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**Little Worlds**

by **RedSneakers**

**Summary**

Joniss oneshots collection, from mini fics (which I will probably expand later) to a slightly longer ones. Every chapter offers a completely different story - some can be a companion piece to another, though.

**Notes**

Disclaimer: THG and its characters aren't mine. Johanna would sweep Katniss off her feet if it were mine, go figure.
"You know, I’ve been thinking," Johanna said out of the blue, rolling over so she was lying on her stomach. Katniss raised an eyebrow to show that she was listening but not lifting her face from the book she was reading. "I think I want to rectify myself," Johanna went on. This time it got Katniss’ attention; the younger woman tilted her head at Johanna, who was now sitting up. "About what I said in the arena? I might be wrong about it."

Katniss didn’t have time to respond as Johanna moved swiftly to grab her wrist, pulling the younger woman close until their faces were inches away. The District 7 woman locked her gaze with Katniss’ eyes for a second before, very slowly, moving down and stopped at Katniss’ lips.

"Maybe I’m just like the rest of you after all," Johanna whispered in a husky voice, licking her lower lip as she spoke. She glanced up at Katniss’ eyes to see slight discomfort at the pair of grey orbs, then leaned in even closer that Katniss could taste Johanna’s breath on her lips. "Maybe," Johanna said, "there is still someone left that I love."

Katniss opened her mouth but it was a split second too long. Johanna grinned and winked at her, releasing her wrist and jumped off Katniss bed. She waved at Katniss cheerfully and left the compartment with a parting “let’s do it again sometime” and the signature slam of the door.

The girl on fire was speechless, staring at the closed door with her mouth agape. For a good hour she was unable to think, unsure if she was actually relieved or disappointed that the kiss didn’t happen. She sighed when she finally realised that it was the latter.

But then Katniss remembered Johanna’s words before leaving. She smiled, thinking that ‘sometime’ might be much sooner than Johanna expected. Oh yes, Katniss thought with a sly grin, Johanna wouldn’t know what hit her next time.
"I’m alive." Katniss’ frown at hearing her own scratchy voice turned into an internal wince at Johanna’s reply.

"No kidding, brainless," the other woman spat the words like a venom as she stared Katniss down.

She tried to move away, Katniss did, but her body felt like jelly and she couldn’t move an inch when Johanna sat unceremoniously on her bed, busily detaching and attaching the morphling drip from Katniss’ arm to her own - her eyes never leaving Katniss’.

The silent scrutiny made Katniss squirm - it was so unlike Johanna to not barrage her with words; if she remembered correctly from their previous, albeit limited, confrontations the other woman had never had any troubles expressing her thoughts - on the contrary, it seemed like Johanna had her brain in her mouth. Katniss opened her mouth, ready to be the first to break the silence, but she found that there were no words coming out so she closed her mouth again. That earned her an eyebrow raise from the woman sitting on her bed.

When she thought that Johanna wasn’t going to say anything at all, that all the District 7 girl wanted to do was intimidate her or whatever Johanna’s twisted mind decided to do with her, Katniss tried to look away.

"Why?"

The question was posed so softly that at first Katniss wasn’t sure if Johanna had said anything at all. She turned her head back at Johanna, meeting her gaze that was now filled with uncertainty. “Why what?”

"Why?" When Katniss shook her head questioningly, Johanna closed her eyes and mentally counted to five. There was something in Johanna’s eyes, something that Katniss didn’t recognise, when the woman opened them again. "You never came."

All the frustration, all the hurt, all the loneliness that was laced in those three little words hit Katniss like a tidal wave and she felt her heart clench painfully, a different - and a lot more painful - sort of ache from what she was physically feeling then. Her throat constricted and Katniss choked on her own words as she forced herself to speak, affirming sadly, “I didn’t.”

Johanna regarded the injured woman for a second, waiting for an explanation. When it didn’t came, she nodded in resignation. The woman averted her gaze and began to detach the morphling drip from her arm. A clasp of bony fingers on her wrist brought her attention back to the girl who had become the symbol of their rebellion.

"Aren’t you going to ask me why?"
"I did," Johanna replied brusquely, pulling her arm out of Katniss’ grasp.

"But I didn’t answer," pointed Katniss sleepily as the morphling started to take effect on her.

Johanna shrugged. “No big,” she brushed the other woman off. “Go to sleep, brainless. They’d kill me if they knew I was harassing you.”

"Were you?"

"Huh?” Johanna’s expression was so confused that Katniss started to chuckle. "Fuck, you’re stoned!" The chuckle turned into a weird laugh on Katniss’ part, the morphling dulled her senses enough for her not to feel her pain from her injury. "And god you’re no less annoying when you’re high."

Katniss watched as Johanna walked back to her bed and drew the curtain with enough force to rip it from its metal hinges. It took a while for Katniss to stop laughing, by then she could no longer hear a single noise from the other side of the curtain.

"Johanna?"

No answer.

"Johanna?” She tried again, thinking how foreign it was to say the name out loud. It sounded different from when she had said it in her head - different, but not unpleasant. She waited but still there was no answer. Johanna had to have fallen asleep or something.

"I went to see Peeta when you guys returned," Katniss began softly, emboldened by the thought that Johanna couldn’t hear her, "He tried to kill me." The memory made her shudder but she pushed the thought away. She yawned tiredly but struggled to stay awake. She needed to say it now when she had the chance; she needed to let it out when her inhibitions were next to nil thanks to the morphling. She glanced at the curtain to see if there was any movements. There were none. Katniss took a deep breath. "I couldn’t…” her voice broke as she went on, "I couldn’t bring myself to see you - not with the possibility of seeing that same look he gave me in your eyes."

"Knowing that Peeta wanted to kill me hurt me so badly," she admitted, blinking rapidly as she was losing her fight against the drowsiness. She couldn’t even open her eyes when the last words escaped her lips, "But I’d die of a broken heart if they managed to hijack you too.”

On the other side of the curtain, Johanna Mason lay awake, too stunned by Katniss’ words to even move a muscle. Whatever she had expected to hear, it certainly wasn’t that. She swallowed hard and let out a shuddered breath. A tear fell from her eye as she closed them, but there was a smile on her thin lips as she mumbled, “Brainless.”

Johanna never thought that Katniss, too, wasn’t asleep until she heard a quiet whisper from that side of the curtain.

"Yours."
“Dance with me,” Johanna said. Her face was impassive as she held out her hand with the palm up to ask for Katniss’ hand; she was looking straight at the younger woman, ignoring four pairs of eyes that were staring at her in surprise. Katniss was too stunned to reply at first – the dumbstruck look on her face was so funny Johanna could ridicule her forever if the District 7 woman wasn’t too nervous herself. Keeping her poker face in place, she repeated her invitation – more polite this time, “Would you dance with me?” The word ‘brainless’ was at the tip of her tongue but she managed to catch herself on time.

Haymitch nudged at Katniss with his shoulder, and maybe that was the only encouragement she needed because the next thing she knew was that she was being led to the dance floor, holding hands with Johanna. She didn’t even know how that happened.

The song was unfamiliar to Katniss, and she voiced her concern at Johanna, who shrugged and lightly said that she didn’t, either, but that shouldn’t stop them from having fun. The older girl sounded so carefree that Katniss was suspicious if Johanna was drunk.

“I’m not drunk, idiot,” Johanna drawled. She rolled her eyes when she saw Katniss blush – apparently the younger woman didn’t know that she had mentioned her suspicion out loud. “But don’t worry, if I knock you up tonight I will be a responsible baby daddy,” she teased with a chuckle that turned into a full-blown laughter when she saw Katniss blush even harder.

Just as they found a spot not too crowded to dance, someone changed the song; the lively rhythm died down to give way to a softer melody. Johanna stood in front of Katniss, her laughter died as she recognised the music.

“What’s wrong?”

Johanna looked at Katniss cryptically. “This song is from my District,” she remarked.

“Oh,” was all Katniss could say. All thoughts seemed to leave her brain when Johanna suddenly pulled Katniss in with her free hand; their fronts flushed against each other. The movement was so sudden that Katniss breathed in sharply, which was another wrong move because she was immediately surrounded by Johanna’s scent. Katniss felt herself getting weak on the knees and she leaned in closer, letting Johanna support her weight.

Their faces were mere inches from each other; their breaths mingled as they danced to the slow music. Neither said a word – they were staring at each other as if they had never seen each other before, communicating with their eyes rather than with words. Johanna could feel Katniss’ erratic pulse under the skin where she was holding Katniss’ hand, and the warmth that seeped from where they were touching skin-to-skin drove her senses into overdrive.

“Katniss,” Johanna whispered in a raspy voice.
“Yeah?” the younger woman replied breathlessly, her skin tingled on hearing Johanna’s voice.

Johanna moved her face closer to Katniss. “I think I’m going to kiss you,” she whispered. Her lips ghosted above Katniss’ but not quite touching. She licked her bottom lip and saw how Katniss’ pupils were dilated as the pair of gray eyes watched the movement.

“I think I’m not going to stop you,” Katniss whispered back, feeling butterflies in her stomach.

“Good.”

“And I think I’m going to kiss you back,” the Mockingjay added shyly. Her eyes fluttered close even before Johanna closed the distance between them.

The moment their lips touched was magical, or that what Katniss thought. It was as if someone put a spark in her belly which spread all over her body, burning her with indescribable sensations. Katniss had never felt more alive than now, when her lips moved against Johanna’s pliant ones – every cell in her body hummed in pleasure as the older woman teased her bottom lip with her skilful tongue. Katniss moaned into Johanna’s lips, gasping as Johanna took it as an invitation to deepen her kiss.

If it weren’t for their traitorous lungs needing air, the kiss would never end. Reluctantly Johanna broke their kiss, panting heavily as she leaned her cheek against Katniss’, who was as breathless. Her ears were still buzzing and it wasn’t until she heard clapping and whistling did she realise that they had created a scene.

“Get a room, ladies!” someone shouted from across the room.

“Get married first!” another one, a woman, quipped.

Johanna’s eyes met with Katniss’, suddenly feeling self conscious. She recoiled internally, panicked, and was about to pull away when she felt Katniss holding on to her tightly.

“Don’t,” the younger woman whispered.

“I’m sorry,” Johanna mumbled

“Jo, don’t.” Katniss shook her head. “Please, don’t.”

Johanna stopped trying to pull away, but her back stiffened when she caught Haymitch walking over to them from the corner of her eyes.

“Nice show, ladies,” Haymitch jeered with a hint of smile in his voice, “We caught you horny bunnies on camera.”

Johanna felt cold. How could she be so reckless? “Haymitch, I’m sor...” she was cut off before she could finish.

“Plutarch is already thinking of your wedding party – so if the stunt you were pulling was a one time thing, tell him before you ladies break his heart.” The older victor winked at Johanna and patted her shoulder. He walked away without giving Johanna, or Katniss, a chance to say anything. The man practically told off the other guests for gawking; he barked at them to go get a life.

Katniss was looking at Johanna when the older woman finally glanced at her. She smiled tentatively, unsure of how Johanna would react. “Hey,” she whispered gently.
“Hey,” replied Johanna, tugging the corner of her mouth in an attempt to smile back.

“So...” Katniss began. “Should I be worried?” Johanna raised an eyebrow in an unspoken question. “You’re not bailing on me, are you?”

Insecurity laced the question and Johanna felt slightly guilty for overreacting earlier. “That depends,” she replied, her expression betrayed nothing.

“On what?”

“On whether I knocked you up or not.”

A broad smile broke across Katniss’ face and her eyes lit up at Johanna’s answer. She leapt forward and put her arms around Johanna’s middle, pressing herself against the other woman.

“I take it I did?”

Katniss laughed as a reply, burying her face in Johanna’s neck and inhaling her scent. It was intoxicating and Katniss thought she could get used to smelling it forever. “You thought right.”

“No bailing then.”

“No.”

“Forever yours?”

“Forever mine,” agreed Katniss.

Chapter End Notes

And err.. I hope you understand that nobody got pregger in the fic. It was just some kind of an inside joke between Katniss and Johanna (headcanon, you can blame my headcanon).
We're back to angst because I suck at writing fluff.

Johanna was sitting cross-legged on her bed, staring at the rope in her hands with a blank expression. She had been fiddling with it – tying it into various knots and unknotting it again – since she found it in the training room that afternoon. She didn’t know why she decided to take the rope; it wasn’t like she would need it for anything. Still, the rope was there now. And she couldn’t help thinking about what to do with it – she had several ideas, but nothing good would come from any of them. Her brows furrowed as she mulled over the last time she was thinking of ending her life and she shivered involuntarily as the onslaught of memory flooded her mind.

It felt like a lifetime ago when she begged and screamed for someone to just kill her, to end her life, to stop the hurting, to stop...

“Johanna, stop!”

Katniss’ panicked voice pierced into her darkened thoughts like a flaming arrow and Johanna’s eyes snapped open to meet Katniss’ worried pair of eyes staring at her. She didn’t even realise that she had screwed her eyes shut, and she didn’t realise that she had been screaming until Katniss told her to stop.

Johanna was panting as she was looking around her, not quite sure about her whereabouts. She felt her bed dipped and her eyes whipped back to Katniss, who was now sitting on the edge of the bed with her both hands up in surrender.

“It’s me – it’s Katniss,” the younger woman said very slowly. “You’re in District 13 now. We’re in our room.” She kept her eye contact with Johanna’s and waited until the wild fear in the dark eyes diminished into a recognition. “Johanna?” she began tentatively, “Johanna, are you back with me now?” When Johanna finally nodded, Katniss let out the breath she didn’t know she’d been holding.

“Sorry,” mumbled Johanna, averting her gaze. She lifted a shaky hand to wipe the cold sweat on her forehead; the clammy hand brushed against something on her neck and she stiffened – somewhere along the way the rope had made its way around her neck. Her stomach lurched and she felt sick. What had she done?!

“Johanna?” Katniss called out again, sensing another wave of panic attack coming in from the woman before her. “Johanna – look at me.” She reached out without thinking and put her hand on Johanna’s knee to get the other woman’s attention. Later on she would think about how reckless she had been for doing so – she could have been hurt badly. Only she didn’t. Her unexpected touch seemed to put the panic in Johanna’s eyes at bay.

Making sure that she didn’t make any sudden movement, Katniss said, “Johanna, I’m going to take the rope off you.” She paused to give time for Johanna to digest her words. “I’m not going to hurt you, okay? Just taking the rope off you.” Her movement was swift as she loosened the knot
and took it off Johanna’s neck, throwing it away as far as possible to the other side of the room.

“I wasn’t trying to kill myself,” Johanna said after a while, breaking the silence. Katniss said nothing. “I really wasn’t,” she insisted.

“I know,” replied the younger woman weakly, not looking at Johanna. She scooted close to the wall and rested the back of her head there, closing her eyes.

“Do you really?”

Katniss opened her eyes. “Yes, I do.” She hesitated, “They’re at it again, aren’t they?”

Johanna didn’t even have to ask what Katniss was referring to. “Were,” she corrected. “Pretty calm now.”

“I’m sorry,” the Mockingjay murmured.

“Don’t be.”

Katniss shrugged and looked away. Again, they went quiet for some time, busy with their own thoughts. Then, out of the blue as if her dam broke, Katniss began to sob uncontrollably that her whole body shook. She balled her fists and struggled a little when she felt strong arms circling her shoulder, pulling her into a hug. She finally relented, though, and clung to Johanna as if for dear life as the older woman mumbled her apologies over and over again.

“You scared me,” Katniss sobbed into Johanna’s shoulder. “You fucking scared me!”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“God! You don’t know how scared I was seeing you trying to choke yourself with that rope! You were hurting yourself, Johanna – you were hurting yourself while screaming for it to stop!”

Johanna went cold at Katniss’ words. Had she really done what Katniss just said? She was at a loss of words and was only able to croak, “I didn’t know.”

Somehow the helpless confession calmed Katniss more than Johanna’s apologies. Her anger was gone in an instant and she sagged into Johanna’s embrace. “I want them to stop,” she said, sounding as exhausted as she felt.

“Huh?”

“The voices in your head – I wish I could make them stop hurting you.”

A hot tear fell down Johanna’s eye. “I wish you could, too.”

“Why you?”

The older girl chuckled mirthlessly. “Isn’t that always the question?”

“I wish I could take it.”

“No, you don’t.” Johanna sighed audibly, “And I don’t either. Having voices screaming in your head isn’t actually a picnic,brainless – I wouldn’t want that for you.” Katniss sniffled as an answer.

They stayed in the same position for several minutes longer until Katniss pulled away from Johanna’s hug. Her face was beet red and she was self-conscious as she scrambled back to her
own bed. It was so out of character of Johanna to hold her like that, she mused. *But it was so out of character of you to break down like that, wasn’t it?*

“I’m tired.” Johanna announced suddenly.

Katniss looked at her and nodded. “Me too.”

They lay on their backs in their own beds, looking at the ceiling. Neither moved to switch the lights off as they knew that the automatic switch would soon turn them off for them. And as if on cue, the lights went off just like that.

Johanna was half asleep when she heard Katniss call out for her very softly. She shifted to her side to look at the younger girl. The room was dark, but not dark enough for them not to be able to see each other once they were used to the lack of light in the room.

“I would, you know?”

“Huh?” Johanna didn’t understand.

“Take the voices from you.”

Feeling a lump forming in her throat, Johanna whispered, “Thank you.”

“I...” Katniss faltered, frowning at the words that were at the tip of the tongue. She cleared her throat. “Goodnight, Johanna,” she said instead.

“Yeah,” replied Johanna sleepily. And Katniss couldn’t decide if she really heard it or if she had been dreaming, for she could have sworn Johanna’s last words were, “I love you too.”
Anchor

Chapter Notes

This one is another angsty one. It is a stand alone fic but can serve as a prequel to my other chapter (which I will post in a few days). I cross-posted this on Tumblr before :)

If she was asked to describe Johanna Mason with only one word, Katniss would say that Johanna was a bully. Yes, the District 7 woman might be of small-built, smaller than Katniss, even, but that didn’t stop her from being extremely intimidating when she wanted to – and that was always.

Katniss had actually lost count on how many times she found herself the unlucky recipient of Johanna’s short temper; like when it took Katniss about a minute longer to wake up in the morning and Johanna simply wouldn’t understand that not everyone had the ability to spring up from bed ready to murder someone like herself. Most of the time Katniss kept quiet and swallowed her opinion, but on occasions she would snap back and they would end up in a shouting match which would result in some kind of cold war that always melted down after a few hours of trainings (mostly because by then they would be too exhausted to remember that they were fighting).

“You are very much alike,” Gale remarked one day after another bad – and this time, public – shouting match between Katniss and Johanna.

“Oh god no,” replied Katniss dramatically, pulling at her shoelace as she spoke, “Don’t level me with that psycho murderer.”

“Who the fuck did you just call a psycho, dimwit?”

Katniss’ head whipped up at the sound of cold voice somewhere above here. She immediately saw Johanna; the woman was standing several feet above the ground on a branch of the tree where she and Gale were sitting under, looking down on them with unreadable expression. Heat spread around Katniss’ cheeks and she retorted, more of embarrassment than anger, “Who else do you think? I’m not the one who spies on other people from a tree.”

Gale cleared his throat uncomfortably, having a gut feeling that he didn’t want to be in the middle of this. However, the banter of words the two ladies had was usually too good to pass – so he stayed. Quiet.

Johanna snorted, “Oh please – who would want to spy on you two boring creatures?” The woman jumped to reach a higher branch and easily hoisted her body up, swinging from the branch with only one hand to hold her up. “Like I haven’t had enough looking at your ugly face,” she spat out.

“That comes from a woman who’s covered in scars,” Katniss growled, knowing even before the words left her mouth that she was out of line.

There was a loud thud and the next second, Johanna was on the ground. Before either Katniss or Gale could react, Johanna had had her hand wrapped around Katniss’ neck. She slammed the back of Katniss’ head onto the tree behind them as she tightened her grip on the younger woman’s neck, knocking breath out of Katniss’ lungs.
Gale was immediately on his feet, scrambling to the two women to separate them. “Johanna, let her go!” he yelled, “Enough!” One look from Johanna stopped him short. He put his hands up in surrender and repeated very slowly, “Johanna – let her go, okay? We can talk about this.”

Katniss’ eyes were teary from the pain radiating from the back of her head and from the lack of oxygen. She clawed at Johanna’s hand to no avail – the older woman’s grip was like metal clamp. “Jo..hanna…,” she choked out, “let… go.. I’m.. sorry.”

The strangled voice brought Johanna’s attention back to the younger woman. She glared at Gale once again and then brought her face close to Katniss. “I despise you,” she hissed through clenched teeth, “I loathe you so much I’d kill you myself if you weren’t the fucking face of the rebellion.” Johanna slammed Katniss’ head once again. “You. Owe. Me. Your. Life,” she said, punctuating each word – and Katniss knew she was talking about their last day in the arena. The angry woman waited until she saw that her words had sunk in before she released her grip. She stared at Katniss, who was coughing and fighting for breath, then turned away and left without another word.

“That girl is crazy,” Gale muttered as he helped his childhood friend into sitting position.

Katniss shook her head. “No,” she croaked, “No – I was out of line.”

“Doesn’t mean she could do that,” he insisted. “Katniss, she could have killed you!”

But she didn’t, Katniss thought. Her neck and head hurt so badly and she knew she would have to wear something around her neck for some time to cover the bruises. She closed her eyes and tried to steady her breath, thinking of the irony of the situation – it was the second time in the course of several weeks that she was almost choked to death. The first time she didn’t expect it; this time, she brought it to herself.

“We need to get you checked up,” Gale commented. He observed the bruises that were starting to form in the shape of a hand around Katniss’ neck. “And I’m going to report her.”

“Don’t you dare!” Katniss snapped, glaring at Gale.

“Katniss, she was out of line! You could have been killed!”

“No, Gale – I was out of line!” retorted Katniss, pointing at her chest. “I will contradict everything you say if you dare report her.”

Gale looked at his friend as if she grew another head. The two stared at each other for a while, and when Gale saw that she wasn’t going to back down, he relented. “Fine,” he grumbled. “But I’m telling Haymitch.”

“Fine,” Katniss agreed, knowing full well that Haymitch wouldn’t do anything to Johanna.

Katniss didn’t see Johanna again until that night when she returned to her compartment. They stared at each other for a very long time as Katniss stood at the door with a wary look, waiting for Johanna to attack again. She didn’t even know that she was holding her breath until Johanna barked at her to close the door. Sighing in relief, she closed the door behind her and walked to her drawer.

“Johanna,” she started.

“I’m not talking to you,” replied Johanna flatly.

Katniss closed her eyes and counted to five. “You don’t have to – just please, listen to me.”
“I’m not listening to you either.”

“Look, Johanna, I…”

The older woman cut her off, “I’m not looking at you – I don’t want to look at you.”

Katniss felt so irritated with the way she was being treated. “Why do you always have to be difficult?”

“Because I’m a psycho murderer covered in ugly scars?”

_Ouch!_ Katniss winced internally; Johanna’s words stung. “I’m sorry, okay?”

“Nope.”

Katniss slammed her fist onto the drawer with a loud bang but Johanna didn’t even flinch. “Grow up, Mason.”

“You grow up!”

“I’m the one who’s trying to apologise here,” Katniss’ voice rose, “I shouldn’t have said what I said. I’m sorry.”

Johanna raised an eyebrow. “I’m not apologising back, if that’s what you’re waiting for,” she stated, “You fucking deserve it and worse.”

They exchanged another glare. “You know what, I can’t wait for the day that I didn’t have to deal with you anymore on the daily basis!” Katniss said.

“Believe me, brainless, the sentiment is well returned.”

“Fuck you.” Katniss gritted her teeth, walking to the shower. She didn’t like swearing but Johanna seemed to always bring out the worst of her.

“In your wildest wet dream.”

The younger woman slammed the door to the shower so hard the mirror rattled.

….  

With each passing day, the arguments between the two women became more frequent – and more heated. To her mother’s dismay, Katniss used more expletives now when speaking to Johanna, who replied adequately with a language so colourful that rainbow looked pale. Judging from how often they fought, it was a wonder they didn’t kill each other in their sleep.

Most of the time their argument would end with one wishing not to have to see the other anymore. It never occurred to either of them that their silly wish would come true – that there would come a day when they really didn’t have to see each other every day anymore.

Haymitch dropped the words like a missile, rendering Katniss speechless. Johanna didn’t pass her test. Johanna wouldn’t be joining them to the Capitol. The Mockingjay felt a sudden emptiness inside of her, numbness spread from her toes to her whole body like poison. For a minute or so she stared blankly at Haymitch, losing her voice.

“You and Finnick should visit her before you leave,” Haymitch suggested.
“I don’t want to visit her,” Katniss’ voice was but a whisper.

The former mentor frowned. He leaned in and growled, “Listen, you fool – I don’t know what problem you two have been having, but I’m not tolerating this behaviour. You’re the only one who’s as close as a friend for her now so, for once, stop being so damn selfish!”

“I don’t want to visit her,” Katniss spoke louder now, challenging Haymitch. She added before the older man could cut her off, “I don’t want to visit her and leave her behind! Damn it, Haymitch – I want her to come with me to the Capitol!”

Haymitch looked straight at Katniss’ eyes, and he nodded after a while, seemingly pleased at whatever he saw in the pair of gray eyes. “I’ll see what I can do.”

But there was nothing that he could do. President Coin was adamant about not letting Johanna go, insisting that the young victor would be a hindrance for them. No amount of persuasion from Finnick and Gale worked either, and Katniss knew that her words would mean nothing for the female leader, who had made it clear that she personally didn’t like Katniss from early on. So Katniss remained quiet.

...

It was a spur of the moment decision that made Katniss decide to go to the woods before seeing Johanna. Somehow she felt the need to leave something for the other woman that would remind her of home, District 7 – and of Katniss.

Katniss started to cry when she found the first pine needle on the woods floor. Holding it close to her chest, the young woman crouched on the ground and wept. She cried for Johanna, for the fact that the older woman failed her test, for the fact that Katniss was one of the reasons why Johanna had failed her test. If it hadn’t been for her, Johanna wouldn’t have been caught – she wouldn’t have been tortured so badly that she was scared of water.

That was when she realised something. Yes, Johanna was a bully; she intimidated Katniss to death. And yet, at the same time she motivated Katniss to keep on going, to keep on fighting. With her own twisted way Johanna had made sure Katniss had enough fire – enough anger in her to keep her from straying from their goal to kill Snow.

“How am I going to leave without you?” she sobbed to no one. Her heart constricted so painfully that she thought she was going to die from pain. “How am I going to fight without you?”

*Why does it always have to be like this?* Katniss thought bitterly. *Why do I always have to realise everything a little too late?*

She didn’t realise how much Peeta meant to her as a friend until after they took him away from her and hijacked his mind. And now Johanna – she had always meant something more. Johanna was right when she said that Katniss was brainless. She was. She was a complete idiot who didn’t know what was in front of her. How could she be so blind? Johanna was her anchor all along and now Katniss was drifting away without the other woman. Lost. Alone.

Suddenly Katniss felt something cool touching her face. She blinked away the last drops of her tears as a calm breeze caressed her face, carrying the scent Johanna would associate with home to her nostrils. A small smile formed at the corners of her mouth – maybe she wasn’t completely alone after all.
“You have to kill him, Katniss,” Johanna hissed, her eyes ablaze with unrestrained anger. “Swear it!”

Katniss winced at the pressure around her wrist, thinking about how it was going to bruise; Johanna Mason was still very strong even when unwell. The younger brunette looked at the other woman square in the eyes and made the promise – on her life, on her family’s life. Johanna’s grip only lessened after she had said it. That was when Katniss noticed that the hand around her wrist was slightly trembling. She glanced quickly down to see if she was imagining thing before looking back at Johanna inquisitively.

Lying on the hospital bed, Johanna looked smaller than she already was. Her face was clammy and pale and Katniss couldn’t help thinking that she looked like something a cat dragged in. However, there was something else haunting her expression – anger, and another thing Katniss couldn’t quite put into words. It was as if Johanna wanted to say something which she couldn’t – or wouldn’t – voice.

“I’m going to take care of Finnick,” Katniss said, assuming that it was what Johanna wanted to ask of her. She knew how close the two were and how Johanna always thought of the Capitol heartthrob as a brother.

Tension left Johanna’s face as she scoffed at Katniss’ words, making her look younger. “Right,” she mocked with a roll of her eyes, “Like that could happen. Don’t be silly, brainless – it’d be the other way around: Finnick taking care of you. You’re as prone to accidents as I am.”

Katniss shrugged, taking a seat on the small space on Johanna’s bed next to her. “I know, right?” She patted Johanna’s hand, which was still holding her wrist, with her free hand. “What a pair we make, huh?”

Johanna’s expression fell so suddenly that Katniss dreaded having said the wrong thing. The frown that seemed to have had a permanent place between Johanna’s eyebrows was back and the woman was chewing the inside of her left cheek. She pulled away from Katniss and turned the other way.

“Jo?”

It was more because of what Katniss called her rather than the question in the younger woman’s voice that made Johanna turned back around. And from the look of it, Katniss was as surprised as she was for having called her with her pet name. Aside from Finnick, nobody else called her that anymore – at least none which was still alive.

The two women stared at each other in silence until Katniss broke the eye contact, feeling uneasy for having been looked at with such scrutiny. She was unused to it, especially when it was done by Johanna. The younger brunette cleared her throat in her attempt to gain her bearings back, which failed quite miserably. In just a brief moment she could read what Johanna had wanted to
say to her in the first place, and it made her uncomfortable – no, it made her afraid.

“I’m coming back home, Johanna,” she whispered softly, feeling her throat closed and her eyes burned with tears that suddenly welled up. She blinked the tears away and swallowed hard.

“You do that,” Johanna whispered back, still looking at Katniss.

“Finnick too.” Katniss didn’t know why she brought him up, but she did.

“Yes.”

“We’ll be alright.”

A sad smile appeared on Johanna’s face, silently asking Katniss not to make a promise she couldn’t keep. They knew that a war was never pretty – people get hurt all the time from many things; it was naïve to believe otherwise.

“We’re coming home,” Katniss repeated, more determinedly now. “And we want to see a healthy you welcoming us back, how about that?” she said. “I need to hear you say it,” she added when Johanna only replied with a nod.

“We will, Peeta and I.”

Katniss froze at the mention of Peeta. Not once did he entered her mind before Johanna mentioned him; she felt rather guilty about it and made a mental note to see him before leaving – if she was allowed to. She turned her focus back on Johanna. “Yes, the both of you.” Katniss paused for a second before hastily adding, “But mostly you.”

Johanna offered her another cryptic smile which was gone in a flash. “Don’t do anything stupid, brainless. I won’t be there to watch your back.”

“What can I do without you, right?” sassed Katniss.

“Indeed. But really, don’t do anything stupid. Nobody watches your back better than I do.”

“I won’t,” Katniss replied in all seriousness. “Don’t get into trouble, Johanna. I won’t be here to get you out of it,” she almost choked on fresh tears, realising how true her words were. Who were they fooling? She was going into a war and this might be their final goodbye.

“No promises,” deadpanned Johanna. “You’re there, I’m here – you can’t control what I do and they can’t contain me.” Then she went quiet. She lowered her gaze and started fiddling with her blanket when she spoke almost inaudibly about her wish to go too.

“I wish you could, too,” Katniss admitted sadly, “No one watches my back better than you do.” From the corner of her eyes she saw Haymitch outside the glass door; he was waving to catch her attention and motioning her to hurry up.

“Your escort is here,” Johanna pointed out, not hiding the bitterness in her voice.

“I have to go now,” the younger woman replied with a small voice. She stood up slowly and felt how heavy her heart felt, as if somebody had tied a boulder around it and dropped it into the sea, restraining her.

Johanna locked her gaze once again. “Goodbye, Katniss,” she bid her farewell.

“No.” Katniss shook her head. “I’m coming home – please don’t say that. You don’t get to say
“See you, then,” the other woman quickly amended. Johanna smiled at Katniss briefly then turned her head to the other side, staring at the wall.

Katniss started to leave, but she had only taken a couple of steps away when she heard a muffled sob from behind her. She froze. Katniss whirled around to see Johanna’s body shaking in the attempt to conceal that she was crying. Katniss took a wide step towards the bed and reached out, cupping Johanna’s face with her two hands.

Her lips were on Johanna’s in an instant; all her frustration was poured in a single, too brief kiss. A sob escaped her throat as she pulled away and rested her forehead against Johanna’s. The older woman was crying, too, as their eyes met – fear was evident in both pairs of eyes.

Johanna’s hands grabbed the collar of Katniss’ shirt; she clutched it as if for dear life and Katniss’ heart broke when the woman pleaded, “Don’t die.” She could no longer think. “I’ll be lost without you. Don’t die.” Don’t leave. “Don’t get hurt.” Don’t leave. “Don’t Die.” I love you.

Katniss nodded and nodded until her head throbbed, hearing the words that Johanna left unsaid. She was openly sobbing when Haymitch knocked the glass panel and came inside to say that he was really sorry but she really needed to go now. It was so painful and Katniss wanted to claw her heart out to stop it from hurting – to stop it from feeling the agony at the knowledge of having to leave Johanna behind.

“Oh Johanna – my Jo. I know,” she sobbed.

“Nobody watches your back better than I do,” Johanna said. “Finnick promised me he’d guard you with his life, but nobody watches your back better than I do.”

“I know,” Katniss replied to Johanna’s lips. “And you couldn’t love me better if you try.”

It took all willpower – and a lot of Haymitch’s coaxing – for Katniss to move away from Johanna. She felt numb inside and was in autopilot for the rest of her preparation it was a wonder she could get into the plane on time. She sat next to Finnick, who offered her a sympathetic smile.

“I’ll watch your back, Mockingjay,” the charming man said in her usual teasing manner.

Katniss smiled back at him. “You’re not Johanna,” she began, “But you will do. She watches my back like no one else before.”

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