What Makes A Man?

by fuckinghawthorne

Summary

An AU where we see what Gale goes through in the Capitol when he's accosted by Peackeepers. Inspired by the song "What Makes A Man", by City and Colour. Violence and Foul Language Warning.

Well I can hear my train coming
Looks like time is not on my side
Well I can hear my train coming
I'm still running for my life

What makes a man pray, when he's about to die?

I think I know
I think I might know

The stench of rotted flesh fills my nose. It's a pity that I'm used to the smell.

Katniss, I think, looking around wildly. Its the only thought I can manage. "Katniss!"

The screams of the woman echo in my ears throughout her entire way down. She was hanging onto the icy doorknob below me, but she couldn't last longer than a few seconds. The frozen air bites at my face as I peer past my hood and into the chasm below. The flaps of the hole, what was previously the road, hang straight down into the abyss. One by one the people clinging to the edges fall to their death, hitting the far-away bottom with a crunch only just audible from where I
hang. Some insect-like sound scuttles below me, and I work my fingers into the door's grate so tightly that it feels as if they're going to be torn off. "KATNISS!" I kick at the door crazily, but no one comes to my aid. It's locked, and whoever's inside won't answer.

The snow is falling heavier than ever, and I can't see much past the few people hanging onto the doorknobs and grates on the doors next to me. A boot moves out of my way and suddenly I see her. She's dangling from the edge of the next intersection, calling my name just as loudly as I'm calling hers. "Over here!" I tell her, desperate for her to hear me. "Katniss! Over here!" She struggles to reach the top of the intersection, and for one terrifying second it looks as though she might slip. I don't dare look away from her, my heart pounding in my chest, as she swings her leg up to straddle the edge of the pod. "Katniss," I repeat desperately, watching as she almost slips again. My sweaty fingers grip the grate even tighter, but I don't try to escape. There is nowhere to go. The iron is the only thing that's keeping me from joining the carnage below. I simply stare through the falling bodies at Katniss, unable to blink until she finally pulls herself up to the level street. I scan the area around her, but luckily neither Peacekeeper nor Rebel have taken an interest in the poorly-dressed Capitol girl with a gun on her hip.

"Gale?!

I kick my feet until she sees me. "Over here!" I repeat. She runs as close as she can get; only about three doors down. I watch her pull out her gun and aim at the doorknob below me. I draw my feet out of the way when she takes her shot. My eyes shut tight. There is no room for fear here. Not when there's death any which way you look. She hits the lock and I kick at it with my boot until it finally gives way beneath me. I drop to the cold apartment floor in a heap, gasping for air. I can't feel my fingers, but I'm alive.

Holy shit. I'm alive.

I can barely let myself feel the elation of my survival before I feel hands clamp down on me. White-gloved fingers wrap around my shoulders, and I feel my stomach sink. Fuck. Peacekeepers. The stolen clothes I'm wearing will be useless once they see me close up. They'll know exactly who I am, who I'm traveling with. I meet her eyes in panic, hoping she'll understand. I can't say it, or they'll know. But we don't need words.

"Shoot me!" I mouth, panic gripping my throat. "Shoot. Me." She looks terrified; uncomprehending. I struggle with the mass of arms that hold me and stick my face out farther for her to see. She's just staring in bewilderment, her gun held loosely in her hands. "Shoot! Me!"

This is it. Unknown hands seize the back of my coat and I know these will be the last words I ever say to her. The last words I'll ever say at all. I'm defenseless. My gun has already fallen in the pod and I can't fight if they've got my hands wrenched behind my back. I struggle, trying desperately to dive into the hole below, but they're shutting the door in my face. "GO!" I scream at her, trying one last time to escape into the pod. They close the door and drag me away from it. There's no help for me now.

Holy shit. I'm gonna die.

I run through the inventory in my head, ignoring the Peacekeepers' orders to surrender. The hole is out. Even if I could spring to the door, there's two Peacekeepers separating me from it. The nightlock is gone; I've already given it to Peeta. I think of my arrows just as they're ripped from my back. Fuck. So much for self-detonating them. I'm screwed.

"Who are you?!" The man in front of me shouts, pushing me onto the floor. I fall on my back and he kicks me in my temple. The other three in the room surge forward to rip away the scarf I've got wrapped around my head, tearing off the long black coat and all of the furs Tigris had wrapped
around my body. My uniform is revealed and all hell breaks loose.

"He's one of them!"

"Rebel!"

"Traitor!"

"See if he has a gun!"

I wriggle on the ground like a fish, trying to army-crawl my way away from the punches and kicks that assault me. The big guy, a dark-skinned Peacekeeper with about a hundred pounds on me, kicks me in the ribs so hard that I can't even breathe. "No!" I groan, reaching out for his leg. Every movement is agony, but I'll be damned if I die on the floor like this. "NO!" My scream is guttural, almost animal-like. I grab his leg and pull, dropping him on the ground next to me. The other three all seize my legs, pulling me up in the air, but I hang onto his uniform for dear life. They pull on me just as I find his kneecap under the white fabric. I push while they pull. His screams of agony mix with mine as soon as I shove his knee out of place, and I send a bloody glob of spit flying in his direction when they throw me into a wall. My heart pounds against my ribs. I know there's no way out of this. Either they die or I do, and it doesn't exactly look like the odds are in my favor. Better to do it now before they find out who I am. Hopefully they'd end it with a single bullet. Fast. Quick. Painless. If they discover I have information they want, there'd be no hope for that at all. "Fucking kill me," I spit, my voice breaking. I doubt they can even understand the garbled mess of sound that's coming from my mouth.

Four sets of eyes all stare at me. I try to hear past the screams of the man whose knee I've dislocated, searching for any sign that any others are in the house, but I can't make anything out. A strange fog is filling my head, making it difficult to do anything but sit slumped against the wall. My right ear is ringing unnaturally, no doubt thanks to the kick in the head I got. I grit my teeth and stare back at all four of them, trying to control my breathing. Two of them put the man's knee back in place while the other trains a gun at my head. The look I give her dares him to shoot me.

"You're the cousin," she says steadily, glaring at me.

I say nothing.

"He's the cousin," she tells the men behind her. They all look at me again. I can see them doing the math in their head.

I say nothing.

"He's the cousin..." she says to herself again, then her eyes narrow. "Was Katniss Everdeen with you? The Mockingjay?" The redhead behind her flings himself to the door, throwing it open so he can look out; no doubt for Katniss. I clench my aching hands and stare straight ahead. I will not tell them anything.

"I don't see her!"

She's gone, I tell myself, willing it to be true. She's gone. She's gone. She's gone. She's gone and they won't be able to find her again. She'll make it to the mansion. She'll kill Snow. They won't find her. She's gone.

"WHERE IS SHE?!!" The Peacekeeper who was tending to the one I injured appears only inches away from my face, shocking me back into the moment. I stare at him through the fog in my head and try not to laugh. He's desperate. He has no answers. I will not tell them anything.
She's gone. She's gone. She's gone and they won't be able to find her again. I see my family in the back of my mind. My mother. Her mother. Rory. Vick. Posy. Prim. They're all safe in District 13, that I know. They'll ride out the war in safety. They're okay and they won't be able to find them again.

The slap the man gives me knocks my head into the wall, but I was prepared for it. I rally my energy and use all of my remaining strength to jolt forward, using the Peacekeeper's momentum to push him to the side. I just need to make it to the door. One final push past the redhead and I can take both of us to our death. Chances are the woman will shoot me first, but that's okay. She's gone and they're okay. She's gone and they're okay.

"Grab him!" A mad scramble ensues and I bite, kick, and claw my way towards the open door. The redhead -Xander, I heard the woman call him-, slams the door shut again and aims a kick at my face. I don't feel it. What I do feel is the bullet that enters my hand. It rips through my palm and sends me into agony. All hell breaks loose and I can't breathe, see, or even think. All that I know is that I need a way out. My pulse pounds in my ringing ears and hot tears stain my cheeks but I can't do it. I'm trapped. I am an animal and they are the butchers. They drag me back to the wall and hold me there, yelling so many different things at me that I couldn't respond even if I wanted to. I hold my mangled hand to my chest and say nothing, although they're all doing the talking for me.

"Hawthorne! Where is she?!"

"Call Command!"

"The radio's not working!"

"Tell us where she is!"

"I'll kill you motherfucker!"

"Where is she?!"

My mouth tastes of blood and I'm able to see through my hand, but that no longer matters to me. All I can see, all I can focus on, is the faces of those in front of me. I've never seen a Peacekeeper like this before. No Peacekeeper other than the ones of Twelve, that is. They have no helmets. They're strewn on the floor and spill into the next room, giving me a full view of four of the most desperate people I've ever seen in my life. The woman's gun is aimed at my head, as if she thinks it matters to me at all anymore. The man I left on the floor and the grey-haired asshole who slapped me both glare at me as though they could kill me with looks alone. But it's the last one which sets me over the edge. The one called Xander has my crossbow and is aiming at me with my own arrow. A red-tipped arrow. One that, once detonated, would kill us all. I burst into crazed laughter at the sight of him, causing them all to share unnerved looks. I ignore them. My own arrow. My own fucking arrow.

"Shut up!" The grey-haired one yells at me. I force my laughter to die down and look him straight in the eye, though I'm still smirking. I can't help it. My own arrow. "I'm going to make this very simple for you," he tells me steadily, talking around a swollen lip. "You're going to tell us where the Mockingjay is. You're going to tell us where she's going. After that, we'll kill you. Stalling will only bring you pain. Do you understand?"

I merely blink at him.

"Get the knives," he orders, and the woman immediately hurries out of the room. "Shaw," he calls after her. "Give me yours. Mine are getting dull."
"Being brave won't help you," The big one says to me. I slide my eyes over to him, but it takes a great effort. It's as if they're moving slower than normal. "Tell us where your cousin is and this will go a lot faster."

"Go to hell," I say to him. "She's not my cousin."

This brings about some raised eyebrows. "But you're Gale Hawthorne," Xander says stupidly, still aiming at me with that goddamned arrow. "I saw you on TV. In District 12. They said you were her cousin. The Capitol said that."

The haze in my mind makes it hard to hear what he's saying to me. The ringing in my ear grows louder and turns into the dull blowing of a train whistle, like the ones that came for Katniss back before the Games. I blink wearily at the redheaded idiot and lean my head against the wall. My blood drips onto the floor from my hand and my head, counting the seconds with every drop. "The Capitol lied to you."

The grey-haired one snorts. "He's lying to us," he says, just as Shaw comes back in the room. "Probably just trying to convince himself he's not her cousin. Sure makes it easier to fuck 'em if they're not related to you, eh?" he smirks, making the men laugh. "Although it's not like that's anything new for Twelvers. They've been inbreeding for generations. Why else do you think they all become filthy coal-miners? They're too stupid to do anything else." His bloody grin is meant to hurt me, but I merely copy his expression and mirror it back at him. We share a bitter laugh that ends abruptly when I spit in his face.

"You're hilarious," I snarl at him. I struggle to keep him in my vision as another bout of fog sweeps over me, making me want to pass out. I blink hard and listen to the train in my head. Drip. Drip. Drip.

"Tell us where Katniss Everdeen is." He didn't even bother to wipe my spit from his face. It drips off his face with his blood.

I will not tell them anything.

"Tell us where she is!"

I will not tell them anything.

Shaw hands him a pouch of what I assume to be the knives. He looks through it with an expression almost savory before picking out a dainty-looking knife barely large enough to constitute a weapon. I stare at it in amusement.

"Something funny?" the dark one asks.

I say nothing.

"I said, is something funny?"

I look between the knife and the Peacekeeper holding it. I know it will not be the weapon that kills me. I look back at the arrow that's still pointed at my face, blinking up at the redhead with my heavy eyelids. My hand is so far gone that I can't even feel it anymore. It drips, drips, drips, onto the floor, keeping the time for me. My blood is my war drum, and I march to the beat of it in my
head with every breath that I draw. The fog swirls around my brain and I can hear the whistling in my mind again. I look at the Peacekeepers who surround me; I meet every one of their eyes. The one with the knife has paused to take me in. He knows he has time. He can savor the moment later. Right now he just looks confused.

"What the hell are you smiling about?"

The arrow is dusty. It's caked with gore and splattered with dirt that somehow has found its way onto the once-gleaming steel. I stare at it and feel rage. It's no longer funny to me. The smile drops from my face. "That's my arrow."

"Tell us where the Mockingjay is or it will go into your other hand," the man tells me. "I'll leave it there while I cut off your fingers."

Fingers. Tongues. Children's limbs. What won't they take from us? It occurs to me that even though I'm sitting here, on the floor of some fancy apartment right in the heart of the Capitol, nothing has changed. I'm still fighting to take my arrow back. In the back of my mind I know that I'm going to die today. I know it as surely as I know that the sky is blue. As surely as I know that I am a soldier. That I will die to save my family. That I will die to save Katniss.

I swallow hard. I open my mouth to speak, they think, of the location of their damned Mockingjay. I guess nobody told them that Mockingjays only live in the woods. That Katniss only lives in the woods. Even now it baffles me. They're so disillusioned. They sit and accept Snow's lie. They honestly think the cause of their war is a seventeen year old girl who volunteered for her sister in a game meant only to entertain. At least I know my death will mean one thing. It'll give Katniss a chance to find Prim again. They'll be able to live freely together. I couldn't volunteer for them back then, but at least I can do this one small thing now.

I know what I'm going to say to these people. My lips form my last words but before I can speak them a thundering boom rattles throughout the house. More follow. The tiny window on the front door glows a dusky orange and the Peacekeepers all swivel around to stare.

"Bombs!"

"Is that..."

"It's the mansion!"

"The Rebels bombed the mansion!"

Katniss, I think, closing my eyes. She did it.

She did it.

I smile the last true smile I'll ever have and open my eyes again. The redhead aims my arrow at me and stares. He looks disturbed, like I'm frightening him somehow. My smile grows broader.

"Where is she?!" the woman yells at me, frantic. "Where did you send her?! Is she the one who just bombed the President?!"

"I told her to run so we'd both be free." I look straight into her eyes and whistle the four-note tune that so many have died for. Xander aims for my other hand without hesitation, sinking the explosive arrow into my bones. My last thought is of my family. She's gone and they're okay.

We're the last explosion to ever rip through the streets of the Capitol. The next time I open my eyes, the first person that I see is Prim.
"She's gone and they're okay," she tells me tearfully.

"She's gone and they're okay," I repeat. I stagger towards her. "We'll... We'll wait for her together."

The song that this is based off of is titled "What Makes A Man" by City and Colour! Stay tuned for a Halloweeny Werwolf!Everthorne as well as the next chapter of T.W.A.B.

Hope you guys liked this! Let me know in the reviews!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!