnick heard someone approaching him - a person, who was by the sound of it bringing down every piece of furniture on his way. He could smell the strong scent of alcohol, and when he turned around, there was no surprise in his eyes when he saw Haymitch Abernathy. “Finnick,” he said, his words only slurred by the alcohol running through his veins. “That’s your girl out there, ain’t it?” He asked, pointing at the screen that were put on the backstage so other tributes could follow the interviews even if they couldn’t see them from the stand itself.
Finnick nodded slowly, not sure why exactly he was in the presence of Haymitch Abernathy, nor why they were talking - tomorrow the kids they were mentoring would try to kill each other, to be remembered. “Yeah, she’s… She’s Annie,” Finnick responded, shrugging just slightly like she was nothing more than another kid he mentored and then watched to die. But she was not, and that was why he was more than terrified. Even though Haymitch was drunk, he could catch the slight change in Finnick’s voice, and he gave him a drunken grin. “Oh, she ain’t gonna make it,” Haymitch blurted out, snorting a drunken laugh that made something light up in Finnick’s gut - something so strong it made his body feel like it was slowly setting on fire.

“What?” Finnick said, giving only slight thought to his arms that he had crossed to his chest before he had even commanded them to do anything. His pose was quite aggressive, and Haymitch must’ve noticed it too because he gave another chuckle that made a shiver run down Finnick’s spine. “Oh, don’t take it so hard, boy. See, I’m just here stating the facts. And the fact is that she’s too weak, and a fact is my bet is on District 2’s tributes,” Haymitch, a tiny pinch of drunken joy in his voice even though he was stating that he had no faith in his own tributes - or Finnick’s, for that matter.

“Listen here, Haymitch. I don’t give a shit about your bets or your beliefs, because-” Finnick’s voice died halfway through his sentence, and not only because a few people were staring with a concerned expression on their face, but because he didn’t know how to continue. He didn’t know why his brain wouldn’t accept the idea of dead Annie, and it made him confused and scared at the same time.

Haymitch bursted out in laughter at Finnick’s weak response, shaking his head in disbelief. “Oh boy, what a mess you’ve gotten yourself into,” he said, patting Finnick on the shoulder. “May the odds be ever in your favor, Finnick.” And then he was going, slowly wobbling away while knocking down a few chairs.

What a mess you’ve gotten yourself into. Finnick could hear the 3-minute buzzer go off, and Caesar and Annie got on their feet so she could greet the audience one more time: the cameras focused on her bright, sea green eyes and her smile that made Finnick’s stomach turn around. He wasn’t sure how, but he knew that this girl with the sea-green eyes was ruining him for good.

Chapter End Notes

More chapters? Possibly. If you all are up for it, please comment if you are! xx
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Finnick and Annie talk at the Tribute Center on the morning of the Games.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Annie had given up on the hope of falling asleep hours ago, yet she would’ve paid anything for a few hours of escape from the reality and her fate. So, instead of trying to fall asleep, she had stared out of her bedroom’s window for hours - right now, it’s was four in the morning but the streets weren’t quiet. Colorful people danced, and she could hear the faint rhythm of upbeat music that made her want to vomit.

Annie got up from her bed, enjoying the feeling of the cold floor against her bare feet. Slowly, without making a sound, she walked out of the door. The living room was quiet as any, and suddenly Annie wanted to escape it all. The silence. The loneliness. The fear. The Games. The dark. She wrapped her arms around herself and closed the bedroom door behind her, suddenly all too aware of the darkness around her.

It did not take long for her to realize that she was not alone. Someone was standing by the glass wall, staring down at the streets. When the colorful lights illuminated their face for a few seconds, Annie realized that it was not her district partner Noah: it was Finnick. His forehead was pressed against the glass, his eyes closed. “Falling asleep standing? Not a good idea,” Annie said, repeating Finnick’s own words from their first night at the Capitol. Even though he didn’t open his eyes for a few seconds, his lips curved to genuine smile - like he was actually happy to hear Annie’s voice. Slowly, he opened his eyes and said: “Couldn’t sleep either?”

Annie shook her head when she walked next to him, staring down at the streets that were still filled with joyful people in ridiculous costumes. She could feel Finnick’s gaze burning her, but she didn’t turn to him or react - she wanted to look at him, she really did, but she knew that if she’d catch his gaze right now, he’d only mess up her head. “Have you been avoiding me?” Finnick’s words were as surprising as his tone - it was hurt, filled with longing and desperation that Annie couldn’t understand. The answer was yes, she had been avoiding him for a few days. “I have,” Annie answered, not bothering to explain her words nor her actions towards the older man standing next to him. He looked surprised, to say in the least. He didn’t ask anything out loud, but Annie could feel his stare burning her.

“You mess up my head,” Annie blurted out. It was a bad explanation, but it was truthful and the best one Annie could come up with. She kept avoiding his gaze, locking her eyes to some colorful people right below them. “And it’s so stupid. I can’t think. I can’t breathe, not when you’re around, looking at me.” The words came pouring out of her mouth when Annie figured that she’d probably be dead by tomorrow - she owed Finnick the truth, even if she really would’ve liked to keep her thoughts as her own.

“You think I don’t feel that way?” Finnick’s voice was soft and quiet, but there was something sparking behind it. “I have barely slept the last week, because I’m trying to figure you out. What you’re thinking, what you’re feeling, and why the hell you’re making me feel this way. But you’re the most stubborn, most guarded, most challenging person I have ever met, and I just can’t figure
you out. And still, I have this feeling in my chest every time I hear you laugh or say anything at all, and you know what, Annie? It scares the hell out of me.” Finnick’s voice got softer towards the end of his small monologue, but his chest was still rising and falling with a quick pace, his breathing ragged with the intensity of his words.

Annie had fallen silent, and for a moment she wondered if there was any way to answer him. For a brief moment Annie fancied the thought of fleeing the room and leaving Finnick be, since she knew she couldn’t possibly give him the answers he needed. Suddenly, she remembered their conversation many nights back, after the parade. When Annie had admitted that she had some things in her mind that kept her awake, Finnick had admitted that he had some haunting thoughts, too. Had he been thinking of Annie? “I’m sorry,” was all Annie managed, finally daring to meet his gaze with hers. Finnick’s eyes were fiery with some emotion Annie couldn’t quite recognize - anger? Grief?

But when he leaned downwards, his eyes locked on Annie’s, his eyes were yet again soft. The anger was gone, and there was just longing, desperation. Annie almost chuckled out loud when she realized that those two emotions were the exact thing she was feeling - longing mixed with desperation. There was a silent question in Finnick’s eyes, his eyebrows slightly elevated. Annie nodded, shuddering with a strange feeling when she felt Finnick’s hand slowly touching her cheek, brushing a lock of red hair behind her left ear. He cupped her face with his hands before slowly leaning down to press his lips to hers.

Annie let her arms lay flat on her sides when they kissed, her eyes closed. When their lips pressed together, it was something she couldn’t even describe - her heart was pounding, shivers were running down her spine. Emotions she had locked away days ago bursted out, and suddenly she felt warmth all over her body. She wrapped her arms around Finnick’s neck, desperately trying to get closer, to feel his heartbeat against hers. Desperately trying to prove herself that he was real, that she was real. They were real, and it felt obscure.

“We’ll figure it out, Annie. I’ll get you out of there,” Finnick whispered, pressing a slight kiss on Annie’s forehead when he realized she had tears in her eyes. Annie’s thoughts were a big mess of old and new, of feelings and common sense. Finnick had messed her up for good, she knew that now, but it might’ve just been wort it all. She didn’t pull away from his arms until she could see sun rising in the horizon and realized that it was time to go.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked it! I'd really appreciate comments, if you want to share your opinions :) xx

End Notes

So, there’s the first chapter. I tend to keep the chapters short, but I update rather quickly so if you’re interested in reading more, you don’t have to wait for long. Kudos is much
appreciated! :) please comment your opinion and if you want to read more xx

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