**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences  
**Archive Warning:** Underage  
**Category:** F/M  
**Fandom:** Hunger Games Trilogy - Suzanne Collins, The Hunger Games (Movies)  
**Relationship:** Katniss Everdeen/Peeta Mellark, Gale Hawthorne/Madge Undersee  
**Character:** Katniss Everdeen, Peeta Mellark, Johanna Mason, Madge Undersee, Glimmer (Hunger Games), Delly Cartwright, Gale Hawthorne  
**Additional Tags:** Alternate Universe - Modern Setting  
**Stats:** Published: 2015-09-08 Chapters: 2/2 Words: 7763

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**It started as a bet**

by aquarpisc

**Summary**

The bet was: Be the first to lose your virginity and you win. How hard could it be? Find a guy. Have sex with him and that would be it. Right? For Katniss, that's all it should have been...

**Notes**

I was challenged by bleedtoloveher on tumblr in the Everlark Drabble Challenge with Everlark + Summer Camp. This was based off the movie Little Darlings. I don't own The Hunger Games or the characters. I'm just borrowing them.
Part 1

Katniss doesn’t even remember how the conversation started but it ended up with two people in a bet and a satisfied smirk on Glimmer Spender’s face. Katniss had only agreed to it for the money and it’s not like she was attached to her virginity anyway. But the worried and scared look on Madge’s face caused guilt to well up in her stomach. The bet was simple, be the first girl to lose your virginity and the money was all yours. Katniss knew why she was doing it, but she had no clue why Madge got herself involved. It’s true, they weren’t the best of friends; didn’t even run in the same circle. And they might have had altercations once or twice…maybe. But she didn’t think Madge disliked her that much to one up Katniss. And she certainly didn’t need the money, all she had to do was snap her fingers and Daddy would come running. So Katniss decided not to dwell on Madge’s reasons and instead to focus on the task at hand.

She had been attending summer camp since she was twelve, now at sixteen, she felt she was just a little too old for it but her mother insisted. Especially since this would be the first year Prim, her little sister, would be attending. So, in a very Katniss-like fashion, she rolled her eyes, and agreed to come back one last time. She had not expected there to be more girls her age but it happened and in a moment of boredom, the bet had been made.

Glimmer had started talking about the new boyfriend she had gotten and how much sex she had been having and she tried to stay out of the conversation but leave it to her friend, Jo, to get her involved and then somehow Madge was involved and now she’s sitting in her cabin thinking about what she’s going to do. The problem is, this is an all girls camp. There’s a boys camp about 10 miles away but how the hell is she going to go there and there’s no way she’s going to try and seduce any of the male counselor’s here. Gross.

The perfect opportunity came when Jo somehow managed to steal one of the camp busses and she along with some of the other girls decided to take a joy ride. They ended up stopping at a small gas station because someone, probably Delly, had to take a piss really bad. That is where Katniss first laid eyes on Peeta. He was standing in front of the store talking to a tall guy with dark hair and the gestures he was making with his hands and the constant smile on his face had Katniss captivated. And his eyes, she’d never seen any so blue. “What are you smiling at,” Jo asked, causing Katniss to blush furiously and mumble a quick ‘nothing’.

Suddenly, Glimmer appeared behind her, looking in the direction of the two boys. “Ooh, ladies,” she squealed, getting the attention of the rest of the group. “Looks like Katniss has found her target.”

Katniss’ eyes widened in horror. “What?” Dammit, that stupid bet. “No, I was just-.”

“Oh come on, don’t back out of it now,” Jo said, grabbing her arm and pulling her to the exit. “I have money riding on this too you know. Besides, blondie’s kind of hot.”

She shrugged Jo’s hand off her and rolled her eyes. “I can do this myself.”

Jo stepped out of her way and motioned for her to pass. Katniss took a deep breath and stepped off the bus.

The conversation didn’t last long. They exchanged ‘hellos’ as well as names. Katniss introduced
herself to both he and his companion. Peeta, was his name. He went to Camp Panem down the road and after some small talk he said yes, he’d like to meet up sometime. Katniss had never been forward with anyone, especially a male. She didn’t know where the courage to ask him to meet had come from. All she knew was when he smiled at her, all bets were off.

On the way back to camp, the girls teased Katniss about the smile that wouldn’t leave her face and how in love she looked. The smile was wiped off her face and replaced with her signature scowl. She gave them the finger and glared out the window the rest of the ride back.

Meeting Peeta was no easy task. It was usually done at night about halfway between their respective camps. Katniss would sneak out at night, careful not to wake any of her bunkmates. Even though they were aware what she was doing, she didn’t want them to know when it was taking place. The last thing she wanted to be thinking about was the girls discussing whether or not she was having sex at that moment. As she walked toward their designated meeting spot, she gave herself a pep talk. She reminded herself that losing her virginity was no big deal. It’s not like she cared. Love didn’t need to be involved. That had nothing to do with it. Sex was just something to get over with. Just seduce him, do “it”, get out and the money was hers. No big deal, right? And don’t, don’t, fall in love.

She heard him before she saw him. “Hey,” she called to him softly from where she had perched herself on the branch of the tree. “Why don’t you walk a little louder. I don’t think they heard you back at camp.”

The smile he gave her took her breath away and everything she had been telling herself flew out the window. That first night, all they did was talk and get to know each other. He didn’t try anything, just gave her a hug and told her to be safe when returning back to camp. It wasn’t until she got back that she realized with a groan, she didn’t stick to her plan.

Their second meeting, a few days later went a little better. She sat closer to him and when complimenting his hair, she reached out to touch a strand. His eyes darkened with her head so close to his and his eyes looked down at her lips so she licked them and smiled at his intake of breath. When he placed his hands on both sides of her head, she didn’t fight it. His lips on hers caused her heart to swell. No, this isn’t what she wanted. This was supposed to be purely physical, there was not supposed to be any hearts a swelling. She moved to stop the kiss when he lightly bit her bottom lip and all logical thought left her.

She didn’t know how long the kisses went on but eventually he stopped and gave her a shy smile. “I think we should probably be heading back now,” he said glancing down at his watch. She nodded, still in a daze and promised to meet him again in two nights. He smiled and gave her one last kiss before heading off into the night. She headed off as well but kept turning back to catch a glimpse of his blond hair that shown bright in the moonlight. Shit, she thought. I’m in trouble.

Katniss promised herself she wouldn’t get too invested in this. She just needed him to win the bet, that’s all. Except night after night, meeting after meeting, she found herself feelings things she swore she’d never feel. He had a way of making her forget her promises. It wasn’t until after she arrived back at the cabin, did she scold herself. Every time. She couldn’t think properly when he was around. She decided he must have cast some sort of spell on her. Don’t be stupid, Katniss, she thought, punching her pillow.

It wasn’t until one night, about a month into their relationship, did she finally decide this needed to end. She had just come back from being with Peeta and settled into bed when the door to her cabin opened and a figure entered as quietly as it could. Katniss watched, her heart falling, as Madge creeped in with a stupid smile on her face. Did Madge do it? Had she won the bet? Katniss
fell into a fitful sleep and when she awoke the next morning, she expected Glimmer to laugh in her face about losing the bet. But everyone was up at the usual time. Madge spoke with the girls but there were no squeals of congratulations. Katniss eyed her carefully and although Madge seemed more happy than usual, she gave no indication she had a secret to tell. She was still in the game.

Katniss walked through the woods with purpose. Tonight would be the night. This had to happen tonight. Losing your virginity is not a big deal, she told herself over and over. It’s just a body, it’s just a thing. It doesn’t have to mean anything. It’s purely physical. When she sees Peeta, she lunges and her mouth is on him before he can say anything. “Well, hello to you too,” he chuckles when they part.

“Come with me?” she asks, her heart beating furiously in her chest. At his nod, she pulls him along the trees. It starts to rain and they run, laughing as they reach the abandoned boathouse. They’re still giggling as they huddle close together. Katniss looked away from the rain and up into Peeta’s eyes and look on his face stopped her laughter. He smiled and pushed the wet hair out of her face. “You’re the most beautiful creature I’ve ever seen,” he said grabbing her face. Before she could lose her nerve, she leaned up and kissed him. Their hot breaths mingled together as she pulled him down on the old wood. He settled between her thighs and she could feel him hard and ready for her. The pleasure coursed through her when his groin connected with her center and she moaned at the contact.

“Katniss,” he groaned, lifting himself off her a bit and trying to steady his breaths. She pulled him back to her desperate to feel him against her once more. “Wait. What are you doing?”

“I want you. I want this,” she insisted, frowning at his hesitation. “Don’t…don’t you want me too?”

“Oh God, yes,” he reassured her and she sighed in relief at his genuine smile. “I just-I don’t want you to think that’s all I want from you. We don’t have to do this if you don’t want to. If you’re not ready.”

Katniss smiled, putting a hand on his cheek. “I do. I am,” she paused for a second, realizing that what she was saying was true. And it had nothing to do with some stupid bet. She was exactly where she wanted to be, right here with Peeta.

It hurt, she wasn’t going to lie. And it was awkward, so much awkward then she thought. It was his first time too. When he confessed, her heart leapt in happiness. The idea of him with someone else was unimaginable. He kissed her tears away when they fell from the pain and it ended far too quickly than they (she) would have liked but it was beautiful because it was them. When he kissed her goodbye he told her he’d see her in a few days and she nodded happily. And as she walked away with a giddy smile, he called out to her. “Katniss,” she turned, smiling at the look of happiness on his face. “I love you.”

Her smiled widened and didn’t even think twice before saying, “I love you, too.”

She woke up with a smile on her face and a little soreness in between her legs but nothing she couldn’t handle. Jo asked her what the goofy ass look on her face was all about and Katniss just answered with, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Jo just shook her head and muttered what Katniss thought was ‘brainless’ but the warm feeling inside her didn’t seem to care.
That afternoon, the squeals she had been waiting to hear finally came when Glimmer announced to the whole cabin that Madge had lost her virginity and won the bet. She thought she saw a forced smile on Madge’s face but it was gone in an instant as everyone crowded around to congratulate her on her victory. “Goddammit,” Jo shouted, clearly upset at the news. “I had fifty bucks on you, brainless.”

Katniss just shrugged and stared at Madge who kept trying to put on a happy smile, which kept slipping into a small frown that no one seemed to catch but Katniss. Questions of when, how, and where were thrown around but more importantly who. Who had taken Madge’s virginity. She blurted out a name but no one knew him. He was apparently someone who went to the same camp Peeta attended. Katniss stopped listening somewhere between Madge explaining he was older and someone saying how romantic it was.

It was over and that’s all that mattered. Katniss found she didn’t care about losing the money. She had gained something far more valuable. Peeta. It was going to be a long few days before she could see him again. She was unsure of Madge’s attitude toward her win, I mean, shouldn’t she be happier than she was acting. It wasn’t until after archery, a day later, where Madge didn’t bother to show up, did Katniss finally have a chance to speak with her. She found her sitting alone behind their cabin.

“Hey,” she called out softly noticing the tears running down Madge’s face, which she tried to wipe inconspicuously. Katniss pretended to not notice and sat next to her. “You okay? You weren’t in archery.”

“Oh yeah,” she said, sniffing a bit, keeping her eyes on the ground. “I’m just feeling a little bit off. I think I might be coming down with something.”

“You need me to take you to the nurse or something,” Katniss asked politely, ignoring the obvious lie.

“No, no,” Madge said, shaking her head. “I think I just need to rest a little. Thank you.”

Katniss nodded and after an awkward silence, cleared her throat. “Um, I never got a chance to tell you. Congratulations,” Madge looked at her with a confused look and Katniss continued. “You know, on winning the bet.”

Madge snorted, “Yeah, ok.” Katniss frowned but chose not to comment. After another moment of silence, Madge spoke again. “Have you done or said something so bad, you immediately regretted it the instant the words were spoken?”

“Sure,” she said, eyes never leaving Madge’s face who continued to look straight ahead. “Haven’t we all?”

“Yeah,” she chuckled out her response. “Yeah.”

Without saying another word, Madge finally turned to Katniss and gave her a small smile before heading into the cabin. For some reason, a feeling of dread fell over her at that moment, one that stayed with her and didn’t quite manage to go completely away.

The next day, while the girls were having their swimming lesson, Madge was summoned from class by the head counselor and didn’t return until late night. When questioned by the girls why she was gone for so long, she just shook her head, saying she was tired and didn’t feel well. The others looked at each other worriedly but let her be. Katniss herself wanted to question her but decided if the other girls could respect her wishes, so could she. Besides, she had a date with Peeta she had to get ready for.
She ran as fast as her legs would carry her until she finally reached the boathouse where she could see the outline of his body, looking out toward the water. As quiet and as stealthily as she could, she snuck up on him and threw her arms around him from behind. His body stiffened when her arms embraced him, probably from being startled. “Hey,” she said happily, turning his body toward her and putting her arms around his neck. “I missed you.”

She leaned up to kiss him but he jerked his head back at the last moment, then he gently removed her arms from his neck before turning away from her once again. “What’s wrong?” she asked, gently touching his arm. He stiffened once again at the contact but allowed it to stay.

“A friend of mine got fired today,” his voice was hoarse as he said it but he still made no move to look at her. “Apparently, he had sex with a girl at your camp and the rumors got around to the higher ups and after it was confirmed, they fired him.”

Katniss froze. So that’s why Madge was called away and that’s why she didn’t want to talk about it with anyone. “I was able to talk to him before he left. He said it never happened. She made it up. Yes, they talked and had a relationship but because she was underage, he never let it go that far. He was willing to wait for her. Can you believe that?” He scoffed and he was starting to sound furious. She could tell he tried to keep his voice calm but it was starting to shake in anger. “When they called her in to question her, she tried to take it back. Tried to say it was just some stupid bet about losing her virginity and a stupid misunderstanding. But they wouldn’t listen to her. He still broke the rules. Staff members aren’t supposed to have any romantic type of relationship with camp goers or their sister camps. So he was still fired.”

Katniss hadn’t so much as breathed a word during his story. Something wasn’t adding up, he still wouldn’t look at her. Why wouldn’t he look at her? “But you know what the real kicker was? He still wants to be with her. After she lied and manipulated him, he still cares for her. Ain’t that a bitch?” he was starting to shake now, she could feel the tremble in his arm. She squeezed it, trying to be reassuring but he stepped out of her grasp, breathing heavily.

“Peeta,” she said slowly taking a small step toward him.

“But you know what else was said, that she let slip out on accident, I think,” he said, his voice once again calm. “The bet wasn’t just hers. It wasn’t just about her losing her virginity. You see, she was competing. She was competing against someone else. Who could lose their virginity first?”

It was Katniss’ turn to shake as he finally turned to look at her. The look in his eyes were full of rage and hatred she’d never seen in anyone before. “Katniss,” and the sound his voice made as he hissed her name made chills run down her back.

“Please,” she begged taking steps toward him to which he stepped back. “I can explain.”

“I don’t need any explanations,” he said plainly. “You used me.”

“No,” she shook her head, tears filling her eyes. “Please, Peeta. I love you.”

“But lie to me,” he shouted, a look of pain crossed his face before masking it with rage once again. “What happened, Katniss? After that night, did she beat you to it? Did you wait until morning to reveal what we had done but she woke up before you? Huh?”

“No, no, please,” she cried out, the tears falling more freely. She sobbed into her hands at hearing the words tumble out of his mouth.
“Maybe, you should have woken them up when you got back, while you still had proof,” he screamed.

Katniss gasped and stood in shock at his harsh words. For a moment, he looked appalled at himself but as quick as it came, it went. He breathed deeply and spoke coolly, “I don’t ever want to see you again. I can see you now for what you truly are. Distrustful and manipulative. And I hate you for it.”
Part 2

The following days were the hardest Katniss had to go through. No one knew about Peeta so she had to go through the motions like her heart wasn’t broken. Trying to keep it together or do something stupid like cry. Except no one really paid any attention to her because Madge seemed to be top priority. Rumors had finally reached the girls camp of what happened. Of course, no one knew the whole story but the fact that a camp counselor at the boys camp was fired gave everyone enough cause to talk. For the most part, Madge didn’t seem to enjoy the attention and closed herself off more and more each day.

Katniss noticed she would cry every night in her bed. It wasn’t loud or anything, just quiet cries into her pillow. Katniss almost envied her. No one would question Madge if they woke and heard her. But Katniss, she had to hide everything. So after Madge would quietly cry herself to sleep, she would sneak out into the woods and go to the place she would meet Peeta and let everything out. Thoughts of their time together filled her mind as she sat there, in almost total darkness. She remembered the stories he would tell her of his childhood with his two brothers which had her in stitches but now only brought tears to her eyes. She missed the way his eyes would crinkle when he smiled or how his blonde hair shone almost white in the moonlight. There was longing too, of their brief time together, she might as well admit that. Every crack of a branch had Katniss looking up in hopes of seeing those piercing blue eyes she loved so much but the only thing she ever saw was the blackness that covered the forest.

One day, near the end of camp, she stumbled across Madge, sitting alone on a swing in the poorly kept playground no one ever used anymore. Katniss, curious about Madge’s side of the story, decided to try and get it out of her.

“Hey,” Katniss said as quietly as she could but still managed to make Madge jump. “Sorry.”

Madge shrugged and gave a smile that didn’t reach her eyes. Katniss sat down on the swing next to her and they sat in awkward silence for a few minutes before Katniss spoke. “So, uh,” she said before clearing her throat. “What a summer, huh?”

“Yeah,” she said softly, a frown upon her face. “I never got to tell but I’m sorry about the bet. I know you were counting on that money.”

Katniss shook her head. “I’ll survive,” she said quietly. They sit in silence, both deep in thought. Katniss itched to ask Madge about it and didn’t want to come off sounding too nosy but in the end, her curiosity won out and she really needed to relate to someone. “So…how did it feel. You know, the first time.”

Madge looked at her, stunned. “I’m sorry,” Katniss said quickly. “It’s none of my business.”
“No, it’s okay,” she assured her with a nod of her head. She started to speak but stopped, hesitant. “I…I mean. It was…” She sighed, resigned. “It didn’t happen. It was a lie. I lied.”

Katniss’ eyes widened in shock. She sat quietly as Madge relayed the whole story. She had met Gale, the counselor at the boys camp, at an outing Glimmer set up after everyone was supposed to be in bed. He was older than her, but that didn’t stop them from entering a relationship. Every chance they got, they were together. She’d never been more happy in her life. And then one day, after Madge had described to Glimmer one of their nights, Glimmer misinterpreted it as having sex. She tried to correct her but everyone had started cheering her on so she just went with it. Things didn’t get serious until the rumors had spread and she was questioned.

“He lost his job, Katniss” she cried, wiping tears from her eyes. “Because of me. Because I was so stupid and selfish and couldn’t speak up. They called my parents. My mother had to come to camp and listen to how her daughter was acting indecent and how disappointed administration was with someone from such a prestigious family. Thank God my father had too much going on and was unable to attend.”

“I told the truth then. Which is why I’m still here,” she sniffed, scuffing the ground with her foot. She looked up at Katniss and smiled for the first time since starting her story. “We’re still together. I was able to speak with him before he left for home. And we talked. I pretty much graved and he forgave me.”

“I know,” Katniss said quietly.

Madge looked at her, confused. “You know,” she asked. “What do you mean? How do you know?”

Katniss’ lips trembled as she fought to keep control of her emotions. “I, uh…I met someone too,” she whispered, trying hard to fight the tears that threatened to escape. “He goes to the same camp as your boyfriend. He told me. Right before he broke up with me.”

The tears that she tried so hard to hold back finally fell and Katniss clapped a hand over her mouth as she choked back a sob. “Oh, Katniss,” Madge said softly. Katniss squeezed her eyes tight in order to prevent more tears from falling to no avail. The dam had been broken and when she felt Madge put an arm around to comfort her, she didn’t fight it. “I’m so sorry.”

It was Katniss’ turn to relay her story and Madge listened quiet, without interruption. By the time she finished, she was a sobbing mess. Madge offered her a handkerchief and Katniss accepted with a small laugh. “You always carry these around with you,” she teased while wiping her eyes.

Madge blushed and shrugged. “Old habits,” she said offering a small smile. Madge rubbed Katniss’ back as she calmed down. “This boy. You love him.”

It was a statement, not a question, one that Katniss answered anyway. “Yes,” another tear snuck out and she immediately wiped it. “But it doesn’t matter, Peeta will never forgive me. You didn’t see the look in his eyes. The betrayal. The hurt. The -.”


“You know him,” Katniss asked astonished.

“Know him? He’s my cousin,” Madge chuckles in disbelief. She couldn’t believe the irony of it all. “This is all my fault. If I had just had the courage to tell the truth in the first place, Gale would still have a job, you would still be with Peeta.”

“You don’t know that,” Katniss sniffed, shaking her head. “Even if I had told him the truth,
there’s a good chance he would have still rejected me. So no, it isn’t your fault. We brought this on ourselves. We should have never agreed to that stupid bet.”

Madge nodded her head in agreement. “Maybe, I can help,” she offered. “I can talk to Peeta for you.”

“No,” Katniss shook her head. “Please, don’t bother.”

“Katniss,” Madge said, grabbing her hands and kneeling before her. “You love Peeta. Right?”

Katniss closed her eyes and nodded. “Okay,” Madge said, giving her an encouraging smile. “Then let’s get him back to you.”

When the end of the summer talent show, put on by both camps, was announced, Katniss decided this was the distraction she needed. After some discussion with Madge, she decided to sign up. And after more discussion, they both decided that Katniss singing a song dedicated to Peeta would be her way of apologizing since he wanted nothing to do with her. And all campers were required to attend. Trying to find the perfect song to express her feelings was difficult and it took a few days but she finally found it.

While Katniss spent most of her free time rehearsing for the talent show, Madge tried to get in touch with Peeta. This proved to be most difficult since she was all but banned from engaging with the boys camp for any reason. She did manage to send him a note that asked she speak to him before the start of the show to which he agreed. The reply message was short and to the point which clued Madge in that Peeta knew the role she played in all this.

Katniss was a bundle of nerves when the day of the show arrived. The initial plan was for only her to be at the spot Madge had arranged to meet Peeta but after a bunch of back and forth arguments, Madge agreed to be there also, not only to boost Katniss’ confidence but to convince Peeta to stay should he try and leave.

After getting dressed, Katniss sat on her bunk, biting her nails and leg shaking up and down, as the rest of the girls bustled around her. “Stop fidgeting, you’re making me nervous,” Jo complained, trying to spike her hair as high as it would go. “I’ve heard you sing, you’re gonna do great.”

Katniss could only nod in response. She was too much in deep thought to pay attention to anything Jo was saying. With too many scenarios running through her mind, all of them ending in a horrible way, she didn’t hear her name being called. “BRAINLESS,” Jo shouted, startling Katniss out of her reverie and causing her to stare up at Johanna with a confused look. “What is your problem? I’ve been trying to have a conversation with you for like 10 minutes and you’re off in La La land. What is going on with you?”

“Nothing,” Katniss assured her, shaking her head. “I just…I don’t like singing in front of people. That’s all.”

“Well then, I suggest you get your shit together before you have to go up on that stage,” she said, standing up and heading toward the door. “Let’s get some breakfast in you.”

Katniss did as told and followed her to breakfast, though she didn’t think she’d be able to keep anything down. Once they were seated with their food, Madge joined them. Jo, unclear why Madge Undersee had been accompanying them lately, rolled her eyes at her arrival. She was still bitter about losing the bet. “How are you feeling,” Madge asked, sympathetically as she watched
Katniss stirring her eggs.

Katniss grimaced in response and continued moving the food around her plate. “Katniss, you have to eat something,” Madge scolded.

“As much as I hate to agree, Undersee’s right,” Jo gestured to her food. “Go on, eat a little bit. Just don’t blow chunks while you’re onstage.”

Katniss glared at Jo and mumbled something under breath. Madge, knowing it wasn’t the talent show causing the distress, smiled in encouragement toward her new friend. “It’ll be ok, Katniss.”

“I hope so,” she said quietly.

Jo looked between Katniss and Madge suspiciously but refrained from saying anything. Madge handed Katniss a piece of toast and she chewed on it slowly. The rest of the meal went relatively quiet and the girls headed to the rehearsal area. Madge was there, under the guise she was helping Katniss due to her own musical background and Jo there, for moral support.

Jo was a great friend and Katniss wanted to let her in on what happened but was too embarrassed to say anything and at the moment, had too much on her mind. After singing a portion of the song onstage and a couple of times for Madge and Jo, Katniss felt confident enough for the main performance.

The show was set to start at around 3, the boys from the other camp were supposed to arrive at lunch. Katniss knew they had to go to lunch but was hoping there were enough boys and girls that they wouldn’t run into each other before the actual meeting was supposed to take place.

And she couldn’t say she didn’t want to go unless she wanted to arouse more suspicion in Jo.

Madge volunteered to look first and upon not seeing Peeta, subtly suggested they eat. Katniss couldn’t help but be on the lookout as they sat at their table and ate as fast as she could in order to leave as quickly as possible which did not go unnoticed by Jo.

“Damn, Katniss. This morning you couldn’t eat, now you can’t stop,” she said incredulously as Katniss shoveled food into her mouth.

“I guess not eating made me really hungry,” she said in between bites. Taking the last bite, she got up quickly without waiting for anyone else. “Ok, I’m done. I’m going to take a walk to calm my nerves. I’ll see you two in a bit.”

Jo struggled to come up with such an abrupt response but Madge only nodded in acceptance. Just as she stepped out the door, she saw him. He stood with who Katniss assumed were friends, having an animated conversation. She immediately placed herself out of his vision and watched. He looked like he was telling a story or telling a joke and had a huge smile on his face, gesturing with his arms. He looked good. Katniss smiled to herself, despite the stab of pain she felt from seeing him again. The boys erupted in laughter at whatever it was Peeta said and he laughed along with him. As the boys were distracted by laughter, the smile from Peeta’s face fell and he cautiously looked around with trepidation. When he didn’t see anything, or more specifically her, the smile returned to his face. Katniss frowned and looked down, turning and walked away knowing that walk and time alone was needed now more than ever.

Katniss took a walk along the edge of the big lake that separated the two camps, thinking about the fearful look on Peeta’s face as he had surveyed his surroundings that he might catch a glimpse of her. She must have done a number on him. She was even more fearful now that he wouldn’t hear her out and run as soon as he realized Madge’s true intent of wanting to meet and catch up
with him. Katniss went over and over, in her mind, what she wanted to say to him. She had a whole speech prepared. In the end, she hoped it would be enough. Even if he decided he still wanted nothing to do with her, at least she could say she tried.

She looked at her watch and noticed, it was time. She took a deep breath and on shaking knees headed to the area Madge and Peeta were waiting. As she neared the meadow, she could hear sounds of arguing. She slowed down and crept quietly, listening in on the conversation.

“Look, I just don’t understand why we have to talk all the way out here,” she heard Peeta say.

“I would rather not have this conversation around other people, ok,” Madge said timidly.

“Afraid I’m going to spill your secrets,” Peeta asked harshly. Peeta sighed at the small squeak that escaped from Madge. “I know what this is about. You don’t have to explain anything.”

“But you don’t know the whole truth,” she exclaimed. “If you could just hear us out.”

“Us,” he asked, confusion in his voice. I took this cue to reveal myself and quietly made my way out of the bushes. Looks of shock and outrage crossed his face and he took a moment to calm himself. “Unbelievable. I should have expected this.” He ran his hands through his hair in frustrated disbelief. “You here to finish me off, sweetheart?”

“Peeta, please,” she starts but is interrupted.

“No,” he shouted and turned to Madge when she tried to calm him. “And you. I can’t believe you’re in on this too. I know you were involved with Gale but to find out you’re on Katniss’ side? Were you both in on this from the beginning. Did you two discuss me or something? Huh? Did she tell you everything you needed to know about how to get me to fall for you, Katniss? Did she?”

“No, Peeta! Stop,” Madge said, appalled. “You don’t know the whole story.”

“I know enough and right now, I don’t care to know any more,” he said trying to step around Katniss but she blocked his path.

“Wait,” she pleaded, holding her hands up. “Please, let me just explain. And I promise, if you don’t forgive me then I’ll…I’ll leave you alone. I’ll respect your wishes and leave you alone.”

Peeta had a look of intrigue and annoyance as he looked back and forth between Katniss and Madge. “Fine,” he relented and stepped back, crossing his arms. “Go ahead. Say what you need to say.”

Katniss nodded and opened her mouth to start. But nothing came out. Suddenly, the speech she had planned flew out of her mind completely. She stood for a minute trying to wrack her brain for something to say but nothing. It wasn’t until she saw Peeta’s tired expression that she started talking. “Yes, it’s true,” she said. “It started out as a bet. I saw you and I picked you. The plan was to use you to win the bet.”

“Well, you’re a piece of work, aren’t you,” he said, shaking his head in disbelief. “I think I’ve heard enough.”

“I’m not done yet,” Katniss shouted. Peeta’s eyes widened in fear and Katniss would have laughed at how comical it looked if she wasn’t trying to defend herself. “Like I said, that was the plan. But it didn’t work. Every night we met, the plan was to get close to you and get you to have sex with me. But every night, as soon as I saw you, everything I had talked myself into doing, went out the window. Every night, it wasn’t about getting you to have sex with me. It just became
about being with you. I just wanted to be with you. And the night that it happened, it happened because I wanted it to be you. I wanted to be with you. That’s all. I fell in love with you.”

Her voice is shaky and there are tears rolling down her face. “When I got back to the cabin that night, I was so happy. I’ve never been that happy before and the next morning when Madge “won” the bet, I didn’t care. I didn’t care about any of it because I had you. And then I didn’t. And it’s my fault and I’m so sorry. I didn’t know how much you’d mean to me. I didn’t know that I’d love you so much,” she said, wiping the tears from her face.

Madge handed her a handkerchief and she thanked her quietly. She watched as Peeta stood there, trying to keep his emotions in check. So many emotions were displayed on his face. Hope, fear, confusion. Love. So she wasn’t prepared when he looked at her and said, “I, um. I need some time to think. I’m sorry. I need to go.”

Katniss watched as Peeta walked away from her, again. This time she, at least, had someone to hold her as she cried. After composing herself, Katniss sat in silence for a while. “He hates me.”

“He doesn’t hate you,” Madge said, shaking her head. “He’s just confused.”

“No,” Katniss said, trying to convince herself. “He doesn’t ever want to see me again. I know it.”

“Why would he tell you he just needed time,” Madge countered.

“Because he’s just trying to let me down gently,” she said, tears spilling out again.

“Oh because he did that last time too, huh,” Madge said, giving Katniss a pointed look. Katniss just shook her head. “He still loves you, Katniss. I can see it even if you can’t. He’s already forgiven you.”

Katniss looked up at Madge. “Then why didn’t he stay?”

“Like I said, he’s just confused. He told himself he hated you for hurting him and now that he knows the truth, it’s just going to take him some time to get over it. He’s still hurt,” she said softly. “And once he hears the song you’re singing, he’ll show he forgives you.”

“You think so?” she asked, hopeful.

“I know so,” Madge said with a smile. Katniss couldn’t help but smile back. “Now, come on, let’s get you cleaned and ready to perform.”

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Katniss’ heart felt like it was beating a thousand beats per minute. Madge and Jo were backstage with her, offering moral support. Once they’d returned to the cabin, Jo was filled in on the details concerning Katniss and why she had been acting unlike herself the past few weeks. Jo had felt guilty about pressuring her to which Katniss told her not to. Everything she did, she did herself. Now, they stood, waiting for one more act before it was Katniss’ turn.

“You’re gonna be great out there Katniss,” Madge said, giving her a hug. “And don’t worry, everything will be ok.”

“Yeah, Brainless. If he doesn’t forgive you, it’s his loss. But something tells me that won’t be the case,” Jo smirked and lightly punched her in the arm. “Break a leg out there.”

Katniss smiled and watched her two friends leave to find seats. She heard her name announced and took a deep breath before walking onstage. She walked up to the microphone in the middle of
the stage and when she looked out into the crowd, her breath stopped. There were so many people. Some looked bored, some were chatting and some looked like they couldn’t wait to see her fail aka Glimmer and Clove. Her hands started shaking and her breathing became labored and it wasn’t until she saw a pair of bright, blue eyes looking at her encouragingly did she start to be calm. Peeta gave her a small smile and slight nod. Katniss shakily smiled back at him and lifted her guitar to the correct position. “Hi,” she cleared her throat. “My name is Katniss and I’ll be singing a song today. I’m not very good with words so I’m just going to sing now.”

She looked into the crowd, took a deep breath and began playing. The chords of the melody caused a hush in the crowd and when the first words left her mouth, all eyes were on her. Her eyes, however, were only on one person.

When I look into your eyes
It’s like watching the night sky
Or a beautiful sunrise
Well, there’s so much they hold
And just like them old stars
I see that you’ve come so far
To be right where you are
How old is your soul?

Well, I won’t give up on us
Even if the skies get rough
I’m giving you all my love
I’m still looking up

And when you’re needing your space
To do some navigating
I’ll be here patiently waiting
To see what you find

‘Cause even the stars they burn
Some even fall to the earth
We’ve got a lot to learn
God knows we’re worth it
No, I won’t give up

I don’t wanna be someone who walks away so easily
I’m here to stay and make the difference that I can make
Our differences they do a lot to teach us how to use
The tools and gifts we got, yeah, we got a lot at stake
And in the end, you’re still my friend at least we did intend
For us to work we didn’t break, we didn’t burn
We had to learn how to bend without the world caving in
I had to learn what I’ve got, and what I’m not, and who I am

I won’t give up on us
Even if the skies get rough
I’m giving you all my love
I’m still looking up, I’m still looking up.

Well, I won’t give up on us (no I’m not giving up)
The applause was thunderous when Katniss finished. Madge and Jo were whistling and even Glimmer and Clove were clapping like crazy but Katniss didn’t notice any of it. Her eyes were on the only person that mattered. Peeta looked back at her with a look that mirrored her own. Love.

Katniss thanked the crowd and made her way backstage. Madge and Jo were there to offer their congratulations but they weren’t alone. Peeta hung back as the girls hugged and compliments were given and then told Katniss they’d see her later.

They stood in silence, neither knowing what to say until Peeta finally spoke. “You, uh. You did great out there,” he said nervously. “You have the most beautiful voice I’ve ever heard.”

“Thanks,” Katniss said with a small smile. “Listen, Peeta. I’m sorry. I’m sorry about everything. I never meant to hurt you and I promise I won’t do it again. I won’t. Please, just give me another chance. I’ll-.”

“Katniss. Stop,” he said, trying to get a word in as she continued rambling. “Katniss. Please, if you say you’re sorry one more time, I’ll lose my mind.”

“But,” she tried again.

“Stop,” he said putting his hands on her arms. “There’s no reason for you to apologize. I forgive you. Just please, don’t say it again. If anything, I’m sorry. I should have given you the opportunity in the first place. If I had, we probably wouldn’t be in this mess.”

“But it’s my fault, if I hadn’t accepted that stupid bet, this wouldn’t have happened,” she stated.

“Ok, sure,” he agreed. “But if it wasn’t for that stupid bet, we probably wouldn’t have met either.”

Katniss hadn’t thought of that. “Can we start over,” he asked, bringing his hands down to grasp hers and pulled her to him. “I mean, I know we can’t start over but…I love you. I know we both made mistakes but I’m willing to move past them if you are.”

Katniss nodded. “I am,” she smiled up at him and moved her hands to cup his face. “Stay with me.”

“Always,” he said and the two met in a soft kiss.

Chapter End Notes

The song Katniss sings is I won’t give up by Jason Mraz which is, in my opinion, the
ultimate Everlark song. Thank you to everyone who expressed interest in this fic, you are the reason it’s finished! Thank you for reading!!

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