The One I Need

by bubblegum1425

Summary

It's all in the title... Quite simply, Katniss goes on a journey to find the one she needs the most.

Notes

This is a third Everlark Drabble Challenge fulfillment that became a short one-shot. The prompt was for “Time Travel Everlark” and was given to me by Titania522. However, I kind of took that and put my own twist on it… T, I hope you'll forgive me :)

On that note, this piece is very different from anything I’ve written before, but I can honestly say it's among my favorites that I've written. The first section is a little sad, but please keep on reading… I always keep my promise of a happy ending. This will also be posted to my FFF and AO3 accounts.

Thank you so much to my lovely betas for all your hard work.
“It’s ok, Mom. It’s ok. We love you, and it’s ok if you need to let go,” my son murmurs softly to me, his body rigid and face stoic, though his grey eyes tell a different story. His sister, on the other hand, doesn’t even try to hide her sorrow, and tears flow openly from her blue eyes. But that’s not really surprising to me. She’s so much like her papa.

My precious children, who have lived...and will continue to live...fully healthy lives in a world I helped make free. Or, so they say. My dear children, whom, along with their father, reminded me that life could be good again, even in the face of great darkness from without and from within. My poor children, who lost their daddy just a few days ago and will soon lose their mother, too.

But I am not what they need.

They have their husbands and wives and children. They have their friends, and their politics. My daughter has her patients, and my son has the bakery. And they both have the woods. Perhaps, at one point, I was what they needed, their daddy and I, but they are all grown-up now.

I did my best, and they have been extraordinarily loved. I am so proud of them. I believe they know that. And I will miss them, and will be waiting for them when it is their time to fly. They know that, too.

But the one I need is not here anymore.

It is time for me to go and find him.

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The gentle breeze sweeping into the bedroom through the open window wakes me from my slumber. I open my eyes slowly and watch the sunlight stream in through the glass panes. Colors of blue and purple, green and yellow, red and orange dance around the room as the beams catch on the prism that hangs over one windowsill. So lovely.

I know one who would commit this image to memory, and then paint the scene with watercolor and oil. His eye for beauty is beyond compare, though he wouldn’t ever call that talent a weakness. Except when it came to me. That’s at least what he told me once. I never quite understood that. I am not beautiful, though once I’d called myself radiant. But in his eyes, I always have been and always will be, no matter how many scars and cracks I obtain. Perhaps, that is one of the reasons I love him.

I know this is not the place I will find the one I need, so I rise from the bed. I find some grey boots, a simple blue dress, and a worn brown leather hunting jacket to wear.

The dress is thread bare but clean, meticulously cared for by a mother in preparation for it to be worn by her daughter on a horrible day. The fabric should smell of grief and ash and regret, as it always has. But instead, when I inhale, its scent is just one of plain handmade soap, and the perfume a miner gave to his wife on their wedding day.

I race down the stairs, intending to rush out the door, but another scent stops me in my tracks. I spin around and race towards the kitchen. The smell of baking dough and melted cheese surrounds me, and memories of countless days spent preparing meals in this house with a blond-haired man, sometimes with sorrow, sometimes with laughter, always with love, flood my mind. Maybe this is the place I will find the one I need.
But the kitchen is empty.

The counters are wiped down. The dishes are all dried. The pots and pans have been put away. The jars of flour and sugar are filled to the brim, as though waiting to be put to good use. Only the smell lingers.

My stomach sinks for a second and disappointment crowds my heart, but the breeze comes in again through another open window. I feel it beckoning me, calling me out to the world. It will help me find the one I need. I spin on my heels and walk out the door.

The walk down from Victor’s Village to the town square takes less time than I remember, though admittedly, it has been several years since I have made this journey on foot. I think I could have, but I did not wish to make my husband feel worse when walking more than a short distance on his prosthetic became too much to handle. I remember the day he informed me that he could no longer accompany me to visit our children and grandchildren in their homes beyond the square. When he told me, the pain and sorrow reflected in his blue eyes, still bright after so many years, felt like an echo of days long past, when more horrible things haunted our every step.

Upon hearing that, I declared that I, too, had found the walk too tiring to complete anymore anyways and that our family would just always have to come to us from now on. I don’t think he believed me. I was never a skilled liar, not the way he once was required to be, but he did not question me. We have done everything together since we were 16. In nearly seventy years of marriage, that never changed.

I walk into the square and stand in the middle, realizing as I look around that this is not the new District 12. The one built after the war. The one that is shiny and well-kept, bustling with mothers pushing baby carriages, children laughing on their way to school, and fathers stopping into the bakery to grab a newspaper, a pastry, and some coffee before heading to work. The one where most of the inhabitants have never known starvation or oppression, where The Hunger Games are just a history lesson.

No, this place is not that District 12. This is one that was buried under smoke and ash, the one that burned. A Mockingjay’s desperate act of defiance...and love...was the catalyst for that heinous act of destruction. It possibly might have happened regardless of her actions, but that Mockingjay still carried her people with her, those saved, and those lost, all the days of her life.

I stare hard at the ground. If this were the new District 12, a glittering memorial would stand here, immortalizing the names of all those who were sacrificed to the Hunger Games. But then, I realize, this is not exactly like the District 12 of my youth either. If it were, a whipping post would be here, and there is no sign of it now. On my bad days, the cries of the handsome boy who was once chained to that ugly instrument of torture often creep into my thoughts. Mourning. Anguish. Agony.

That is what that boy brought down on me. But it was not all his fault. He bore some of the responsibility, but he was not the only one. I destroyed the ones most at fault. I still do not know if it was the right thing to do.

But I do not wish to think about the evil dead anymore. Something tells me they do not matter. Not in this place. And I remind myself there was good even with that boy, too. Days spent in the woods. Practicing with our bows. Making snares. Ensuring that we and our families survived. Laughter. Even a bit of love.
But he is not the one I need.

The wind blows again, whipping my braid upwards as though directing me to look around, and for the first time, I realize there is no coal dust in the air. I can see the Capitol Coal cars are empty rather than piled high with the labors of the men of District 12. There are no horns harshly demanding that everything must be loaded within a few minutes. No loud whistles shriek from the coal yards, announcing the shift changes. All the buildings in the square look worn, but they are clean and whole. There are no guard towers, and no large television screens. And in front of the Justice Building, two glass bowls sit on wooden stands side by side.

There is nothing in them.

I feel my heart lift looking at those abandoned urns, and suddenly, I hear the sound of mockingjays ring in the silence. They sing a familiar, sweet, four-note melody I once used to signal to a little girl on a day that would become covered in blood. But this time, their song does not bring me to grief. Like the wind, they seem to be coaxing me onward, assuring me that my odyssey will soon come to an end.

“Take me to the one I need,” I whisper into the stillness. I continue down the dusty road.

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I walk along the gravel pathway that I know will bring me to the Seam, noticing that I now see the forest that borders District 12. It rises along the rolling hills, covering the earth in a soft green blanket, straight up to the mountain peaks far beyond.

I know those woods.

At first, they were a secret, my father’s and mine. A place where laughter and song could still be had, where I could forget the woes of our world, even if just for a short time. Then, when my father’s soul fled that plain, taking his song with him, the woods became my refuge and strength. They sustained me through my long twilight, before I was called to stand, before the games. And afterwards, too, when the world was breaking, when it soaked up the blood of thousands upon thousands, a devastating offering to the gods of war.

That was before I found the one I needed.

I pause before a lonely storefront. It looks familiar to me, though still a little different from the bakery I remember. The worn-looking sign with peeling blue letters that hangs above the entrance is the same, along with the cracked and creaking, yellowed, wooden boards of which the building is constructed. I can see the white caulk stuffed into holes in some places, the sign of a desperate attempt to keep the wind out on cold winter days. So, too, the beautifully frosted cakes on display behind the polished glass window, are the same, and I can almost see a little girl with two blonde braids and a longing expression on her face, her body pressed against the pane to get a better look at the things she could never have.

The air that surrounds the structure is filled with the smell of slightly burnt bread, a rarity during this place’s heyday. Only once, in fact.

I walk around the building to the small backyard to study the trash bins. They are empty, and so is the pig pen. And while the scent of the scorched roll still fills my nose, I do not find any bread on the ground.

I suddenly notice the sky is a clear cloudless blue, not unlike the eyes of the one I am searching for. He is not here, but then again, I did not expect him to be. This place was not happy for him,
but it is a reminder for me of where we began, a commemoration to one rainy day, when a brave boy’s selfless act gave a dying girl hope.

I smile when I spot a dandelion sprouting stubbornly up from the dirt.

I can hear the mockingjays more clearly now, still hidden from my view, but they follow my path with twittering joy. And the breeze is stronger, too, rustling the leaves of the trees while wafting the sweet smell of the good clean earth in my direction. The sunlight dances happily amongst the trees and catches on pools of water, turning them to radiant sapphires, but they still would not compare to his eyes.

I am nearly there. I know it. I know I am close to finding the one I need.

I come upon a house that looks even more worn down than the bakery, one I know so intimately, even after so many years. The tears spring to my eyes at the sight of it.

The faded grey clapboards are held together with rusted old nails, the gaps between them half-filled with straw. There is no glass in the windows, but tattered, threadbare curtains flutter in the breeze, while the house groans with the wind, almost as though it were uttering its last breath. But again, I find a difference even in this building’s appearance, one far more obvious than all the ones that came before. For above the doorway, a single word is written:

TIME

I walk up to the threshold, captivated by that simple script. It, too, invites me onwards, challenging me to explore whatever pathways lay beyond the doorway. I am going to accept its offer. But first I turn around to say goodbye.

I look back up the road, towards the bakery, towards the town center, to Victor’s Village, and even beyond. I can see the hospital is whole in District 8. The Nut is revived in District 2. The fields are overflowing with bountiful harvest in District 11. The waves crash upon the shore in District 4. The Capitol is glittering, but the evil that was once there is no longer present, and the arenas have been wiped away. The earth has been restored.

I nod my head once, take a deep breath, and raise my hand in a three finger salute. It once was used as a call to action, to arms, to revolution, but I am using it as it was originally intended: To say thank you. To show my admiration. To say goodbye to the ones that I love.

I walk through the door.

I do not turn around again after I have passed through the entranceway. That world is behind me, and a new one lies ahead, one I sense I will have forever with the one I need. He is close now. I can feel it in the way my heart is pounding, as it always does when he is near. I can almost hear his laughter, see his smile, taste his skin, and the faint combination of cinnamon and dill hangs in the air.

Oh, he is so close.

I hastily make my way towards the back door, but then a loud hiss erupts at my feet. I jump back, utterly startled by the ugly yellow tabby cat with the mashed-in nose and mottled ear that continues to growl at my feet.
“I can still cook you,” I tell him with a scowl.

He quirks his head to the side, his eyes skeptical, and it is almost as if he understands what I’m saying to him but does not believe it. I suppose he’s right. We went through too much together to truly hate one another now. I wonder if his owner is around here somewhere. I decide to find out and gesture for the cat to follow me as I walk out into the light beyond the back door.

The sunshine is so beautifully bright that for a second, I feel compelled to pause and close my eyes, allowing my skin to soak up the rays. Their warmth moves over me, flooding my body with a gentle heat, before finally settling deep within my soul. A sense of peace I have seldom experienced before steals over me, and it is then that I realize the point at which my journey will end. I open my eyes and begin to run, racing to the place I want to go.

As I travel, laughter erupts from me. I can feel the cares and worries and burdens, the pains that I have carried with me all my life, slip away, like water over a child’s outstretched fingers. I am soaring over the ground, as light as a bird on the wind, with the understanding that sorrow does not exist here. And when that vast green meadow, strewn with wildflowers and dandelions finally comes into my view, my heart feels like it might burst with joy.

I come to the meadow’s edge and peer, breathlessly with excitement, across the ocean of grass. Indistinct shapes move at its far end, and I bound forward, wishing to join them. But a new voice stays my feet--

“What’s your hurry, sweetheart?” a gruff voice grunts up at me.

I look down, my eyes widening at the man sitting before me. He is not sickly, his face sunken by the drink, his private grief, and his secret regrets, like the last time I saw him. Instead, his body is whole, healthy. His face is flushed, not from the white liquor he consumed so much of, but with happiness, and his eyes no longer reflect the horrors of his life.

I rush to him and throw my arms around him. It is not a gesture I have generally afforded him in the past, but I have missed him in the years we have been parted.

“I have to find the one I need,” I say by way of explanation to his question. But then I pull back from him and give him a smile. It’s another token I don’t usually bestow upon him, but then neither have his eyes ever twinkled like they are now. Contentment looks good on my old mentor. This man who became something like a surrogate father, the one who took on the task of caring for two broken young people and helped make them whole again.

He grunts with amusement at my answer. “You’ve got everlasting to do that, sweetheart. Didn’t you read the letters?” He eyes me in appraisal, as he once did on a train ride long ago, but the smirk he gives me suggests he’s secretly pleased I still need his advice. “You left the place where time matters the second you walked through that door, and anyways, your boy would wait forever for you, if he had to.” I glare at him and earn a laughter filled “Now that’s the sweetheart I know,” in return.

I start to go but then glance back to him. “I will see you later?” I ask, the little bit of uncertainty I feel leaking into my voice, but the man’s raised eyebrows, suggesting to me that I’m an idiot, reassures me I have nothing to fear.

I turn and speed onward, feet flying over the damp sod, until I see the place I am supposed to be.

It was once a graveyard, this place. A secret tomb that held the ashes of an entire people, where darkness was not just a memory, and death claimed victory over all. But as my feet finally come to a halt, I see that annihilation has been reversed, and life has taken root once more.
They are all here, smiling at me, to welcome me home, the last victor come to rest in the meadow of eternal peace.

The first person I see is a tall man with copper locks and sea green eyes. He does not have his trident with him, but I would know him anywhere. His arms are wrapped around a tiny woman with auburn hair. She was always so frail when I used to visit her, her eyes never quite focused on her reality, but rather somewhere far away. But the clarity and brightness in her eyes shows me that she is finally in the place her gaze was directed upon.

Next, I see a young woman who is missing an axe, though she doesn’t seem too troubled by it. Her hair is still chopped at her shoulders, her makeup is still dark, her expression still fierce, but I do not detect the anger she once carried within her. She smirks at me, and the word, Brainless, is clearly written in her brown eyes. But then she winks at me and whoops out a lively greeting.

And so on it goes. All the ones I have loved and cared for have come to meet me.

A man with golden eyelids smiles and gestures at an outfit in his arms, indicating he has been awaiting my arrival, though I think I will have to tell him I don’t need new wings. A woman in a bright pink wig stands next to him, and I almost laugh, wondering what she does in a place that requires no schedules.

Standing next to them, most of a Star Squad has reunited. I can hear a man, formerly tongueless, talking to his brother, while a young woman with green tattoos covering her head smiles brightly. Twin sisters hug one another. A brave commander and his lieutenant joke with their soldiers.

I next notice an old woman, no longer mute, laughing next to the copper haired man, while another old woman prepares some squirrel stew. A bespectacled man, once wheelchair bound by a violent lightning strike, stands tall. He holds hands with a woman whose speech once again makes sense. A blonde haired girl giggles while a quiet girl, once a mayor’s daughter, smiles. And a family with four children, whose members have olive skin and grey eyes, so much like my own, beam at me. The father has his arm around the shoulders of his oldest boy.

I smile at that boy, for I do not see the fire of hatred that once consumed him in the relaxed stance of his body. He is a childhood friend and gladness fills my heart that he has finally returned. I start towards him, wishing to say a quick word before I continue my search for the one I need, but I am distracted by a young girl’s laughter.

I whip around, eyes darting frantically to and fro, until they finally lock with two soft brown eyes, set into a caramel colored face framed by wild curls. I swiftly go to her and gather her into my arms, and she hugs me back tightly, not because she must cling to me for warmth on a cold night in the woods, but simply because she can.

“You’re nearly there,” I hear her whisper against my heart. She pulls away from me and points me on, but not before saying, “And later, we’ll have music.” She gives me a playful shove, but I give her another hug, wondering how this could possibly be real. That is, until I see him.

My father.

I know him by his hair, the color the exact same shade as my own, and the astounding love written on his face. He opens his mouth and exhales such a melodious laugh, I believe the birds would fall silent in the face of it. I already know they do that when he sings, so why not his laugh? His arms are wrapped around a small woman with blonde hair.

My mother.
Her eyes are no longer dull, but vibrant and full of life, recalling a happy era when our family had not yet been rent into pieces. There is adoration on her face for the laughing man beside her and I see that she is finally awake again. She smiles at me like she once did, a smile that speaks of many days to come, when we can talk, when she will brush my hair. She holds the hand of a small girl, who stands next to her.

My sister. My precious Little Duck.

Soft tendrils of hair have escaped from her two long braids, and I can just see where the flap of her shirt has come untucked in the back. Her cheeks are rosy, her skin dewey in the soft afternoon light. She holds that mangy cat in her arms, and I can hear a goat bleating behind her.

Tears begin to stream down my face as we all rush forward at once and embrace one another, collapsing onto the ground into a laughing, crying, smiling, tangled heap of arms and legs. My family has been made whole.

Almost.

“We were wondering when you’d show up,” my sister laughs after we have sufficiently hugged one another, at least for now. “I was getting tired of waiting.” But then to my surprise, she looks at me rather sternly. “Though, I was a little angry when you tried to show up here early.”

I bow my head in a little shame. “I’m sorry,” I murmur. “I didn’t remember that life could be good again, not with my losses. I needed someone else’s help to learn that. It took a long time.”

“Yeah...And think how much easier it would have been if you’d just listened to me from the start. I guess it’s a good thing I love you,” a teasing male voice that sends my heart rate rocketing upwards echoes from behind me. I scramble to my feet, turning as as I do so, and the tears start anew at the sight of the person now before me.

He stands a short ways away from me with a wide grin on his face. The sunlight is glinting off his golden waves, and his eyes are two tropical oceans, full of light and life. He wears a simple shirt, the top button open so that I can just see the smattering of hairs on his taut chest, and while his pants cover his legs, I can tell he does not need his prosthetic. His body has been healed, and he does not move with pain anymore the way he used to, a gruesome reminder of the terrible damage from that time he was ripped away from me. He is clean-shaven, his face no longer wrinkled, and his body is as toned as it was on the day of our second reaping.

I stare and stare and stare at him, drinking my fill of of his wholeness, his solid warmth that I can feel even from here. He is young again, just like me, but when I look at him, I can see 5 and 16, 21 and 35, 64 and 80. I see all of it...all our years together...and all the eternity to come.

My best friend.
My husband.
My love.

“Peeta!” I cry out, bounding towards him. His grin widens and his arms open wide for my final welcome home. He strokes my face as if to assure himself that I am real. I feel him press me against his body, and I wrap my hands tightly along his neck, raking my hands through his soft curls.

“Katniss,” he whispers reverently as he dips his head to meet my lips for a deep kiss. And this world flees from my sight, until it feels as if we two are the only ones left in it, but I do not care who is watching.
I have found the one I need.

 XXXXX

 The reaping bowls are empty;
 the ash has disappeared.

 A gathering of friends dance to a fiddler’s merry tune.

 Echoes of laughter drop like a sweet spring from the mouths of two young girls as they play in a dandelion strewn field.

 The last soft rays of an orange setting sun fall softly on a sleepy green forest, while mockingjays trill happily in the treetops.

 A reunited couple makes love on the banks of a crystal lake.

 They renew their vows, promising each other ALWAYS, as they first did on their toasting day.

 And somewhere in the distance someone sings:

 Deep in the meadow, under the willow
 A bed of grass, a soft green pillow
 Lay down your head, and close your sleepy eyes
 And when again they open, the sun will rise.

 Here it's safe, here it's warm
 Here the daisies guard you from every harm
 Here your dreams are sweet and tomorrow brings them true
 Here is the place where I love you.

 Yes. Here is the place where I Love You.

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