It was cruel, he thought, to make her Reap her own child's name. " Post-Mockingjay, slightly AU. The 76th Hunger Games with Capital children is a go. No longer a one-shot.
Chapter 1

It was cruel, he thought, to make her Reap her own child's name. She should have seen it coming, of course. Haymitch surely would have, had he known she even had a daughter. All those years they spent in each other's presence and he hadn't even known that much about her. He didn't care about her, of course, she was just another Capitol person that rubbed him raw, someone he was forced to spend time with a month out of the year for the Games.

Being the only surviving Escort, the rest had either been tortured to death or died by their own hand, Coin only saw it fit that she was to read the names. Everything that Haymitch found to be ridiculous about Effie's appearance had only been exacerbated for the day's event: her wig was ridiculously high and rainbow colored, her face covered in red polka dots, and her dress far too puffy and thick to ever look good on anyone. Coin's cruelty and hatred for those from the Capitol definitely showed by how much she was trying to humiliate Effie onstage. Making her dress so ridiculously over the top, making her recite a speech about how honored she was to be Reaping her friends' children, etc. The names were already chosen beforehand, of course, but she was forced to pick them out of a large glass jar one by one anyway. She'd pick one out with a shaky hand that she had to constantly force still, read the name of some important official's child, wait for them to come up, give them a hug and a congratulations, and then reach for another slip of paper. Haymitch didn't even know why he bothered watching. To feel avenged for how the Districts had to suffer? To get a sense of closure? Just to see what was going to happen? He wasn't sure. He knew he wasn't going to stick around to watch when the time came for the actual Games, that was for sure. Effie was on the last slip of paper, and Haymitch was just about to turn off the TV in the room, when, instead of a final name being called, he heard a choked sob and a scream.

"You can't do this!" Effie's face had gone completely pale behind the polka dots. She was shaking all over and her eyes were threatening tears. Her hands were gripping the slip of paper so tightly that her knuckles had gone white.

"You can't do this!" She repeated, but quieter and less brave. She was about to have a complete breakdown, Haymitch thought. He wondered who mattered to her so much that the thought of their child dying made her sick. She'd never expressed any remorse over Reaping names before, at least, never onstage.

Two of Coin's henchmen came out from behind the curtains that Effie was standing in front of and dragged her away from the podium, so quickly that she barely had enough time to yell to be let go. Haymitch watched as Coin stood up from her seat of honor, picked up the slip that Effie had dropped in her haste to fight the grip of the two men, and read what was written.

"We're proud to announce our 25th Tribute, Maisie Trinket."

The girl was smaller than any of the other children. Katniss and all of the others had agreed to up the age limit to fourteen from twelve, because that was just too young, so all of the children they had decided upon were at least large enough for it to be equally fair. There were going to be 24 tributes, all children from some important official in the Capitol, all between the ages of 14 and 18, and strong enough for it to not be as cruel. Coin must have added in Effie's daughter at the last minute, or else Effie would never have gone to read the names, even if she'd been forced to. It made Haymitch angry. Effie wasn't even that important. If she hadn't read the names for District 12 for so many years, somebody else would have. Her daughter couldn't have been more than 11, which was too young even for the Capitol's Games. Granting Effie immunity from District 13’s punishment was only so that she could watch her daughter die right before her eyes. Everything ended up working in Coin's favor. It gave him a bad taste in his mouth. The point of these final
Games was to insure the Capitol knew that District 13 meant business, that they wouldn't put up with them trying to rebel against the rebels. So why was Coin changing the rules?

He didn't have to answer that: he already knew there was no real reason for doing so. Coin just wanted to watch her suffer. Watch them all suffer the way they had.

Her eyes were gray. Long blonde hair flowed in elegant locks down her back, and her skin was pale, and whether it was due to fear or just how she normally looked, Haymitch couldn't discern. But her eyes were so, so gray.

They paraded the Capitol's Tributes around just like they had done with the District's Tributes, and the volunteer from 8 in charge of the interviews was relentless.

Some of the Tributes tried to act tough, feign apathy, but he saw through them all straight away. They were all scared shitless. They looked ridiculous, what with their blue hair and red eyes and fanged teeth, all fake and fabricated and shallow. None of them were skinny enough to have ever known hunger, their eyes too innocent and spoiled to have known true pain or sadness. Watching them go into the arena, watching them die with their unnatural appearances, in whatever cruel fashion Coin would have made Plutarch cook up, would be akin to watching the ideals and virtues of the Capitol die right before their very eyes. It should have delighted Haymitch, would have delighted him, if Maisie didn't look so young and normal.

Maisie was the only one who cried, and they saved her for last, so it was fresh in everyone's memory. The volunteer from 8 asked her why her mother liked to kill children every year, why she thought it fit to have a child when she had all of that death on her hands. Maisie, between tears, replied that she didn't know, just that her mother loved her very much and that she would do anything to see her again. The woman then asked about her father, and went so far as to even insinuate that Effie probably didn't even know who it was. Her tears stained her cheeks, soaked the feathery pink dress they threw her in, and turned the whites of her eyes red.

Grey and red. Coal and blood, the colors that haunted his nightmares.

He started counting. 76 years since the Games were started. 26 years since his Games. A few years since Katniss and Peeta. A few months since the rebels overthrew the Capitol. Two weeks until these Games started. 13 years since his lips first touched Effie’s. 12 since they were first, and last, intimate, the day when her first Tributes were killed and she drank herself sick. A few weeks after that and he never saw her again until 1 year later.

He downed the entire bottle and passed out before he let himself finish the thought.

The Cornucopia that year killed the first ten tributes that approached it. Blew them right to bits.

They should have known better.

Haymitch didn't know why he was still watching. He should have turned it off when he saw Maisie pick up a knife that landed near her after the explosion. He should have turned it off when she sought out someone, Dacia Sagittarius, whose father was President Snow's head military strategist, and teamed up with her. She and Maisie were the smallest two in the arena.

He should have turned it off when he saw Maisie kill her first person. They started crying, because the dead boy was the first one Dacia had ever kissed, and because Maisie was now a murderer. The arena was a conglomerate of how all the various Districts in Panem looked, and he should have turned it off when Maisie and Dacia wandered into the area that was meant to replicate District 12.
Dacia was freezing that night and she refused to start a fire. Maisie was submissive at first, but no amount of huddling and hugging considerably warmed them up. They were afraid to move, because it was dark and they didn't know if anyone was near them.

Dacia's lips were frozen cold and her teeth were chattering when Maisie had a spark. Dacia's protests were barely audible, and Maisie didn't even have to pretend not to hear them, though she knew they were there.

They had been huddling around the fire for a good twenty minutes. Maisie was plenty warm and Dacia was much better, and they'd even managed a few laughs. Maisie said she thought that, if they managed to survive long enough, they might both get to live, just like Katniss and Peeta. Dacia snorted at that, and Maisie, with her hauntingly gray eyes, looked away and didn't say another word.

He should have turned it off when Hersilia Snow snuck up behind them and struck Dacia with a rock. Hersilia was grabbing for another from her sack when Maisie, who she hadn't seen, stabbed her directly in the heart with the knife she grabbed from the Cornucopia. Maisie ran her knife through Hersilia's stomach, and through her chest, and, when she was sure Hersilia was suffering too badly to retaliate, slit her throat.

He should have turned it off when Maisie turned back around to see that Dacia had fallen into the fire, unconscious, and was burning alive. His television was on a low volume, but Maisie's screams still filled Haymitch's room and sent a chill up his spine. He should have turned it off then too.

She couldn't put the fire out, so she dragged Dacia's burning corpse to a small stream about two minutes away. Maisie had stopped screaming but she was hyperventilating and Haymitch thought that she would have exploded if she didn't calm down soon.

After she was no longer on fire, Maisie dragged the remains of Dacia's corpse out of the stream and laid her near the edge. She braided what was left of her violet hair and kissed what might have been her lips.

Haymitch reached for the remote and instead found his liquor bottle.

Maisie did not kill another person, but she didn't have to. After that night, only five tributes, including her, remained. Ten died at the Cornucopia, Hersilia, Dacia, and the boy who attacked them were all dead, and seven others had died in fates that Maisie was too frightened to imagine. It was the second day, and Maisie was washing off crusting blood in the river when she heard the singing. It was low at first, and seemed very distant. It took her a good thirty minutes to reach the artificial grain fields, which were to replicate District 9. Maisie's small frame and golden hair were well hidden behind the tall fields, where she spied the four other tributes that were left.

They were standing in a circle, holding hands with one another. Their eyes were closed and they were singing a popular Capitol lullaby. Maisie was transfixed. She tentatively walked towards them. Haymitch's entire body went rigid as he watched. He started pleading with Maisie, even though she was thousands of miles away in the Capitol, pleading with her to not get any closer, to not be stupid. She was five feet away, still well hidden, when common sense took ahold of her and she stopped walking. They were still singing. Maisie quietly reached into her small bag, pulled out a handful of blackberries, and continued to observe them. It wasn't until nightfall that they stopped. Maisie had been careful to keep her distance and not move around much, but she could still see them easily enough from where she was crouched. An older boy with spiky red hair and tattoos of dragon scales all over his skin told the rest to give it up, that she wasn't coming. Maisie's ears perked up at this. They were talking about her.
None of the others seemed pleased by this, but the boy continued, saying they had made a pact. The girl had obviously not heard them or wasn't able to reach them, so they should continue on with their plan anyway. So what if she did become the final Victor? Their point would still be made. None of them explicitly cared for any of the others, and if the girl was tortured, what would it matter to them? They'd be dead. They all took knives out of their pockets, and slit each other in a clockwise fashion.

Maisie ran out suddenly, screaming their names. She had thought she was too late, but the boy with the red spikes and dragon scales looked at her. He coughed up a ton of blood and smiled, and congratulated her on being the final Victor in the Hunger Games.

"Looks like the odds are always in the Trinkets' favor." The boy coughed up another ton of blood and his eyes went blank.

Maisie's tears were expected, but no less painful.

Claudius Templesmith's voice rang out over the arena and through the television, declaring Maisie Trinket the victor of the 76th Hunger Games.

Haymitch felt a burden he didn't know he was carrying lift from his shoulders.
Coin's plan had not extended past the final Hunger Games, ergo no Victory Tour. She'd already successfully proven her point.

Maisie spent three days in the hospital- she was in shock, swinging from states of catatonia to frightening panic attacks. Her first day was the hardest- the adjustment to a real, safe (though this was quite the ambiguous word) world after she'd just survived hell was confusing and painful. The calming effects of morphling helped keep her panic attacks under control, and the doctors declared on the third day that they saw no reason to keep her there, although that was just medical speak for 'leave, there's nothing more we want to do to help you'. As soon as Effie was released from Coin's custody (having been forced to watch the entirety of the Games), she spent every waking moment at Maisie's bedside, whispering prayers in her ear while she was asleep, talking to her when she was blank and listless, and trying to calm her when she was anxious and would start shaking.

Effie felt so broken. She'd failed as a mother. She thought that she'd been smart, that she had done a good job of keeping her daughter safe. She knew that something odd was going on during the preparations for the Quarter Quell, and a few days before the Games had started made arrangements for Maisie to stay at Effie's aunt's house, citing that she'd be too busy with the Games to come home, that she'd be safer with Aunt Callista watching over her. Effie thought that this was a failsafe plan: her daughter's existence wasn't too highly publicized, and no matter what went down with her, the Capitol's focus wouldn't be on some little girl living on the outskirts of the city, anyway. Callista had been an important member of some important industry in her day; her old money and notoriety would only help to keep Maisie safe if something ended up happening to her mother.

Something happened, indeed. Just hours after the explosive finale to the Games, Effie had been brushing her teeth in the bathroom when her door was kicked down, and she had been subsequently knocked unconscious. She didn't know how long she'd been out for, but she woke up in a jail cell - the dank cold, the unforgiving darkness, the stench of torture (and it had a smell) swirled around her for what could only have been months. She was paid regular visits by large military officials with steely eyes, hard mouths, and cruel hearts. They would question her, she would have no answers to give, and they would hurt her in such gruesome ways, usually by whipping, occasionally slaps, and in one particularly painful visit that resulted in a broken leg that had never properly healed, thus the reason for the cane she now heavily relied on. She'd blacked out a lot during her torture, and in her most vulnerable moments after she would often fear for her memory. It oftentimes seemed like there were other things that had happened in there, coming back in the form of violent hallucinations, with large men overpowering her, touching her, hurting her. She'd wake up from these reveries in a cold sweat, shaking and panting and hurting all over. She was scared that soon, she wouldn't be able to decipher the line between reality and imagined horrors, that her nightmares were a new method of torture designed by her government, to affect her long after their demise. It's scary to not be able to trust your mind.

She didn't know how Coin had come to learn of Maisie's existence. Upon her rescue from prison and subsequent recovery in 13, Effie had no contact with her daughter, knowing that it wouldn't be safe to talk to her until everything had been sorted out with the Rebels and Snow and everything else she hadn't even realized was happening, until it was. Effie had kept her head down, done what was always expected of her, and even managed to endure the pain of walking.
without her cane (Coin insinuated Effie was only using it for sympathy) to escort Katniss to her trial. When it came time for the Reaping of Capitol children, Effie was so sick, so upset over the entire idea, but there was nothing more she could do than what she did every year: pull some names out of a bowl. How Coin could have such vengeance and anger in her heart that she would deign to continue it on with more children, Effie would never know, but there was nothing more she could do. She supposed she couldn't rightly be angry over this, after all, her government had been doing it for decades, but wasn't the inherent cruelty that was the murder of children by children exactly what the Rebels had been looking to overthrow? It wasn't their sole purpose, obviously, but the Games had been a catalyst.

Maisie would be discharged in a few hours. Effie looked down at her sleeping daughter, holding one of her hands with both of hers, rubbing it, trying to keep her constant tears at bay. How would she piece herself back together? Would she still be the same bubbly, bright little girl inside? Would she grow up to resent everyone and everything around her? How could Effie piece her back together?

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The train ride to the Capitol was torturous. Normally, one on a train to the Capitol from a District was not there by choice- they would spend every minute stretching the seconds into an eternity, wishing time would stop so they would never have to get off this train. No happy memories were made on them. It would take some getting used to before anyone felt anything other than discomfort riding on one, but for a person eager to reach a destination, their perspective could be easily shifted.

He didn't know what his plan was going to be once he got there- vague thought-lets swirled through his mind, ambiguous in commencement, execution and conclusion. A mind muddled with just enough liquor kept anxieties at bay, and the only that mattered was getting to the Capitol in time to see her. He had to know, had to be sure- it'd been a month since the conclusion of those Games, and every night he'd wake up thinking of a small girl with Seam grey eyes and dirty blond hair, a slight nose and an aura of innocence that was ripped away all too soon.

All because he had said yes to a vote.

Once his train of thought led back around to that nugget of guilt, he would take another giant swig. Bury the thoughts with incoherence so they won't destroy you.

He'd been in the Capitol two days, and hadn't mustered up the courage to find Effie and her daughter. It wouldn't have been hard, it was the doing it that was his stumbling block. Instead, he found himself at various bars, undoing all the progress he promised himself he would make. He wasn't giving himself time to cope with his feelings, to sort through them, to really analyze them. And when did he ever do that? Why was this situation so much more pressing than all of the other painful things he's had to repress and drink away over the years?

*This could be his daughter.*

Children were a scary thought. This was completely new territory and ground. What the fuck was he even doing here?

*He also was the reason that he'd destroyed her life.*
Sorry this chapter's kinda short + uneventful. I had to plan out where I really wanted this story to go, since I was just planning on having it as a one-shot. I have a pretty good idea of how I want it to go, so yeah :) Hopefully my next chapter will be more intriguing.
The days back home after Maisie's release from the hospital had felt otherworldly and unfamiliar. You can't experience familiarity after trauma - you are reborn and experience everything newly through your broke self. Your shattered pieces distort the light and happiness of the day, stifle your memories, and build castles of numbness around you. It can wear and scar and fog up and fade, but the foundations are always there and never leave you. The younger you are, the more innocent, the tighter its grip on you becomes.

She cried out the first night, but rejected Effie's comforts. Effie thinks she knows why her daughter doesn't want to talk to her. Simply put, she had helped. Effie's mouth was the one that uttered the names of all those endless children. She had sent them to their deaths. She was a part of this system. She had been complacent, and her repentance, her atonement in that Capitol prison... meant nothing. She thought she was making up for all of those lives she'd sentenced to die - with every whip and every vulgar touch, making up for a dead child. And, even if the punishments were for a different "injustice" (she would never have the makings for a rebel), in her mind she believed... she knew, she deserved this.

With her rescue some guilt had been relieved, and some part of her felt Coin's idea to continue these Games were to continue her guilt. It had never gone away and never would, but at least with prison shed' had some sense of closure, however warped. Coin could have chosen any Rebel- any would have gleefully reveled in the chance to kill Capitol children, but Effie knew she just wanted to torture her. But here was the thing- at the time, Effie couldn't hate her. She'd still had the weight of all those dead children on her shoulders. Effie saw her broken daughter's face and still couldn't hate anyone else but herself.

It was 5 am. 14 hours since Maisie had been released. Effie was waking up to a panic attack, a continuation to her anxiety addled nightmares. She had seen a counselor for these in 13, a recommendation from the doctor who presided over her, but none of the many techniques they mentioned to combat them worked. She simply waited them out until they were over. They varied in intensity and had the audacity to last days. She was so tired, of them, of life.

Effie made her way from the cold, empty room to the kitchen. Making some tea would steady her hands and give them something to do.

- A steady stream of warm honey
- drop after drop of vanilla

and her hands were calming. The warm glass of the teacup against her cold, scarred hands was a testament to her need to hold onto something. Hold onto something fragile and keep it safe- safe in her hands, in her control. Effie's thoughts were as pensive as always- repeating varied lines of the same thought. She was reaching for the cup to take another sip when soft noises grabbed her attention. Looking up, she saw the slight form of Maisie approaching her.

"Tea? Could I have some?" She lifted her head to look her mother in the eye, "I can't sleep.

Maisie started to cry. Effie ushered her daughter into a chair. Pouring Maisie a cup, she set it in front of her daughter. The child's tears seemed to not let up. Effie leaned against the back of the chair, wrapping her arms around Maisie's shoulders. With every tear, gasp, shudder her daughter uttered, another crack tore up her heart. But a tiny, tiny part of Effie, a part so minuscule and selfish she tried to push out, was glad her daughter was letting her touch her, not looking at her with dead neutrality. She wanted Maisie to feel, to take her emotions + acknowledge them + in time, let them go, as time has a habit of tricking us into doing. And Effie wanted... to be a mom
again. She wanted her sweet, innocent little baby back \(\text{but the innocence had broken, and in the most gruesome way possible.}\)

That selfish part of her harbored the unlikable realist as well; this Effie knew she would never get that again. Perhaps it was this, thought, is why, when Maisie did finally speak minutes, hours, centuries later, her words didn't surprise Effie... added the final crack that shattered her throbbing, frail, tired heart, yes, but did not surprise her.

"Why were you a part..." Maisie started, her frail voice breaking off, riddled with a concoction of emotion, "All those years... why...?" Maisie choked back something she'd been holding in. She wouldn't, couldn't, be specific. The question couldn't mean anything other than what it did.

"I never knew that's what you did for them," she continued. "I never knew that's what they were. You never let me watch them... because you didn't want me to see them... see what they were," her voice had gotten so light by this point Effie had to strain to hear. "...or did you just not want me to see you on there?"

Maisie had shoved her mother off of her, and Effie was wiping away her own tears.

"Both."

"You've killed so many children... and would I ever have found out? How could you ever think that killing children was fun? Was a game?" By now Maisie was screaming, and Effie was scared of her daughter, of the anger welling up inside of this beautiful, young, once-innocent baby. But this was another form of atonement, her daughter's hatred, revulsion. It was necessary, in a gruesome way. But it killed her.

"I don't know." Effie felt sick. There were no words in existence to explain. How upsetting her first night was working on the Games. How she would murmur the names of the tributes during countdowns, how her fingers cried while swirling around in bowls, the slips of paper she brushed past burning her. How she would grab one, let it go, and grab another, just to give her mind closure, trick her into thinking she was saving someone. But she wasn't. She was just trading lives.

But she never did and these reasons meant nothing. Bits and pieces of what remained from a shattered illusion. They were lies of comfort for her ears and hers alone; to another, they were desperate please of nothing. Mad cries of \(\text{I was a victim, too.}\) Nobody wanted to hear those things.

"I don't know." She repeated, quieter. Maisie's storm had passed, and she now stood with a more dangerous rage composing her form. The rage deepened and widened the chasm between her and her mother, made it grow so large and so heavy and so endless that in that moment there was no reconciling the two. They were two different specimens entirely, and in that infinite moment, there was too much. Too much grief and betrayal and disgust. That moment was hardest of their relationship. That moment.

"You're a monster. Like all of those others." It was a strange thing, to hear the youthful voice deliver such powerful, crushing words.

Maisie's feet carried her back into a room with a storm-like ferocity so unlike her tender entrance. Her anger was all-encompassing, the rage never-ending, she couldn't be in the same room with her mother any longer. She was trying to make sense of it all... trying trying trying. Her mother was the only one in reach, to lash out at, to scream and scream at the only outlet in reach.

Effie's heart was so shattered: remnants so fine and crystalline... could one really say she had a heart anymore?
chapter iv

Chapter Summary

a letter left on a doorstep.

Chapter Notes

I added a typed version of this letter for accessibility at the end of the photo.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Hey Princess,

it's taken me awhile to work up the courage to send this to you... or I guess "leave on your doorstep" is more accurate. A very long while, in fact. Ever since I saw her in the Games. You know who I mean. It scared me. Why did you never tell me about her? I suppose that's a dumb question, who wants an alcoholic for a father? But it hurt, seeing her for the very first time on that stage.

It made me angry, too, thinks Haymitch, but declines to add more emotionally charged information with an already delicate piece of correspondence.

I wrote the first part of this message long after I thought of writing this at all... and it took me another month to finish. I've been in the Capitol this whole time. Too scared to see you, but I want to. I need to. You and her. I keep going places thinking I'll see both of you then getting scared right after I get there and leaving. I'm shaking as I send this. I got your address from Plutarch, I don't know what he thinks I'm doing with it. Does he know about her?

Write me back with something, I suppose.
I tried to make my handwriting, which is feminine when I'm conscious of trying to make it look nice, look as sloppy and Haymitch-esque as possible.
chapter v

Chapter Summary

a guest in the trinket home.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was very awkward. Emotionally-charged, stressful, and exceedingly awkward. Effie sat at her glossy mahogany table, staring into the depths of her steaming (honey + lemon) tea. To her right, Maisie, doing the same but with her hands firmly clasped together. Sitting on her feet, not saying a word. To Effie's left... Haymitch Abernathy.

He had sent her a letter. It was six months after the final Games had ended. Effie had stepped outside early in the morning for some fresh air- she'd barely slept that night. Time had helped, but the nightmares, the anxiety, the everything, they were still there, just not as heavy, not as burdensome. Maisie hadn't gotten any angrier with her mother, but tension was still afoot. Effie hadn't tried to start anything at first, but as the weeks came and went, she'd decided it was time to try and attempt to reconcile their (broken? fragile?) relationship. Things were...there. They weren't laughing and smiling, but Maisie was talking, and Effie was listening, and she had decided that was good. It was wonderful. Maisie was talking, she was talking to her, and that was good enough (a tiny part of her wishes... hopes... yearns for a day when everything will be just as it was before. Not perfectly, not one-hundred-percent, but close to it).

It had been three months or so since Effie and Maisie had began mending the fragile threads of their close bond when Effie stumbled upon that letter outside. The wind was kissing her cheeks, the not-yet humid air of the dawn promising a wet and sticky day in early June. She'd just shut the door when the sight of a ratty envelope caught her eye.

Picking it up, she had seen there was no return address, no name, nothing written on the outside of it to signify the sender. Effie turned it over once, twice, three times in her tiny, nimble hands. She honestly had no idea who it could be. She was afraid to open it up. What if it was something disgusting, something vile and mean from someone who'd watched her on the final Games so many months ago? She knew she deserved it, but she didn't think she wanted to keep subjecting herself to those things anymore. It was time to, if not completely turn away from the past, start cutting the strings.

She ripped it open anyway... and inside was the letter. From him. From Haymitch.

It was short and concise, but it still managed to still Effie's heart. He knew. Effie didn't think he'd be watching. Out of all the remaining Victors to understand the terrors of the Games, Haymitch was the one to revile it in its entirety. He watched? That question tugged at Effie's mind more than the pertinent one, the one that she had been afraid to reveal ever since the clean, crisp stick she'd peed on presented her with a guilty + sign. She didn't think it would've been all too-difficult to put the pieces together. Haymitch had seen her with her makeup and wigs on more often than without, and besides, Maisie looked so much more like him anyway. It was laughable to think she could be
fathered by anyone else.

She held the letter in her hands, rereading and rereading, afraid to do anything with it other than hold it, until she remembered there were no bugs listening in and no spies to account for. It felt freeing, it felt unnatural, this new ability to not be afraid all the time.

She'd had to go to Plutarch to track him down. He'd told her to write back with something, but (the act was truly a testament to the lack of foresight Haymitch exhibited when being careless...or scared) the dumbass had left no return address or anything by which to send word. Plutarch had told her the address and number of some run-down Capitol apartment he'd been staying at, but Effie was too scared to go and see him? talk to him? do something? so she'd had Plutarch send to him a message asking him to come over and... here they were. She wondered, taking another sip of her cooling tea, if Haymitch had hesitated to come, so afraid, as she had been, of the journey there.

He'd arrived that morning.

"Hey Princess, I got your message." He left the sentence hanging there, on the threshold of her modestly-sized apartment. It was delivered in true Haymitch fashion, as cool ever with a hint of nonchalance, but she could sense in his eyes a fear, a warning in his body holding him back, telling him to run run run. He was scared to see the daughter she'd had to hide away. Effie could hardly blame him.

She was bare. Clothed of course, but no makeup. None of the frivolity the Capitol so deeply worshiped, nor even the unassuming, modest face that so many were sporting nowadays, to show respect in the face of tragedy. To discard the Capitol value of excess. To express revulsion of wealth, but still have a pretty visage. Effie's reasons were all of the above, and so much more. She couldn't indulge the frivolity of snow-white face, golden painted eyelids, pink lips, when Coin had made such a final mockery of her on that stage. Literal insult to literal injury. She couldn't indulge that luxury she had once enjoyed. The makeup she so perfectly, lovingly applied mocked her now. Bases her skin tone and simple eyeliners were her companions now, and only to ward off the age and add a natural looking type of beauty-if that at all.

"I'm glad." She stepped aside. "Come in. I was expecting you today, just wasn't sure what time." She shut the door behind him as he entered. Her voice was different, changed. He could hear it in the cadence, in the tone. She was done with putting on airs. She was tired. Taking the lead, she'd led him to the kitchen table. "I have tea, if you'd like. Some cookies. Ahh.. other things..." She'd left the sentence hanging there, not sure what to offer. Almost the entirety of their acquaintance, Effie had only seen Haymitch consume alcoholic beverages, and the occasional bites of a meal (what, she could not remember).

"Tea's great." She'd set to work then, opting to duck towards the stove, if only to guarantee a few more minutes of relief from this awkward visit. She hadn't told Maisie, what was she to do when she came down? Her hands were too quick turning on the kettle. Effie cursed the years of experience she had creating this beverage. A creature of habit, Effie could never do anything slowly. Fast and concise were her nature.

Finishing up, she poured the tea into two cups, set one down in front of Haymitch, one in front of herself, and went to grab a plate to place some cookies on when she heard her guest take in a deep breath. Effie half knew what to expect, whom to expect, when she turned around.
And so there they sat, third teacup added, a plateful of untouched, store-bought cookies in the center. None of them had said much, said anything. They'd been sitting there going on fifteen minutes now, each waiting for one to break the silence. Effie knew it had to be either her or Haymitch. As much as her and her daughter were mending their relationship now, it was often on Effie’s prompting to begin a conversation. Then again, while talkative and bouncy, Effie was just as much the same (...before) and therefore she presumed it was out of habit and familiarity Maisie waited for her mother to go first. She'd half expected her daughter to guess as to the identity, the role, of the visitor before them, the same way he had guessed her, but that might have been asking too much, after what she had been through. It would have made it easier, though.

It was, funnily enough, Haymitch who had broken the silence, but Effie had not been there to witness it. She'd gone back into the kitchen for something to add to the table, even though what was already there had been untouched. Five minutes spent pilfering through cupboards, opening (closing, and re-opening) the fridge, and scanning the contents of the filled but unappetizing freezer. She eventually decided on more cookies, and made her way towards the door.

"So it's nice there?"

Effie froze before opening the swinging door back to where the table was. She'd picked up on the beginnings of a conversation. They were talking. Effie didn't move from her spot, the tray of cookies in hand.

"Well, completely different from the Capitol, I'll say. You city-slickers don't know what you're missing. Sure you have all these nice buildings and fancy stuff, but you never really get to see nature and how beautiful it can be. Big, giant oak trees and fields for miles. Giant lakes and rivers. Mountains in the distance. Birds and other kinds of animals. Really makes you feel more... at home. Well, I suppose I can say that because it is my home, but it just feels nice. It feels right."

Effie smiled. Rarely, if ever, had Effie heard Haymitch talk with that much kindness in his tone, that gentle type of... love. She could hear it in the rise and fall of his voice, that inflection. She knew he loved 12, was probably glad to be back, but the ability to share the love he had for his roots with Maisie was truly what made him seem happy. They’d only just met, but any fears Effie had about what would happen had all but vanished; she could tell just from the three or so minutes of listening to him ramble that he was determined to be there for Maisie.

She stood there a few minutes more, listening to him talk about his home, hearing her daughter (their daughter) ask him questions back, feeling a sense of contentment was over her. It was a good feeling, a nice feeling, something she hadn't felt in too long.

Chapter End Notes

I know I kind of ended the chapter on a slightly week note, but I wanted to tie it up so I could move on to the next one, haha.

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