Fear Of Falling

by chraezanty17

Summary

Finnick is dead, Katniss is a shell of a human being. There is an anger in Gale that would have served him well in the Arena and you think that even if the Rebellion burns the Capitol to the ground, what emerges out of its ashes will not be clean of the blood soaking the earth.

Johanna, in the aftermath.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

You watch the haggard faces surrounding you and see that every single one of them is lost on their own path, just out of the reach of the other person. It's pathetic.

The whole lot gathers at night to a bonfire and somehow, in half-drunken whispers, someone makes a mention of Finnick. Before you realize what you're in for you're sharing stories and all it would take to complete the picture would be some sticks with marshmallows impaled on them to be fried. Annie has long gone to retire to her room and even so it is doubtful that the redness around her eyes will fade overnight.

"Isn't anyone going to say it?"

Identical expressions of perfect incomprehension.

A sigh. "Finnick was not a good person."
There's a pain in your chest. The image of a deep crack running through a block of ice flashes through your mind and out of your whiskey-induced daze a thought emerges that this is why they call your brand of honesty brutal.

Katniss makes as if to stand up to introduce your chin to her fists, only Peeta lays a hand on her elbow and she immediately sits back down. The look on Gale's face doesn't help the peals of laughter that threaten to clog up your airway.

"Don't you see it? He was a mass murderer. He cheated, manipulated people, blackmailed those who thought he loved them."

"He hardly had a choice! He was a good person who did what he had to do to survive and protect those he cared about. We are all guilty of crimes." Peeta whispers and even as the flames block your view, you would bet all of the nonexistent items in your possession that his hands are clenched into fists. You know that Finnick has saved his life, which left him grateful enough, but more importantly, he has made sure that Katniss is still drawing breath, a favor he will now never be able to repay.

"Does that excuse him completely? Does death grant absolution to fucking everyone? I didn't see you shed a tear for Nuts and you were besties, weren't you?"

You spit into the fire and soon enough, your head hits the ground. Groaning, realization dawns that a sweet concussion has just been granted to your sorry self, courtesy of Beetee. You gasp, tasting iron and red on your tongue. Didn't know he had it in him. Good on Volts.

Haymitch comes to your rescue, his breath stinking of the liquor the two of you have been sharing all night, but his grip on the scientist's shoulders is firm as he leads him away from the scene.

The world is still spinning by the time Thirteen's power couple leaves the ring of warmth and light in favor of their respective underground quarters.

Gale doesn't look at you, but the fire is burning bright enough yet to reveal the tight line of his mouth. The bubbles are choking you, so you let go. The raspy laugh that fills the clearing, magnified by an entire orchestra of mockingjays, resemble nails on a chalkboard. The cacophony makes you want to scream, but a tidal wave has been released and you were never fool enough to believe that life is wonderful.

"You poor son of a bitch."

He faces you then and inclines the bottle in your direction before guiding it to his mouth.

You keep lying on the cold earth, knees pulled up to your abdomen until the flames have died and the embers cooled. You stumble through the tunnels leading to your chamber alone and collapse on the bed.

"Good night, roomie." There's venom in your voice and it is a testament to Katniss being asleep that you wake with the flesh of your throat smooth and unscarred.

Annie breaks down during breakfast the day after the next and Peeta is there to comfort her in a heartbeat. The Mockingjay hesitates, fidgeting in her seat with her hands entwined. Her limbs seem so white, so fragile, so much like porcelain that it is a wonder they don't shatter from the pressure. She settles for an awkward string of sweet nothings that Coin must have been feeding her. You know that she would never be caught dead lying to another person's face otherwise.
You meet Gale's gaze across the room and fight the urge to belt out songs at the top of your lungs. He could wring a person's neck with his bare hands but he really cannot handle a hangover. You'd do a lot for a sparring session with him, for the opportunity to scratch and bruise the one person who would only break your bones for victory in place of a personal grudge.

Prim approaches you with rope in her hands. You raise an eyebrow and ask her why, since it's been rendered useless. Cutting through the knots would only leave them with snippets appropriate for nothing more than the claws of her cat.

She lowers her voice and explains that it would finally break the new widow if she was to be confronted with one more cruel reminder. You bite the inside of your cheek, knowing that the former victor's sanity lies on the bottom of a sea, a past arena, a former life. You almost find it in yourself to pity the life growing inside her.

Good intentions and belief move you to accept the rope.

You sit with it in your lap with the plan of burning ingrained firmly in your conscience, all of which pales against the perpetual motion at the tip of the match. It blackens the wood, laps at your fingertips with an eagerness that makes you yearn and the only reason you drop the damned thing just before the fire reaches the hand holding it is simple surprise at the door being opened.

Katniss stands in the door frame, her eyes full of accusations and larger than life. You have not spoken since the memorial gone wrong and a voice in your head is shouting now, reminding you that if you still had the hair on your head it would have caught, engulfing your body to leave charred remains for the rest of them to deal with. Still another thing, a different sort of escape the Capitol has robbed you of. You swear that should the grand Revolution fail, you will not be there to watch your tyrants assume the role of the phoenix, a rebirth out of the flames.

"I thought he was your friend."

You scoff.

You remember Snow's garden during the party in celebration of the victor of the 71st Hunger Games, the fluffy pink cocktail dress from your first interview with Caesar Flickerman discarded and traded for a midnight blue evening gown clinging to your frame and revealing a generous amount of cleavage. A princess no longer; now you are a queen.

You greeted your subjects with a half-hearted wave and the crowd went wild. You recall stuffing your face with exotic delicacies and champagne until your head was swimming and you found yourself crouched on a bench away from the noise and colors that hurt your eyes.

He walked up to you with ease and a spring in his step. He offered you a yet unopened bottle of vodka along with his smile.

"You'll learn to get wasted and remain the picture of beauty and composure around here soon enough." The grin playing on his face didn't falter and the cheer never left his tone and you were cold all of a sudden. You clutched at the neck of the bottle until, impossibly, cracks appeared in the surface of the glass.

The living legend reached out to cup your face and asked you just how much you love the people you left in Seven. You squirmed under his touch, a faint demand of why on your lips. He sighed and seemed ancient in the shadows of the rose bushes.

"I'll give you a hint." He said and gave you your first real kiss. You almost expected to taste blood.
Soon enough, Snow summoned you to his chambers and revealed the secret behind Finnick’s words, the requirements he had for you, a plan spanning several decades. You told him to go fuck himself and watched as others paid the price.

It was midnight and you knocked on his door hard enough for your knuckles to drip crimson. When he emerged from the door frame he was wearing a bathrobe, his hair disheveled. You found that imperfections made him vulnerable, tangible, human instead of a mere image on a pedestal.

He put his arm around your shoulders and led you to the couch before placing a glass of clear liquid in your hand. It tasted of fire and if the glass had been full the liquor would have spilled over its rim unto the carpet. As if from a distance, you heard him murmuring comfort and you thought that maybe you had found the one person messed up enough to share the insanity with.

You turn towards Katniss. "He taught me that I had only myself to rely on more than President Snow ever did."

You broke a mirror, shards of glass landing in the sink amidst a pool of blood because he would screw any and all Capitol citizens Snow threw at him but he wouldn't touch you because that would be cheating on Annie.

You get the sparring session with Gale that you wanted a few months after you have just about forgotten the features of his face.

The war has been won, or so they say. You let yourself be convinced simply because to fight another one would suck the marrow from your bones and leave you no better than the mutts, lifeless killing machines that followed orders because no other path has ever been destined for them.

You are back in District Seven working regular shifts of different jobs - after the bombs, the fall of the Mockingjay, Coin's death and many a goodbye to a person that never even knew the color of your eyes your old home needs to be rebuilt. Johanna Mason, lumberjack. Construction worker. Architect.

Each time you take a step back and laugh about it all, you taste bile in your throat.

Haymitch calls every few weeks to check in and a voice in the back of your mind tells you that if it wasn't for Mr and Mrs Mellark he would have offed himself a year back. You are not surprised when the relationship he describes sounds about as healthy as the morphine you have been taking, on- and off-again for a while now. What else could have come out of a society created by traumatized children and their bitter elders?

You take no pains to dig for information concerning District Four. Since you had been granted the privilege of the Capitol's hospitality as Peeta's neighbor in your own little snug cell you have not been crazy about water, anyway.

The day Hawthorne let the chance to volunteer for Peeta Mellark pass him by he has cheated them out of a hell of a competition to watch. He would have held his own against the Careers, give or take a few well-timed alliances and cutting of throats at the pale hours of dawn.

You hear about how he has been working in District Two while he pins you to the ground, your arms bent behind your back as he straddles you.

You catch him off guards, flipping him, in turn, on his back.

"Life here is bearable, too, I'll have you know." You say as you dislocate his left shoulder.
The two of you patch each other up, proud of the bruises caused rather than embarrassed. None of you mention the Games, not during the hours of swapping stories over pots of stew, not during your explanation of how tomorrow you will burn down a couple of houses to build them again from scratch, not during your walk towards a roof over your head for the night.

The stench of gasoline drenches the entire house. There is no old flame to rekindle between the two of you because the will to live has been burnt out of you both years ago.

There is a fury in him as he kisses you.

The warmth of his mouth washes the taste of a dead man's kiss away until you shiver and your head is spinning.

You ride him and you see past the tricks the moonlight is playing on your eyes, because his hair is brown, not blond. He takes you against a wall and utters wordless cries rather than the name of a girl that once burned for the sake of an entire nation.

You wash the sheets as soon as you get up in the morning, but they still catch fire instantly as you hold a match to one corner.

Before he leaves he presses a kiss to the corner of your mouth and you pretend that the warmth of your skin and fire in your veins has not turned to ashes in your mouth.

End Notes

Would this have worked better if it had been written in 3rd person?

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