Panem Fleet's annual raid is coming up and Katniss Everdeen will do whatever she can to keep her sister from being discovered and deserted... Even if it means volunteering to become one of the Forsaken. From her home on Station 12 to being deposited on a possibly hostile planet Katniss was ready for anything. Except perhaps her companion. The boy with the bread who was a hidden illegal just like her sister. Will his utter fascination in all the things he has never seen drag her into dangers she could have never imagined? Probably.

This fic is inspired in part by all of the good scifi shows that I have watched (including Battlestar Galactica, Falling Skies, The 100, Stargate, Star Trek, Firefly, and Doctor Who). You can find me as TheMaryPrincess on Tumblr/Instagram/Twitter etc.

This is my first non-private fic so I need feedback. Comment and leave kudos for my everlasting appreciation! ;)

The first two chapters are fairly close to the book to establish the characters in the new universe so if it feels familiar that is why. Fear not though because the rest of the story will be wildly different (it is in space after all). That said, all excerpts from The Hunger Games belong to Suzanne Collins and not me.

Thanks to my kind and patient beta PeetaBreadGirl for being awesome.
When I wake up the other side of the bunk is cold. My fingers stretch out seeking Prim’s warmth but finding only the rough synthetic cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course, she did. This is the day of the raid.

I prop myself up on one elbow fruitlessly looking to see if my sister is curled up with my mother. It is still too early for them to have turned the lights on. We must conserve energy. I swing down from my raised bunk as quietly as I can, and make only a small thump as my bare feet hit the metal floor. I don’t weigh very much. None of us do. I slip on my boots and leave our small metal cabin without making any further noise.

Our part of Station 12 is quiet as I tiptoe through the utter darkness. I literally know my way around most of the station in the dark. The familiar sound of my boots echoing on the floor and bouncing off the grubby unpainted metal walls blends into the constant creaking and whirring noises of our station. I often wonder if the other Stations have the same noises or if ours is different because of our main purpose.

As soon as the lights are turned on men and women usually begin their work managing the machinery in the fuel refineries that our station is known for. But some of them will be off to their jobs scrapping. We take everything that is broken, torn, and somehow useless and re-purpose it to be used on the Stations. But today work won’t begin until after the raid.

Our cabin is on the outermost of our station’s housing rings. I pass only in darkness until I reach the ring of passageways jokingly called the Meadow. I’m not sure there is any one reason it is called so. Some say it is said ironically because it is one of the dirtiest places on our station. (Although, that is debatable.) My mother says we call it the Meadow because if you look out of the windows you see fields of stars.

After I pass three windows I locate the floor panel that has been loose for years. Sliding it aside I climb through into the air ducts beneath the floor and slide the panel back. Once again I am in total darkness. I used to be afraid of the dark until my father took me here and taught me how to hunt the ship-rats that nest in the ducts in the dark. That was before he was blown to bits in a refinery explosion. I was eleven then. Five years later, I still wake up screaming for him to run.

Even though going into the air ducts is illegal I have to in order to have enough food for Prim. The Capitol ship makes sure that each person who works gets enough calories in rations to survive on, but no more. Of course, they don’t account for any more than one child per family because that is also a felony. They can’t have too many mouths to feed or we will all starve to death. That’s the main reason for the yearly raid. Too many families were secretly having more than one child and barely keeping them hidden. The Capitol ship found out and the raid’s were established.

After my father died I talked a friend of mine, Gale, into hunting in the ducts with me so I wouldn’t be alone. He had two little brothers. Twins. His father died in the same explosion that mine did and it didn’t take much to convince him to join me. I used the small bow my father had tinkered together out of broken things and spare parts. It folds small enough to fit in my pocket and can shoot anything from a toothpick to a real arrow from it. Gale used a slingshot that he put together himself. Until a raid two years back. They found his little brothers and Gale and his
mother both volunteered. Of course they did. They were both so noble that they didn’t hesitate to be forsaken for their family. Their rations were now feeding little Rory and Vick. I check in on them now and then as I promised Gale I would.

Other than Gale the only other person I have trusted enough to tell about Prim is my friend Madge. She is supposed to look in on both families now if I have to volunteer. She says it won’t come to that but every raid day they search more thoroughly.

I hear the wake alarm in the distance and quickly gather my kills. The two decent size ship-rats should be enough to help feed Prim for three days. Although my father said they were not really rats anymore. They genetically bonded with some other species and modified themselves to live off nearly no food in the air ducts.

I tie them tightly into a bag and leave them near the entrance. I would usually take them home, but I don’t dare to on a raid day. I’m out of the ducts and walking back towards our cabin when the lights come back on. I close my eyes and block it with my hand. I feel as if I spend more time awake in the dark than in the light anymore. Like a rat myself I have become a night animal. When I get back to our tin box that we call home my mother is pacing in circles and Prim is quietly eating her ration for her. She smiles when I return. A nervous smile. And asked if I had any luck.

“Two fat rats.” I exclaim and Prim’s smile brightens. Selfless little thing she actually gets more food than my mother and I but we hide our growling stomachs from her. It’s hard enough for her to never eat. There used to be 13, but that was before. When Panem fleet left our home world of Panem because we had used up it’s resources the thirteenth station was left nearly empty so the future generations could eventually fill it if our population continued to grow. Well, it did. Station 13 filled up and there were not enough rations to go around even with our recycling methods and foraging on what planets we could. The Captain of the Fleet made a decision. In order for most of us to live we would have to cut our population. He abandoned Station 13 and made the law that no couple may have more than one child. If they do and that child is found they will be named forsaken and left on the nearest planet whether it is remotely habitable or not.

I sit at the table and my mother immediately comes over and rebraids my hair. It’s a nervous habit of hers. I look over and see Prim’s hair has been taken down and braided again as well. After my hair is done mother and I help Prim into her current hiding spot which is a in a panel in the wall. She wraps her arms and legs around the wires and pipes as she has so many times and we shut her in. She is twelve now and nearly too big for that spot. We would have to think of something else soon, but not today. Mother and I push our dresser indirectly in front of the panel Prim was behind and stack our heaviest belongings on top. Often if something is too much trouble to move than the Peacekeepers won’t bother looking behind it.

We step outside of our home and wait to the side of the door. Soon after we have done so the second alarm sounds. This tells that the raid has begun. Mother and I try to act as calm as those down the hall do. Those with nothing to hide are chatting with one another amiably. Some a bit miffed to have been kicked out of their homes for nothing or to have to stand there and wait for their belongings to be ransacked. No one else looks as if they have has someone they love at stake.

As I wait I try to take my mind off the coming raid by thinking about anything else. I live in Station 12 of Panem Fleet. The Capitol is the name of our commanding ship. There are 12 Stations total. The Capitol is to be 13, but that was before. When Panem fleet left our home world of Panem because we had used up it’s resources the thirteenth station was left nearly empty so the future generations could eventually fill it if our population continued to grow. Well, it did. Station 13 filled up and there were not enough rations to go around even with our recycling methods and foraging on what planets we could. The Captain of the Fleet made a decision. In order for most of us to live we would have to cut our population. He abandoned Station 13 and made the law that no couple may have more than one child. If they do and that child is found they will be named forsaken and left on the nearest planet whether it is remotely habitable or not.

That is why I stand in front of my home trying to hide my shaking hands as the Peacekeepers approach. They enter our cabin after a curt nod from my mother and I close my eyes as the sounds of moving furniture reach my ears. Just don’t move the dresser. It seems to go on forever but eventually the moving stops and as I go to breath a sigh of relief I hear the clang of the wall panel dropping onto the metal floor.

They found her.

Peeta

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I huddle inside my brother’s mattress trying not to breathe as the men search around me. I am getting too big for this. I have lived my life hiding in this cabin. It is getting more tiresome the older I get. What use is a life not lived? I have only seen four people my entire life and I only remain fed because my father is a “baker”. My family takes the scraps from what Station 11 forages (fruit skins, seeds, nut shells etc) and makes them into semi-edible loafs to occasionally be distributed along with the rations. That’s the only reason they’ve kept me around I expect. Because they simply tell the Capitol that they made one less loaf and give it to me. I eat these disgusting loaves and live in hiding all because the alternative is to be set free on the surface of a planet that may or may not be habitable. Every day that passes makes dying from unbreathable air or being eaten by some strange beast seem more and more appealing. At least it would be different!

It is getting harder to breathe in this mattress on the floor and I am sure that it doesn’t look right.
even with a couple of synthetic blankets piled over me, but I refused to be locked in the floor again this year. Being in the wall or floor has always made it hard for me to breathe and I get this trapped feeling. Most of the time my mother would tie my hands and feet and tape my mouth so that I had no choice. She would do this when she had company over too. Usually I would hyperventilate and then pass out. Today though I told my mother that I was not going in the floor again and I am finally too big for her to restrain me so she just told me good riddance and stormed off. My brother and father are the ones who helped me into the mattress.

All I would have to do was cough and the Peacekeepers would find me and liberate me from this hell. My only entertainment is the art supplies my brother sneaks in. Usually recycled paper or some chalk for the walls and floors. I write sometimes but mostly I draw whatever might be out there. I draw things I hope exist that I might see one day. I try to focus on what I might draw on the green tinted paper I have been saving when I feel something poking around above me through the blankets. All of my bravery jumps out the airlock as I hold my breath and suddenly wish very much not to be found but then something touches my leg and I hear a Peacekeeper say, “There’s something in here!”

It’s over.

I was pulled from the mattress quite haphazardly and I take a deep breath as my freedom or death sentence loomed. I had never seen a Peacekeeper before. They were less patch worked than my family but their uniforms which were perhaps once white were now a dull gray patched with the occasional blue or green. They also bore a rough emblem of the Panem fleet on one of their shoulders. After uncovering me they looked at me not kindly and pushed me into the hall towards my future.

I don’t even have time to brace myself as I am thrust out of the only world I have ever known. I dully acknowledge that my family is still outside, my father and brother try to catch one last glimpse of me but my mother looks away. She is ashamed; many times she has told me that she never should have listened to my father and kept me. The hallway that I’ve only seen from our threshold rushes past me but I try to take it all in. Metal panel walls just like our cabin but they go on and on! A window! I try to stop our progress to look out of it but the guards shove me on as one mutters to the other, “They always do that. Never seen a window you see.”

Then we go in a small box with sliding doors. I’m reluctant to go in but the Peacekeepers don’t give me a choice. They push a button on the wall and the doors close. The oddest feeling of a contained falling occurs and when the doors open again and we are not in the same place. This must be some sort of transporter!

I must have a surprised look on my face because the stoic Peacekeepers actually laugh at me. Then we walk a little while more and then we hear screams in the distance. The Peacekeepers take off and leave me to make my way on my own as they go to assist in whatever disturbance is causing those eerie screams to echo towards me.
All I can think is not Prim. No, no, no, not Prim! Not now! I feel trapped in my mind and body calling out with no one to hear. I must have started to fall because one of my neighbors is now gripping my arm. This can’t be happening. I have dreaded it and run over the scenario so many times in my head, but now nothing seems real. It is as if a haze has fallen over everything.

And then I see her being gently shoved out of our home, the blood drained from her face, hands clenched into fists at her sides. Her blue eyes meet mine and I find my voice. “Prim!” My muscles begin to move again, “Prim!” I reach her and push her back where she is safe. Our cabin. Our home. My brain finds some clarity to do what I have practiced so many times in my head just in case and I yell “I volunteer!” I gasp. “I volunteer as forsaken!”

Prim is screaming hysterically behind me. She’s wrapped her skinny arms around me like a vice. “No, Katniss! No! You can’t go!”

“Prim, let go.” I say harshly, because this is upsetting me and I don’t want to cry. I look into her eyes and one more time say, “Let go.” A little softer this time. She knows this is the plan. If she was ever found then I would volunteer. Yet it felt so strange actually doing it. Like my body was not my own. Though at least now I have control of it. I look toward a Peacekeeper as my mother does what she can to keep Prim from coming towards me and begging anymore. She knows how hard this is for me to do.

“What’s your name?” The Peacekeeper asks as he pulls out a device to input information.


Two new Peacekeepers arrive, out of breath, but once they see the situation is in hand they seek out someone who is behind them and thrust him towards us. “This one too.” I blink and my eyes take in the newest arrival.

Oh no. I think, not him. I don’t even know his name, but I recognize his face.

The Peacekeeper asks him his name and he replies, “Peeta Mellark.”

Mellark. I know his father. He has an older brother too. The thin and ashy blond boy’s blue eyes
look my way and I do not see as much alarm in them as I would expect. He is glancing around at every new face and even looking at the ceiling as if some new wonder may fall from above. Then he looks directly at me and I see, recognition? No. It couldn’t be. Suddenly the Peacekeepers shove us forward and I can’t help but think, why him? Then I try to convince myself it doesn’t matter. Peeta Mellark and I are not friends. Not even neighbors. We have never spoken. Our only real interaction happened years ago. He’s probably forgotten it. But I haven’t and I know I never will…

It was during the worst time. My father had been killed in a large refinery accident three months earlier. We not only lost his rations but my mother was unable to bring herself to go to work. On the station if you do not work you receive a half ration, the idea being that if you are not working then the extra calories are not a good investment for the Fleet. We went from having three rations, and all of the ship-rats my father and I could catch split among four of us, to one and a half rations split among three.

I tried going into the air ducts by myself, but it reminded me so much of my father that I would double over with pain that would rack my body with sobs. Where are you? Where have you gone? I would cry in my mind. Of course, there was never any answer and my weeping would scare away the rats.

My mother didn’t do anything but sit. In the dark I would sometimes pretend she was a statue carved of some alien stone. It was preferable to reality with her glassy eyes fixed on some point in the distance, but that was before she turned to Bliss to dull the pain. Bliss is a pill that makes one feel, well, blissful. She went from staring into space as if paralyzed with despair to floating around our apartment as if in her own world, and then sleeping for days. Bliss is not rationed so you can get at much as you want if you have enough to trade and my mother fed her addiction until she had traded everything that we owned. No amount of pleading from Prim seemed to reach our mother through her drug induced haze and soon everything that wasn’t nailed down or on our bodies was gone until we had nothing left. Then she was worse than before. She alternated between staring, sleeping, and thrashing fits that Prim and I could not contain. Once in a while, she’d stir, get up as if moved by some urgent purpose, only to then collapse back into stillness.

I was terrified. We were slowly starving to death. Rations were calculated (using a person’s age, weight, height and sex) to be just enough calories for that person to exist barely above the malnourished level. Posters of “Waste not, Want not!” occasionally appeared on the dented and smudged metal walls. I hated those posters. The three of us were living on half rations for my small mother and full rations for myself (at the time a stick of an eleven year old girl).

Starvation is not an uncommon fate on Station 12. There isn’t a person here who hasn’t seen the victims. The elderly, too feeble to work or a child from a family with others hidden away. Those injured in the refinery, struggling through the corridors. And one day you come upon them sitting motionless against a wall or lying in the Meadow. You hear the wails from some nearby cabin and the Peacekeepers are called to retrieve the body.

On the afternoon of my encounter with Peeta Mellark, the heating was turned down particularly low as we were passing by a sun with a solar flare. This meant some part of the station would be swelteringly hot while our side was bone-chillingly cold. For three days we’d had nothing but boiled water with dried, flavorless rat bones to eat along with our bite each of rations. It wasn’t enough. I was out begging for leftover rations and digging around trash bins for any crumb that could feed us. Too soon the lights would be turned out so I headed home, but I was shaking so much I could barely walk. I fell to the floor in defeated resignation.

I couldn’t go home. Because at home was my detoxing mother with her dead, hollowed eyes and my little sister, with her pale, shrunken cheeks and cracked lips. I looked up and saw the cabin in front of me was open. A small ribbon of light from inside fell across my face, and then it was blocked by a head with blond hair that glinted even in the sparse manufactured light. The door creaked open just a hint more, and I saw a face with two blue eyes glance at me wearily before it snapped shut.

I could tell he was a second child. Like my sister he was afraid to be seen even in his own cabin. If I’d had any energy left I would have told him he didn’t have to hide from me. I wouldn’t turn him in. But he was gone and there was nothing to say. Then I heard the scrape of metal on metal as the door opened just a few inches. This time instead of a head I saw a hand and it tossed something at me from the doorway. It made a slight thud as it hit my leg and the door clanged closed again. For good this time. I stared in disbelief at what he threw at me. It was a loaf. One of those manufactured from the rubbish of the gleanings of harvests on planets. They taste terrible but are very hearty. I had never even seen a whole loaf before! It seemed so big.

I stumbled off to our cabin to show Prim just as I heard a woman’s yell and the unmistakable thud of a body hitting the metal floor of the boy’s cabin. Was that because of me? Because of the loaf? I could give it back, but surely the boy meant for me to have it. I close my eyes and send a silent thank you to the boy. Hopefully it would soon be forgotten for them, but for my family it was the difference in life and death. I made Prim and my mother sit at the table while I portioned off pieces of the loaf for each of us. We ate nearly half of the loaf that night slice by slice.
As I lay in bed the next morning I wondered why the boy had done it. Had he known he would be punished? He didn’t even know me. Still, just throwing me the bread was an enormous kindness. I couldn’t explain his actions no matter how much I tried to rationalize it.

That day my mother found enough energy to go to work in the recycling sector. I found myself going out of my way to walk by the boy’s cabin and I saw a picture stuck to the door. It was some plant, a flower I think. Bright yellow and green on the dull brown recycled paper. I confidently went back into the ducts that night and I knew we were going to survive.

To this day I can never shake the connection between this boy, Peeta Mellark, and the bread that gave me hope and the drawing that reminded me that I was not doomed. More than once I found myself walking by his cabin door feeling like I owed him something, and I hate owing people. Maybe if I could have thanked him I would be feeling less conflicted now, but there was no way to do so without risking more wrath from whomever had beaten him. And now it would just seem insincere to say, “Thanks for the bread fellow forsaken!” He probably doesn’t even remember me anyway.

Peeta

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It’s her. The girl that I threw the loaf to. The girl who sings at night in the halls when she thinks no one can hear. The only person outside of my family that I have ever seen. Until today, that is. She has calmed down since she volunteered and now she seems to be looking at me strangely. She probably doesn’t remember me, and I am staring at her trying to memorize every inch of her face as if I could draw it next to the young version of her in my memory. That is not a thing that normal, non-shut-in people do. I turn my attention to the Peacekeepers, who seem to be discussing where to eat lunch, as the leader finishes inputting our names into the glowing screen in his hands. Then the four Peacekeepers harshly grab Katniss and I, shoving us down the hall. Katniss suddenly digs in her heels and perks up, “Don’t we get to say goodbye? Gale got to say goodbye to his brothers!”

“No time for that today. The Capitol says we have more Forsaken this year than we have shuttles. Have to streamline the process.” he says as he roughly drags us forward in an attempt to quicken our pace.

“NO!” she turns and yells back towards her former home. “PRIM! I LOVE YOU! TELL MOM NOT TO…” Katniss starts but then dies out realizing how far we have been shoved from the crowd. Her family can’t hear her anymore. I feel a pang of guilt towards not saying something to my brother and father at least, but that is soon replaced by a burning anger that I couldn’t say something to my mother too. Tell her she is right, and I should never have been born or that she was a terrible mother and she should be the one to die of asphyxiation on this planet. At least I will never see her again. Or hear her. Or smell her. Or…

I’m brought out of my thoughts when a pink-cheeked, blonde girl darts by us and away so quickly that I had no idea why she came this way at all until I saw a glint of something gold in Katniss’ hand. She doesn’t look at it but tucks it into her pocket as we approach a large double door. The Peacekeepers wave at the wall by the door and it opens with an ominous mechanical click and hiss. We enter the biggest room that I have ever seen. That isn’t saying much of course, but still the ceilings tower above us and I can’t even see the far side of the room yet. I am having trouble focusing on any one thing for this room is a flurry of machines and people in motion. In the center of the room is what I can only imagine is a shuttle. Our ticket out of here and into the unknown.

I wonder if my first adventure will also be my last. Will this shuttle take us to a planet that is habitable? I think of all of the natural wonders my brother has told me exist on planets. Could it have lakes or streams? Maybe some curious little water creatures? Will I see a mountain or a big open grove of beautiful alien flowers and trees? I have only imagined these things before and my mind stirs with all of the potential new things I could see and draw. Then I remind myself of the danger I could face - acid rain, black hole pits, carnivorous beasts, and my worst and most likely fear: a planet with no oxygen.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to my new beta PeetaBreadGirl for editing and getting my creative juices flowing!

I’m TheMaryPrincess on tumblr/twitter/instagram.

I want to hear your feedback! Comment your hearts out with theories your favorite parts! I’d love for you guys to help shape this fic. Thank you for reading!
Peeta Mellark and I are unceremoniously shoved into the shuttle that will take us to our new planet and whatever fate it holds. I take this time to properly look at the boy who saved my family’s lives years ago. The first thing I notice is the sparkle of interest in his eyes. He’s taking everything in as though it is all magical and new. Well, of course it is new, though this shuttle could hardly be described as magical. It’s rather dingy and beat up like everything else on 12.

The boy is blatantly staring at me as I am at him. His hair is blond, but a dull dreary blond that has clearly never seen any UV light. His eyes, though. I have never seen anything so blue in my life. Prim’s eyes are blue but with a steel to them and my mother has a paleness in her blue eyes. Peeta though, his eyes are what I imagine would be pictured beside blue when it is looked up in a directory. Although he is thin he is not frail looking like Prim or myself must look, and his pale skin doesn’t hold a malnourished pallor that so many I know have. He has a strong jaw, which is set in a hard line. He seems ready for whatever we may face. That’s good.

I’m trying to figure out what to say to the boy to whom I owe everything. Maybe awkwardly introduce myself or ask him about our chances on this planet when suddenly a cyan light in the center of the shuttle flickers on. “I am E.F.F.I.E. Efficient Fractured Fluorescent Introduction Element, although colloquially I am referred to as a hologram. I am here to introduce you to your predicament.” echoes a cool, inhuman, feminine voice through the little shuttle.

E.F.F.I.E. has swirling, incandescent hair that changes color gradually as it speaks. I scoff at the little hologram’s highly impractical ensemble. It looks to be modeled after a geode, aquamarine in color with glowing spiked crystals sticking out at every angle that throw off lighted reflections around the shuttle. I suppose holograms don’t really have to dress practically.

“The odds that you will be deposited on a habitable planet are one in five. The odds that you will then survive the unknown environment with your lack of any training or knowledge of said planet are one in 240,” the swirling, blue hologram said, as if this were just another day. “Potential ways to die are: drowning, asphyxiation, self destruction, hostile natives: both sentient and bestial, starvation, thirst, weather anomalies such as tornadoes, hurricanes, planetary black holes, hostile lightning…”

With each deadly item the hologram clinically adds to the list another breath seems to be forced from my lungs like a stab until I can take it no more and I find myself screaming, “STOP!”

“Registering… Forsaken has asked for the potential fatal circumstances to be terminated. Confirm?”

“Confirm!” Peeta says before I can. If possible he looks even paler than he was before.

“Very well. Continuing with programing: You will be sedated before the landing.”

“Why?” I argue, “I volunteered for this!”
E.F.F.I.E. blinked out for a moment before mechanically replying, "It is a safety measure."

"For our safety or yours?"

"It is a safety measure. The hologram repeats, then continues without stopping to let us say any further comments. "You will be deposited on the planet with..." Here she pauses as if to calculate before saying, "22 other individuals to be forsaken. That is a record! The most forsaken in one raid!" Is it possible that this hologram interface seems almost cheery? I resist a shudder. E.F.F.I.E. is just about to go into some new terrifying aspect of the worst day of my life when someone else in the shuttle with a smooth voice says, "E.F.F.I.E. off!" and the little figure made of light flickered away after saying, "May the odds be ever in your favor!"

The voice that silenced the hologram came from what appeared to be the front of the shuttle where there is what I thought was a solid wall, but then it too blinked away as if it was never there, leaving a stylish man with short, brown hair and bright, golden eyes blinking at us from an important looking seat.

"Hello Katniss and Peeta! I am Cinna and I will be piloting you to the planet. If you both are settled go ahead and fasten your restraints. These are just a safety requirement. Also place that band on your arms. That will release the sedative when I tell it to. I can do it now if you like or after we near the surface if you prefer that. Give you some time to prepare yourselves?"

"Um, I think we'd rather wait." I say as I attach the silver band to my arm. After it clicks on a blue light on the side blinks steadily.

Meanwhile, Peeta is transfixed with our pilot, "Your eyes are beautiful. They actually shine!"

Cinna chuckles "Yes, Peeta. I have some alien DNA a few generations back in my family. That's where the eyes come from. Supposedly it is from a race that lived on a dark planet. Their eyes evolved to help them see. I am very proud of that part of me but... Ah. Best not to speak of that. Go ahead and and click in Peeta. We need to take off."

Peeta smiles at Cinna and obeys by fastening himself to the shuttle and clicking his sedative band on. A loud rushing wind and a whirring of mechanisms rattles the little ship as it prepares to take us to our fate, and I finally have a moment to think.

Prim can now freely leave our cabin. At least one good thing has come of this. She will no longer be stuck in that dim metal box that might as well have been her jail cell. She can see other people and spread her contagious enthusiasm for life all over Station 12. It's better this way. I will miss her of course. And Madge. My only friend after Gale volunteered. Wait! Madge gave me something as we were being marched away. I had quickly stuck it in my pocket so that it wouldn’t be confiscated, but now I pull it out and see that it is a tiny, metal pin, shiny in some places and dull in others. It's as if someone fashioned a small golden bird and then attached a ring around it. The bird is connected to the ring only by its wing tips. I suddenly recognize it. A mockingjay. A bird native to our original planet of Panem. They almost became completely extinct but we managed to keep them alive with a breeding program, and I've heard that somewhere on Station 10 there are a few that may some day be set free if Panem Fleet ever finds an uninhabited planet they can settle on.

This is a precious gift. It could be traded for so much, but I think I see Madge’s message in it. She is telling me to fly away and be free, but not to forget where I came from. Madge always talked of how she felt so trapped on Station 12, and, though we passed by so many different planets, we never really saw or did anything. A part of me is suddenly assured that, though my future is uncertain, Madge will look out for Prim and my mother. I pin the bird in flight to my worn jacket as the ships noises quiet.

Our shuttle stabilizes while Cinna announces over the low hum of the engines, "We are now out of the Station. This will be a first for you two, of course. I always ask that windows be put into these shuttles so that you can see our descent but I don’t have much sway around here. My cries fall on deaf ears as they say, but I will describe what I can for you."

"You will?" Peeta piped up a little too cheerily.

"Thank you Cinna!" I try not to, but I can’t help feeling irritated at how chipper he is, but at the same time I wish that I could find that much excitement in such a meager thing. I stuff that down with a sigh. I stuff down my annoyance with a sigh as I once again think of Prim. She would probably be even more excited than Peeta is. I silently chastise myself for scoffing at Peeta’s exuberance.

"From here I can only see one side of the planet, but I think there is some water! It could be blue vegetation of course but there is hope! Also, I see some clouds. Now that could be good or bad, depending on what type of weather the clouds portend. I don’t see any large cities or towns. No large force of civilization at least." Cinna’s tone trails off, and I hear a small sigh. "I'm sorry but this is as far as we can go before I have to sedate you. You won’t want to be awake while we enter the atmosphere anyway. It’s going to be a little bumpy."

Cinna turns to us and gives a small hopeful smile,"I'm betting on you two! I think the planet might be habitable. No way to be sure of course just in the shuttle, but my scans look good so far. Good luck!"

"You will now be sedated," came the voice of the hologram from earlier. A needle came down from the bands on our arms with a sharp jab as Peeta and I briefly made eye contact. I can’t help but think that he looks like a frightened rat and I probably do too. We are just as trapped as the rats in the ducts. Everything goes black.
It's warm. A little too warm even. I shift as I sleepily try to throw off a blanket that is not there. We must be passing a solar flare. My head is pounding. I try to remember if there was anything I did to cause that yesterday. Yesterday was... Raid day.

My eyes snap open and I try to look around but the bright light blinds me. I close my eyes to a squint and feel around with my hands trying to take in my new surroundings while my eyes adjust. I am laying on soft wet grass and as I sit up I feel a little like like I am floating. The thudding in my head subsides and I open my eyes enough to see the grass has a blue tint to it. Some patches of the grass are swaying in the barely discernible breeze. There is plant life in various shades of blue, purple and green in all directions, tall enough so that I cannot see the horizon, but the sun is up. Wait- suns. One seems fairly close but the other is almost a day star in the distance of the pink and yellow sky. That must be the source of the heat. But with this much vegetation it can't be deadly heat, can it?

Looking around I see no sign of the Fleet in the alien sky. I wonder how far away they are by now and I hope that Prim is enjoying her newfound freedom. Beside me I sense movement and jump to my feet ready for danger. I relax a little when I realize that it's only Peeta stirring beside me as he wakes groggily. My head is still thumping. It must me from the drug they sedated us with, and I sway slightly as I realize the feeling of floating is probably from the lighter gravity on this planet. That will take some getting used to, I think as I carefully return myself to the ground, this time closer to Peeta on a lush bank of grass. At least I'm not alone. He squinting at our surroundings and doesn't seem to notice me until I am beside him.

"We're alive?" Peeta hoarsely asks me. I nod and a sleepy sort of smile spreads across his face. It's the first time I have seen him smile, and I can't help but return one to him. We are alive. We haven't drowned on some water-covered planet or been sucked into the gaping mouth of a giant beast. Well, not yet anyway. Peeta suddenly resembles clips of pet creatures I've seen. He is rolling around in the grass, smelling the air and then frolicking blissfully through the clearing. I don't think I have ever seen anyone frolic before now but there is no other way to describe this. Suddenly he stops and turns his face up at the two-sunned sky, basking in the warmth with his arms outstretched. Watching him enjoy this planet is making my face hurt from smiling. He stops basking though when we hear the scream. I realize that I have momentarily forgotten about the dangers this planet likely held. The sound of rapid footsteps coming nearer give me the urge to run, but I don't know where is safe here. If anywhere is.

A scrawny boy with brown hair a hollow face runs into the clearing still screaming until he isn't anymore, and his sad eyes lose their life as the boy falls, face down with a resounding thump that tells me he will never rise again. He has something long and sharp angled out of his back which we can now see is covered in so much blood that it the slick red looks almost black. I don't think. I grab Peeta's hand and start running in the same direction the boy had been as fast as my legs can carry me.

Chapter End Notes

I'd intended to post this chapter way earlier but life got in the way. Anyway, I hope you enjoy it!

Bookmark, give me kudos, and leave comments to let me know that you like it!
It doesn't take long before Peeta is out of breath. He has probably never run before, and the heat is quickly becoming oppressive. It is one of the strangest feelings running in this unfamiliar gravity. I'm convinced that we would have had sun blisters if it weren't for the shade of this planet's strange plants. There are giant leaves that reach towards the sky, and drooping piles of vines like running water which fall and swirl around us with strange pustular things. I wonder if they are edible but hope they are not as even the thought makes my stomach churn. What I begin to notice most as we slow down is how many of the plants have sharp spikes jutting out dangerously. Big and little, most of them red on the ends, though from blood or something else I cannot tell without stopping completely to look so I shove that thought out of my head and press on.

Once we've slowed to a walk I have less time to observe our surroundings because Peeta keeps asking me questions. "What do you think killed that boy? Was he from the Fleet? He looked like he was from the Fleet, didn't he? How much further should we go?" I answer each of his questions in stride as we travel but I can't seem to find an answer for that last one. I honestly don't know when to stop or if we are far enough from whatever killed that boy. The heat has now penetrated the canopy of plants and my feet feel raw from all the running and walking. I can't tell how bad Peeta's feet hurt but, though he doesn't complain, I know he is in pain because he is limping.

"Here," I abruptly announce.

"Here?"

"Well it's as good of a place as any. We don't know anyplace that is really, truly safe here. Maybe nowhere is."

"That's encouraging." Peeta replies dryly.

"Well, here!" I say, an idea forming in my mind. "Let's climb this plant. This... tree?" I gesture towards the plant looming in front of us with dozens of finger-like branches shooting out of its massive trunk. The plant would almost make a sort of cage that could protect us. If we can manage to get up there.

"Yes. Tree," I decide. "Then nothing can get at us while we rest... unless it can climb."

"But, we can't climb." Peeta protests.

"I think between the two of us we can manage it"
I'm not sure how long it took us to get into the palm of the hand tree, which is what I have decided to call it because to me it looks like a hand with too many fingers. There was a lot of pushing and pulling and Katniss somehow stepped on my ear, and I on her hand but finally we reach our little nest and settle into the palm of the tree. Well, I settle in. Katniss begins pacing like a trapped animal looking around us and surveying our surroundings. I try to rest but her movements make me uneasy, so I begin playing with a vine draped across our hand tree. It is one of those with the strange red-orange bumps and I gently nudge one with my pointer finger. I squeak in surprise as the lump pops and immediately sucks my finger into the vine.

“Um, Katniss?”

She turns around and takes a second to assess the situation before doubling over with laughter. This is the first time that I have heard her laugh and the sound coats my ears sweetly. I find myself thinking that I want to hear that sound as much as I possibly can for the rest of my life. Katniss regains her composure far too soon but I am happy to see a smile lingering around the corner of her mouth. Something within me lurches at the sight of it and I wonder if I kissed that corner if I could make the smile grow. I shake that thought out of my head as Katniss deftly yanks my finger from the vine with apparently no harm done.

“You ought to be more careful. You could have lost your finger, or been poisoned…”

“Oh yes. Any number of dangerous things. I will try to keep my hands to myself.”

“Good.” Katniss agrees. “Now we should rest before you do something else stupid.”

A part of me wants to be offended at her words but that part was quelled when I see the hint of her smile.

We realize just how little room there is in the hand tree when we both lay down and can’t seem to get quite far enough away from each other to keep from touching. We end up facing away from each other with our backs touching and slowly our breaths sync together as we drift off to sleep.

Katniss

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I wake up shivering. My back is the only thing that is semi-warm, and as I try to blink my eyes open I feel something cold and heavy on my lids. As I rub my eyes I discover it is frost. I look around only to find that we are no longer in the tree. Peeta and I are laying on the hard frosted earth of this new planet with no tree beneath us or above us. In fact there is not a single thing around us where there was just a lush and vibrant jungle. Where did all of the plants go?

My shivering must have become worse, for it wakes up Peeta and if he is as confused as I am about the disappearance of an entire alien forest he does not show it. Instead his concern goes straight to the temperature.

“Katniss, you are freezing! Get up. Walk around a little. Maybe that will warm you.” As Peeta helps me to my feet I feel that his hands are only slightly warmer than mine, probably due to the fact that he is bigger than I am. We walk together with Peeta’s arm around me mostly to keep me upright, and though the shivers subside some the icy chill is still too much. We have to find something to warm us or we will die. I don’t know how to make a fire and even if I did I have no supplies to do so. We walk towards a lumpy silhouette in the distance and I see that the suns are no longer in the now green and blue sky. All of the stars seem so far away and I am hit with the crushing feeling of being absolutely and utterly alone. I cling onto Peeta tighter in order to reassure myself that I am, indeed, not by myself. Though I may not have Prim anymore, I am not alone but this is not enough to keep tears from welling out of my eyes and freezing on my cheeks.

The icy wind picks up and the cold has numbed my feet and hands. Literally the only thing that is keeping me going is Peeta. I keep stumbling and falling so eventually he picks me up. I must be coming in and out of consciousness, for a moment ago there was no rock formation near us and now there is. It is filled with shadows, much like my mind seems to be. At least I am not shaking as badly anymore.

Peeta

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Katniss is barely hanging on. She is so cold and her violent shivers have calmed, which in these circumstances doesn’t seem like a good thing. My sore and numb feet have taken us to the rocky outcrop that I saw in the distance, but now what? The shadowy rocks shield us from the freezing wind that will only stave off the cold for so long and Katniss is already so drained of energy. She isn’t even opening her eyes anymore and she feels so heavy despite this planet’s lighter gravity. I set her down in the warmest rocky corner I can find and go in search of a large enough hole in the
rocks that provides more shelter from the cold. Or something. Anything.

The cold is getting to me now. My shivers are more violent and even my vision does not seem to be working. I trip and scrape my arm as I try to catch myself on the ground. I pull away quickly so that I won’t be burned. What? The ground is hot? I rub my eyes brushing the ice from my lashes and I see steam rising from a pool of water. If I had stepped to my right I might have fallen in and drowned. I reach my arm in and needles seem to sharply stab up my arm giving me the sweet pain of feeling again. I grope around the pool and I feel a wide enough ledge on the side of the pool to sit or stand on.

With renewed energy I race to where I left Katniss and I carry her near-unconscious form to the hot pool not bothering to remove my shoes as I step onto the ledge and sit with her in my arms. The hot water wakes her up immediately and her bleary eyes look at me with such a puzzlement.

“It’s okay Katniss,” I assure her. “We’re safe. We’re warm.”

She tries to reply but eventually only manages a nod which I take as thanks.

Katniss
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The longer we sit in the gloriously hot pool the more I feel the life coming back to me and I realize how much of my energy was drained by the cold. Here I am owing Peeta Mellark my life once again. The thought agitates me and I use what energy I have to climb out of his arms and onto some sort of rocky ledge in the pool. He looks concerned as I do so, but he lets me. A shy smile reaches his lips that is so different than those I saw earlier today. Still full of wonder but somehow sad and distant.

“Do you still sing?” Peeta asks.

Here we are fighting for survival on a literal alien planet and having almost just died, and his question comes out of nowhere. After my brain re-adjusts from nearly freezing to death to a lighthearted personal conversation topic I am able to squeak out, “How do you know I sing?”

We are both flushed from the warm pool but I think I see Peeta’s cheeks deepen to something closer to a real red. I find myself thinking that some boys would look like a boiled red fruit in such a position, yet somehow the blush suits Peeta. Eventually he stutters out something about hearing me sing in the hallways at night.

“I’m not good at sleeping at night,” he says “I usually sleep during the day with no problem but at night it doesn’t come easy, but sometimes your songs would help me get to sleep.”

Instead of responding to his endearing comment I simply say, “But how did you know it was me? You only heard my voice that one time…”

But I look over my shoulder and suddenly Peeta is no longer there. My heart starts beating furiously in a panic. He must have fallen in and he can’t swim but neither can I. I’m just considering jumping in after him anyway when a giant black tentacle rises from the pool in front of me with Peeta in its deadly grip. He is dripping wet and seems unconscious. I have to save him.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the cliffhanger! I’ve got a evil streak in me I guess.

Don’t forget to leave kudos, comments, and theories!

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