Elevators

by bubblegum1425

Summary

Katniss Everdeen has had a crush on Peeta Mellark since the day he walked into her Freshman Speech Class, though she's never found the courage to tell him. But now Katniss is trapped in an elevator with him, and it might just be the opportunity she needs to finally tell Peeta the truth. One-shot (which will eventually expand to a 4 chapter series) Modern AU.

Notes

Author's Note: This is a one-shot I just published for Yellow for PIP. It will eventually become a 4 chapter fic…hint, hint…there's a reason this one is labeled "Freshman Year." ;)

Thank you to my betas, ct522 and Peetabreadgirl for their wonderful work, and a third thank you to nightlockinthecave for making such a great banner! Now without further ado...

Elevators: Freshman Year

See the end of the work for more notes
"I finished class, Finnick. What court is it again?"

Katniss looked up from her phone, startled at the sound of the voice now reaching her ears from just outside the rickety dorm elevator and began to blush. She would know that low timbre anywhere.

"Ok, 3A, got it," Peeta Mellark said, phone to his ear, as he walked onto the platform. He pushed the button for the 9th Floor and turned to face forward so quickly that Katniss was sure he hadn't noticed her standing in the corner, continuing his conversation with his friend. "Shit, she is going to be there? Why didn't you say that earlier?" he said in an exasperated voice. Katniss let out an almost inaudible sigh and looked back down at the text message she'd just received from her sister.

Prim: Go out with Johanna tonight. It'll be good for you! P.S. You have almost a full semester of college under your belt now, and you may be hopeless, but I definitely don't believe you when you say that you haven't thought even one guy at CU is hot. Gotta fly, Rory's here! XOXO

Katniss glanced back towards Peeta, her eyes raking over the jeans that hung deliciously off his narrow hips and molded perfectly to his well-sculpted ass, before they traveled higher to stare at the slightly flexing muscles of his broad back, outlined easily by the thin blue jacket he wore. Finally, she peered upwards at his wavy ash-blond hair that looked like it was in need of a trim, repressing the strong urge she always felt at the sight of those curls to run her fingers through them. Katniss let out another soft sigh, knowing from the many days in the classroom that Peeta's front was just as hot as his backside.

Sure, Katniss could tell her sister that she thought the boy in front of her was, in fact, the hottest guy she'd ever seen, not to mention funny, kind, and incredibly sweet. But Katniss had too much pride.

She knew Prim probably wouldn't laugh at her for liking the guy who was the Freshman Class President, the captain of Capitol University's soccer team, and chair of multiple volunteer projects on campus. Peeta was the guy every girl wanted to fuck and by the sound of his phone conversation, he already had someone to fuck him. Meanwhile, Katniss had a hard time just admitting to herself that she'd fallen for him, too, even more that she'd had a crush on him all semester long.

She still remembered watching him stroll through the door on that very first day of the stupid speech class all freshmen were required to take, exuding confidence in every stride, a broad smile on his face…

Katniss scowled around at the empty seats surrounding her, unsurprised and yet a little disheartened that no one had wanted to sit by her, much less engage her in any semblance of conversation. She hadn't been bothered by it in high school, was used to ignoring the popular girls who insulted or shunned her for the sometimes ragged clothes she wore and her love of archery, hunting, and the general outdoors. But Prim had insisted Katniss buy some new clothes for herself in honor of a new school year instead of going without for the sake of her sister like usual. She was, after all, beginning college, thanks to a very generous need-based grant.

Katniss had hoped she'd be able to make some friends besides Gale, whom she had known since she was young and was like a brother to her, and his girlfriend Madge. They had been her only real friends in high school and were both starting school as well, but playing third wheel to them wasn't always enjoyable.
She tried to remind herself that she didn't need friends. She wasn't here to have fun, of course. Katniss was here to obtain her degree. However, she'd thought...maybe...possibly...that she'd be able to start over somehow, that she wouldn't be known as the girl with blood under her fingers and dirt on her face. But judging by the vacant desks around her, it appeared to Katniss that college was going to be just like high school. She pulled her textbook and notebook out of her bag, resolutely avoiding any further thoughts about the loneliness that the next four years might hold for her.

But then he walked into the room.

Katniss could barely keep her jaw from dropping as she caught sight of the boy's handsome face, crooked grin, and astonishing crystal blue eyes. And that wasn't even to mention his toned body that was on display for all to see in a well-fitted orange t-shirt that stretched across his broad chest and blue basketball shorts that hugged his ass to perfection.

Katniss looked around, judging by the wide-eyed looks on the other girls' faces, that she hadn't been the only one to notice the boy's arrival. But then Katniss embarrassingly remembered she'd been left alone in here like the loser she was, an island unto herself in the middle of her chattering classmates. She ducked her head, wishing for once that her hair wasn't in the braid she always had it in, so that it could fall on either side of her head to shield her from the humiliation she was feeling.

But then, much to her surprise, the boy came over and plopped down into one of the seats next to her. She watched him out of the corner of her eye as he rummaged around in his backpack, barely able to tear her eyes away from his rippling bicep as he pulled a notebook out from his bag, and she felt herself burning with embarrassing desire. She'd never been affected like this by another person ever, especially not one that hadn't even spoken to her yet...And one that likely wasn't going to, she realized with chagrin, for the blue-eyed, blonde-haired god was immediately engaged in conversation by a vapid-looking but beautiful, simpering, ultra-blonde girl with the plastic-looking smile on the other side of him. Katniss bit her lip to keep herself from sighing and went back to staring at her textbook. She hated this class already.

Katniss stared at the clock anxiously, wondering what Professor Snow could possibly be doing that would delay him five...now ten...now fifteen minutes past when the class was supposed to start. She was staring so intently at the door that she only caught the tail end of what the boy said to her.

"...in your hair?" Katniss looked at him in startlement, shocked that he had turned away from the blonde bimbo to talk to her.

"Wh-what?" she managed to stutter out, desperately willing away the flush she knew was creeping into her cheeks. Katniss had never been good at concealing what she felt.

The boy gave her a broad grin and pointed at her hair. "I said, do you know there is a dandelion in your hair?"

Katniss mouth fell open in mortification. "Shit," she said, frantically combing her fingers over the top of her head to try to remove the offending weed, accidentally releasing several threads of hair from the braid in her haste. The strands fell in front of her now beet red face. "I was lying out in the grass before class. Thanks for telling me," she muttered, casting him a discomfited look, which only increased at the clear look of amusement she could see on the boy's face. She glared at him, and he gave her a mollified smile.

"Ah, sorry," he said carefully. "Just, it's...still in your hair."
"Damn it," she cursed, sweeping her hands over her crown once more. She gave him a questioning look.

He shook his head, laughing softly. "Nope. You've moved it, but it's still not out."

Katniss huffed in frustration and glanced at the door, debating whether she should chance running to the bathroom and risk the professor finally showing up while she was out of the classroom. Public speaking was definitely not and would never be Katniss' forte, and thus, this was one class she couldn't afford to make a bad impression in. She bit her lip while the debate raged in her head.

"Here, I got it," the boy said, reaching out his hand towards her hair. But Katniss jerked away from his sudden nearness so fast that he jolted into putting his hands up, looking like he was being held at gunpoint. She stared at him in wide-eyed alarm. "Ok, ok. Sorry, bad idea, should have asked," he said hastily, his blue eyes earnest and apologetic. Katniss relaxed a little bit at his apology. "I promise I'm not a creeper. You just looked upset about it."

"You just startled me," Katniss said with an irritated sigh. "A heads up before you invade my personal space next time would be nice." She watched as a light pink tinge flooded the boy's cheeks and nearly kicked herself. Katniss hadn't meant to sound so blunt, but the only close contact she usually had with anybody was a hug from Prim or perhaps a slap on the back from Gale. Though it wasn't exactly like this guy could know that. She had just reacted on instinct. "Sorry," she mumbled at the floor. "Could you just tell me where it is?"

"Right above your left ear," he said quietly. Katniss quickly reached up and finally swept the elusive shoot from her hair. She watched it flutter down to the floor with disgust and moved her foot to grind it into the wooden floorboards. "Hey! Wait a sec, don't do that!" exclaimed the boy, drawing Katniss to reconnect with his gaze. She watched in astonishment as he bent down to pick up the dandelion gingerly. He placed it carefully onto his desk.

Katniss narrowed her eyes at him suspiciously. "Why are you saving an ugly weed?" she asked confusedly. The boy just shrugged.

"Guess I just have an eye for beauty," he said with a searching look that Katniss didn't quite understand, her eyes rising skeptically at his ridiculous sounding answer. The boy laughed again. "Or maybe I just have weird tastes."

"Ok...Sure...Whatever," she said, rolling her eyes a little, which earned another grin from him. "But what are you going to do with it?"

The boy opened his mouth to answer but just then a tall intimidating looking man with a white beard that looked to be in his early 70s walked into the room. "I apologize for my delayed arrival. One of your peers from the previous class thought he'd have a go at becoming the class clown and needed to be...dealt with," the man said in a soft but deadly sounding voice. Katniss' eyes marveled at the thought that there was a student who had dared attempt to mess with this almost sinister-looking man. If there was any teacher who was one not to be trifled with, Professor Snow clearly was it.

He asked them to get out their syllabi so that he could go over the course expectations with the class, which Katniss did so dutifully, but after a few minutes of explanation on the various speeches they would be expected to give, her attention began to wander. She cast a sideways glance at the boy besides her, eyes flying wide in surprise at what he was doing.

The boy hadn't bothered to get his syllabus out but had instead brought out a small worn-looking notebook with a leather binding. He was staring at the dandelion still perched on the edge of his
desk, looking down occasionally to sketch the flower out on the paper.

She watched the image bloom before her eyes, fascinated at the way his hand moved smoothly across the page. His care-free expression faded, giving way to a look of far greater intensity, hinting to Katniss that there was an entire hidden world inside him. She wondered who would be lucky enough to explore that place. Certainly, it wasn't going to be her.

Suddenly, the boy looked up at her so quickly that she jolted and had to grip the desk chair to prevent herself from falling out of her seat. She saw his eyes widen, clearly noticing that she had been watching him work, as his mouth upturned into a smile. Katniss felt herself go bright red, and she immediately dropped her eyes to the floor. It was only then that she realized Professor Snow was speaking.

"KATNISS EVERDEEN," the man called out loudly. Katniss snapped her hand up into the air.

"Yes?" she asked.

Professor Snow gave her an imperious gaze, his cold eyes radiating displeasure. "We were introducing ourselves, Miss Everdeen. Or do I have to give you a zero on your first assignment?"

Katniss scowled and got to her feet.

"My name is Katniss Everdeen. I am eighteen years old. My home is a small town called Seam about two hours from here. I have a sister named Prim, who is 4 years younger than me. I want to study environmental science," Katniss said bluntly.

"You may sit down now, Miss Everdeen," came Snow's curt reply, dislike written on his face. Katniss' heart sunk, knowing her speech had probably been too short or that she hadn't fulfilled some sort of instruction because of the distracted state she'd been in.

She cast a sidelong glare at the boy as she lowered herself to the seat, feeling a little guilty at the mollified look he was giving her under her stare. Katniss knew she shouldn't be angry at him. It wasn't his fault that she'd tripped all over him like an airhead. She had just never let boys or anything else distract her from her goals and wasn't quite sure how to deal with the frustration. Katniss pulled out the hair tie holding her braid and let the curtain of hair fall into place, determined to ignore everything and everyone for the rest of the period, though that became much harder to do when the boy's name was called.

"Peeta Mellark?" Professor Snow asked. Katniss tensed slightly as she noticed the boy's Converse shift so he could rise from his desk.

"Hey everyone. I'm Peeta Mellark, as the good professor said. I'm from Merchant, though my parents aren't merchants, ironically enough. They're bakers. " Small titters of laughter echoed in the room while Katniss felt a little stunned. Merchant was another small town only fifteen minutes from Seam. They lived so close, and yet she'd never even heard of Peeta. Or maybe she just hadn't noticed.

Peeta continued, "And before you ask, my name is not spelled P-I-T-A; it's P-E-E-T-A, but please don't feel too sorry for me. It could've been worse. I've got two older brothers named Bannock and Rye. At least our parents changed the spelling on my name. They didn't even try to hide the fact that we're all named after bread with those two, the poor bastards." The room erupted into laughter, though Snow's frigid voice still managed to be heard above the din.

"Mr. Mellark, I will not tolerate that sort of language in my classroom. Please see me after the period ends."
Katniss finally looked up to see Peeta holding up his hands in apology, but she could tell he wasn't really sorry at all by the amusement sparkling in his bright blue eyes. "Sorry, Professor," Peeta chuckled. "Anyways, I'm going to be studying business in the hopes that I can open my own bakery someday. Also, I'm on the soccer team so it goes without saying that I'm going to shamelessly beg everyone to come watch us play. First conference game is on the 29th," he finished, sending the group into another round of guffaws.

Katniss subtly looked around, noticing the determined looks on all the girl's faces, and almost snorted with derision. She didn't doubt they would all be at Peeta's games, particularly the blonde girl who was now staring at him with wanton expression, plainly trying to claim his attention as he sat back down...

...Successfully, she realized, as Katniss watched the girl slip something onto Peeta's desk. She didn't bother assuming that it was anything other than the girl's phone number, and she looked away before she could see what Peeta did with it. It was better not to know.

The rest of the period passed quickly, much to Katniss' relief, and when Professor Snow announced the end of their session, she hastily began to pack up her things. All Katniss wanted to do was get the hell out of the stuffy room, away from her feelings, and get a bow and some arrows into her hands as quickly as possible.

"I expect you to have read Chapters 1 through 3 of your textbooks for next time," Snow announced as the class began heading towards the door. "There will be a quiz. I also expect you to have picked topics for your first speech about demonstrating 'how to do something in 5 minutes or less.' Now Mr. Mellark, up here if you please," he finished.

Katniss couldn't help but look at Peeta as he again rose from his chair, chatting amiably still with the blonde. Katniss felt her mouth twitch down into a frown, which only deepened when Peeta, not watching where he was going, tripped over someone's bag still on the floor and bumped her desk a little. He met her eyes, a sheepish expression on his face, but Katniss only scowled back.

"Mr. Mellark. I'm not going to ask you again," Snow rumbled from the front, while Katniss looked away from him, refusing to be drawn in again. And she swore she fabricated the frustrated sigh she heard him exale when she did. Peeta made his way to the front, where the professor pointed him towards the door. "Let's go to my office to talk about appropriate classroom behavior, shall we?" said Snow. He marched out, Peeta following along after him with a surprisingly bored expression on his face.

Katniss watched after him in confusion, wondering if he really didn't care about Snow or if he was just acting that way, but then blinked under the realization that she was the only one still in the room. She looked down at her notebook, the only thing she hadn't yet put away, and started at what lay on top of it. It was the dandelion Peeta had been drawing.

Katniss let out a gasp as she looked down at the image, staring in wonder at the way he had sketched each tiny petal with intricate detail. Much to her bewilderment, he had even shaded in the image with some color, though she had never noticed him with any colored pencils. The stem he had shaded a deep forest green, while the flower he had colored the bright yellow of the sun. She tentatively ran her hand over the drawing, marveling at how real his sketch looked. Katniss could imagine the dandelion amongst the grasses and wildflowers of her meadow back home, swaying in the summer breeze under a cloudless blue sky.

Under his hand, Peeta had indeed made the dandelion beautiful. Katniss saw that now, and she could not explain the new sense of hope, for the semester, for friends, for herself, that stole over her. She carefully tucked the drawing into her folder, determined that she would thank him for the
"Alright man, I'll see you in a half hour," Peeta finished, breaking Katniss out of her memory, while the elevator doors slide shut. She felt it begin to rise. Peeta did not turn around to look at her, and Katniss grimaced, knowing she had been right to think he hadn't noticed her. It wasn't surprising really. Following that first day, she and Peeta hadn't spoken at all.

Katniss had arrived early to the next class session and taken her chosen seat, assuming that she'd again be treated like a pariah, and thus, open desks would remain around her. Instead, she had been surrounded by other girls. It didn't take Katniss long to figure out they were all trying to do the same thing, and to no girl's surprise, the beautiful blonde was the one who managed to have an open seat beside her when Peeta finally walked through the door.

She had almost jumped in surprise when Peeta's eyes had flitted in her direction as he had sat down, but Katniss had only ducked her head in embarrassment, sure he was only confused why the seating arrangement had so radically changed. All thought of thanking him for the drawing had fled from her mind, and she dismissed the strong connection she felt with him as a passing fancy. Though they hadn't even sat near each other since, Katniss at least acknowledged that she was riveted by Peeta's speeches. But then so was everyone else, which made her feel a little better about it.

Whereas Katniss struggled just to get through one assignment, even with the aid of notecards, Peeta talked with such ease that she wondered if he ever practiced at all. Anytime he spoke, she swore she could see every girl clenching their legs together as his smooth voice washed over them. The one where he had demonstrated how to make cheese buns, culminating with him passing around a bag of freshly made ones for the class to try, had been particularly memorable. Her mouth still watered when she thought about how fantastic they had tasted. But Katniss still swore she didn't like him.

Of course, that hadn't stopped Katniss from going to the first men's team soccer game when her roommate, Johanna, had asked her if she wanted to go. Katniss had told herself she was doing it to get out of the dorm, ignoring the fact that she only followed one blonde-haired man as he ran around throughout that game.

She'd been to every game since then too, but Katniss assured herself that it was only to keep Johanna company. The two had formed a fast friendship, much to Katniss' shock. But her friend was a bit wild in terms of her sex life, and Katniss tried not to let it bother her when Jo constantly joked that she wanted "to make it through the entire soccer team, or at least the hot ones." She was never sure if Johanna was serious about that and stopped herself from asking whether Johanna included Peeta in that group. She still didn't like him after all.

Unquestionably, a little thrill still ran through her when she pulled out his drawing from where she always had it carefully tucked in her Speech folder, but she was unable to accept the small hope that still rose within her at the sight of it. And her heart rate always increased when she thought she saw him looking at her in class, but his eyes usually flitted away so quickly that Katniss convinced herself that she was imagining things.

No, the only time Katniss acceded that she might have feelings for Peeta occurred in the dead of night, when she awoke with a cold sweat, her dreams of them together still flashing before her eyes. The visions demonstrated heated kisses and warm embraces, gentle caresses and kneading strokes, two slick bodies lithely intertwining in a rhythmic dance performed since Adam first discovered Eve in that ancient Garden. The hunger that grew within Katniss under the onslaught of those fantasies spread like wildfire through Katniss' body until she felt consumed, a flame burning in the darkness.
It was at those times that Katniss would begin to squeeze her breasts with one hand as she slipped the other beneath her panties to explore the wet that pooled between her legs. It was never long before she would slide her fingers inside to pump herself, wondering all the while what it would be like for Peeta to be there instead. When she would next find the sensitive nub at her apex, rubbing over the bud with rapid circular motions, she imagined it was his fingers performing the act. Then her entire body would tense like a tightly wound coil until the sensations became too great, and Katniss brought herself to trembling completion. She would always have to turn her head into her pillow to muffle her pleasured cries, Peeta's name falling from her lips as she moaned softly with hidden longing.

Tendrils of that now familiar heat were just beginning to surface within her, due to what Katniss assumed was Peeta's all too close proximity, when the elevator came to a shuddering stop.

Katniss jolted forward and went careening into Peeta's back, sending him into straight into the shiny elevator doors. He let out a small cry of pain as his knee made contact with the hard metal.

"Ouch!" he yelled out. Peeta swiveled around to look at her, his pained look giving way to one of surprise. "Katniss?" he asked wonderingly.

Katniss blinked, voice suddenly frozen in her throat over the shock that he had remembered her name. She was sure that he'd forgotten it. "Katniss? Are you ok?" he asked, this time with a look of concern.

"Y-yeah. Just was startled. Are...are you?" she forced out. She looked around him and glared at the elevator doors.

"I'm ok. Just surprised the crap out of me," Peeta answered. He turned around again and went to examine the elevator panel, pointing to the button with the word 'Alarm' written on it. "Think we're justified in pushing this?" he asked. Katniss looked up at the small screen above the doors that should have been displaying what floor they were on. It was blank.

"Yeah, I don't even know what floor we last passed."

Peeta nodded his head in agreement and pushed the small square. They waited a few seconds before a sharp click sounded out from the intercom, indicating it had been turned on.

"Yes? Is something wrong, my dears?" a chipper voice trilled out. Peeta and Katniss exchanged a chagrined look of understanding, recognizing the voice as Effie Trinket's. She was the Resident Director for the dorm and though she was nice, she was sometimes a bit dramatic.

"Uh, yes, Effie," Peeta said politely. "This is Peeta Mellark; I'm here with Katniss Everdeen. We're on Elevator B right now, and it just abruptly stopped about minute ago. Power is still on, but the display screen is blank above the doors."

"Oh, yes, Effie," Peeta said politely. "This is Peeta Mellark; I'm here with Katniss Everdeen. We're on Elevator B right now, and it just abruptly stopped about minute ago. Power is still on, but the display screen is blank above the doors."

"Oh! Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear," Effie exclaimed. "My poor dears! That must have been so frightening for you; please be alright." Katniss rolled her eyes at Peeta, which he replied to with a smirk.

"We're fine, Effie," he said calmly, his voice so reassuring that Katniss actually heard Effie breath her sigh of relief.

"Ok, Peeta, I trust you my dear. Let me just see who I need to call." They heard some papers shuffling in the background. "It looks like the on call person for maintenance tonight is Haymitch Abernathy. I'm going to hang up now to page Mr. Abernathy, but please don't be scared children. Should you need anything, just press the button again. I am sure we will be able to get you out in
a jiffy!" There was a click, and Katniss knew Effie was gone again.

Katniss slumped against one elevator's side panels, letting her head fall down to her chest in frustration. "Haymitch. Greeeeaaaaaaat," she said. "We're so going to be in here til next year." She brought her head up again to find Peeta looking at her with a confused expression.

"You know the maintenance guy?" he asked.

Katniss snorted. "You must have gotten a better dorm room than my roommate and I. Our sink keeps springing a leak, and Haymitch is usually the one who gets called to come fix it. He always smells like alcohol no matter what time it is, and I swear to God, he deliberately does a crappy job repairing the sink just to piss me off." Katniss grimaced. "I, uh, may have accused him of that and kicked him out the last time he stopped by. I mean…I don't really know if he was doing that, but telling me 'I know what I'm doing, sweetheart,' when he'd been in to fix it seven times already was the last straw. So…he might not be too keen on helping me, and we might be in here awhile. Sorry."

Peeta's stared at Katniss impassively as she finished speaking, and for one heart wrenching second, Katniss thought she had made him angry, but then he let out a loud laugh. "I don't mind waiting a little longer. It sounds like he deserved it. Next time, you should call me and my roommate, Finnick, instead. We somehow managed to fix our sink the second week on campus, so maybe we can tame yours just as well," he said with twinkling eyes.

Katniss' mouth fell open, both at the way he was taking the news that he was going to be trapped with her until God knew when, and at the insinuation that he would be ok with her calling him. She tried to come up with something witty for a reply, but all she did was blurt out, "I don't have your number." Peeta stared at her, his eyes growing wide in surprise, while Katniss felt a deep heat begin to rise through her face. She bowed her head again, wishing she had a rock to hide under. She'd never been great in social settings, but she thought this might take the cake in terms of awkwardness.

Therefore, it completely bewildered her when she heard a ripping sound from Peeta's side of the elevator. She looked up to find him handing her a piece of notebook paper with his number neatly printed on it. "Here," he said. "For leaking sinks or any other emergencies that may arise." Katniss reached out to take the paper, and their fingers brushed together in the exchange.

Katniss felt a spark of energy as charged as a lightning bolt ran through her, and she reeled back from him, stunned by the sensation. Peeta met her eyes, his blue orbs glinting in the dim light, an expression on his face that Katniss didn't understand. But she felt her heart begin to pound, thundering in her chest under his gaze. They stared at each other in silence for what must have only been seconds but to Katniss, it felt like hours. Finally, she managed to utter a breathless "Tha-thank you."

"You're welcome," Peeta murmured, offering her a warm smile. Katniss smiled back, her stomach flipping with nerves…or maybe it was pleasure. She looked down at her phone and fiddled with the touch screen to bring up her contact list.

Peeta groaned. "Or I could have just told you my number, and you could have put it in that way. Sorry."

Katniss shook her head. "It's alright. It's old school. Now we just have to start passing each other notes during class to solidify our retro coolness," she smiled. "Here, I'll send you a text so you have my number, too."

Peeta retrieved his phone from his pocket eagerly, grinning widely when his phone buzzed with
"Got it," he said. Katniss watched him type her name into his contact list before he looked back up at her. "Passing notes, huh? That would be quite the rebellious thing to do in Snow's class. What do you think he'd do to me if he caught me trying to send a note to you?"

"He'd probably torture you, brainwash you, and then use you as a weapon to kill me. Since, of course, he likes me so much," Katniss laughed. "I think he reminds himself every day that I wasn't paying attention to him that first day in class."

"Just as much as he likes me. I don't think he's forgiven me yet for using 'bastard' that day," Peeta grinned. "It appears we're just two accidental revolutionaries, sacrificing our grades for the betterment of all." He puffed out his chest and struck a noble pose, winking at her as he did so. Katniss laughed again, but then eyed him skeptically. "I doubt your grades suffer. You're the best speaker in class." Peeta's mouth dropped open.

"You like my speeches?" he asked, a bewildered expression on his face.

"Of course, I do," Katniss said. But the confused look stayed on Peeta's face, prompting her to ask, "Did you think I didn't?"

To Katniss' surprise, she saw a distinctly pink flush creep into Peeta's cheeks. He lifted his cap up and smoothed his hair down, replacing the hat back on his head before he finally answered, "Well, uh, yes…Or, no…I don't know," he said slowly. Katniss quirked her head at him, and he let out a nervous sounding laugh, directing his eyes towards the floor. "It's just…you never look at me when I'm speaking."

Katniss felt warmth spreading from her head all the way down to her toes until she felt like her whole body was on fire. She didn't usually look at him during his speeches, not because she didn't like them, but because she liked them too much. Or rather, she liked the boy who was giving them so much that it took all her willpower not to jump from her seat to kiss him when she listened to his smooth voice, a feeling that only grew stronger if she actually was looking at him. But she couldn't tell Peeta that.

"No, I like them," Katniss said hastily.

"Oh. That's good," Peeta said, but his eyes still did not meet hers. Katniss frantically cast about in her head for some explanation to give him, but none came to her.

"I mean, I did listen to them, Peeta," she said. "I thought the social issues one about the disparate spread of wealth even in Merchant and what's going on there reflects the country as a whole." Peeta's head snapped up at her words, but Katniss plowed on, trying to make him understand that she had been keeping track of him. "You're talk on how to make cheese buns was amazing."

Peeta gave her a sly look. "Or maybe you just liked the snacks I brought? Don't deny that you took two. I definitely saw that," he said teasingly.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Katniss denied airily, trying and failing to keep the scowl on her face, acutely aware that she'd smiled more in the half an hour that they had been trapped in here than in probably the last two weeks. She continued, "And that debate between you and Cato about the best way to survive in the wild was so funny. I still can't believe Snow assigned that as a topic. I don't think I'll ever forget the looks on Cato's face or Snow's face when you said you'd hunt animals by bringing 100 pound bags of flour to throw at them."

Peeta grinned. "Well, when Cato suggested that he'd bring a pack of rabid dogs to hunt for him, obviously forgetting that you know…rabies kills you if you get it, I thought I should respond with
an equally stupid answer," he laughed, but then he eyed Katniss furtively.

"I think you'd survive in the wild with no problem," he said, eyes suddenly serious. "I can talk about how to make cheese buns, but you're 'How to' on techniques for the use of bow and arrows was amazing. I only wished you could have actually shot them in the classroom."

"Snow didn't like that I chose that topic for precisely that reason. Could talk about different arrow types, proper stance to be in when you shoot, and how to track the target, but couldn't exactly fire at anything. He gave me low marks," she scowled.

"What?!" Peeta said in an outraged voice. "Yours was definitely the best speech. I think you could have heard a pin drop, we were all so spellbound."

Katniss inhaled sharply at his compliment, feeling like he had to be lying. No one was ever 'spellbound' by herself in general, much less by her words. "Thanks, I guess," she said curtly. A shadow crossed Peeta's face upon hearing her abrupt reply, and Katniss thought she saw a little sadness in his eyes. He nodded his head in acknowledgement of her words, set his backpack down, and slid down the wall to sit next to it.

"Seems like we've got a little longer to wait," he said quietly before pulling out a textbook from his bag. Katniss shrugged and slid down the wall as well, but she didn't move to pull something out of her backpack.

The next few minutes passed in oppressive silence, the easy rapport they had established in the last minutes gone. Katniss opened her mouth multiple times to say something, regret over her blunt reply filling her heart, but each time, she closed it again, at a loss for what to say. Then, her phone buzzed, causing her to jump.

She glanced at Peeta quickly but was disappointed to see he hadn't even looked up from his book. Her gaze again turned downwards to view the message on her phone.

**Johanna:** Are you coming out with me tonight? Scratch that. I'm not even going to give you a choice. I'm going to get you to loosen up if it's the last thing I ever do.

Katniss let out a soft sigh. She'd almost forgotten about Johanna's insistence that she get out more. Apparently, Katniss' willingness to go to soccer games earlier in the semester didn't meet Jo's standards in terms of social engagement. There hadn't been a weekend since the soccer season ended that her friend hadn't hounded Katniss to come to the parties she went to, telling her over and over that spending entire weekends studying or on the shooting range by herself was abnormal.

**Katniss:** Trapped on Elevator B right now. Waiting for Haymitch to get me out. Has been 45 minutes already with no end in sight. I'll text you if we ever get out of here, but I doubt I'll want to go out. This is exhausting.

**Johanna:** Pfft. You spending an hour alone in there shouldn't be tiring. Unless there's a wild and crazy party going on that you aren't telling me about…

**Katniss:** Well, I'm not alone. Peeta Mellark is in here with me. We talked for a little while, but now he's reading a book.

**Johanna:** Wait a second. You're trapped. On an elevator. With PEETA MELLARK?

**Johanna:** WTF, Katniss? Why didn't you tell me that first?
Katniss hesitated before responding, casting another surreptitious look in Peeta's direction. She had the distinct feeling that he'd been watching her, even though his eyes were at least now focused on the book. Or maybe that was just more wishful thinking, she thought, exhaling another sigh. She began to type out a reply.

**Katniss:** I don't know. It didn't seem important to say.

**Johanna:** Katniss. You went to every soccer game I asked you to go to with me this semester, and then didn't pay any attention to me whatsoever during them. Don't think I didn't notice you eye-fucking our Class President, Mr. Sex Walking, the whole time. I'm not an idiot.

**Katniss:** That's not true, Jo!

**Johanna:** You've been hot for him since the first day of your speech class. Yes, I know you have that class with him. No, you're not allowed to ask me how I know that. It doesn't matter. What matters is that you are in a small enclosed space with that tasty morsel. So what you are going to do about it?

**Katniss:** Tasty morsel? That's gross, Jo.

**Johanna:** No deflecting! Seriously, Kat. You've liked the guy since the day you met him. Take a chance and tell him. Going to sign off now but text later when you get un-trapped.

Katniss bit her lip. It was easy for Johanna to say all these things to her; she'd never had a problem saying what she wanted. Katniss, on the other hand, wasn't sure what her desires were half the time. She was always so focused on school or Prim or whatever else was going on at the moment. Her phone buzzed again.

**Johanna:** P.S. He likes you. Don't fuck this one up, Brainless.

Katniss gaped at the screen, repressing the strong urge to look at Peeta again. What did Johanna mean? How could she possibly know who Peeta liked? Hadn't Katniss heard him talking about another girl earlier when he was on the phone with his friend?! Those questions and many more like it raced through Katniss' head, before she let out a snort of disbelief. Johanna had to be wrong.

"Something funny?" Peeta's asked suddenly. Katniss looked up and saw the curious expression on his face. She felt her face turn red.

"Ah…Just something my roommate, Johanna, texted me. She wants us to go out tonight, but as I'm trapped here, it's not too important." Katniss internally sighed with relief when Peeta nodded, seeming to have bought her lie. She was terrible at keeping secrets. But then an odd look crossed Peeta's face.

"Johanna…" he said slowly, recognition dawning on his face. "As in Johanna Mason?"

Katniss blanched, her fears that Johanna had successfully worked her way through everyone on the soccer team rising again to the forefront of her mind. Her heart plummeted to her stomach and then continued downwards, shattering on the floor. "Yes, that's her," she said flatly, anger flaring at Jo for having encouraged her when she and Peeta had probably hooked up sometime. That was probably how she knew that he and Katniss shared a class. Katniss got to her feet, suddenly too anxious to sit anymore.

"Johanna is cool," Peeta said, staring at her confusedly, before he rose to stand as well. "That's got to be fun having her as your roommate."
"How do you two even know each other?" Katniss asked in a harsh voice.

Peeta winced at her tone. "We've been at a few of the same parties, so we've talked to each other a bit. Some of the guys on the team have uh…gotten to know her well."

Katniss stared daggers at him. "Gotten to know her well," she echoed. "That's an odd way to put it. Did you forget I live with her? She talks about how well she's gotten to know your team, all of the members on your team 'in the biblical sense,' as she likes to phrase it," Katniss practically shouted. Peeta just stared at her, open mouthed and wide-eyed.

Katniss took his silence as his acquiescence, and she had to turn away from him to blink back the frustrated tears that had formed in the corners of her eyes. Suddenly, all she could think about were those lonely nights where she had thought about him while touching herself. Some of those were probably times that Johanna and Peeta had been together.

She heard Peeta softly stepping towards her and tensed as she felt his presence right at her back. "Katniss, please look at me," he requested, his voice just barely above a whisper quietly. But Katniss shook her head, refusing to turn around. "Ok, then. Please just listen to me," Peeta said with a soft sigh.

"Johanna is nice and all, but she scares the shit out of me. I probably don't need to tell you some of the crazy stuff she does, and while yeah, she's probably um…been with the majority of guys on the team, I'm not one of them. I don't have a problem with the way she is, but I can guarantee you nothing will ever happen between her and me." Katniss sucked in a breath, her heart rate increasing again, but she still couldn't bring herself to look at him.

"Why?" she whispered.

"Because I like someone else," he said simply. She felt Peeta's hands on her arms, his touch sending warmth flooding through her body, as he gently turned her around to face him. Katniss looked up at him and nearly gasped at the loving look he was giving her. "And judging by how jealously she was acting just now, I think she might like me, too," he finished with a smile.

Katniss opened her mouth to say something but once again found her words paralyzed in her throat, stunned by his confession. She watched the smile slide off his face, and he took a step back from her. "Or maybe not," he mumbled at the floor, his face turning bright red. The loss of him finally sprung Katniss into action.

"Yes!" she said, taking a step towards him to bridge the gap he had created. "Or…I mean no. Or…shit," she said, embarrassed at her stumbling words. But then, she got an idea.

Katniss reached down to her backpack and rifled through it, finally spotting the item that she wanted. "I'm not…always good with words. Sorry. But here," she said, pulling out a piece of well-worn notebook paper from within her speech folder. She offered it to him, and Peeta took it, his confused expression morphing into one of astonishment.

"You kept this?" he asked, his voice rough with emotion, staring down at the drawing he had given her of the dandelion.

Katniss tugged on her braid a little nervously. "Yes. It, you were right. Dandelions are beautiful. Or at least the way you draw them."

Peeta looked up at her then, amazement plastered on his face. "I thought I had made you mad. You looked upset when you sat down after you gave that introduction speech. I…I just wanted to make you happy."
"You did make me mad," Katniss admitted, bowing her head in shame. She moved on quickly, saying, "But I wanted to thank you the next class period, and then I just lost the nerve to tell you." She watched Peeta's feet move closer to her again. "That first day in class, I was so embarrassed that I was alone, that no one had chosen to sit by me. It felt like high school all over again." She paused, trying to collect her thoughts, and took a deep breath. "But your drawing…it probably sounds so stupid…it just gave me hope for this year. That things would be better. Yellow is now definitely my favorite color after green."

Katniss shuddered as she felt Peeta's hands cup her face, bringing her head up gently so that she met his blue eyes, which were like shining lakes, brighter even than the stars. They were so close now that Katniss could have counted every small freckle he had scattered across the bridge of his nose. He ran one finger along her cheek, leaving a trail of fire in its wake, and Katniss felt her eyes drifting downwards seemingly of their own volition to his mouth.

"So your favorite color is green," he whispered, his warm breath caressing her face. "Mine's orange." And then his mouth descended upon hers.

For a second, Katniss stood there, not quite able to believe that Peeta was kissing her, but the heat from his lips on hers finally left her with no doubt, and she began to respond. Katniss wrapped her arms around Peeta's neck as he pressed her tightly to him, her hunger for him licking through her as quick as wildfire. His kiss was so much better than she had ever imagined.

Katniss moved her hands up to Peeta's hair, knocking off his baseball cap to gain better access to his curls. She ran her hands through them, smiling against his mouth at the deep groan she drew from him by her actions. "Two can play at that game," Peeta said roughly. He gripped her hips and pulled her lower body more tightly against him, causing Katniss to gasp in surprise. She could feel how hard he was already though his jeans, and she felt wetness begin to pool between her legs in response. "Oh, Peeta," she moaned, pulling his mouth back to hers.

Peeta tentatively ran his tongue along her bottom lip, a silent question on his lips, which Katniss answered by opening her mouth to him. He plunged inside, probing every corner of her mouth with his tongue, sending new pulses of energy directly to Katniss' already throbbing clit with every stroke. She joined her tongue to his in a sensual dance.

She didn't know how long they held each other like that, but when they finally broke away from one another, Katniss found herself unable to catch her breath, paralyzed under the look of desire on his face. His eyes were nearly black from his want. "I've wanted to kiss you like that since the first day I saw you in that classroom," Peeta gasped, his chest heaving from their exertions. He brought her back to him to suck on the tender skin behind her earlobe before he began to trail kisses along her jaw.

"Really?" Katniss panted, gripping his shoulders tightly as even more powerful sensations wracked her body under his ministrations.

"You're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen." He stopped for a second, and Katniss growled with disapproval, but his eyes had a curious look to them. "Why were you mad at me that day? You said you were." Then, he went back to kissing down her neck.

"I-I wasn't' really m-mad at you," Katniss stuttered out. "You just were...Oh!" she paused, temporarily rendered speechless by the onslaught of pleasure flowing through her as he ran his tongue along her collarbone.

"Yes?" he chuckled, now blowing on the supple skin that formed the juncture between her neck and shoulder.
"Y-you just were…" she trailed off again as he began to suck at that point, struggling to hold herself up. Katniss' legs felt like jelly. He stopped again, giving her a playful grin.

"Yes?" he asked again. By the mischievous look in his eye, Katniss could tell he knew exactly what he was doing. She snorted in frustration, watching as his lips descended towards her neck again.

"Fuck. Distracting," she called out. Katniss cupped his face, not allowing him to go any further. Instead, she ran her hands down his chest to his stomach and back up again and backed him up against the wall, she stretched up on her tiptoes to attack his neck with her lips, satisfaction rising within her at the loud gasp he emitted. Two could play at this game, indeed.

"God, Katniss," Peeta groaned. "You feel so fucking good." He tilted his head downwards again and slanted his mouth back over hers, his tongue thrusting between her lips without hesitation this time.

Their kisses took on a different texture than before, filled with a more frantic energy. Little sighs of blissful revelry fell from Katniss' lips as Peeta's hands ran over her body, making her feel like he was everywhere at once. But eventually she couldn't take anymore. Katniss gripped him tightly around the neck and wrapped her legs lightly around his waist.

Peeta slid his hands underneath her and turned, pressing her up against the wall. He thrust against her, grinding against her core until Katniss was moaning with pleasure. "Peeta," she gasped. "Please. I'm...I'm going to…" But she couldn't speak anymore as she reached her climax, coming harder than she ever had before, never more grateful for Peeta's steadying presence as she shiveringly came down from her high. Finally, Peeta set her down gently but still kept his arms wrapped around her.

Katniss looked up at him and kissed him gently. "Thank you," she whispered.

"Mmmm. You're wonderful, Katniss," he replied softly.

"I think you have me confused with someone else," Katniss said with a shake of her head. "But you're amazing." She glanced down at his still straining erection and boldly cupped him, stroking his length through his jeans. "I'd like to take care of you now," she smiled.

Peeta groaned, his head falling back onto his shoulders. "Don't you think that would be a bit messy for the elevator?" he asked. But he made no effort to remove her hand.

Katniss looked at him wickedly. "I think there are ways to avoid the mess, don't you?"

Peeta's eyes flew wide at the implication behind Katniss' sentence, his body tensing as Katniss quickly unbuttoned him and slid her hand inside his jeans. "Katniss, you don't…"

A loud banging suddenly erupted from just outside the elevator doors. Katniss and Peeta sprang apart like they'd been shocked by something as a gruff voice called, "I'll have you out in a second, sweetheart."

"Shit," Peeta groaned, scrambling for his backpack. He arranged it over his groin and gave Katniss a sheepish smile. Katniss, however, was unable to smile back, suddenly panicking at the thought of leaving the elevator.

Small, dark, and dingy as it was, Katniss had come to like this place for the safety it provided. But once those doors opened, she knew the reality of their world would come crashing down upon her and Peeta. Even though he had confessed to liking her since the beginning of the semester, Katniss could not hope to expect that he would continue to want her. Peeta could have anyone he
wanted, and there still was that girl he'd spoken about on the phone, after all. She tried hard to resign herself to the concept that they would probably not have more than this hour together, but the pain in her heart suggested that she would not survive it. Somehow, Katniss knew she needed him.

The elevator doors slid open to reveal a grinning Haymitch. "Good evening, sweetheart. Nice to see you again," he said, voice filled with sarcasm. She watched his eyes scan over herself and then travel to Peeta, a knowing look that Katniss didn't like on his face. "Who's your boyfriend?"

"Nice to see you actually fixing something for once," Katniss retorted, deliberately ignoring his second question. "Let us out now," she demanding.

Haymitch smirked at her and moved to the side silently. Katniss breathed a small sigh of relief as she walked past the man, feeling Peeta walking closely behind her. She looked around and realized the elevator had actually jammed at the eighth floor. Her dorm room was just down the hall. She turned to Peeta but scowled when she saw a troubled look on his face, her fears rocketing skywards now that they were officially out of the elevator.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Oh. Nothing," he replied, but he didn't quite meet her eyes. Katniss' heart skipped a beat.

"So, I...uh...guess...you probably have things to do now," Katniss said haltingly, her distress increasing as Peeta's face fell. She didn't understand what she'd done to upset him.

"Yeah, I guess so," Peeta sighed. "I was supposed to meet some friends to play basketball a half hour ago, but I would…" Peeta trailed off briefly for a second. "J-j-just. Nevermind. I'll see you a-round," he uncharacteristically stammered. He turned to go, but Katniss caught the sad expression on his face, and she finally understood that he didn't actually want to go.

"Wait!" she said, gripping his hand to stop him. He turned back to her, the hope sparking in his eyes encouraging Katniss to speak. "Don't go. I...I know you're supposed to play basketball tonight. I heard you when you were talking outside the elevator. I'm sure that girl is way prettier and better than me, but please stay with me. I don't...want to lose this."

"Girl? What girl?" he asked her, confusion reigning on his face.

"You asked your friend why he didn't tell you she was going to be there," Katniss said reluctantly, worrying that Peeta would be upset that she had eavesdropped. But to the contrary, Peeta started to laugh. "What?" Katniss asked indignantly. She tried to place her hands on her hips, but Peeta tugged her into his arms to embrace her tightly.

"The girl I was talking about was Glimmer. I don't think I have to tell you what a nut she is?" he asked against her ear, kissing along the shell carelessly. Katniss trembled and nodded. Glimmer was the beautiful blonde that Katniss had been jealous of on the first day of class. It hadn't gone without her notice that Peeta rarely talked to Glimmer, no matter how hard that girl tried to get his attention.

"So you'll stay with me?" Katniss asked in a small voice.

"Always."

Katniss: I found a cute boy. Not so hopeless anymore, Little Duck. 

Katniss: Hey Jo. Took your advice. Sorry...or not so sorry...but I can't go out tonight.
**Johanna:** Details! I need to hear this…

**Katniss:** Nope.
Hello! I know the wait has been long for an update on this series, but I hope you'll find that the wait was worth it. Thank you to my lovely betas, titania522/ct522, Solas Violetta, and peetabreadgirl. They are all awesome, and I appreciate there hard work immensely. Look for Junior Year sometime in the early fall! Hope you enjoy reading and please review!

The sound of feet scuffing against the hardwood floors of the Capitol University Rec Center and the stale smell of sweat met Katniss as she walked through the doors that separated the enclosed archery range from the rest of the facility, breathing an exhausted sigh. She’d run for 45 minutes on the treadmill upstairs before coming down to practice with her bow for an hour, as was her normal Friday routine, but the week had been a particularly taxing one, with multiple tests, and she was more tired than usual. She scanned the area for Johanna.

“Katniss! Over here!” She turned, spotting Jo waving at her from where she sat with a bunch of other girls on a set of benches placed along one of the basketball courts. Katniss made her way over carefully, dodging several runners who were making their way around the track that surrounded the wooden floor.

“Hey, Jo. Hey guys,” she said, bobbing her head at two of her other roommates, Annie and Madge, as well as a third girl called Delly.

“Oooohh, Katniss,” Delly exclaimed. “I’ve never seen your bow before. It looks SO cool! Peeta talks about it all the time. He says you’re amazing at archery. Did you really win the State Club Archery contest last year? I remember him telling me about that. I wish I could have seen it…” Katniss tuned out the rest of Delly’s speech. She knew it would probably be a good few minutes before the blond-haired girl stopped talking, making a mental note to tell her boyfriend that he shouldn’t share anything about her with Delly, wondering what deal he’d made with the devil to have the skills to head Delly’s ramblings off before they picked up steam. Years of practice, Katniss guessed, trying not to smile at the murderous look of annoyance on Johanna’s face. And Peeta had always been good with words. She smiled.

It had been nearly a year since Katniss and Peeta had become trapped in an elevator together, nearly a year since she’d shown him the dandelion sketch he’d drawn for her on the very first day of their Public Speaking class that she’d embarrassingly kept, revealing the secret crush she’d had on him since she’d first laid eyes on him. Katniss had been shocked to discover that Peeta felt the same way. She smiled even more widely, a small twinge sparkling between her thighs at the thought of what they’d done in the elevator after their confessions and later that night in the comfort of Katniss’ bed.
Since then, their relationship had been blissful almost to the point of “sickening,” at least according to Johanna. Peeta took great pride in getting her to smile and laugh, and Katniss couldn’t help but love his kindness to others. They were comfortable enough with one another to be able to sit for hours, working on homework, sketching, or just watching TV, without any awkwardness seeping in. They took care of one another and protected one another.

Once, there had been a whole week where Peeta had gotten sick, and Katniss had dutifully attempted to nurse him back to health. He liked to joke that he’d gotten better in spite of Katniss’ disastrous attempt at homemade chicken noodle soup, but she knew how much it meant to him that she’d been there for him. (She’d learned quickly that made-from-scratch noodles were a lot harder to make than it seemed and that baking of any kind should be left to bakers.) He, in turn, had practically carried her around for two weeks when she’d badly sprained an ankle after tripping over her sister’s stupid cat when she’d gone home over spring break, and Katniss had never felt as safe as she did when she was in Peeta’s arms.

Even more than that, the lonely world of Katniss’ freshman year had expanded substantially when Peeta had become a part of her life. Rather than just having Madge, Gale, and Johanna as friends, he’d introduced her to a host of others to whom she was now acquainted with, some of which, like Finnick and Annie, were now her good friends. Delly had come along this year, a childhood friend of Peeta’s, now in her freshman year at Capitol.

Occasionally, Katniss felt a little uneasy about this as she’d never been one for taking handouts, even when it came to meeting people, but she also knew she’d never been good at making friends. Still, overall, Katniss’ life was far happier than she’d ever expected or anticipated. Everything was good, and it all had to do with Peeta.

“Hellooooooooo, ladies. You’re all looking mighty fine today,” a flirtatious voice called out loudly, interrupting Katniss’ thoughts. She looked up to see Finnick Odair striding across the court towards their group, bronze hair glowing in the fluorescent lighting, his handsome face lit up with a broad smile. “Everdeen, you’re looking well,” he added. Katniss rolled her eyes, knowing he only said things because he knew how much she hated being the center of attention, but his attention had already turned to Annie. “And must I say,” he said, raking his eyes up and down his girlfriend’s petite frame, “you’re looking the finest of all, Miss Cresta.”

“Finnick, stop!” Annie giggled as he lifted her into the air to kiss her soundly. Katniss looked away, trying hard not to gag at such a public display of affection, and was glad when Johanna yelled at them to give it a rest. Finnick pulled back from Annie with an amused expression on his face.

“You know, Jo. I seem to recall many a party last year where I had to watch you suck face with someone, not to mention the fact that we have to watch you now with Thresh.”
“No one ever said you have to watch, Odair,” Johanna snorted.

“Doesn’t the same rule apply here, Mason?” Before Johanna could reply, they all winced as Delly let out an excited squeal.

“Oh, here come the rest of the boys. And look, there’s Thom!” she squeaked, and Katniss watched, incredulous, as Delly bounced up and down excitedly at the sight of her boyfriend. But a second later, she was distracted by the sight of Peeta among the crowd of boys walking over, spinning a basketball on one of his fingers.

His blue eyes shone, even from across the court, as he laughed at something Gale was telling him, his blond waves of hair flopping casually onto his forehead. He passed the ball to another boy, Thom, and the muscles of his forearms rippled in the light. He was wearing a light orange Under-Armor t-shirt that stretched nicely across the broad muscles of his chest and washboard stomach. The loose blue athletic shorts reminded Katniss that she’d peeled those down his strong, muscular thighs off of him last Friday so they could take a shower together, and she clenched her legs against the sudden rush of heat between her legs. She smiled as he approached.

“Hey, Katniss,” he said, leaning down to give her a kiss. Katniss involuntarily flinched and shied away, prompting him to pull back. He quirked an eyebrow at her, his eyes darting to where Delly and Thom were performing the same ritual as Annie and Finnick had. Johanna was allowing Thresh to kiss her, albeit not as enthusiastically as the other two couples, and even shy Madge had accepted a peck on the cheek from Gale. Katniss grimaced apologetically at Peeta.

She knew on some level that she was being unreasonable when it came to showing affection for her boyfriend in public, but Katniss felt she more than made up for it in private. She just didn’t see the need to be demonstrative and also really didn’t like being the center of attention. She knew Peeta knew that and was grateful when he sighed, knowing he was giving into her silent request for restraint.

“How was your test today?” he asked. Katniss wrinkled her nose, the reason she’d spent so long on the archery range today and the target she’d imagined she was hitting coming to surface of her mind. “You know Snow. He makes everything impossible.” Peeta nodded sympathetically while Katniss wondered how she’d ended up in another class of Professor Snow’s after the hell he’d put her through in that speech class last year. She’d had to sign up for another English Gen Ed requirement with “TBA” listed for the teacher because it had been the only time that fit into her busy class schedule. She’d almost felt like running from the room in horror when the severe older man with the meticulously styled beard walked into the room. Instead, Peeta kindly allowed her to use him (and his body) as an outlet for her frustrations when Snow was being unfair.
“Cheer up, Catnip,” Gale said, having come up to stand beside Peeta. “We’ll go out tonight to the Mockingjay. Chaff doesn’t give a shit we’re under age. You can drink your sorrows away.” Katniss wrinkled her nose again, debating whether she’d rather try to persuade Peeta to stay in with her. He was far more social, having been elected to Sophomore Class President following his tenure last year as the freshman one, as well as still staying involved in multiple activities and volunteer projects. Katniss mostly just studied or hung out with their core group of friends, among a few other reasons.

“It could be fun, K,” Peeta smiled encouragingly. Katniss studied his hopeful expression and sighed.

“Ok,” she agreed. “It could be fun.” Gale grinned at her agreement and tickled her arm annoyingly, the way he’d used to when they were kids. Katniss scowled and swatted his hand away, earning a laugh from Gale and Peeta. “Aren’t you supposed to be protecting me from handsy jerks?” she directed at Peeta, who then mock-glared at Gale.

“Hands off my girlfriend, Hawthorne. What would Madge say?”

“She would say I’m picking on my sister and doing a wonderful job of it.” Katniss rolled her eyes at her oldest friend.

“Just beat him on the court, Mellark. Defend my honor and all that,” she ordered. Peeta leaned down, skating his lips along Katniss’ temple before she could react.

“Always,” he grinned before walking off to join the rest of boys so they could pair off into teams.

Half an hour later, with the boys’ basketball game in full swing, Katniss talked with the other girls about their plans for the upcoming Winter Break, though Delly was doing most of the talking.

“He’s driving Katniss home and taking me too, right Katniss? Panem is only about fifteen minutes from our town. I still can’t believe we didn’t know each other. If only you’d gone to the soccer matches between Panem and Merchant. I know you’ve been to Peeta’s games here, but you should have seen him then too, Katniss. He was so good. It didn’t surprise me at all when he was made one of the captains even though he was only a freshman last year. He’s so good!” Delly prattled before finally taking a breath. Johanna cast Katniss a wide-eyed sarcastic look, and
Katniss shrugged, shifting uncomfortably. Delly’s speeches always reminded her of how much she still had to learn about Peeta and how much history he and his childhood friend had.

“Yes, Delly,” she said dully, watching Peeta fly by with the basketball in his hands. Seconds later, his team let out a cheer as he made a lay-up. She beamed as he gave her a thumbs up. “My sister, Prim, and I are going to hang out while my mom works.”

“Oh, what does she do, Katniss?” Annie asked softly, her gaze following Finnick as he strutted by, pleased with the three-point shot he’d just made. She blew him a kiss.

“She’s a nurse,” Katniss replied.

“Our mothers actually work together,” Madge added quietly. Katniss gave her a mild look of surprise. Her friend usually didn’t often join in their talks, preferring to sit quietly and listen to the conversation.

“Do they work in Panem General? My mom works in billing there. I wonder if they---” Delly stopped talking abruptly, and Katniss looked at her quizzically.

“Hey motor-mouth, you awake there?” Johanna asked a little unkindly, having obviously reached her limit with Delly, but the blonde girl remained silent. It was only then that Katniss realized a large portion of the people in the gym seemed to have come to a complete halt, including several of the boys playing basketball in front of them. Katniss followed their gaze, and her stomach dropped to the floor, a spark of anger bubbling in her chest. Didn’t she know when to quit?!

Katniss watched as a leggy blonde girl stepped to the side of the track and bent over to stretch, her ass barely contained by the tiny, striped shorts she was wearing, her perfectly tanned legs exposed for all to see. She was only wearing a training bra, which left nothing to the imagination when it came to her breasts, leaving her abdomen on display to show off more taut, tanned skin. Her blonde hair was pulled into a ponytail, highlighting her beautiful face, complete with blue eyes that were almost as bright as Peeta’s. If Katniss didn’t already know better, she would have assumed a professional model had randomly decided to use the Rec Center, reminding her that she hadn’t been entirely honest when she’d told herself everything was good.

“Who the hell is that? I see her around here all the time. Good fuck, one wrong move and we’re all going to see her tits,” Johanna quipped, disgust in her voice as they watched the girl begin jogging around the track. It didn’t escape Katniss’ notice that she was staring rather pointedly in the direction of their group and more particularly, the boys. Her eyes shot to Peeta, only to see him looking at her a little nervously. She could only muster a grimaced smile in response.
“Cashmere,” Katniss mumbled in response. Johanna and all the other girls looked at her curiously.

“Uh, how do you know her, Kat? Blondie Big Breasts doesn’t exactly strike me as someone you’d call your BFF.” Katniss scowled deeply at Johanna’s words.

“She’s NOT,” Katniss said more shortly than she meant to. Katniss paused and took a deep breath, willing herself not to get angry. Before she could reply, Delly spoke.

“She’s Peeta’s ex-girlfriend. They dated for two years in high school,” Delly said thoughtlessly. Katniss glared at her, wincing at the wide-eyed looks her friends were now giving her before resolutely turning back to stare determinedly at the basketball game, trying and failing to keep the memory of the first time she’d met Cashmere out of her mind…

“So, what do you want to do for our last night before classes start? You sure you don’t want to go with the others?” Peeta asked, pulling Katniss into his chest as they lay on his bed. Katniss snuggled in closer, listening to the commotion of Gale, Finnick, and Thom, Peeta’s roommates, moving throughout the suite on the opposite side of bathroom they all shared. She was still surprised how well Gale and Peeta had taken to one another when she’d introduced them last year but was thankful for it. Finnick had been Peeta’s friend from before they’d begun dating and though it had taken Katniss awhile to warm up to his teasing, flirtatious nature, she’d come around to him, especially once she’d gotten to know Finnick’s girlfriend, Annie.

“No...I think I’d like them to leave so I can get this…” she tugged on the hem of Peeta’s cotton t-shirt, “…off of you. Remind me to thank Finnick for being willing to hang out on Gale and Thom’s side until they leave.” Peeta grinned. “And we can also order pizza,” she added as an afterthought.

“Sex and pizza. I think that’s something I can handle.” Katniss laughed softly in response, surprised by how happy she felt that school was starting again.

While she and Peeta lived barely fifteen minutes from one another, between his job at his family’s bakery and days Katniss toiled away waitressing in her town’s only restaurant, not to mention keeping Prim out of trouble, they had seen far less of each other than she would have liked or expected during the summer break. She hadn’t seen him at all in the past week, as his responsibilities as Sophomore Class President had required him to be on campus a week early to greet the incoming freshmen. So while the idea of going out with their friends was tempting, Katniss wanted Peeta all to herself tonight and welcomed his kiss when he pulled her up to him.
A few minutes later, she vaguely registered the sound of a door slamming as Finnick and Gale left the suite. Katniss shifted to immediately pull Peeta over her to cover her body entirely. She could feel his erection hard against her thigh, and her core throbbed in anticipation of what she knew was coming.

“So now that you've got me, what are you going to go with me?” Peeta asked, his eyes bright with amusement.

She cupped him, “Put you somewhere safe where I can do what I want with you.”

Peeta’s grin widened. “Does a dorm room, which we know will be empty for at least the next four hours count?”

“Yes, I think it does, Mellark.”

Two hours later, Katniss sat on the couch flipping through channels as she munched on some pepperoni pizza. “Watch it, Everdeen. You’re going to get grease on my shorts,” Peeta teased, taking another slice for himself. Katniss looked down at herself to study the pair of shorts and grey “Capitol Soccer” shirt she’d found in Peeta’s drawer for grease spots. She glared at him in mock rage.

“Better watch it yourself, Mellark,” she said, pointing at the gob of cheese falling off his pizza slice to dangle dangerously close to his pants. He hadn’t bothered with a shirt, much to Katniss’ pleasure. She laughed as Peeta lifted his pizza to bite the cheese off. “Sae’s is such a greasy spoon. Remind me why we had to order from there again?” It was Peeta’s turn to laugh.

“Because she likes me and gives me a discount. I’m a poor college student, remember? All I’ve got to live on is my charm.” Katniss rolled her eyes and snorted. Peeta was neither poor, judging by the chain of local bakeries his family owned, nor did he only have to go by charm. He was smart, funny, and good-looking, among a host of other qualities that made him desirable, apparently even to 60+ year old women. He grabbed her legs, tugging her towards his lap. “You know that’s why you fell for me,” he stated confidently.

“Keep dreaming, Peeta,” she grumbled. “And you’re getting grease on me.”

“Nope. Not dreaming. I drew you a dandelion, and it was all over.” He grabbed a napkin and wiped his hands, wiggling his fingers when he was done. “Well, we can’t have you all greasy. I guess I better get these contaminated clothes off you,” He reached over to the begin undoing the
buttons on her shirt, but Katniss pushed him down onto the couch and straddled his hips, giving him an imperious look.

“If I remember correctly, you were so annoying on the first day in Snow’s class that you had to make me that drawing as a peace offering because you were so worried you’d made me angry. **I was** mad, you know.”

“I think the word you used was that I was **distracting** to you, sweetheart,” Peeta smiled up at her, daringly reaching his hands inside her boxers to begin caressing her inner thighs. Katniss was barely able to keep herself from moving to direct his hands where she really wanted them to be, her arousal growing again despite the two hours they’d already spent in bed together. But she was also very competitive and refused to give into her boyfriend... yet.

She began to grind down onto his hardening length, and Peeta gasped, “That’s not playing fair, Katniss.”

“All’s fair in love and war.” Peeta quirked an eyebrow at her and pulled his hands out of her boxers, only to slip them under the elastic band to cup her sex. Katniss cried out as he swirled a finger around her clit before dipping it between her folds.

“So which is this? Love?” He caught her hand in his free one and kissed it gently, a mischievous look on his face. “Or war? He pumped another finger inside her, and Katniss jerked at the sensation. “Fuck, you’re already so wet, so beautiful.” He looked at her in adoring amazement.

“God, I need you. So damn much.”

Katniss said nothing, her heart rate increasing at his words, a tumult of emotions suddenly ablaze inside her. She reached down to stroke him through his pants, and Peeta moaned, though she could see there was some sort of question in his eyes due to her lack of response at his words. She pumped him faster, hoping he wouldn’t notice her continued silence, but then a sudden knock at the door stayed her movements. She looked at Peeta in confusion.

“They said they wouldn’t be back until after midnight right?” she asked him, checking the clock on her phone, which told her their friends weren’t supposed to return for at least another hour.

“No. They shouldn’t be back, and they wouldn’t knock either. Can you get it? I’m...not exactly fit to receive anyone,” Peeta asked, gesturing towards the tent in his pants. Katniss nodded and grabbed Peeta’s robe off its hook. Wrapping it around herself, she headed towards the door.
“Can I help y—” Katniss stopped talking as she swung the door open, revealing the most beautiful
girl she had ever seen. She gaped at the just-short-of-sheer, red dress the girl was wearing, her
blonde hair cascading down around her shoulders. Her eyes raked over Katniss, her eyes
judgmental, and Katniss was suddenly distinctly aware of her wild, flyaway hair and lack of
make-up.

“This is a boy’s dorm room,” the girl said snottily. Katniss had the sudden urge to punch her,
even though she knew absolutely nothing about the girl.

“Rules for the weekends are that girls can be in boy’s rooms and vice versa until 1 am. Only 11
on weekdays, but I’m allowed to be here,” Katniss said coldly. Who was this bitch?

“Oh right…” the girl said dismissively, attempting to peer into Finnick and Peeta’s side of the
dorm room.

“If you’re looking for Thom, he isn’t here,” Katniss said, throwing out the name of the one
roommate she knew didn’t have a girlfriend. Finnick was dating Annie, and Gale had Madge.
“And he’s on the other side of the bathroom,” she said pointing down to next door. The girl
gave her a withering look.

“I’m not looking for Thom. I don’t even know Thom. I’m looking for Peeta. Peeta Mellark. I
was told he lived on this floor.” Katniss’ mouth dropped open, but before she could speak,
Peeta’s voice echoed in the hallway.

“Cassie?” he asked. “What are you doing here?” Katniss whipped around, her mouth still wide
in astonishment. He looked confused, tugging his shirt down over his head.

They’d discussed their exes before (or in Katniss’ case, the lack-there-of), Peeta mentioning that
he’d gone out on a few dates before dating a girl named Cashmere, or Cassie for short, during
his last two years of high school. But Katniss knew Cassie had broken up with him before he’d
come to Capitol, and he rarely spoke about it. The pain that flashed whenever her name was
mentioned had been more than enough to keep Katniss from asking about the topic, but as she
turned back towards the girl, she realized she shouldn’t have shied away from asking him about
it. She reassessed Cassie, feeling even more inadequate and awkward than normal.

“Peeta!” Cassie cried out, abruptly shoving Katniss to the side to fling her arms around Peeta’s
shoulders. Fire flashed in front of Katniss’ eyes as Peeta just stood there, seemingly too stunned
to move.
“Excuse me,” Katniss said. “Who do you think you are?” Cassie pulled back as Peeta finally seemed to wake up and began extricating himself from his ex-girlfriends grip. Cassie gave him a hurt look before surveying Katniss with a look of superiority that stoked Katniss’ blood to a boil.

“I’m Cashmere. Who are you?”

Katniss almost wanted to shout, but Peeta, clearly sensing danger, stepped between them.

“Cassie, this is my girlfriend, Katniss. Katniss, this is my…” he trailed off as he looked from Katniss’ furious expression to Cassie’s now angry one. “Well, this is my...Cassie...What are you doing here?” Cassie smiled so sweetly at him that it made Katniss sick.

“I transferred here from Heavensbee Academy. I realized it wasn’t for me, and that I missed you. Daddy was fully supportive, and your mother was excited about it too. I saw her a few weeks ago when I stopped in Merchant, but she said you were over in Panem visiting a friend.” She sent Katniss a nasty look that Peeta didn’t see, but he sighed in exasperation at her words.

“I think I owe my mother a phone call,” Peeta said, annoyance on his face. “Cass, that’s great that you transferred to Capitol, and I’m flattered that you missed me, but…” he pulled Katniss to him. “All I can offer you is friendship,” he said firmly. Katniss’ heart sank; he was just too nice. She knew the only thing that was going to keep this blonde bitch away was a restraining order and a can of pepper spray.

For a second, Katniss thought she saw fury cross Cashmere’s face, but if it had really been there, she quickly replaced it with her sickening smile again. “Of course, Peety. That’s all I wanted, too. I just wanted you to know I’d be around. For, um, anything you need.” She ran her hands up and down her red dress before adjusting the straps to expose even more of her breasts than were already on display. Katniss nearly gagged, involuntarily clutching at Peeta’s hand with her own. He gave her a curious glance.

“I’ll leave you two alone for now, but I expect to have lunch with you sometime, Peety. I want to catch up!” She turned and walked off towards the elevators without any acknowledgement of Katniss at all. She turned to Peeta.

“You aren’t really going to have ‘lunch’ with her, are you?” she asked incredulously.

“No!”

“I think you are.”

Katniss shook her head more vigorously, denying completely what she was feeling. “No, I’m not, Peeta. I just know that she hurt you.” Peeta’s face fell, and Katniss leaned up to kiss him. “Sorry,” she whispered. Peeta finally gave her a small smile.

“Come on. Let’s go back and finish that pizza.”

“Katniss? Katniss, snap out of it,” Johanna’s terse voice broke Katniss out of her recollections.

She looked dazedly at Jo. “Sorry, what?”

Johanna rolled her eyes. “I asked why you failed to tell me this before? I’ve seen her around. We’ve all seen her around. I just thought it was a coincidence, but now you’re telling me that she and Peeta have a history. Why have you and Bread Boy never mentioned anything?” Katniss flinched at Johanna’s harsh words. “Spill it, Katniss.”

The truth was that though Peeta hadn’t shown any enthusiasm for hanging out with Cashmere, despite the offer of friendship, she had still somehow turned up at nearly every public outing Peeta went to. Or well, she’d been at Peeta’s soccer games, at least, and seemed to be on Peeta’s dorm floor a lot, not to mention the times she appeared in the gym, and somehow she always managed to snare Peeta for at least one conversation. It was the secret reason Katniss was less than enthusiastic about going out most of the time, even though she tried to tell herself that she wasn’t jealous, that it hadn’t bothered her when Cashmere had been named Capitol’s “Most Eligible Bachelorette” in the school newspaper nor that Peeta had been named “Most Eligible Bachelor,” completely discounting the fact that he had a girlfriend already. Katniss looked down at her black, oversized T-shirt and baggy workout pants, wishing she’d thought to put on something a little more form-fitting today. She looked at Johanna a little helplessly.

“I don’t know. I just haven’t been that worried about it. Peeta is with me; he’s never indicated he wants her back,” Katniss tried to say impassively. Johanna narrowed her eyes to show she wasn’t buying it.

“So it doesn’t bother you at all that this Cashmere...God, what an awful name...hangs around a lot,
apparently trying to get her ex-boyfriend back?”

Katniss shifted uncomfortably. “No. I...like I said. Peeta’s never given me a reason to doubt him.” Johanna’s eyes narrowed even further to the point that Katniss could barely see the brown of her irises.

“Who cares? That’s great that he’s faithful, but you can’t tell me it doesn’t bother you. Has Peeta never told her to fuck off? I know how much you care about him, Katniss, but that’s shitty if he hasn’t done that. I honestly can’t believe you haven’t said anything either to him or to her.’ Katniss glanced at Peeta only to catch his eyes darting away from hers. She could feel the appearance of Cashmere hanging between them.

“I don’t want to fight with him, Jo. I don’t want to fight with anybody.”

“Where’s the fire? The Katniss Everdeen I know would fight for what’s hers,” Johanna accused.

Katniss sighed. “I don’t want a war. Just drop it, Jo!” Katniss moved to stand up, fed up with the conversation. She waved at Peeta to indicate she was going to take a shower, scowling when she caught a smirking Cashmere running behind him. She glared at her, but Peeta seemed to think it was directed at him because his expression became one of hurt confusion. Katniss gave an exasperated sigh. She did not want to deal with this anymore. “I’ll see you all tonight at the Mockingjay,” she mumbled at the girls.

“Fine, Brainless. But I have a feeling you’re going to get a war whether you want it to happen or not.” Katniss didn’t bother turning around as she strode away.

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“Are you sure you’re ok, Katniss?” Peeta questioned as they walked through the cold night air towards a slightly seedy building. Katniss looked up to see lights flashing on the top floor.

“Yes, I am, Peeta. Stop asking if I’m ok. I’m fine,” she said curtly. Peeta said nothing more, and Katniss inwardly became filled with regret.

It hadn’t been an easy night since she’d stormed out of the gym, the image of Cashmere’s malicious grin still in her mind and Johanna’s words ringing in her ears. She’d been in a foul
mood when the others had finally come back from the Rec Center to get ready for tonight, and Katniss had only grudgingly accepted the red, strapless, crystal-infused dress Johanna had noisily thrown at her. Annie had offered to help her with her hair, and Katniss had almost refused, except for the fact that Annie looked so terrified Katniss might yell at her that she’d graciously accepted her assistance.

Her poor mood had continued even after they had arrived at the Mockingjay’s building to find Peeta and the other boys waiting for them nor had it improved when Peeta pecked her on the cheek and called her the most beautiful girl there. She hadn’t laughed when Finnick had jokingly said he might have to fight Peeta for that declaration and pulled out the mini-trident bottle opener on his key ring. Peeta had whipped out his own key, and the two had looked like they were about to do battle until Katniss had snorted impatiently and declared she was cold. She didn’t miss the look that passed between Peeta and Gale at that, like her boyfriend and best friend knew exactly what was up with her, though it hadn’t stopped Peeta from asking her twice if she was alright. She realized she probably owed him an apology.

“Look Peeta, it’s just been a bad day. Snow’s test just threw me off, and I didn’t get as good a workout in as I wanted to, and Johanna was just being annoying.” She waved up ahead of them to where Jo was talking to Gale and Madge before she looked at Peeta, fully aware that she hadn’t really given him an apology. His blue eyes, still so light even in the dark winter night, studied her with careful consideration. “I need this,” she said with a shrug.

“You know, Katniss, you can tell me if and when things are bothering you. I want you to tell me. I want to be there for you,” he said.

“Didn’t I just do that?” she snapped, but Peeta gave her a hurt, skeptical look.

“This seems like more than just a bad day,” he challenged. “I don’t know why you’re so reluctant to open up to me. We’ve been dating for almost a year.”

“I know, Peeta. But really, I’m fine. Can’t we just have fun tonight? I don’t want to talk about stuff right now. Maybe later.”

“Ok,” Peeta sighed. “Come on. We’re going to miss the elevator.”

The music pounded in Katniss’ ears as she moved around the dance floor with Peeta, one second
being twirled outwards by him, the next being pulled back into his chest. Sweat trickled down the side of his face, his face flushed with the heat of the surrounding bodies and the alcohol they’d both consumed. They’d been there for several hours, but it had been only a few minutes since Katniss had finally gained enough liquid courage to join Peeta on the dance floor. Until then, she’d been perfectly content to stay in the corner booth Finnick had claimed for them with Gale, both beyond understanding why their partners liked to dance. But after several bottles of beer and several girls asking Peeta if he wanted to go with them out onto the floor, ignoring Katniss’ sullen, angry expression when they did, she had finally pulled him to the floor herself, much to Peeta’s surprise.

“Having fun yet?” Peeta grinned, brushing his damp hair off his forehead. He spun her around happily.

“Peeta! You’re going to make me dizzy,” Katniss giggled despite willing herself not to give into his silliness. She’d apparently had more to drink than she’d thought. Peeta’s grin broadened.

“I’m not the one who claimed I needed this tonight. I’m just trying to be a good boyfriend, trying to comply with your wishes,” he laughed. He twirled her again, and Katniss gripped his shoulders to steady herself. Suddenly, the heat Katniss was feeling wasn’t just from the room. She looked up at Peeta through half-closed eyes, her heart pounding as she watched his eyes darken. He leaned down to her as she pressed up into him, but then she stopped, too aware of the moving bodies around them.

“Peeta, people are watching” she said, hoping she sounded playful to justify her lack of affection, but his smile dropped from his face. Katniss knew she’d made a mistake.

“No one is paying attention to us, Katniss,” he sounded exasperated. “Why does it bother you so much when I show any sort of affection to you in public?” The frustration grew on his face. “Is there something about me that bothers you? Have I done something wrong? What is so wrong with letting me claim you as mine? Do you realize the effect you have on all the guys here?” Katniss’ eyes widened at his uncharacteristic outburst, confusion setting in as she considered his questions.

“I don’t have any effect on anyone, Peeta,” she replied defensively, her voice rising, dismissing his other queries to the back of her head where she wouldn’t have to think about them. “And I didn’t realize you felt the need to ‘claim’ me. I’m going out with you for the sake of your ego? Excuse me if I don’t like to be the center of attention.” Fury bloomed in Katniss chest, knowing she was probably drawing the eyes of everyone around with her raised voice, the exact opposite of what she wanted. She stormed towards the elevator at the far end of the room, feeling Peeta at her heels, ignoring the calls of her friends. When the doors opened, she practically jumped inside.
“Katniss, what I said about claiming you...I think you misinterpreted what I meant,” Peeta started. She could hear the desperation and panic in his voice now but refused to look at him. “All I wanted--”

“Oh Peety, are you alright? I saw you walking off the dance floor. You looked so upset. Is everything ok?” They both turned with mouths agape as Cashmere walked onto the elevator.

Katniss balled her hands into fists as she scanned Cashmere head to toe. She hadn’t thought it was possible for her to wear less clothing than she had at the Rec Center, but she had somehow managed it with a red dress that had few carefully placed cutouts to cover her nipples and groin. It was wildly clear she’d gone without a bra or underwear. Katniss watched furiously as Cashmere stepped between her and Peeta, jutting her chest out, her fire burning higher when she saw Peeta’s eyes dart downwards. He stumbled backwards while Katniss gave him a look of utter disgust, in complete disbelief that he hadn’t pushed her away.

“I’m, um, fine Cass,” he said uncomfortably. “I didn’t realize you were here.”

“Oh, I heard some of your friends talking about it after you left today. I hope you don’t mind. I’ve never been to the Mockingjay before. The owner is quite funny...Chaff...such a smelly, dirty man.” Katniss pressed her lips together hard to keep from screaming. Cashmere had basically just admitted to stalking Peeta. Now he would have to say something.

“Cass, he’s not bad. It’s lucky he doesn’t care what age anyone is,” Peeta said sternly, ignoring the other things Cashmere had said. Katniss rolled her eyes as Cashmere flashed her fake smile and laughed fakely. Typically too nice as always, Peeta.

“I’m sure you’re right, Peeta.” She took another step forward. “Are you sure you aren’t upset though?” She ran her hand along Peeta’s arm, and Katniss finally snapped.

“He’s fine, Cashmere. We were just talking.” She cast Peeta another angry look. He grimaced at her as Cashmere slowly turned around, blinking in exaggerated surprise.

“Katniss! I didn’t even see you!” she said snidely. Katniss had the resist the desire to slap her.

“Yeah...Sure you didn’t. Now, if you don’t mind, I’d like to finish our conversation.” She jammed the button for the bottom floor of the building while simultaneously holding the door open button, indicating with her head that she wanted Cashmere to leave. She watched the girl’s face darken.
“I’ll only leave if Peeta wants me to. Not you.” Katniss glared at Peeta as if daring him to say anything differently, but his face hardened as he looked back at her.

“Cass, I’m sorry, but I think it’s best if you leave,” he said. Cashmere looked at him shocked fury for a second but quickly rearranged her face again.

“Of course, Peeta. I’ll, um, let you work things out with your…friend.” She smiled wickedly at Katniss and flounced back out the door. Katniss released her hold on the door open button, wishing the elevator door would slam shut to reflect her mood.

“Peeta! What the hell?” she yelled. She watched Peeta’s face flush as it always did when he felt stressed.

“What?” he asked slowly, but Katniss wasn’t having any of it.

“You didn’t even try to stop her when she came at you! You haven’t once done that. Never apparently consider how much she obviously wants you and how humiliating it is for me to just stand there and watch you be nice to her. You didn’t even correct her when she called me your friend,” she spat, internally recognizing that attacking Peeta with accusations was not the way to do this, but she just couldn’t stop. “You never stop any of the girls. You never do,” she finished, the hurt and jealousy Katniss had been holding at bay for so long finally relieved. Peeta swallowed thickly, but she was disheartened to see the hard set of his jaw, which was why what he said next startled her.

“Katniss...I didn’t know you felt that way,” he started.

“What?”

Peeta sighed tiredly. “I didn’t know you felt that way, Kat. Every time I’ve asked you if Cashmere bothers you, you’ve said no. You’ve always just said you were worried for me. But the thing is, Katniss, I’m over her. I got over her a long time ago…I was over her the day you walked into that classroom. You were the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen.” Katniss couldn’t help but scoff, barely able to register the soft ding that indicated the elevator had arrived at the ground floor. Peeta stepped out with a frustrated shake of his head.

“You were and still are, Katniss. I know you’ve seen Cashmere, and you think she’s…” he
hesitated. “Cassie is beautiful. Objectively.” Katniss flinched and stepped out of the elevator, not able to look at him. She felt his hand on her arm, but she pulled away. “She is, Katniss, but all I see is you. Cassie isn’t warm like you are. She isn’t kind, and smart, and funny, like you are. She isn’t stubborn as hell. She doesn’t challenge me. She isn’t who I want. You are.” Katniss turned back to him, stunned by his speech. He grabbed her hand and placed his keys inside, and an avalanche of fear cascaded through her soul. He looked at her sadly.

“I want you, Katniss, but I want all of you. I want you to let me love you, but you don’t seem to want that. I can’t even kiss you in public.” The tears began to prick in Katniss’ eyes. “That’s all I meant earlier when I said I wanted to claim you as mine.” Katniss could feel the lump growing in her throat, but she couldn’t speak. Peeta gave her a small smile, like he didn’t expect her to. She wasn’t sure how this conversation had turned into this.

“I drove here, but you can take my car back. I’ll get a cab. The others will manage between Jo’s car and more cabs.” His words finally unstuck Katniss’ voice and her stomach roiled at the thought of what this might mean.

“Are you breaking up with me?” she whispered. Peeta expression turned even more sorrowful than before, and Katniss knew she’d asked the wrong question again. He leaned down, grabbed her hand, and kissed her cheek softly.

“No, I’m not. You’re...You really have no idea, do you? The effect you have on me.” He shook his head again. “I just think we need to cool off before we talk anymore. I’ll text you tomorrow,” he said, kissing her lightly. Katniss’ hand contracted around his, dreading the moment when she would have to let go.

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An explosion went off in the distance, then another, then another. Katniss coughed, unable to breathe, blindly stumbling her way through the smoke. “Peeta!” Katniss cried. “Where are you?” She called out his name again, but the darkness surrounded her completely. A girl’s high-pitched cackle sounded through the void.

“I have him. He’s mine.”

“Peeta!” Katniss called again. Distantly she thought she heard him yelling back to her. Another explosion rocked the ground at her feet, and she was thrown to the ground. Suddenly, a ball of light burst through the darkness, and Katniss could finally see.
There was Cashmere. She was holding Peeta in her hands, which had grown into hideous mangled claws, her blonde hair glowing like hot embers in a fire. Katniss could see he was struggling to free himself. She ran at the two, but the distance never seemed to close.

“Give him back!”

Cashmere only laughed again, “You didn’t fight hard enough for him. You didn’t even want to be seen with him. How could you possibly think you’re worthy?” Katniss lunged forward in a last desperate act...

And found herself on the floor of her bedroom, blinking up dazedly at the ceiling fan. Johanna was standing over her with a concerned look on her face.

“Are you ok, Katniss? You were thrashing around so hard; I wouldn’t be surprised if Madge and Annie heard it on the other side.” Katniss scrambled to a sitting position, which proved difficult as her legs were caught in the pile of sheets she’d taken with her when she’d fallen out of bed.

“I—I’m fine,” she stuttered out. Johanna gave her an imperious look and reached to switch on the lamp on Katniss’ desk.

“Yeah... Anyone ever tell you how terrible you are at lying, Brainless? That must have been some nightmare to make you do that. You usually sleep like a rock and snore all night.”

“I do not snore! Peeta’s...” Her breath caught as she spoke his name. She took a shuddering breath. “Peeta has never said I snore.” Her roommate looked at her knowingly.

“Speaking of Sunshine, shouldn’t you be in his bed tonight? I know for a fact Thom went home this weekend so Madge went to Gale’s room, Finnick is in Annie’s, which would leave you and Peeta with a room all to yourselves.” Katniss was silent for a long moment, and then to her horror, she began to cry. Johanna looked at her in alarm.

“We had a huge fight last Friday, Jo. I messed up. And I hate Cashmere. But I messed up. I didn’t know how much I was hurting his feelings. I just didn’t want to be the center of attention. He said we would talk. We’ve talked a little this week, but it hasn’t been… Things just haven’t been the same. And there hasn’t been the time. And he’s gone until Sunday night. The Student Council has their retreat this weekend. I had the archery meet, and Peeta had to do some soccer stuff. I don’t even know why! They don’t really start practicing until spring. And we both had tests, and--”
“Katniss!” She looked up at Johanna, whose hands were raised in wide-eyed surrender. “I barely understood half of that. I wasn’t expecting you to vomit out all your emotions. Start over and use words in sequences that make sense please.” Katniss stared at her until Johanna finally sighed, crossing her arms. She went over to their small fridge and pulled out two bottles of beer, popping off the caps quickly, before she handed one to Katniss. “Come on, Kat. I knew something was off this week. Tell me what’s wrong.” Katniss accepted the drink, taking a long pull of it before she finally began to speak.

It was strangely cathartic, Katniss accepted, as she poured out everything that she had been feeling since Cashmere had appeared at the beginning of the semester.

Johanna listened silently as Katniss divulged about their initial meeting, how she always managed to be where Peeta was, how Peeta never seemed bothered by it, and never sent her away. How much it confused Katniss that he’d never picked up on her discomfort, and how inadequate she felt compared to the girls who usually hit on Peeta, even in her presence. Was he that nice? Or just that dense? Or was it something more serious? Could he be tired of her prudishness and looking for someone more fun? She also confessed about their fight and Cashmere’s interference, including all the things Peeta had said to her as well, his words still shocking a week later. When she was finally finished, she’d not only drunk her first beer but a second as well.

“So...What do you think?” she asked. Johanna snorted.

“Well, I was wondering when your honeymoon period would finally be over. We were all wondering who’d be the first to snap. Guess you both reached it at the same time….somehow that’s not surprising,” Johanna mused, more to herself it seemed, than Katniss.

“What?! What in the hell do you mean by that?” Katniss demanded. That certainly hadn’t been the reaction she’d wanted or expected. Her roommate snorted again.

“Brainless, you’re in a relationship. Fights happen. And while I’ll agree with you that Peeta has been a clueless idiot who should have told Cashmere...God, that’s still such a terrible name...to back off a long time ago, he made some fair points as well.”

“Like what?”

“Like the fact that you really don’t allow him to show any kind of...well, anything...for you in public. I swear to God, sometimes we forget you two are dating because you’re so anti-touching.
I can understand how that would bother Peeta, and it’s kind of a wonder that Boy Wonder doesn’t get hit on more often, all considering.” Katniss stared at her, flabbergasted.

“I just don’t like to be the center of attention!” she shouted, hoping no RAs were trolling the corridors. Johanna rolled her eyes.

“No one is going to give two shits if you kiss each other occasionally or hold each other’s hands or cuddle together on movie night. Mean, I’ll think it’s gross,” she said with a wink that did nothing to comfort Katniss. “But I’ve also seen far worse. Do you see how Finnick and Annie are? All. The. Time. I don’t think Peeta wants that level of PDA. He may be the world’s biggest social butterfly, but my impression is he still wants to keep his personal life personal.”

“He makes friends with everyone. I’m not like that,” Katniss replied, Jo’s statement reminding her of Peeta’s popularity. Johanna narrowed her eyes, and Katniss felt like she was being x-rayed.

“Yeah, annoyingly, he does, but I think that’s part of why you fell for him in the first place right? We’ve all heard the dandelion drawing story at this point. And it doesn’t matter that you aren’t that way. It clearly doesn’t bother Peeta so it shouldn’t bother you.” Katniss shook her head.

“It’s not that easy, Jo! Sometimes I feel like I could live a hundred years and still never deserve him. He’s too good, too nice, too handsome, too--”

“Kat, that’s bullshit.” Katniss looked up at her, angry tears forming in her eyes. Johanna came over to sit on her bed and grabbed her hands, making sure Katniss was looking at her before she spoke again. “First thing. Peeta isn’t perfect. I think we’ve established that quite well vis a vie his moronic behavior in regards to his awful bitch of an ex, and he definitely owes you an apology for it. Second thing. You have just as many good qualities as he does, and you’re just as worthy of him as he is of you. You probably aren’t going to believe that right now, as I think that’s just something you have to realize on your own, so I won’t push it for now. Last thing.” Johanna paused to grimace. “I’ll deny I ever said this, but you guys honestly have the sweetest relationship ever. It’s sickenly adorable how each of you light up when the other comes in the room. I think everyone hopes they can find someone who makes them as happy as you make each other.” She took a last deep breath.

“Peeta is so deeply in love with you that I doubt he even saw those other bitches that hit on him. And you’re so obliviously in love with him that you fail to notice you, too, get hit on all the time. You two attract pervs like bugs to a torch, but you love each other so damn much, neither of you notices.” Katniss gaped at her, and Johanna smiled triumphantly. “So is there anything wrong with you showing that you love him?” she asked.
Katniss knew there wasn’t.

XXX

Katniss was bouncing nervously on the balls of her feet, her long coat flapping in the cold, snowy, night air when she finally spotted Peeta walking up the walkway to their dorm, duffle bag in hand. She sighed with relief, the sight of him reinforcing how much she’d missed him since they’d had their fight.

“Peeta!” she called out. She wanted to run up to him and fling her arms around him, but she knew she couldn’t yet. Johanna had helped her last night immensely, but she knew she needed to talk to her boyfriend more than anything else.

“Katniss?” Peeta looked surprised to see her, his eyes scanning over her shivering form. “How long have you been out here? You look frozen.” He ripped the beanie off his head and placed it on hers. Katniss laughed.

“A little while. I’m not that cold. I just...couldn’t wait to see you. I m-missed you this week.” Peeta smiled.

“I missed you, too. The retreat felt like it would never end.” He stared at her, his eyes darting to her lips briefly, but then they flitted away, a reminder of the things they still needed to talk about. “Do you want to talk?” he asked tentatively. Katniss nodded her head.

“That’s why I was outside. I didn’t want to miss you coming in. I’m sorry; I know you probably have homework.”

Peeta smiled more broadly. “I told you the retreat was slow. I got it done already. And Finnick texted me he’s in Annie’s room tonight. Apparently, Thom got stuck in nowheresville because the District 12 train had to stop due to snow. So we’ll have the room to ourselves tonight.” Katniss nodded her head again, hoping the fact that her plans didn’t involve them making it to Peeta’s room quite yet wouldn’t bother him.

She followed him into the dorm lobby and then onto the elevator. She didn’t move until they were just a few floors below Peeta’s. Then she pressed the emergency stop button, and the car jolted to a halt, sending Peeta stumbling into the wall. A short buzz sounded, and Katniss hoped it would be a little while before maintenance or anyone else noticed the elevator was stuck between the fifth and sixth floors.
“Katniss, what are you doing?!” he asked her, a confused, alarmed expression on his face.

“I just wanted to talk in here.” She watched Peeta’s eyes dart around the cab of the elevator, looking even more confused than before. Katniss tried to offer a better explanation. “Finnick could still come back for something, or Gale and Madge could be...noisy...on the other side.” Peeta snorted at that, and she gave him a small smile. “Plus, we got our start in an elevator. It feels right to me to talk in here.” He barked out a short laugh.

“The elevator from last weekend wasn’t so lucky for us,” he said, but then his smile widened. “But yeah, it feels right.”

For a long minute, they just stared at one another, as Katniss struggled to gain the courage to speak her feelings, the calm she’d experienced while talking to Johanna having suddenly fled from her. She felt her face flush as she opened her mouth to finally talk, but Peeta beat her to it.

“Look, Katniss,” he sighed. “I thought about what you said at the bar, and you’re right.” Katniss blinked in surprise as Peeta gave her a sorrowful look. “I should have told Cashmere to stay away from me...and you...a long time ago. It may be hard to believe, but it honestly didn’t register that she might still want to be with me until you pointed it out.” Katniss’ eyebrows shot up, and she looked at him skeptically. He sighed again.

“I know. I know. It’s just when we broke up, she basically told me I wasn’t good enough for her. My family wasn’t wealthy enough. I was too inclusive of people of less status than herself and didn’t have my priorities set right. I should be going with her to Heavenbee’s Academy, never mind the athletic scholarship I got from Capitol. I spent too much time playing soccer. I spent too much time volunteering. I spent too much time in the bakery. I…” He ran a hand through his hair, hurt on his face, and Katniss’ anger rekindled at the thought of Cashmere and what she’d said to Peeta.

“I just figured she transferred to Capitol because she flunked at her college...likely…” he paused, and Katniss laughed. “Or that she was here to find someone who could actually put up with her ridiculously high maintenance behavior. That isn’t me. It didn’t take me very long after we broke up to realize what a horrible relationship we had, but I guess that’s high school for you.” He looked at her thoughtfully. “I really just thought she talked to me because she needed a friend. I’ve been an idiot.” Katniss laughed again.

“You have,” she said, still laughing, but then she sobered. “But I should have said something to you about it. I, um, lied when I said I wasn’t jealous.” Peeta smiled.
“Yeah, I think that’s obvious,” he said with just the hint of a tease. It encouraged Katniss to continue talking.

“Peeta, I was jealous of all of them. Cashmere. The girls who asked you to dance at the bar. The girls who look at you even when we’re walking back to our dorm. I just see them and think you could do so much better than me. You’re perfect. And I’m not.”

“Katniss… that’s not even remotely true.” He stepped towards her, but Katniss held up a hand.

“No, just listen. I have to get this out before I chicken out.” She took a breath. Peeta pressed his lips together though she could tell he was dying to speak. “I know, logically, that that’s not true. We both have our flaws, but it feels like mine are on display for everyone to see, whereas you’re Sunshine, like Jo likes to call you. Everyone loves you, and it just sometimes feels like I’m the surly, awkward girl who is holding you back. I know that’s my issue, and something I’m going to have to work through. Jo told me I’m worthy of you, but it’s hard for me to see it. And those girls… those girls just make me feel…” She trailed off, a million adjectives running through her head. Insecure? Ugly? Worthless? Stupid? None of them quite fit. She looked down at the floor.

“I know I’ve acted like I’m ashamed of you. I didn’t realize how much it bothered you, not being able to even kiss me in public. But it wasn’t about you. It was about me, and my hang-ups about myself. I think there’s a part of me that’s scared you’ll see the real me. See me for what I am. And you won’t like what you’ll see,” she mumbled, fists clenching. She didn’t look up until she saw Peeta’s sneakers come into view as he moved to stand in front of her, but when she did, there was such warmth in his eyes she almost gasped. He tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear and enveloped her in his arms.

“Katniss, I’ve seen you.” She felt his lips brush the top of her head. “And I love every bit of you. When I said I only wanted you, I meant that. You’re it for me, K. I knew it the moment I saw last year.” Her heart clenched at his words, and she tightened her grip on him, feeling both elated and afraid at the same time. It was a lot to take in, and Peeta seemed to sense that. “I know that’s probably a little much, but it’s the truth. None of those girls hold a candle to you, I swear, and they never will. We can work on everything else.” He kissed her forehead. “Including the PDA. Maybe someday we can give Finnick and Annie a run for their money.” Katniss pulled back from him, wrinkling her nose in disgust, when she saw his amused expression. She hit him on the arm.

“Not funny, Mellark,” she growled. Peeta grinned.

“So now what do we do? Head back to my room?” he questioned, reaching for the emergency stop button, but Katniss stayed his hand. He looked at her curiously.
“Not yet,” she said. Peeta’s eyebrows arched into his hair, his eyes darkening slightly.

“Oh...what are we going to do instead?”

“Well, as I recall the last time we were in an elevator alone, you got me off, but I wasn’t able to return the favor before Haymitch barged in. I thought tonight would be a wonderful time to pay you back.” Peeta’s eyes flew wide open.

“Wha--” Katniss cut him off by pulling in for a kiss, her hands immediately wending into the curls at the nape of his neck. He tried to speak again, but Katniss slipped her tongue in his mouth to silence him entirely. She felt the groan rumble in his chest as she pushed him against the nearest wall and ground her hips into his pelvis.

“Katniss,” Peeta gasped. He thrust against her, his cock straining against the unforgiving material of his jeans. He grabbed at her coat, undoing the buttons quickly, and he moaned when he saw the thin top she’d thrown on with her jeans. She’d dispensed with a bra for the evening, leaving her hardened nipples on display for him. Katniss grinned as he cupped one breast in his hand over the material, shuddering as he rolled the small bud between his thumb and index finger. “You are so fucking hot,” he said gruffly.

He attacked her lips then, his hands slipping inside her shirt to knead her breasts, and Katniss whimpered at the sensation. She sucked on his tongue, pulling him back into her mouth, as she renewed her motions against him. She ran a hand along the buttons of his coat to get it undone, which proved even more difficult a task as Peeta pulled away from her lips, only to run wet kisses along her jaw. She cried out when he bit lightly on the pulse point at the juncture of her neck and throat.

Before she knew how it happened, Peeta had managed to unsnap her jeans, running his hand along her abdomen before inching it inside her panties. “Peeta, I’m supposed to be doing this for...oh, ohh, she panted, cutting off as his fingers curled inside her, his thumb pressed hard against her clit.

“You first,” he said, circling her sensitive button at a furious pace that Katniss assumed meant he was worried about how much longer they might have in the elevator. But then she wasn’t thinking at all as he yanked down her top with his other hand to suck at her breasts, his tongue running tight circles around her nipples to mimic of his ministrations below. She rocked against his pumping fingers, driving them deeper inside of her, and she called out his name again and again until she finally fell apart with a shout. Katniss clung to him as the waves of her orgasm shuddered through her. Finally, she sank to the floor.
“You’re not...playing...fair,” she gasped. Peeta smiled in response.

“I love you, Katniss.” She looked up at him, stunned. It was the first time he’d ever explicitly said it, and she was troubled to see the sudden wary panic in his eyes.

She gave him what she hoped was a reassuring look as she reached for the zipper of his pants and pulled it down. She tugged the jeans over his hips before moving his boxers enough to expose his straining cock. It sprung free to bob against his thigh. Katniss regretfully wished they had more time, the desire for him to be inside of her growing with each passing moment. Instead, she took him in hand and stroked him slightly as his whole body tensed and he closed his eyes.

“I love you, too,” she said. His eyes flew open in shock as her mouth descended over him.

“Oh fuck,” Peeta moaned as Katniss licked him from the base to his tip, swirling the head of his cock with her tongue. She pumped him with her hand as repeating the action, the other hand coming up to fondle his balls. He let out another groan, mumbling her name, and his hands found purchase in her hair. He jerked into her mouth involuntarily, and Katniss used the opportunity to hollow her cheeks as she began to suck him off. It didn’t take long before Peeta was trying to bat her away. “Katniss, I’m close,” he gasped, his hips snapping erratically as he tried to hold off long enough for her to release him, but she only sucked him harder, rolling his cock with her tongue.

“Katniss!” Peeta shouted, as the first spurts of semen hit the back of her throat. Katniss swallowed as best she could, but some inevitably leaked out of her mouth and onto her chest. When he finally stopped throbbing, she released him with a pop and gave him a pleased smile.

“Good?” she asked, wiping her mouth and chest with her shirt. Peeta looked at her like she was crazy, his eyes locked on her as he put himself back in his jeans and zipped up.

“Better than good,” he said, chest still heaving. He watched her adjust her shirt and resnap her own pants. When she was finally settled, he pushed the button to get the elevator moving again, studying her in complete amazement. “Real or not real? he asked, moving to stand next to her. He kissed her gently and wrapped a hand around her waist. “Before, uh, that, you told me you loved me?” Katniss grinned at him.

“Real.” She was just about to pull him in for another kiss when the elevator dinged open to reveal the last person Katniss wanted to see.
“Oh, Peety!” Cashmere exclaimed, completely ignoring Katniss as per usual. “I’d been wondering where you were. Was knocking on your door for ages, and I was just coming downstairs to see if you’d stopped by the front desk. I was still worried about you after last weekend. You really did look so upset.” Peeta shot Katniss an incredulous look and opened his mouth to speak, but Katniss waved at him to stop. She suddenly found she didn’t need him to tell Cashmere no.

“Thanks for your concern, Cass, but we’re ok now,” she said, grabbing Peeta by the hand and pulling him out of the elevator. She gave the girl as wicked of a smile as she could muster. “We were stuck in the elevator for a little bit but don’t worry. I took care of him,” Katniss said. Then, though she couldn’t quite believe she did it, she wiped her mouth daintily with her hand, even though she knew there was no evidence of what she’d done to Peeta left on her face. She heard Peeta quickly turn a laugh into a cough as Cassie looked first in horror at the two of them and then at the elevator itself, still standing open and waiting for a passenger.

Katniss smiled again and turned to Peeta. “Ready to go back to your room?” she asked, reveling in the sparkle of disbelieving amusement in Peeta’s eyes.

“Yeah, sweetheart. I’m ready.” He leaned down to kiss her, still in view of Cashmere, who had remained riveted to the spot, and Katniss did not hesitate to let him. She would likely still be a work in progress in this area, but she’d had enough of Cashmere to last her a lifetime.

When he pulled away, he turned to her. “Sorry, Cassie, but I need to spend time with my girlfriend tonight.” He offered his ex a polite smile. “And please don’t come around again… anywhere…unless I say it’s ok. The unexpected visits are getting extremely old,” he said firmly. Katniss was satisfied to see Cashmere’s face turn an unflattering puce as they turned away from her without another word, and they burst out laughing once they’d reached the safety of Peeta’s room.

“A good start for keeping Cassie away?” Peeta asked. Katniss nodded, holding her side from her guffaws. He pulled her onto his bed. “I think elevators are lucky for us,” he said.

“I bet Cashmere doesn’t think so.” They both started laughing again.
As always, thank you so much for reading. Please review!

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