Land & Sea

by herainab

Summary

“I’m a lost soul. I spend my days chasing the sun and dreaming of the ocean.” She admits with a shy smile. “I run away from love but daydream about having it. I walk along the sand and picture a life of saving people but find myself singing too loudly and racing the moon home after getting sidetracked by the coast. I leave home of the morning and don’t return until dinnertime because I discovered something new.”

Katniss meets Peeta on a family vacation in Byron Bay. Peeta spends his days planning on where he'll wake-up next. Katniss spends her days dreading the end of her vacation and fighting with her parents. The two teenagers worlds collide as they search for perspective and their place in the big wide world.

Notes

This is my first multi-fic story for this fandom. It's been a work in progress for a long while and I'm so glad to be sharing it all with you. It's all finished and will be about twenty chapters long.
It has been inspired by my favourite album and the singers journey as someone with no fixed postal address and lives in his van travelling up and down the Coast, learning a lot along the way.
Her sister stands besides her, yawning as they stand behind their parents who bicker in the airport check-in line. It’s early and those catching international flights are all flocking to the airport.

Their mother holds their boarding passes and passports and squabbles away to their father about things that really aren’t necessary. Katniss directs her attention to her phone and blocks her parents out.

Between them they have four large suitcases; a surfboard bag filled with three surfboards, one guitar case and three backpacks. They’ve been up since 4 am and struggling to stay awake as they wait for their 16 hour flight leaving at 8:30.

And between her parents nagging and her sister’s extreme anxiety of flying, she’s dreading the trip, wishing she flew separately or her parents seated her in anywhere other than business class. But this was her parent’s way of making up for the lack of time they’ve spent at home. The lack of family vacations and bonding they’ve done as a family. To sweeten their job, reminding their daughters that if they study hard, they’ll be able to live this life of flying business class, long holidays and living in the high class.

This was basically a plea for Katniss to go into medicine, follow their footsteps and have the opportunity to live this lavish life.

But Katniss isn’t falling for their trap. She’s dead set avoiding studying medicine and wanting to get into the best music program in the country. But her parents have reminded her that they’re not funding such a childish course choice. A career that they think she’ll struggle to succeed in.

But as her sister lets out another yawn, she’s brought to scowl at the back of her parent’s heads and wish she could do whatever the hell she wanted.

The only perk of this trip was meeting up with her cousin who left the country four years prior and the two months spent in Byron Bay. The Undersee’s were the ones who suggested they vacation in Byron Bay at the suggestion of Madge and Katniss. Mostly Madge pestering her parents to get the Everdeen’s to agree. And with that, the Everdeen’s agreed to vacation in Byron Bay and the two families staying in the Undersee’s beach house. The family catching up after years of estrangement.

“Next please.” The attendant calls out.

Their mother steps forward with her family carting the luggage behind them. Katniss rolling a suitcase and the surfboard case behind her. Her sister carrying her guitar case and another suitcase and her father wheeling two suitcases.

Their mother checked them in and their luggage is tagged and sent on the conveyor belt for their flight.

Katniss ordered a large coffee once they were in the business lounge. The hit of caffeine was needed after the crappy morning and nagging undertaken by her parents.

She watches the people come and go, getting ready for the impending flights. She even snickers to herself as she watches those who are running late, running for their lives to get to their gate in time.
before they miss their flight.

Prim was starting to calm down with the Valium prescribed and was starting to mellow out. She’d be asleep in an hour.

She sips her coffee and eats her toasted ham and cheese croissant and waits for them to be called to their gate. She has her ear buds pressed into her ears and lets her soulful tunes calm her down from the tense morning, sinking further into the plush chair, blocking out the world as she listens to Ben Howard.

Prim engrosses herself in her phone, blogging or texting as if she wouldn’t have internet for the entire 8 weeks they would be away. Her parents settle with the paper and their coffees and continue their bickering. They don’t bother engaging their daughter’s in conversation and were too concerned over patients and trials they’d be leaving for the duration for their vacation.

By the time they board, Prim is beginning to feel the effects of the Valium, hitting the drowsy stage and Katniss helps buckle her sister into her seat, as their parents take the seats in front of them.

They’ve been on enough planes to know the drill. And by the time the seatbelt sign comes off, Katniss curls in for one of the inflight movies and lets the flight carry her, distract her from the real reason they’re on a holiday. She just thinks of the crashing waves and the sun, the exploring and the getting into mischief with Madge and Prim. And mostly, the opportunity to be inspired by a new country.

Her parents wouldn’t let her fly halfway across the world for a trip like this. So she was grateful they agreed to make it a family vacation. Even if they were there to keep an eye on the girls, there were still so many options to explore and be free.

The sixteen hours of recycled air was starting to get claustrophobic but they were close to landing. They were above Australian waters and Katniss could already feel the sand beneath her toes. She was itching for a swim and surf and a good cup of coffee.

It was 4pm when they land in Australia, a full day ahead when they left America.

They were let off the plane and met with the humid spring air, weather that reminds her of California’s Springtime. It wasn’t a climate shock either. They were used to the all year warms and humidity. They lived for the warm days and nights.

A blonde beauty comes crashing through the crowd, enveloping Katniss into her arms.

“I’ve missed you a ton Everdeen.”

“I’ve missed you too Undersee.” She tells her older cousin, squeezing her tighter.

Madge greets the rest of her family and leads them out of the airport and to a Range Rover. They stack the trunk with their luggage and climb into the car.

“Thanks for coming and getting us Madge.” Her father says to his niece.

“It was the least I could do. Getting the train is hell this time of the afternoon and I knew it’d be quicker to collect you all.” She tells the family with a big smile. She had been so excited to see Katniss and Prim, it almost being four years since they had seen each other. And no Skype or
phone calls made up for the separation and physical contact.

“Girls, we’re here.” Their mother says softly, shaking Prim and her awake.

Madge has pulled into a large six-car underground garage, besides Madge’s red Audi hatchback she loves to boast about to her cousin despite Katniss having exactly the same.

“Welcome to Paradise Waters.” She exclaims.

“This the new house Madge?” Her mother asks, walking to the back of the car.

“Yeah it is.” Madge tells her aunt, opening the trunk.

The Undersee’s had only just moved into the U-shaped architecture masterpiece that had taken them almost two years build. It sat on the corner of the court styled street and boasted a 98 metre waterfront view.

They each grab a piece of luggage from the trunk and follow Madge.

They walk to an elevator, taking them up to the first floor of the house to drop off Rosie and James’ luggage as they were staying in the detached one-bedroom guesthouse.

“Wow, this is beautiful.” Prim gasps as they step out onto the first floor of the house.

“I’ll show you to your rooms. Mom and Dad should be home soon but I’ll let you all get settled.”

James and Rosie grab their bags and follow Madge through a set of double doors and to the guesthouse.

The girls leave them to get settled and then are shown upstairs.

“Prim, your room is in there and Katniss you will be in here if you don’t want to share.” Madge says pointing to the two rooms.

Katniss followed Prim into the bedroom, the two of them enjoying sharing a room. The room had views of the water. Katniss drops her suitcase on the ground and collapses on the queen-sized bed. The windows were wide open and the afternoon sea breeze blew through the windows.

Madge lies down across the bed. “Keen to cause mischief in Byron?” She asks with a chuckle, patting River, the Golden Retriever who has joined them on the bed.

“Sure am.” Katniss responds. “So is this one. I’m ready to corrupt her.”

“You’ll never corrupt me, you’re too pure.” Prim replies.

“That’s true.”

“Oh screw both of you.” Katniss huffs.

Prim and Madge giggle wildly, holding onto their stomachs.

The Madge, Katniss remembers has certainly come out of her shell in the last few years. A new country and over 7 thousand miles would force her to come out her shell. But like always she’s still quiet old Madge, so reserved and beautiful. She is now sun kissed and her blue eyes shine like diamonds. She’s absolutely stunning and is gawked at by boys, gaining attention for her stunning looks on social media.
“So, how are the boys going?” Prim asks.

“Take my word for it Prim. Boy’s are a nuisance.” She states. “And immature who think with their dicks. I thought I’d meet more mature guys since I’ve left high school but they’re just as bad as one another. They’re just drunken or drugged up idiots who think they can be douches and think they’re so cool.”

“Touché. Less drama not being involved with them.” Katniss agrees.

“How’s Gale? Still following you around?”

“No, thank god. He’s got college girls to keep him distracted.”

“You still have no idea the effect you have on people.” She chuckles. “Gosh I still wish I was in Santa Monica to see all the gazes and double takes of you.”

Katniss sighs. “Yeah once I grew boobs the boys really started noticing me.”

“They were noticing you before the curves came in. The curves just highlighted your feminine physic.”

“Hardly.” Katniss scoffs looking down at her body that lacks noticeable curves. Madge and Prim had inherited the Undersee’s curves. Prim’s boobs were bigger than Katniss’ and she was only 14.

“She’s right.” Prim says. “You’re still beautiful Katniss and everyone knows it.”

A voice calls them downstairs and they trail downstairs slowly, Katniss’ parents already downstairs in the lavish kitchen with a hard earned drink in front of them.

Katniss notices how well her aunt and uncle look compared to when she saw them before they moved across the world. Her Aunt Michelle was Australian born but never found herself comfortable in America. It was like she was homesick all the time. She didn’t have that glow she seemed to have in photographs from her younger college days. Michelle and her Uncle Paul, her mother’s brother, had been so stressed in the months leading up to the move with a job loss, family issues and the death of Thomas, Madge’s younger brother who had suffered from an incurable tumour in his brain, dying at only 6 years old. The change of scenery and new environment was doing wonders for them. And her aunt had that familiar glow about her again.

Her aunt and uncle looked like totally new people. And surrounded by Michelle’s family was what Michelle needed the most. Even if Nan and Pop Undersee thought they were running away from their problems. That was all Katniss heard from her grandparents when the Undersee’s moved to Australia when really Katniss knew it had been on the cards for years, long before Thomas’ death.

Thomas’ death hit the family quite hard, even Katniss’ parents. Her father was the one who diagnosed the young boy and treated him right up until his final operation. Katniss can still remembers her weak cousin in his hospital bed in the kid’s ward. It was the first time she had experienced death and she knew in that moment she never wanted to follow in her parent’s footsteps, becoming a doctor. She didn’t want to become anyone’s last hope, she didn’t want families holding onto every word and then blaming her when it all went wrong. She just couldn’t bare the pain of watching people die.

“Girls, it’s lovely to see you again.” Michelle says embracing her nieces. “How are you both?”

“Good.” They both reply.
“That’s great. You two have grown up so much.” She tells them. “I bet you’re all hungry? There’s a beautiful Thai restaurant that we swear by. We’ll call you when it gets here.”

They shoo the girls and Madge leads them outside to the outdoor patio to overlook the river with boats and yachts attached to private jetties.

“I bet Uncle Paul is glad he finally got his boat?”

“He sure is.” Madge replies sitting down on the daybed, pulling out her phone as it sounds with a text alert.

The sisters sit themselves down beside Madge. Prim reacquainting herself with her friends back home.

“Hey, we’re on vacation.” Katniss scolds her sister.

“I have a popular blog and friendships to maintain. I can’t drop off the planet. I’ll lose status.”

Katniss rolls her eyes and Madge chuckles. “It’s like this all the time.” Katniss tells Madge. “Do you even have real friends?”

“I do.” Prim states. “I have plenty of friends.”

“And boys.” Madge says. “I notice the comments and the likes on you pictures.”

Prim shrugs her shoulders and keeps to her socialising.

“Did you want to go out tonight?” Madge asks Katniss.

“She’s 18. She’s not allowed to.”

“Welcome to Australia Primmy.” Madge giggles. “There’s a good nightclub we go to regularly.”

“I would but I’m exhausted. I just want to sleep for a million years.”

“Well I have Netflix and lots of junk food. You won’t sleep much tonight. The jetlag is worse. It took me a while to get used to it.”

“Do you have a good Netflix line-up?”

“Sure do.”

“Then let’s do it for old time’s sake.” Katniss agrees. “I’m sure there’s plenty we have to tell each other.” Prim’s ears perk up. Madge and Katniss were very close, sharing everything and Prim knew that they shared literally everything without any limits. “Stuff that is too mature for you.” Katniss tells her sister.

“I’m 14. There’s nothing too mature for me.”

“There is Hun. I don’t want you getting the wrong idea. Deciding to get yourself mixed up in boys and intercourse. It’s not pretty.” She tells her sister.

“She’s right. You’re still too young. I mean you’re pretty but don’t jump at the first opportunity. Make sure you deeply know him.”

“Ok but Katniss I know you sneak out of the house and you’ve got a long list of booty calls.”
“How do you know?”

“I read you’re texts one day. I’ve heard you on the phone. I’ve heard you sneak out and when a boy picks you up in his car with a large exhausts, it’s not hard to put two and two together.”

“I can’t believe I’m having this conversation with you.”

“Relax. I’m not as young as you think. You’re just too pure to talk to me about it.” Prim states. “I just wish you’d confined in me about boys and such. Tell me secrets. I am good at keeping secrets. I want you to tell me about kisses that make you dizzy and boys that tell you you’re pretty. Or the little things that make you swoon or the most meaningful conversation you’ve had. You’ve never told me these things and I feel like we’ve missed that connection that sisters usually have.”

“Oh Prim, why didn’t you tell me?”

The 14 year old shrugs her shoulders. “I just thought you didn’t want to.”

“I didn’t know you cared so much.”

“I don’t but I love hearing you tell me stories, waking me in the middle of the night to show me the song you’ve written and tell me how you were inspired. I miss us being what we used to be.”

Katniss embraces her sister, kissing the top of her head.

“I’m sorry Prim. There’s just been a lot going on.”

“I know. You’ve been stressed over Mom and Dad. I know that. You could have still told me. They do drive me crazy also and I’ve noticed how much they’ve been on you about college. And I know you sneaking out has been a way to rebel against them…”

“But they’re hardly home to realise.” Katniss replies softly.

There’s silence for a long time.

“Throw your swimmers on.” Madge says breaking the silence. “And let’s swim. Swimming is refreshing, especially after a long flight.”

The three change into there bikinis and wade into the warm water of the pool. Madge was right, the water really did refresh them.

They’re called for dinner and they enjoy the early evening breeze as they eat out on the patio as the sun starts to set.

“Madge, your mother and I are going to play tourist for James and Rosie. We’re going to show them the area and The Practice. I’ve got a couple of patients over the weekend and one early Monday morning. We thought we’d let you girls go on ahead to Byron. I know you’re all itching to get there.”

“Are you sure?” Madge asks her father.

“You and Katniss are both 18. You’re responsible and we trust you both. And we know how much Katniss is itching to get on the board. We’ll be there Monday afternoon, Monday night at the latest.”

“Thank you Daddy.”

“But you better find a good surf spot Kat.” James tells his daughter. “I want the toughest waves.”
He winks.

Katniss smiles and deep down she’s pleased to be going there early, without her parents. For the chance to have some freedom and an opportunity to see the town without the parental’s watching over them.

The three girls are giddy with excitement.

“But, no going out.” Rosie states. “You have your sister to take care of and it won’t be a good impression on her if you go out. No parties either. You’re to be at the house by 9pm, you three understand?”

The girls nod.

“And no drugs either.” Michelle warns them. “We want you girls to reassure us that we can trust you. Especially if we come and go between home and there.”

“You won’t be spending the whole time with us?” Madge asks.

“We hope to but we might want to travel a bit. Your father will be travelling back and forth for patients. But James and Rosie will be there the whole time.”

“Depending on what happens. I do have a consult here.” James explains to them. “And the team of doctors at the hospital do want to meet me. They might allow me to do a surgery or two.”

“Dad, this is supposed to be a vacation. No work.” Prim whines. “You both promised no work.”

“We did. It’s not definite.” Her father reminds her. “But if there’s a chance to teach these doctors something then I’m all for it. It’s called exposure.”

Katniss fights the urge to roll her eyes. She sat her fork on her plate. Her appetite lost. Madge and Prim getting the sign.

“I’m finished.” Madge announces.

“Me too.” Katniss says.

“Madge, why don’t you get them some towels and they can have a shower.”

“Come on.”

Madge leads them through the house and back upstairs, River following them upstairs. Prim claims the guest shower and Katniss gathers her things, following Madge into her bedroom.

“Just in there. The temp is set, if you want it warmer just touch the panel.” Madge tells Katniss as River jumps up onto the bed beside her.

“Thanks.”

The bathroom boasts floor to roof marble and a view of the water that runs behind the Undersee’s house. Katniss turns the water on and undresses from her bikini. She uncoils her braid and steps under the water. Rinsing her bikini, hanging it off the towel rack at the end of the walk in shower and rinses her hair. She gradually soaks up the warm water. Washes her hair, ridding of the 16-hour plane ride and the salt water that fills the pool.

She steps out of the bathroom, towel drying her hair. Madge scrolling through her phone, River
resting his head on Madge’s stomach as she casually scratches his head.

Katniss throws the towel over the desk chair and braids her hair. She climbs in beside Madge, patting River’s fur. She pulls her phone out, checking out the things she’s missed out on. She checks her emails and sets her phone on the bedside table.

Madge goes to shower and Prim takes her spot. She asks for Katniss to braid her hair.

“So much for a family vacation.” Prim pouts.

“I know but we’re going to get time apart from them.”

“Please tell me we’re going to have fun?”

“We are. Plenty of fun. And the curfew. How will they know we’ve been out? We’ll make the most out of the four days without them.”

Prim smiles from ear to ear. Katniss had been all too keen to get her sister out and about. Making memories and going on adventures their parents would disapprove of.

Madge joins them. Sinking into the space on the bed, throwing a bag down filled with snacks. She switches the overhead light off, turns on Netflix and they settle in with a movie and snacks.

“Can we get high?” Madge asks.

“Sure.” Katniss agrees. “Prim, you’re not allowed.”

“I’m not touching that stuff anyway.” She tells the girls, chewing on a rope of red liquorice. “But I so want to see the two of you high.”

“No telling.”

“Yes Prim. Pinkie swear you’ll not rat us out.”

“I pinkie swear.” She states, holding out her two pinkies, locking them with the two 18 year olds.

Katniss thanks her sister, kissing her cheek.

“Yes, thank you Prim. You’re the best.”

Prim smiles and takes a bite of her liquorice. “As long as you two make the time memorable I’m all for you two doing whatever the hell you want.”

“Gosh she’s amazing.” Madge says to Katniss.

“I know. That’s why I love her so much.”

Sleep for the Everdeen girls came easy at first. The three bodies and the dog, found comfort on the king sized bed. Prim had always been a heavy sleeper, while Katniss was the opposite. Katniss woke to almost anything. She was used to the sleep noises her sister made but the new environment couldn’t settle her.

And with Prim’s habit of kicking in her sleep and her constant tossing and turning, Katniss went to her designated bed but found sleep hard to come by. She read for a while. Spoke to Gale and
researched some activities for them to do.

Madge frequented Byron Bay. The beach house was often occupied during her school holidays and weekends away. She’d bring friends or her cousins away with her and spend her time getting to know the area.

So Madge was as valuable as any local. And the beach house had everything. It had pushbikes, surfboards, paddleboards and kayaks. Madge assured them that they’d get around easily on bikes or on foot. They were close to town, the market site and right on the beach.

She even said the neighbours were friendly. They were down the street from the local caravan park filled with backpackers who usually invited people by for games of volleyball or a game of cards.

Madge frequented the park, mingling with the tourists and getting to know a bit about them and where they came from.

She always had stories to tell when Katniss and her spoke.

She finally felt her eyes getting heavy with sleep and fell into the much-desired sleep.

But she woke what felt like only minutes later.

It was morning and with the girls deciding to leave as early as possible. But Katniss wishes they didn’t agree to leave so early.

They ate a breakfast of pancakes and fresh fruit. Packed Madge’s car, the bags just fitting and the surfboards attached to the roof racks on her car. River was staying behind but would join them on Monday when the parents arrived. They were loaded with groceries and told to follow the rules.

The speakers were set to play tunes as they drove down the coastline, the sunroof open.

They waved goodbye to the parents and by the time they were around the corner they were blasting the music from the speakers and planning the next 8 weeks.

“Welcome to Byron Bay girls.” Madge says as they pull up into the driveway of the house.

They unpack the car. Set the groceries in the fridge and cupboards. Madge shows them around the four-bedroom beach house, told them where everything was and they let their parents know they had arrived.

The ocean was calling their names but they hop on the bikes and ride into town. Madge gives them a tour of the street, pointing out the best food places and local hangouts. They stop at the kebab shop for lunch and sit at the park that overlooks the Main Beach.

The beach was busy. There were surfing instructors. Kayaking groups embarking out into the water. There were swimmers and surfers. There were sunbathers and tourists. There were joggers and meditators and kids playing at the playground.

And Katniss had itchy feet. She was ready to get out on her board and ride the waves. Madge though took them around town, introducing them to those she had met in the years she had been visiting.

And she takes them to the local surf hire shack.

“Hey Sam.”
“Madge. I was wondering when you’d be back again.” The brown haired teenage says. He’s skin was sun kissed and he wore board shorts and a singlet. He’s hair was in dreadlocks. He looked almost like ones of those Tumblr boys Prim constantly showed her big sister.

He embraces Madge in a tight hug. A hug that was more friendly than a usual hug.

“Sammy, these are my cousins from the States. This is Katniss and Prim.”

“Nice to meet you girls.” He greets them with a wide smile, showing off his pearly white teeth. “How old are you?”

“I’m 14 and Katniss is 18.”

“Too young to party my dear.” Sam tells Prim. “Don’t worry, we’ll find something for you to do.”

“Sam said he’s going to show us around.” Madge tells the sisters. “You have Sunday off right?”

“I do but I’ll hook you girls up with some of the crew. I’m sure they’ll be happy to show you around.”

“Thanks Sam. You doing anything tonight?”

“There’s a bonfire down near my place. You girls are welcome to join us.”

“We’ll see. These two are suffering from jetlag still.”

“That’s all cool. There’ll be plenty of parties. Just text us when you want to party. I’m sure there’ll be plenty of opportunities.”

“What about tomorrow night? Any plans?”

“We’re going to a gig one of the boys is playing but that’ll be done by 9. We can probably hang after.”

“You can all come to mine. We’ll have booze and good entertainment.”

“I don’t doubt it.” Sam smirks, pinching Madge’s arse.

“And you’ll bring some weed?”

“You don’t even have to ask babe.” He tells her with a wink.

A customer enters and they farewell Sam.

“He seems charming.” Katniss speaks as they climb onto their bikes.

“He’s lovely. He hooks me up most of the time. And we sometimes get high together and fool around.” She tells the girls. “He’s wonderful in bed.”

“Don’t the dreads turn you off?”

“When he’s that good in bed, I don’t care about them.” She states. “Come on let’s get back. We can come for a ride this afternoon.”

Katniss and Prim giggle as they follow Madge, weaving through the lunchtime traffic.

They stop though at the corner of Lawson Street, the sound of a singer stopping Katniss in her
tracks. The soul of the voice imbedding itself deep in her soul and she’s rendered dizzy at the beautiful combination of sounds of a folksy blues song.

The blond busker plays a left handed guitar, wears ripped jeans, a loose white cotton that’s hastily been buttoned at the middle and an Akubra hat that’s seen better days. He’s barefooted and mesmerising. Making eye contact with those who slow down to watch him.

The girls linger. Listening to him play. And Katniss is taken on a journey from the sound of his voice.

“So follow the ocean back to your heart,
so follow your fears back to the start,
follow the ocean back to your heart,
follow your fears back to where we learned,
and where we were taught,
to fear this falling, falling, this falling for you,”

She throws a five-dollar note into his case and as she takes a step back as he makes eye contact with her.

She notices the blue of his eyes. Ocean blue eyes that sparkle and shine in the afternoon sun. He also has a crooked smile that warms her insides.

She gives him a smile as he plays and she steps back to the girls, taking back a hold of her bike. He nods at the three of them, flashes his white pearly teeth and continues singing.

And as they ride past, he holds eye contact with her, grinning at her and strumming his guitar as he sings.

“Cause I’m not sure when I’m coming home girl,
coming home,
cause I’m not sure when I’m coming home love,
coming home,
coming home because I’m not sure when I’m coming home,
coming home, coming home,
because I’m not sure,
when I’m coming home, coming home here”

“Wow, he was gorgeous.” Prim chimed. “He was clearly looking at you Katniss.”

“Whatever.” Katniss scoffs.

“Prim’s right. Maybe he’ll frequent here while we’re here. Maybe you can ask him to coffee.” Madge suggests. “You did say you wanted a fling.”

“I’m already coming up with the lies to tell Mom and Dad.” Prim tells her.

Katniss scowls and pedals ahead of the girls who giggle widely.

“We were joking Katniss.” Madge calls out.

“You’re just so easy to tease.”

“Well, I hate it.” Katniss bites back. “I just want to go home and sleep.”

“More like take a cold shower.” Prim teases.
Katniss rolls over. Her sleep cycle was shot and she couldn’t sleep. Prim though was sound asleep in the twin bed by the window. Madge had left the sisters to pick up some more groceries, supplies and alcohol.

She sneaks out of the bedroom with her guitar. It was late afternoon and she could hear the voices sound from the beach as people swam in the remaining hours left of light and started to chill out for the upcoming weekend.

She curls up on the daybed out on the back patio that had a view of the ocean. The backyard steps right onto the golden sand that lead to the beautiful ocean.

She sits crisscrossed on the day bed with a bag of corn chips open and strums the strings of her guitar, humming along to the tune she plays and watching the waves crash onto the shore.

She was at a crossroads in her life.

While most of her school friends went to college and are spending their nights getting wasted. She fought with her parents about following her dreams.

They had always told her to follow her dreams, do what she loved but when it came time to turn that dream into a career they scolded her for the childish dream, said she’d be better having a career in medicine. She’d have security and could live a lavish lifestyle.

But she wasn’t a healer like her parents and Prim. She cringes at the sight of blood or when her mother told her about the births of babies she delivered. She couldn’t see herself standing at an open brain or looking at the vaginas of screaming women, bringing new life into the world.

Her fingers were meant to play the strings of her guitar and write songs. They weren’t to be wasted on saving lives.

She wants to inspire people, entertain them and make them dance and forget about the troubles in life, if it only lasted the four minutes of a song.

But they couldn’t see that.

She’d be a lousy doctor.

She’d be an excellent musician.

And she was going to spend the next two months proving to them how happy music made her even if she struggle financially; the love of it would pull her through.

“Hey, you play well.” A strong Australian accent calls out to her and she looks up and sees Sam, leaning up against the back gate. “You should come and jam with us one night, I’m sure you could teach us a thing or two.” He smirks at her.

She blushes at Sam as he jumps the back gate and makes his way towards her, sitting down on the steps of the back porch.

“You a songwriter?” She nods and smiles shyly at him. “Can you play me one of your songs?”

“Okay.” She finally tells him, caving in to him.
She knew she’d have to get over her fear of playing for people sooner rather than later.

She tunes her guitar and remembers the chords in her head before she places her fingers on the strings and begins to play.

“One look into your eyes, and I already know that
What I’ve got to give will never be enough for him
Don’t be shy but I feel your body shaking
Laying is our bodies there, and I feel your heart is aching”

She doesn’t look at Sam but can tell he has been captured by her so-called ability to make the birds fall silent.

“Down, Down this road we’ll go
Down, Down this road we’ll go”

She finishes playing for him and sees he has been reduced to silence.

“Wow, you’re amazing.” He chokes out. “Have you thought about pursuing this further?”

“I’m not that good.”

“You are. You really should get signed, I’d buy your albums.”

“You’re just saying that.”

“I’m not. Katniss you are so fucking good! You need to pursue this.” He exclaims. “Are you going to further your education?”

“Probably go into medicine.”

“Nope, don’t. Don’t even think about it. You’d be successful cause there’s no one who sounds like you Katniss.” He claims. “But you should meet my friend Peeta and collaborate together. It’d be magic the two of you.” He tells her. “Thanks for playing for me. I’ll be seeing you around I suppose.”

“You will be.”

He’s gone in an instant, jumping the gate and is out of sight. She sighs and places her guitar down beside her as the inanimate dread of college and everything else fills her head.

But she’s decided. This holiday, will be about fun, making memories, being reckless, free-spirited and do some soul searching. No thinking about college and the future.

She could deal with that in 8 weeks.

And she would.
Chapter End Notes

I've created a playlist of Spotify with all the songs used in this story and I'll post a link at the end of the story.

The songs used in this chapter were
Follow the Ocean by Ziggy Alberts
Down This Road by Grace Pitts

Both are Australian artists and will feature throughout the story as music is an important aspect to Peeta and Katniss.

Please let me know what you think and I'll have an update next week.
“So, what are we doing tonight?” Madge asks. The three of them have collapsed on the oversized lounges with the late afternoon breeze blowing through the open French Doors.

“I think I’m close to passing out.” Katniss replies yawning. “But you can go by all means. Even Prim, if you promise to look out for her.”

Prim’s head rises from her phone. “Can I have a drink?”

“Alcohol and jet lag aren’t good my friend.” Madge tells her. “Tomorrow night.”

“Ok. Well I’m keen to go, even if it’s for an hour or so.” Prim tells her. “Is that enough time for you two to do the dirty and leave?”

“Yeah sounds good.” Madge laughs. “What are you going to do Kat?”

“Probably just head to bed. Maybe go down to the beach for a little while.”

“Ok. Don’t get eaten by a shark.”

“I won’t.”

“Ok Primmy, I’ll let Sam know. Don’t worry Katniss, I’ll keep an eye on her.”

“And no boys.” Madge and Prim laugh hysterically. “I mean it.”

“She’ll be fine. I promise.”

Katniss sees the two off with Madge promising to keep an eye on Prim. Katniss changes into her swimmers and grabs a towel. The sun was still setting and the beach was illuminated with late afternoon sun. She switches the back porch light on, heading down to the beach. She was still surprised at how many people were still in the surf. There were the joggers and the swimmers. Some letting their dogs swim before they called it a night.

She lays her towel out on the sand and sits for a moment. The ocean calmed her and after a stressful few days of preparing for the trip she was glad she was here on the beach. She’d hit the surf in the morning. Paddling out to sea and letting the waves take her back to shore. Let the waves challenge her and push her to her limit.

But for now the ocean was enough to get her by.

The sound had been her lullaby since birth. The calming sound of the crashing waves. The wind blowing. The smell of the salt in the air.

Her father used to keep her bedroom window open of a night to allow the sound of the ocean drift into her room, soothing her to sleep along with his lullabies he’d sing her. And ever since she was little, she’d sleep with her window open to hear the sounds of the ocean.

And her father always told her; if she could see or hear the ocean she knew she wasn’t far from home. Humans were connected to the ocean with their minds and souls. Wherever they went, the
ocean followed. She was never far from home if she could see the ocean.

And if she was ever homesick just find the ocean.

She breathes in the salty air and smiles.

She is home.

She closes her eyes, focusing on the sound of the ocean. Her father said she only smiled at the beach.

Lucky for her, their house back in Santa Monica backed right onto the beach.

She opens her eyes as she hears someone approaching. Looking up at the fading light, she sees the person cast in an orange shadow.

She barely makes out the person, his hair dripping droplets of water. His wetsuit pulled down to his waist and surfboard tucked under his arm.

“You’re the girl from this afternoon?” He asks.

“Sorry?” She asks, shading her eyes from the brightness of the sunset.

“You stopped to watch me busk. I would remember that smile anywhere.”

She’s glad the light is fading so he can’t see her cheeks flush red.

“Well you’re incredible.” She tells him. “You have a wonderful voice.”

He smiles a grateful smile. “I better be going. Catch you round?”

“Possibly.”

He smiles at her “I hope so,” before he turns away, running up the beach to catch up with a mate who waits for him, without turning back to take a second look at her before he’s gone.

She smiles, goose bumps covering her body as she remembers his voice and the words he sung so beautifully.

She gets up from her towel and walks down the cool sand, letting the water crash over her feet. She spreads her toes, letting the water get between them. The water was cool and refreshing. And that little feeling of missing home was gone.

She picks up her towel and walks back to the house. Washing her feet under the tap, cleaning off the sand. She dries them, stepping inside and leaving the French door open as she realises Prim and Madge aren’t back.

Her phone sounds and she sees it’s her father calling.

She was bad at lying. Always had been and always caught out, especially by her parents. And now, she felt anxious answering it. She was sure she’d blow the cover and alibi they had agreed upon earlier.

She answers the call, exhaling the big breath she had gulped in.

“Hey Daddy.”
“Katniss, how is everything?”

“Great.”

“Where’s the girls?”

“Prim’s in bed and Madge is in the shower.”

“What’d you girls do today?”

“Not a lot. Explored the town mostly.”

“Yeah? Found any surfing spots yet?”

“I haven’t been surfing yet. But first thing in the morning I will be.”

“That’s good. I bet you have itchy feet?”

“I do but like you say, the sound of the ocean and the feel of the sand is enough to get you by.”

“It is my dear.” He laughs. “What are you girls doing tomorrow?”

She yawns into the receiver. “I’m not sure Dad. I think we’ll decide in the morning. Prim and I are still trying to get over the jetlag.”

“Us two sweetheart.” He tells her. “Anyway, we’re just checking in. I better let you go. You sound exhausted.”

“I am.”

“Text us in the morning. Tell the others we say hello. Sleep well Katniss.”

“Night Dad.”

She ends the call relieved and grateful her father didn’t press for too many more details.

She showers, getting into her pyjamas and climbing into bed. She settles in to watch Netflix and curls into the queen-sized bed Prim and her were sharing, waiting for the girls to return.

But she can barely keep her eyes open the minute her head hits the pillow.

She wakes when Prim tries to sneak into their room. She checks her phone noting it close to midnight.

“You’re back?”

Prim looks up like a deer caught in the headlights. She presses her pyjamas to her chest. “Yeah. We got a little side-tracked.”

“That’s fine. How was it?”

“Good. Met a lot of people. And that busker from this afternoon was there.”

“He was?”

“Yeah. Said he ran into you at the beach.”
Katniss nods and smiles at her. “You need to shower. You smell of bonfire.”

“Thanks.”

She’s gone from the room with her pyjamas and Katniss hears the shower turn on across the hallway.

Madge enters the room a few minutes later in her oversized t-shirt and boy shorts she calls her pyjamas. She hits the bedside lamp on and climbs over Katniss settling against the wall of the bed, cuddling into her cousin.

“So, has my sister been corrupted?”

“No. It was pretty tame. Nothing too concerning. We did run into the busker though. He seems real nice. Turns out we went to the same high school. He was two grades above me. But I don’t remember him.”

“Prim mentioned you ran into him. I ran into him at the beach.”

“He said that. Wondered why you didn’t come to the bonfire.”

Katniss nods and curls into her pillow, facing Madge. “So, you and Sam spent some quality time together?”

“We did.” She smirks. “He’s amazing Katniss. Best lay of my life.”

“He’s been your only lay.”

“No, that’s not true. But honestly, he’s been the best.” She grins. “Have you had amazing?”

Katniss shakes her head. “They’re too busy trying to get themselves off. They don’t even last five minutes.”

“More like five seconds.” She snickers. “I don’t know what it is but I hear great things about the Byron boys. Maybe we’ll hook you up with one of them.”

Katniss shrugs her shoulders and yawns. “Maybe. I’d be happy with just surfing and exploring.”

“I know you would be but maybe a little more fun would make the trip memorable.”

“Maybe.”

Prim soon joins them, falling onto her bed.

“Prim spoke to a few cute boys. But it was just talking nothing else. There was no touching, kissing or intercourse.”

“Prim can experiment. I’ll encourage experimenting, I just don’t condone intercourse at her age.”

“Geez, I’m not that hormonal. I’m waiting.”

“Good.” Madge and Katniss reply in unison.

“Until what age?” Madge asks curiously.

“16. At least.”
“Ah, just like her big sister.” Madge giggles. “You Everdeen girls are so alike.”

Katniss rolls her eyes, rolling onto her back staring up at the ceiling.

“I think I want to stay longer than two months.” Katniss admits after a long moment of silence. “I just feel like there’s not enough time for what I want to do.”

“Ask your parents cause we have so much catching up to do. And I feel as if this will be the only chance we have for a while. I’m off to Uni next year; you’ll be doing whatever your parents allow you to do. Our holidays won’t match up. It’s going to be hard.”

“You’ve got to help me sell my case. You’re good at persuading them.” Katniss tells her. “And you too Prim.”

“Sure.” She yawns.

“So, early morning surf?” Katniss asks.

“Yes and then breakfast at Sae’s café. It’s tradition.” Madge tells them. “And she has the best coffee ever. You’ll enjoy it.”

Katniss lets out a yawn and turns the bedside lamp off. “Sounds good.”

“And then we can decide what we want to do for the day.”

The girls are quiet, exhaustion taking over their bodies.

“I’m so glad you girls are here.” Madge admits. “It’s nice to have you back by my side, causing trouble.”

They’re up before the sun starts to rise. They move sleepily and slowly. Mostly wanting a few more hours of sleep and not wanting to leave the cocoon of warmth they had managed to fall into during the night.

The three girls are in their wetsuits when the sun is peeking at the horizon and they walk to the beach with their boards under their arms. A few surfers are already in the water, making use of the quietness of the beach before the beach fills with people on the Saturday.

Katniss breathes in the ocean air and smiles.

They attach the leads to their ankles and run out to the water. It’s cold on their exposed skin but is rejuvenating.

When they are waist deep they climb onto their boards and paddle out further into the ocean.

They turn on their boards and face the beach. They begin taking turns catching waves, challenging their tired bodies and moving their weary muscles as they surf back to shore and paddle back out.

They even sit on their boards, letting the waves rock them gently as they watch the sunrise behind the lighthouse, not speaking a word and enjoying the peacefulness of the early morning.

This was Katniss’ favourite time of day. Early morning. When the birds sang. When the world was silent and still and magical. When the first light started to appear and the ocean was brisk and cold. She loved sitting on her board watching her neighbours start their day. Watching their
movements in their homes from the water. She especially loves watching the world wake up. There was this strange sense of calm about it. And something beautiful seeing the world come to life.

And she especially enjoys late afternoons/early evenings when the world calmed down from the loud, rushed nature of the day to going completely calm, still and quiet.

When the sun has lightened the new day they ride a wave each back to shore and sit on the sand for a moment, drying off and admiring the view.

They don’t bother showering. They peel their wetsuits off, hanging them to dry and throw clothes on over their bikinis, Prim and Madge ride into town on the bikes and Katniss rides her skateboard, trailing behind the girls. They ride amongst the early morning traffic and pedestrians.

They lock their bikes on the stand out the front of the cafe and step inside, Katniss carrying her skateboard by the hanger and following Madge.

“Mornin’ Sae!” Madge greets an older woman at the counter, ringing up a customer’s takeaway coffee.

“Madge, hello dear, it’s been a while.” Sae hugs Madge, smiling widely at her as she steps away from the counter.

“I know. I’ve been meaning to get down here and I’m finally here. I will be for the next two months.”

“I’ve missed seeing your smiley face.” The woman tells her, squeezing Madge’s cheek. “Who, you’ve got here?”

“My cousins, Katniss and Prim, they’re from the States. We finally got them over here for visit.”

“Nice to meet you girls both. You both surfers?” She asks.

“Yes we are.” Katniss tells the woman with a smile. “Our father taught us both from a young age. Now, he can’t keep us away.”

“Have you surfed here yet?”

“Yeah, just this morning. I haven’t been for a long while.” Madge tells her. “It was great getting back out there.”

“Supposed to be some good swells on the way.” Sae tells them. “I’ll be the first one out there.” She chortles. “Take a seat, I’ll bring you over some menus.”

Madge leads them outside to a table. The outside of the cafe overlooked the beach.

“Sae is an avid surfer. She’s great.” Madge tells the sisters. “She shows those boys a thing or two.”

“Professional?”

“She won a lot of competitions but never made it to professional status, I don’t know why though.”

Sae sets some menus down on their table and moves over to another table taking their order and having a chat with the group.
“The busker is here.” Prim whispers.

“Where?” Madge asks looking around.

“Don’t make it obvious.” Prim hisses. “Over there, in the corner. Sae is talking to them.”

Katniss peaks over her shoulder and catches sight of the blond busker. She turns back and reads the menu in hopes of not bringing attention to them all with her cheeks burning red. She had had a very odd dream last night with the blond busker in it. One that she was too embarrassed to tell the girls about as it was pretty explicit.

“What, else have you girlies got planned for the day?” Sae asks, after she finishes writing down their order and picking up the menus.

“We don’t know yet.” Madge tells her. “What would you suggest?”

“Get out for the day, too many tourists are in town today.” She tells them. “There’s a gig on tonight you should check out though, starts at 7.”

“Is it all ages? Prim’s underage.”

“As long as she has someone over 18, she’ll be fine.”

“So what do you think we should do?” Madge asks.

“Head up to Brunswick Heads and spend the day there. They’ve got the reserve, the beach, good food and cute little shops you girls will like. The waves are pretty good to.”

“Oh, let’s go kayaking. I want to go kayaking.” Prim exclaims.

“You’ll enjoy that. See Ian, tell him I sent you. He’ll help you girls out.” She leaves them with a smile and to discuss their day.

During breakfast she feels the eyes of a stranger bear into her back but she doesn’t dare turn around and face him. She pretends she doesn’t feel the lingering stare of the stranger and the little smile that comes with the stare.

Prim unlocks their bikes and just before they pedal off a hand on Katniss’ elbow stops them.

Katniss spins around and is face to face with the busker, with their faces inches apart.

“You scared me.” She tells him, nervously rolling her board with her foot.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to.” He apologises with a smile, scrubbing a hand over the back of his curls. “I just wanted your attention.”

“Well you’ve got it now.” She replies with a soft smile.

“I have this gig tonight, it might not be your scene but I was wondering if you and your friends would like to come and watch. It won’t be a long gig.” He tells her. “I just, you seem like you enjoy live music.”

“I do. I like it a lot.” She tells him. “Was that the one Sae was talking about?” He nods with a shy smile. “Well, we’ll be there.” She tells him with a smile. “We better be going.”

“Right. I’ll see you all at 7. Have a good day.”
“Wait, Peeta.” Madge calls to him.

*That was his name.*

“Yeah?”

“We’re having a little get together tonight. I spoke to Sam about it; he said he’d talk to you all. It was after the gig. You’re welcome to come.”

He smiles. “Thanks. I’ll be there.” He tells them. “Nice seeing you ladies again.”

He turns on his heel fast and is back inside the café. Katniss watches him briefly; he wears a red shirt and jean shorts. His worn Akubra hat on his head with his unruly curls peaking out from the hat.

She pictures his smile as they ride home. It’s the most beautiful smile she’s ever seen. It reminds her of summer and the moon when it’s the brightest. His hair is like sand, and his eyes are like the ocean. He is all her favourite things wrapped together. He’s like a really good song and a perfectly tuned guitar.

He’s indescribable.

Theie boards are attached to the roof racks, towels and everything else thrown into the back of the car.

Ben Howard plays on the stereo and the spring air blows through the open windows. Katniss leans her head out of the window, letting the sun bathe her in the warm light of the day.

*And I'll be yours to keep.*
*A wind in the shadow,*
*a whale song in the deep.*
*A wind in the shadow, a whale song...*

“You like him.” Madge questions.

“What?” She asks turning to face her cousin.

“Peeta. You like him.”

“I hardly know him.”

“I know how you work Everdeen.” She responds. “And he’s the perfect person for you. He’s your Land and Sea.”

“My what?”

“Land. He’s the sand, music, the sun, the sky, the moon, the trees and summer. He’s sunburnt lips and the morning stars. He’s the start of spring and the death of the winter.” She explains. “And he’s the sea. He’s the waves, the blue of the ocean, the surf, everything you love about the sea. He’s what you would describe as home.” She continues. “He is where your heart lies.”

“I don’t even know him.”

“But you want to.” She speaks. “Please, get to know him tonight.” Madge demands. “He seems like a great guy. You have a lot in common.”

Katniss shrugs her shoulders and leans her head back against the sill of the window and watches
Katniss shrugs her shoulders and leans her head back against the sill of the window and watches the world pass by and thinks about the blond busker and his beautiful voice.

Brunswick Heads is beautiful.

It’s one of the most charming places Katniss has ever been in her life. It’s buzzing with tourists and residents.

The water is so clear and boasts a beautiful blue. She has to take a photo of it to send to her parents. The camera though does no justice to how beautiful it really is.

The walks are fascinating and peaceful. Kayaking is even more beautiful. The surf is magnificent.

Their lunch is one of the best lunches they have had in their lives. They strike up conversations with the patrons who tell them stories and guide them to local wonders. The shopkeepers are friendly and welcoming and eager for a good conversation.

The sun is beaming just like everyone else. Their good mood rubbing off onto everyone else, making their jet lag not as bad and the feeling of being homesick dissipate further.

And they join the rite of passage, jumping off the long wooden bridge into the water.

And it makes Katniss not want to return home at all.

“You’re going to have to try your absolute hardest to convince them to let me stay longer.” Katniss tells Madge as they head back to Byron, Prim sound asleep in the backseat.

“I’m working on it.”

“I don’t think I ever want to leave the country.” She admits.

“Have fun convincing your parents.” Madge utters. “From what I’ve heard, you’re headed straight to college in January.”

“Not if I can convince them otherwise.”

“Become an overseas student. You can come to University with me. You can become more culturally aware because two months is not long enough.”

“I know.” Katniss agrees, frowning at the thought of leaving in exactly 60 days.

They shower when they get home, washing the ocean from their bodies. Madge speaks to their parents this time. She was a much better liar. It wasn’t that she was lying, she told them they were going to a gig in town but skipped the part about the party tonight.

What they didn’t know wouldn’t hurt them.

They did their hair, put on some nice casual clothes and applied lip-gloss. They slipped into their shoes and grabbed their bags before walking into town.

The house was ready for the get together after the gig. Drinks already chilling and snacks ready to put into bowls.

They ate dinner at the Sushi train and wandered down the street to the pub. People filtered in, filling the building and dance space in front of the stage. The bar was bustling with drinks being ordered and another musician winding down from entertaining the dinner crowd. They had a good view of the small stage and Madge went and got them all drinks.
A boy, who was not much older than Prim came up to their table with a shy smile on his face.

“Prim. How are you going?”

“Hi Jai. I’m good.” She replies with a smile. “And you?”

“I’m good.”

“Jai, this is my sister Katniss.”

“Nice to meet you. Prim told me a lot about you.” He smiles, holding out his hand.

“Did she?” Katniss asks, shaking the boys hand.

“Yeah she did.” He says and someone whistling gets his attention. “I’ve got to go but I’ll be by tonight if the party is still happening?”

“It is.” Prim tells him. “I’ll see you later.”

He smiles and heads off through the crowd, Katniss watching him curiously.

“Who’s he?”

“I met him last night. He’s name’s Jai. He’s really nice.”

“And how old is this Jai?”

“Almost 16. He hangs with Peeta and Sam.”

“Well, he’s good looking. I’ll give him that. He’s not cocky?”

“Nowhere near it. Very laid back and kind of dorky.” Prim tells her. “He has an older brother and sister as well. He’s 20. Finnick is engaged and an expectant father. Hopefully you’ll meet him tonight. He’s really cool too. His sister is at University and your age.”

Katniss nods and searches across the room to where Jai ended up. He stands with a group who talk to Peeta who is setting up his instruments.

“They should all be coming tonight.” Prim tells her. “They’re all real nice. I met them all last night. I think they’re might be a few extras but they are all keen to meet you.”

“So you and Madge talked about me last night?”

“We did. Nearly every conversation started with my ‘sister Katniss’, everyone wanted to meet you. I think it’s the American accent too.”

Katniss rolls her eyes and Madge comes back with their drinks.

Peeta starts his set and Katniss has her focus on only him. He’s taken her on a journey and she never wants him to stop. She wants to hear him sing forever. Singing her to bed, singing to her late at night and early morning. She wants to hear him forever.

Sam finds his way to Madge partway through the gig. Madge sitting on the surfers lap as they listen to Peeta play. They’re giddy and touchy and Katniss knows she won’t be seeing much of them tonight.
“An ochre love in the heart of all,
an ochre love and the cold sea shores dear,
my blood is yours for the night,
for my fear is only little things like
these cold seas and broken strings,

cause my blood is yours for the night,
late nights and this warmth between your thighs,
warm eyes and this warmth between your thighs,

Winter love so soft winter love so warm, youngblood”

Peeta ends the gig to a loud applause and Katniss feels goose bumps prickle her skin. Her heart is racing a million miles a minute and she swears she’s been to heaven and back in the last hour and a half.

Sam gives them a lift back to the house with everyone else on their way in the next half-an-hour.

“How long has Peeta been playing for?” Madge asks Sam.

“Not long. He asked for a guitar before he turned 17. So almost two years.”

“He’s great.”

“He’s one of the best ones I’ve seen.” Sam tells Madge with a smile. “He’s in the process of writing for his next album.”

“How exciting.”

“We’re all excited for him. He deserves all the success.”

Sam pulls into the drive and Madge goes ahead unlocking the house. The four of them do the final set up. An iPod is connected to the speakers and the music plays out tunes throughout the house.

“I didn’t forget either.” Sam tells them girls, pulling out a baggy filled with weed.

“Good man.” Madge praises with a grin and kissing his cheek. “There’ll be none of this when the parents are here.”

“We better make use of the no-parents then.”

Sam squeezes Madge’s arse and nuzzles her cheek. The two of them giggle and start kissing.

“Get a room.” Katniss tells them, rolling her eyes.

“We will, once the guests arrive.” Madge reassures her. “She’s pure this one.”

“I am not.” Katniss huffs and dumps a bag of potato chips into a bowl.

“Oh, that must be everyone.” Madge excitedly says when the doorbell sounds.

The house is filled with around thirty guests. Nothing too big that could get out of hand. Most of them are friends of Sam and Peeta’s. Those who usually have post gig drinks or those who frequent their bonfires and Sunday afternoon barbeques.

Katniss head is racing from all the people she has met and probably won’t remember. But she’s polite and speaks to everyone, everyone interested in her and her life. She finds out a bit about
Jai and Prim are cozy on the couch together. Jai nurses a beer and Prim a vodka mixed drink. Katniss had promised her a drink or two in exchange for keeping her word about their antics. She left the two teenagers to be who seemed deep in conversation. Madge and Sam had disappeared upstairs and Katniss could hear the faint moaning just above the music. She shook her head and grabbed a drink from one of the buckets and made her way outside. It was becoming stuffy inside and she was becoming claustrophobic with all the people inside. She was never good with crowds.

And in the far corner of the yard she spies the busker looking deep in thought, watching the waves from the back fence.

“It was a great gig tonight.” She tells him when she slips in beside him.

He jumps slightly at her sneaking up on him but he smiles. “Thanks. I’m still new to the whole gig thing.”

“It doesn’t seem like it. You seem like a natural.”

He smiles, the light of the moon reflecting off of his eyes. He’s even more beautiful under this light.

“I hear you play.” He speaks, turning to look at her in the moonlight. She looks at him confused. “Sam mentioned it. Said he saw you playing yesterday afternoon.”

“Oh, yes.” She blushes. “He did.”

“He said you sounded lovely.” He says. “Something about the birds falling silent when they hear you.”

“I’m not that good.” She tells him, pushing a loose strand of her hair behind her ear. “I think the birds stop to listen for you.”

He smiles once again and takes a sip of his beer. “So, are you enjoying your trip so far?” He asks.

“So far I am. I don’t think I want to go home.”

“Then don’t. We’d happily take you under our wing.”

“Try convincing my parents that.”

“Well, our parents have to let us go some time. Their children do have to go off into the big world and experience it for themselves. That’s what I did. I packed up my stuff the minute I finished my school exams and I moved down here. I was inspired by their travels and time alone. It was time for my own adventures and time alone. Time to see the world with my own two eyes and see who I wanted to be as a person.” He tells her. “If they love you, they’ll let you go.”

“I wish. They want me to become someone I never picture myself becoming and spending the next 7 years studying medicine is not what I picture.”

“Then what do you picture yourself doing?” He quizzes.

She turns to him and smiles. “This.” She tells him. “Music and surfing.”

“I see nothing bad about that.”
“I don’t either. It’s just they don’t see it as a serious life choice.”

“I’ve been living out of my van for almost two years. In this short amount of space I’ve learnt perspective and what I really need in my life. I don’t need flashy cars or houses. I just need something that makes me smile. Brings me joy and happiness. I’ve learnt about myself and I know that if I only ever have my music and the water, then I’ll be a fortunate man. And if I get the chance to share it with a beautiful woman then I’ll be extra blessed.”

“Sounds like a good life.” She exhales. “I think though it was time for some self-discovery and some time alone, when I get the chance.”

“Time alone. That’s exactly what I’m calling this venture.” He says. “It’s good to get some perspective.”

“I honestly don’t know who I am in this big world.”

“I don’t think anyone does sweetheart. At least not for us lost souls. That’s at least what I was and I still am. I still have a long way to go before I find my footing, even if it looks like I have my life together.”

“I’m a lost soul. I spend my days chasing the sun and dreaming of the ocean.” She admits with a shy smile. “I run away from love but daydream about having it. I walk along the sand and picture a life of saving people but find myself singing too loudly and racing the moon home after getting sidetracked by the coast. I leave home of the morning and don’t return until dinnertime because I got sidetracked and followed the coast or discovered something new.” She tells him. “It’s just all about land and sea for me.”

He smiles and in that moment she sees everything Madge mentioned earlier. Sand, music, the sun, the sky, the moon, the trees and summer. Sunburnt lips and the morning stars. The start of spring and the death of the winter. He’s the sea, the waves, the blue of the ocean, the surf, the marine life and everything else she loves about the sea. He’s what home would be. He’s where her heart would lie.

“Very true.” He agrees smiling at her. “Land and sea.” He repeats.

They watch the waves for a long while, neither of them speaking.

“Peeta?” She asks. “What do you love most about the ocean?”

“It’s always there. Its underrated qualities are stability and loyalty. The ocean doesn’t break your heart, it doesn’t go behind your back and kiss the girl you like. The ocean is always there and always welcoming.”

She looks up from the ocean and smiles at him. “It doesn’t talk back.” She laughs.

“It’s a good listener also. I tell all my secrets to the ocean.”

“Me too.” She tells him.

He drains his beer but doesn’t dare takes his eyes from the ocean. His arm does find its way around her waist, holding her as the waves roll onto the shore.

She’s never been one for public intimacy or affection. She’s preferred the arms of a boy holding her behind closed doors. The warmth and the attention they give her. She’s been starved of attention her whole life and craves it from those who are bad for her. Those who’ll never make her happy long term but are there at the present. They were a quick-fix solution and she was fine by
that. She never needed to beg, boys were the ones who gave her attention without her lifting a finger.

She was also bad at saying no. She fell into the notion of that quick intimacy. Losing herself for an hour or so. She loved the thrill of sneaking out of the house. Being reckless and wild. She loved the high of being with a boy in the back seat of his car, tugging at his clothes and feeling boneless afterwards. They gave her attention and she took all of it when she could. They had an agreement and they were fine by it. She remained stone cold and closed off to the boys. She never opened up to them post-sex. They didn’t deserve to know her feelings or know her life.

But this type of intimacy, a shy arm slung around her waist was what made her weak at the knees, especially from the boy who was magical. They had opened up to each other, that barrier Katniss put up knocked down for the special ones. She was open and honest and wanted to spill everything to him. Wants him to know every secret she has ever told the ocean. She wants to lose herself to him and have him lose himself to her in the secrets they tell. She wants intimacy and affection and post-sex pillow talk. She wants to share her music and her heart. She wants the comfort of his arms and to feel his fingers and lips. She wants his lips to sing a song for her and never let her go.

She desires her land and sea to consume her, make her fall apart and put her back together. She craves the warmth and to know what it felt to be between his sheets as they sung out cries of pleasure and made music and shared a part of themselves to each other.

He squeezes her hip and she turns to him, looking into his eyes and smiling.

He begins singing into the night and she feels her heart surge in her chest.

“Cause I want to be your bad habit when the nights done,
when everybody’s gone home and we are sober,
Cause I want to be your bad habit when the nights done,
when everybody’s gone home and we’re sober now.”

He sings out to sea and she watches him in the faint light of the night, cuddling into his side as his folksy tune takes her on a journey.

“And these chapters taught us well
and these chapters taught us how to know,
from all this talk of the terror in the nights
and these wolves in the dark
but we’ve come to,
I said we’ve come too far
said we’ve come too far dear not to be,
lovers now, lovers here, lovers dear,
and we cannot drown I said we will not drown dear,
cause we are made of water dear made of water here;”

And she knew she wanted to love and be loved.

Chapter End Notes

This update came quick. I'm just excited to share this with you all. Updates will vary between a few days and a week, depending on how busy I am.
Please let me know what you all thought. Authors like feedback, it fuels our inspiration and desires to continue writing.

Songs used in this chapter:
Ben Howard - Only Love
Ziggy Alberts - Youngblood
Ziggy Alberts - Waterside

Next chapter, Katniss and Peeta spend the day together.

Come and find me on Tumblr - Herainab
“It’s freezing!”

She hears him chuckle as he paddles further out to the ocean. She chases after him with pale morning light guiding their way out to dark sea.

The world is dead still.

But she is alive.

And so is he.

He has awakened something inside of her. Something she never knew existed inside of her. Her soul has been awakened. And she feels like a totally new person. She’s happy with the path she’s taken in just the couple of days she’s been here.

And she finally understands what she might want in life.

“Wait up.” She calls.

He looks over his shoulder and smiles his signature, 100-watt smile. A smile that makes her weak and her whole body warm. It makes her feel incredible.

She’s sure she’s never met someone whose smile makes her feel so incredible.

It’s the same smile he gave her last night.

She catches up to him and their boards are side by side as they paddle further out.

Prim and Madge were still dead to the world. Prim sleeping off the little bit of alcohol she consumed last night. Madge and Sam a tangle of limbs, coming out of the haze of alcohol, pot, sex and love. Katniss didn’t expect to see the two of them until mid-morning.

Katniss, despite the cloudy head, still managed to fight her alarm and get her arse down to the beach for her predawn surf.

Despite her body’s protests she knew she’d feel better afterwards.

Peeta stops paddling and sits up on his board, his feet dangling in the water. She sits silently beside him. The gentle rocking of the waves brings a smile to her face and they watch the sea and the sky. They watch the sun fight the night sky and the stars. The first light signaling the new day before the world becomes chaotic and crazy. The last day of the weekend as it would become rushed and meaningless before the start of the new week.

Moments like this made the early mornings worth it. They weren’t in any rush. They had nowhere to be. It was just them and the world.

And they both knew that the beauty of the world isn’t appreciated like it should be.

But Katniss loved this part of the day.
And she learnt Peeta did as well. But he mostly loved the late sunset. He loved chasing the last bit of sun and racing the stars and the moon. He loved the orange hue of the late afternoon and tended to admire that rather than the afternoon waves.

He turns to her and smiles. “Show us what you can do Everdeen.” He smirks.

She smiles at him and turns her board around. “Just you wait Mellark.”

He’s left gawking at her after she shows off her moves, challenging herself on the monster waves and the ones that would leave other’s shaking on their boards.

“You’re bloody good.”

She shrugs her shoulders, grinning at him.

They spend time riding the waves, taking turns and challenging their bodies. They’re silent for most of the time but wide smiles are plastered on their faces.

She’s breathless when she turns to him. Her heart racing, the blood pumping throughout her veins, she feels more alive than ever before.

“Coffee?” She asks him.

He nods and they surf back to shore. It’s lighter now with the sun a little higher in the sky and the world beginning to wake.

Katniss is on a high. She always felt like this after a great surf and today was one of the best ones she’s had in quite a while.

They rest their boards on the sand. Sand sticks to their wet feet and hands, they pull their wetsuits to their waists and she uncoils her braid and lets her long-wet ebony hair cascade down her back.

She turns to face him and catches him staring at her, his jaw almost hitting the floor.

“You coming?” She asks him picking up her board and ignoring the heat that races to her cheeks.

He nods and follows behind her, his board tucked under his arm. She leads him up the sandy path, through the back gate and up the yard to the porch. They lean their boards up against the wall and pull their wet wetsuits off, wrapping their towels around their waists.

The house is still quiet and everyone else is still sound asleep. She pulls two cups down from the cupboard, grabs the milk from the fridge, closing the door with her hip.

“Let me help you.”

He moves to her side and he helps her make their coffee. He greedily accepts the cup and she takes her own, warming her hands with the ceramic mug.

They settle on the back porch on the daybed, much like they had the night before. Katniss tucks her feet underneath her body and rests a cushion on her lap, cradling the cup of warm coffee in her hands. They watch the ocean, the waves and people moving through the water and along the sand

She sips her coffee and exhales. This was her routine. Morning surf and then her morning coffee. The rush of the surf followed by the caffeine coursing through her body. It put her in a good mood for the whole day.

But the company of Peeta, his company really made her whole day. Maybe even the rest of her
But the company of Peeta, his company really made her whole day. Maybe even the rest of her week.

She scoots closer to him with their knees and hips touching.

He sneaks a hand around her shoulders and pulls her even closer to him.

He sips his coffee and she sips hers, remembering last night. A night she’s sure she’ll never forget.

They sit on the day bed on the porch. The party still carried on inside and they eached nursed a drink and watched the dark waves roll onto the sand and listen to the roar of the crashing waves.

“So Miss America, tell me about yourself.”

“I think you know everything about me.”

“We’ve barely scratched the surface.” He smiles. “I want to know the deep stuff.”

She cocks an eyebrow. “The deep stuff?”

“The deep stuff.” She exhales, preparing herself for what he’s going to ask. But he shocks her with his reply, “Like what’s your favourite colour?”

“Green.” She tells him with a smile. “Yours?”

“Orange. Like a sunset.”

“A beach sunset?”

“Exactly.” He chuckles. “And let me guess you’re a spring baby?”

“How’d you know?”

“The appreciation of the nature of the world. The love for the pollen on your noses and the death of the winter. The rebirth and rejuvenation. The start of something new. New life and renewal. The shining and blossoming and thriving under the warming sun and the longer days. But technically in Australia you’d be an Autumn baby. But just like spring, you’re the balance of day and night before night takes over and brings the coming winter. You’re the transitioning leaves. You’re the change in the temperature. The months of harvest. You’re spiritual transformation. You are autumn.”

She smiles at him. “And let me guess, you’re a spring baby?”

He nods and takes a sip of his bear. “October 22nd.”

“You’re the dandelion in the spring.” She mumbles.

“What?” He asks.

“Nothing.” She replies.

But silently she thinks. He’s the dandelion in the spring. The symbol of hope. Of rebirth. The promise of life being good. Something her father constantly told her as a young girl.

Springtime was a magical time. Her favourite time mostly.

She smiles at him and draws closure to his body.
“So am I an autumn baby or a Spring baby?” She asks him with a smile. “Because you’re definitely a spring baby to me.”

“When’s your birthday?”

“May 8th.”

“You’re a spring baby, it’s rooted deep inside your soul. You’re the warming temperature and the longer days. The pollen on your nose and the death of winter.” He tells her. “You’re land and sea.”

She looks into his eyes and truly notices everything about him. The ocean blue eyes, the freckles on the bridge of his nose and his ruddy cheeks. The pale eyelashes, that are a beautiful golden colour under the faint glow of the porch light. His lips, he moistens with his pink tongue.

His lips turn upwards and she’s pulled to his eyes.

He stares back at her with such intensity, she can’t tell if she’s dizzy from just him or the alcohol. She likes to think it’s him.

“You have beautiful eyes.” He whispers softly. “They are almost silver like moonlight. I’ve never seen anything as beautiful than your eyes.”

She blushes and smiles shyly at him. “Thank you. Yours are pretty magical also. Almost like the ocean... my favourite thing.”

They are closer than ever before and he places his hand on her cheek, brushing his thumb over her cheek gently.

“I’ve spent an hour with you and I’m already so crazy about you.” He admits in a whisper.

“Me too.” She whispers.

“You have this effect on me. One, I’ve never experienced before.”

She smiles at him and anticipates his lips. Her stomach clenches and the heat races to her cheeks and across her body.

He touches his lips to her ever so softly like light morning rain. He isn’t pushy or needy. He just wants to touch her, know what her soft lips feel like against his own as the attraction becomes too hard to ignore.

He tastes of beer and smells of the ocean and cologne.

But the desire becomes apparent and they both want more. His kisses turn into the rolling waves when the tide is high. They pull her under and she never wants to resurface. She wants to drown in his kisses and his touch.

She wants to drown in him.

She doesn’t realise how much time has passed but it feels like hours. She’s so lost in his touch, the feel of his tongue and the overwhelming smell of his cologne and the ocean. She thinks this might be her knew favourite smell.

The breaking of a glass inside breaks them apart. Her lips are red and swollen and they are both breathless.
But they wear wide smiles and become lost in each other.

“Did you sleep well?” He asks her, bringing her out of her reminiscing.

She nods and rests her head on his shoulder. “You?”

“I did. A beautiful women like you beside me, even if we slept on the couch, it was the best nights sleep I’ve had in a long while.”

They had been kicked to the couch. Prim was passed out, dead to the world, snoring loudly and Madge and Sam were locked in Madge’s room, no sign of resurfacings. Katniss played host and farewelled everyone when they left. And when Peeta got up to leave she grabbed his hand.

“I’m just going to sleep in my van.” He told her.

“Stay with me.”

*He nodded, smiling. “Always.”*

She had fallen asleep in his arms, her ear on his heart and a smile on her face. She woke up with a smile on her face and a long good morning kiss.

“I like waking with the birds.” He told her.

“Me too. You miss too much of the day if you don’t.”

“My parents had a bakery cafe by the beach back home. We used to be awake at 4 to prepare for the day. If it was my day off I still woke and headed down to the beach. I was always at the beach every chance I got. And if I wasn’t on the beach I was close by. Either writing, strumming my guitar or riding my skateboard.”

“I was always the same. My parents woke early and I’m a light sleeper. I woke at dawn and began the day with a surf or swim. And if I didn’t have my swim or surf I’d be cranky for the whole day.”

“Me too. I needed the fresh air, the thrill and the rush of surfing. Then my morning coffee.”

“Tell me about it.” She giggles.

He nuzzles her temple with his nose and she’s putty at his touch.

“What time are you playing?”

“12.”

“The lunchtime crowd?”

“It’s the best time. You should come along and watch.”

“I was planning to. Even if I have to come alone.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll make it worth your while.”

She smiles at him and sips her coffee.

No one had ever had this effect on her. No one made her putty. No one made her swoon and blush. No one brought butterflies to her tummy or took the time to appreciate her. They never
sought to dig deeper. They only saw her on the outside, the no bullshit kind of girl she was. They didn’t know the deep stuff. The things that moved her, made her cry or laugh out loud. They didn’t know she had a sense of humour or how caring she could be. They didn’t know her at all. Most of her friends, it took them years before they decided to chip away the layers to her soul and reach inside, understanding her heart and her mind. And in just a few hours Peeta has reached inside of her, rooting himself inside of her soul not intending to leave anytime soon.

He didn’t fall for the flowers she had to offer, he got to know the roots of her soul, understanding her more than anyone else and has gradually worked his way to the surface, appreciating the flowers as well as the roots.

Her phone sounds from beside her and she answers the call, seeing her father calling her.

“Hey Dad.”

“I wouldn’t think you’d be up this early.” She can hear the humour in his tone.

“Why would I waste a perfectly good Sunday morning sleeping when I can be surfing?”

“How is it?”

“Wonderful. I’ll have to take you out when you get here tomorrow. Ready for the challenge?”

“I certainly am. I’m just on my way for a surf. Couldn’t resist.” He laughs heartily. “Anyway, just thought I’d check in. Any plans for the day?”

“I think we’ll head to the markets and probably just chill out afterwards. We haven’t really made a decision as of yet. I’ll converse with the girls when they wake up?”

“You’re telling me they are still snoozing?”

“They sure are.”

“Prim’s never been a good morning person.” He states. “Or Madge. Anyway, I’ll call you later. Have a great day.”

“Will do Dad. Bye.” She ends the call and turns to Peeta, seeing an amused looked on his face.

“Let me make you breakfast.” He says.

“I don’t want a lot. Toast is just fine.”

“Let me make you toast then. I insist.”

He pulls her back inside, dropping their coffee cups in the sink and he pulls her body flush against his and leans down, capturing her lips. She can feel the warm coffee on his lips and he most likely can feel the warm coffee on hers.

They pull apart, only inches between their faces. He pushes a loose strand of hair behind her ear and smiles.

“Thank you.” She tells him so softly, she’s unsure if he actually hears her.

His lips turn upwards and he kisses her lips briefly before letting her go.

They eat toast, smothered with peanut butter and drink another cup of coffee.
“What made you decide to live out of a van? I mean, most guys your age wouldn’t be game enough to do it.” She asks him as they walk out to his van that is parked in the driveway.

“I wanted an adventure mostly. Something that would challenge me and teach me. I’m all about learning and I thought I could give it a go. I needed time alone mostly and this is the perfect way to get it.”

“Doesn’t it get lonely?”

“It does but that just makes me strive to meet more people, engage in conversations and travel more. You meet a lot of people on ventures like this, backpackers, tourists, locals.” He tells her, pushing a damp strand of hair behind her ear. “And it makes it easier with my own family, this time alone. I mean, it makes it worth it coming home after weeks and weeks away. I can face them and they seem to enjoy my visits.” He tells her, sliding open his van door and opening the back of the van.

“Were your parents pleased you’re doing this?”

“It was a mixed reaction. They were a little shocked at first but they’ve come around to it now. I didn’t want to continue to please them. And they’ve encouraged us kids to spread our wings but not spread them this far.” He laughs. “But I’ve enjoyed these last two years and they can see how much enjoyment I’ve gotten from my time alone. And I’ve loved every moment of living on the road and I’ll continue to love every other moment. You know, it’ll be a good story to tell my kids about living on the road, meeting new people and all these memories. I hope to inspire them to want to adventure and experience life a little differently.”

She smiles at him and sits down in his van, he sits down beside her.

“Do you get homesick?” She asks him.

“I did at first but as long as I can see the ocean I’m cured. I was born in a room that overlooked the surf life saving club. I was born to the ocean sounding in the room’s window and grew up listening to the waves. I’ve been a duck to water since I could breathe. I was happiest when I was near the water and it was tradition for late night walks along the beach to help me fall asleep. So the ocean has always been apart of me and has always been a cure when I’ve been sick, heartbroken or upset. Home is where your heart is; my heart belongs to the sea. I want to die a fool by the sea.”

She smiles and brings her knees up to her chest. “I know the feeling. I’ve been a beach baby the minute I was born.”

He places a hand on her knee and squeezes it.

“I hope my parents can see how happy I am during this trip.” She admits. “They’ve never been around much to take notice of me or my sister. But when they are around they always have an opinion that is never right. They hardly understand me and where my heart belongs, And the moment I was old enough to make decisions on my life they scolded me and suddenly they were around treating me like a baby. They think they know what’s best for me but really, they have no idea because they don’t know who I am.”

“Anything I can do to help you?”

“Help me convince them that I’m not cut out to be a surgeon. Help them learn some perspective and teach me some too.”

He smiles and links his fingers through hers. “I can do that.”
She turns around and looks into his van. “So this is your home?”

“This is my home.” He turns around. “You learn what you need and don’t need in life. All I really need is a box of CD’s, some clothing, my guitar and surfboards. The things that help my soul.”

She smiles as she checks out his van. A double bed is propped up on boards with storage underneath it most likely filled with the things he needs mostly. Photos and drawings are pinned to a pin board; journals are stacked on his bed, his camera and laptop. His guitar is propped up against the end of his bed.

And she can imagine herself living a life like this. Her few possessions and everything that makes her happy in life. She smiles and looks back into his van. “Do you mind?”

“No, take a look for yourself.”

She steps into the van, ducking to avoid hitting her head on the roof of the van. She sits on the end of his bed and picks up his camera.

“I imagined you to shoot in film.”

“I’ve been searching for one for a long while but the digital ties me over. I can film or take photographs. It’s easier when I’m putting things up on my social media. I am a sucker for disposable cameras to.”

She nods and powers it up, looking at the replay button and flicking through his shots. Most of them are of him surfing, skating or busking. There’s people and places. It’s a mixed catalogue of documentation.

“I’ve got a million memory sticks, I’ve filled most of them up.”

“You don’t delete your photos?”

“No. I never do. Its memories.”

She smiles and looks back down at the camera. She sees two boys who look remarkably similar to him, both pulling faces and picking on their younger brother. They have their surfboards and wetsuits on. Another shots is of a baby, not even a year old resting in the arms of his father, pointing out to the ocean.

“You have a nephew?” She asks him.

“I do.” He beams. “And a niece.”

“He’s adorable.” She tells him.

He smiles and sits down beside her. His knee brushing against hers. She gets a little look into his life and finds herself smiling at all his images. All the adventures he has had in almost two years spent on the road.

She turns his camera off and he places his hand on her cheek, leaning in and kissing her so softly on her lips before moving away.

“Can I use your shower?” He asks with a small smile.

She nods and sets the camera back on the bed. He follows her into the house with his clothes and towel and she shows him where the shower is. He thanks her and closes the door between them.
She slips into her bedroom and flops down beside her sister on her twin bed and Prim peaks out from the sheet.

“Peeta still here?” Prim asks sleepily. Katniss nods. “I saw the two of you kissing last night. I never imagined you to be this girl.”

“He’s different.”

“He is. He’s lovely.” She tells her big sister. “You two looked cozy on the couch last night too.”

“You saw us?”

“I came down for a glass of water around three. You two were dead to the world.”

“How’s the head?” She asks her sister, deflecting the topic.

“Fine. I’m not too bad.”

“Good. I don’t want Mom and Dad finding out.”

“They won’t.” Prim assures her. “So what are you and Peeta?”

“I don’t know. We’ve just met.”

“You both have a strong attraction for each other. It’s going to turn into something even if you don’t think it will be. This is going to be more than a fling.”

“You’re 14, what do you know?”

“A lot. I just hope none of you have a broken heart when we leave.”

The pit in the bottom of Katniss’ stomach starts to hurt and she’s unsure at why.

Peeta’s head of blond curls peaks around the corner a little while later, his mile wide smile on his face. “Hey, thanks for that.”

“No worries.”

“I’ve got to head into town to meet a couple of people. I’ll see you at the markets?” He asks.

She nods and gets up from the bed. “You will. I’ll walk you out.”

He leads her down the stairs and to the front of the house; she opens the front gate for him and follows him to his van. He climbs into his front seat, winding down his window.

“You’ve left your surfboard.” She tells him.

He flashes that smile again. “I’ll come back for it. It’s an excuse so I can see you again.”

She feels her insides go warm. He leans his head out of the window towards her and she meets his lips for a kiss. A kiss that fills her insides with even more warmth.

“See you at 12.” He says breathless when they pull apart.

She nods and steps away as he drives his van out of the driveway and into the morning traffic.
It’s cool when they’re ready to leave. Madge and Sam are still hung-over. Madge wanting to stay in the house but Sam telling her the fresh air would do her some good.

They walk to the markets together, Madge and Sam leading them to the grounds. There are people everywhere, leaving and entering the grounds. They throw a donation into the charity bucket as they step through the gates.

Stalls upon stalls are set up and Katniss can see why Madge raves about the markets.

“We’ll have to come to the farmer’s markets on Thursday.” Sam tells them. “But make it early. All the good stuff goes quickly.”

“There’s nothing better than fresh watermelon and pineapple.” Madge tells them girls.

“And the strawberries and rockmelon.”

“We call it cantaloupe.” Madge teases Sam, poking his side.

“Sorry.” He apologises and leans down, kissing her forehead. “Let’s take a look. Peeta’s on in half an hour.”

They explore the stores, looking through clothes, produce, jewellery, handcrafted wares and other bits and pieces. They buy fresh lemonade and head to the stage. A belly-dancing group is finishing up and Peeta is getting ready to go up on stage. Sam helps him carry his gear onto the stage and comes and joins the girls who stand at the front of the stage. A small crowd gathers, mostly his followers.

Peeta flashes his smile and greets everyone before beginning. More shoppers are drawn to the stage from Peeta’s magical performance.

He played his small half and hour set and finished with his crowd favourite.

“Most of you know what this song is but for those of you who don’t know, Simple Things is a song written for my infatuation for Byron Bay, the community and the travellers. Byron Bay changed my music and my mental space in such a positive way – I wrote it inspired by making eye contact for several seconds with complete strangers in the middle of singing songs on the street. Most of the strangers were beautiful women.” He chuckles. “So this is Simple Things (The Ocean Song.)”

“Do you love the ocean and could you love the ocean with me,  
cause I’ll be yours, cause I’ll be yours  
These are the simple things, and I want you  
These are the simple things,  
my love, my love.”

He keeps his eyes on her the entire time and his folksy sounding voice roots itself deep into her soul and leaves her wanting more. He’s left an impression on her and she knows she’ll forever be in love with his music, lyrics and art.

“Thank you.” He tells the gathering with a thankful smile and leaves the stage.

They meet him at the side of the stage as the next act sets up. He embraces Katniss, burying his nose in the crook of her neck and holding onto her. She relishes in the embrace and doesn’t want to let him go.

“Come on lovebirds, let’s get some lunch. I’m starving.” Madge tells them, breaking them apart.
Sam and Peeta carry his gear to his van. Peeta drives his van out of the grounds and to the house, telling them he’ll meet them in town. They find the burger shack and grab a table and Peeta shows up with his skateboard in his hands and bare feet.

Katniss smiles at his laid back style and motions for him to sit down beside her. Prim is overlooking her purchases from the market.

“You buy anything?” Peeta asks Katniss.

“No, not today. There was lots of nice things but it didn’t matter.”

“Maybe next time.” He tells her with a hopeful smile.

She nods and smiles at him as the waitress comes to their table, taking their orders and then leaving again with the menus.

Five burgers and a large plate of fries are brought out. They dig in like they haven’t eaten in weeks and polish off the plate of fries.

“What are your plans for tonight?” Sam asks them.

“We don’t have any. Anything happening?”

“They usually have a Sunday afternoon barbecue but it’s not happening today. Maybe we could hang out again tonight, just a smaller group.” Sam suggests. “I’ve got to be up early to get to work so not too big of a night.”

“A barbecue at our house then? We can have a late afternoon surf, some dinner and a few drinks?” Madge suggests.

“Sounds good to me.” Peeta tells Madge.

The afternoon waves are choppy and challenging. A late afternoon storm is rolling in from the north. Swells are coming from straight from deep sea right up onto the reef causing big barrel waves, Katniss’ favourite kind of waves.

They surf and laugh. They watch the clouds roll in and feel the strong winds on their faces. They hear the rumble of the thunder and watch the flash of lightning. The crack of light on the horizon as the sun becomes lost in the clouds, the sun swallowed up for another day.

They let the waves bring them back into shore and they drag their boards up the sand. Sand sticks to their wet feet and their hair blows in the late afternoon ocean breeze.

They walk through the back gate and up onto the deck when the rain starts. But none of them move quickly for cover, they’re already wet from the surf and the rains bring happiness to Katniss. The rains are always welcome back home and Katniss relishes in it when the rain does fall.

She stands in the backyard and lets it rain down on her. She holds out her hands and lets the droplets slip between her fingers. She finds herself laughing and tips her head back, looking up at the darkening sky. Even with the thunder and lightning looming closers she’s not threatened or scared.

When the rain has soaked her she turns and walks back to the porch, undercover where everyone else stands, watching the rain fall with smiles. Peeta throws her a towel and she thanks him, stripping out of her wetsuit and wrapping the towel around her waist and sitting down on the
daybed beside Peeta who wraps his arm around her shoulder and kisses her wet cheek.

They drink beer and watch the storm ease up while the boys cook dinner. Music plays from the living room and the windows and doors opened right up.

“How long are the parents staying for?” Sam asks.

“We don’t know. They’re coming and going when they please. But it’s mostly to keep an eye on us and make sure where not partying and trashing the place.” Madge tells him. “And they’re specifically not telling us anything which is frustrating.”

“It is.” Katniss and Prim agree.

“It’s like they can’t trust us being here on our own.”

“Well, we’ll just have to make the most of it when they’re not here telling us what to do.” Katniss adds, tipping her beer back to sip from it.

They eat steak sandwiches and drink beer. Conversation is kept casual and constant and they get to know each other a little bit better. Sharing tidbits and stories.

Prim volunteers to do the dishes and tidy up the kitchen and Madge and Sam head upstairs.

“Let’s go for a walk.” Peeta suggests.

“Where to?” Katniss asks.

“To town, go and get some gelato. It’s the best gelato ever.”

She smiles and stands up. She throws on some shorts and a tank top over her bikini and Peeta throws on a shirt and shorts. Prim remains behind for some time to herself.

“We’ll come home via the beach.” Peeta tells her as they step out onto the street.

He speaks while they walk into town and she’s happy to listen to him. The ground is wet and the air is warm and the town is bustling for a Sunday night.

“Is it always like this?” She asks him as they round the corner and head for the gelato shop.

“Yes. I love it.”

He buys her gelato and they head down to Main Beach. There are plenty of people around the area and music plays from one of the pubs. They sit on the damp rocks overlooking the dark waves and eat in silence.

“That was the best gelato I’ve ever had.” Katniss tells him, giggling from the feeling of satisfaction she’s gotten from the gelato.

“I told you. It’s famous this gelato.” He laughs and sets his empty bowl down beside him.

She looks at him and smiles. “I had a great day today.”

“I did too. We’ll have to hangout some more.”

She just smiles.

They walk back along the beach, navigating over rocks and through the darkness. The beach is
deserted when they arrive at the house and Katniss pulls Peeta to her body flush by his shirt, kissing him deeply and ferociously. His hands tangle in her dark locks and pulls her hips to his, aligning their centres.

It’s late when they move inside after their kissing on the damp sand, Sam having left and the others in bed.

“I should be going.” He tells her.

“Don’t be stupid. Stay the night.” Katniss tells him, smiling at him. “But I want to sleep in your bed.”

He smiles at her and lets her go and change her clothes once again. He slides open the door to his van and they climb inside the dark van. He switches on a small lantern and pulls the curtains across the windows. He slips out of his clothes, down to his boxers and she lays under the covers waiting for him. She feels the sand on his sheets and on his feet when he slides in beside her.

He shakes her awake sometime later and she can still see the moon filtering in through the sunroof. He kisses her longingly and climbs out of bed.

“Where are you going?” She asks him, sitting up and letting the sheet fall down to her waist.

He has a mischievous grin on his face and presses his finger to his lips and she knows he wants her to follow. She checks her phone and sees its 1am.

She follows him down the side of the house and to the gate, down the sandy path and to the beach. It’s still deserted and the moon and the stars are their only light source.

“Breathtaking isn’t it?” Peeta exhales.

She nods and Peeta is already heading for the water, his boxers discarded halfway down the beach and she watches his bare body hit the dark water. She was never brave enough to do this. But she never wanted to miss an opportunity for adventure or a memory. She discards her clothes and runs down the sand, chasing the moon.

The moment her nude body touches the water, she feels alive. That feeling you get when you’re doing something wonderful. That feeling that makes you feel indestructible.

She catches Peeta, wrapping her arms around his shoulders, he is waist deep and turns to her with a smile on his face. He’s laughing, laughing in a way that’s contagious. She joins in laughing. And they’re soon laughing into the night.

She knows that they will never forget this moment in their lives.

He kisses her under the stars and the moonlight. He holds her close to his body and their bare hips soon touch under the water. She feels the blood pumping through her veins, much like the morning surf they had together.

And she knows she never wants this too end. She wants more of Peeta Mellark, more moments that make her feel alive, moments where she steps out of her comfort zone and lives a little on the daring side.

Moments that would make her parents cringe and scold her for allowing the daredevil instincts to overtake her body and mind.

She knows she wants to die having lived on the wild side with lots of memories to tell her
grandchildren.

And she knows, Peeta will be the one who will make her feel alive, that feeling of being indestructible for the remaining weeks of her vacation.

Chapter End Notes

Song used in this chapter:
Simple Things (The ocean song) - Ziggy Alberts
You're probably noticing a trend with songs used by this artist. He's album is the main inspiration to this. They will feature frequently throughout.

Next chapter - the parents arrive.

Come and find me on Tumblr - Herainab
“Where are you three girls off too?” Paul asks as the girl’s make a beeline for the front door.

The parents had arrived late that afternoon. They had just finished up with dinner and Michelle, Rosie and James were down at the beach with River, soaking up as much of the remaining light as they could.

“I told you Dad, to a friend’s house, they live just around the corner.” Madge tells him with a sheepish grin. “We’ll be back before curfew. We’re meeting a few people, we’re having a jam.”

“They better not be boys.”

“Dad, it’s a mixed group of males and females.”

Paul narrows his eyes. Katniss can tell he still sees his daughter as a 12 year old. The 12 year old who he wouldn’t let out of his sight or would call in at sleepovers to make sure she was fine. Even when she started growing breasts and showed an interest in boys her parents still were keeping tabs on their daughter and where strict regarding whom she hung around with. No boys were even allowed in their house unless her parents knew who they were.

That was part of the reason she used to sneak out of her room and lie about where she was, she was careless with the details in hopes they caught her. But her parents were mostly caught in their grief and didn’t notice her anyway.

Now, as the cloud of grief started to lift and their daughter grew, they couldn’t accept the fact that she was a young adult and stepping into the big wide world. That she was ready to date or hang out with boys without their permission or drink or attend parties.

“Home by 8:30.” He tells them.

“Mom said 9.”

“9 o’clock, if not, we’re heading home tomorrow morning.”

“I got it.” She tells him. “We’re just down the road. I have my phone if you need me.”

“I don’t want you walking around alone in the dark.”

“Dad, it’s fine. It’s safe here. Besides, Katniss can do a solid roundhouse kick.” Paul frowns. “Dad, it was a joke. We’ll get Sam to walk us home if you’re that worried.”

“9 o’clock on the dot.”

“We know. Bye.” She tells him waving and pushing Katniss and Prim to the front door. “Jeez, they treat me like I’m an infant.” She says as she slams the front door behind them.

They head down the road, the get-together was at Sam’s brother’s house who lived just around the corner. It was just a casual get together, one where they would jam, have a couple of drinks and chat. It never went too long or too late, considering everyone had early starts.
Madge could still see the beach house from Nate, Sam’s brother’s home. Sam and Finnick became friends through Nate a few years earlier when Sam moved to Byron Bay. Nate’s home is homey. It’s three bedrooms and right near the beach. Nate shares it with his fashionista girlfriend and his younger brother.

They go through the side gate and see everyone. Sam gets up, greeting them and brings them towards the group introducing Katniss and Prim to everyone they hadn’t met.

Katniss found Peeta’s blue eyes and smiles at him. They had only been apart for a few hours and she hadn’t realised how much she has missed him until right now. She’s in his arms in an instant for a long embrace and he kisses her cheek softly before leading her to where he was sitting. Annie calls Prim over, patting the space between her and Johanna. The two had hit it off the other night, talking about their love for fashion. Annie works alongside Johanna and Cashmere, Nate’s girlfriend, working in a clothes boutique in town, selling handcrafted bohemian-style clothes they design and make. They were in the process of branching into kids clothes and hopefully babies, Annie’s pregnancy influencing the expansion of the line.

He hands her a beer and takes the beaten up guitar that is being passed around.

“You all know I’m left-handed. This is going to be terrible.” He tells the group who still cheer him on. “Give me a beat, Nate.”

Nate begins hitting the bongo drums he rests on his lap and Peeta begins strumming, despite the guitar not being right for Peeta, he does exceptionally, starting up a tune that everyone starts singing to enthusiastically.

“*Home, let me come home*
Home is wherever I’m with you
Home, let me come home
Home is wherever I’m with you”

Katniss smiles at the group. They were comfortable with each other, friendly and inviting. They were all smiles and happiness. Not a sad face amongst them all. And she knew they were truly happy with their lives thus far and she wonders if she’d be the same if she lived a life like there’s.

She looks over at Peeta who looks really happy. He talks with Sam about his plans to tour up and down the East Coast playing small gigs.

She still felt like she was on a high from last night. Their skinny dipping venture was still secret between the two of them.

She was saddened when they left the water, putting their clothes back on their wet bodies and moved to Peeta’s van where they dried off and fell into his soft sheets again. Bringing more sand to his bedding.

They kissed until they were sleepy and fell asleep as a tangle of limbs. He woke her with warm coffee and a long kiss that she felt right to her core.

He headed into town after a shower and placed a load of his clothes into the washing machine, coming back for them later.

She still felt his kisses on her lips during the day as they tidied up the house for the parent’s arrival. Madge and Prim asking her what got her so distracted but she brushed them off. She was keeping their kisses, the shy touches and late night dip to herself for the time being.

She soaked up as much of their time together because she knew they wouldn’t be able to do what
they have been doing when the parents were here.

She linked her fingers between Peeta’s like they have been doing it for years and moves closer to him with their knees and arms touching. She rests her head on his shoulder and listens to him, even feels him place a kiss on her forehead.

Peeta passes the guitar off to Sam and Katniss asks Peeta where the bathroom is.

“T’ll show you.” Cashmere says smiling at Katniss.

She follows the beautiful blonde into the house. “Just through there.”

“Thanks.”

Katniss steps out of the bathroom, closing the door behind her and finds Cashmere in the kitchen, pouring herself a glass of water.

“Katniss, Prim was telling me you’re off to college next year? What are you studying?”

“Medicine.” She tells Cashmere, rolling her eyes.

“Oh. Not so thrilled about it?”

“No, my parents want me to be just like them. This whole holiday is to prove to me that for a life of luxury, cars, houses and vacations; I need a serious job that pays money. But in all honesty I don’t care about fancy houses or cars.”

“Do they know this?” Cashmere asks.

“They do but chose to not acknowledge it, telling me I’m crazy to throw this opportunity away.” She tells her. “And in all honesty, I’ll fail under the pressure. I’ll crack being a doctor. I can’t work in a job that I become the last hope and are cursed to hell for failing, for not being able to save people. It’s not for me. I’m not a healer.”

Cashmere gives her a sad smile. “I had more my grandparents on my back. They were stricter. My grandfather was a politician. My mother was on the path for a career in law but she met my father and hopped in his beat up Panel Van and never looked back. They settled in Tweed Heads and raised five kids. We were all homeschooled, taught to love life and the world. My grandparents were always on my parents back about the private school system and taking our education seriously. The five of us were above average and all very bright. We had our own passions and interests. Mine was fashion and photography. I moved down here and now they see how happy I am and they realise the pestering was all for nothing.”

Katniss smiles at her. “I watched my cousin, Madge’s brother die. My dad was his doctor and it tore him apart. I can’t be like that. I can’t watch children die or be their last hope. Watching Thomas die was the worst thing in my entire life.”

“What do you want to do?”

“This. Music, surfing, late nights and good company.”

“Well, fight for what you love Katniss. That’s all I can tell you. They push, you push harder. They don’t have the final say in your life. Don’t let them turn you into something you’re not. You’re mental health won’t be good if you’re living a life you don’t want.” She tells Katniss. “And if you need help convincing them, just give me a call. I’ll be sure to convince them otherwise.”
“Thank you.”

"Come on, let's make the most of the evening. The next 7 weeks are going to fly.”

Peeta links his fingers through hers and he leads her down to the beach, leaving the gathering behind. Prim was fine with the company, listening to the stories they were all telling her, leaving her wide eyed and inspired. Madge and Sam had disappeared like usual and wouldn’t be seen until they had to head home.

They sat on the cool sand, burying their toes into the sand. The breeze whips at her neck and blows her hair that she’s left to fall down her back.

“I like your hair out.” Peeta tells her with a smile. He told her the same thing last night, when they slipped back into bed after their late night dip. Her hair was damp and curly. He found pleasure in running his fingers through the tresses as the moonlight bathed their skin.

“I know.” She replies with a shy smile.

Stars litter the night sky and shine brightly, they lay on their backs and watch the stars.

“How are the parents?”

“Fine. Their usual self.” She tells him. “They’ve got plenty of things planned for us these next few days, so we won’t be able to see each other as much as we’d like.”

“That sucks but I’m sure we can go for surfs. I’m sure they’ll allow that.”

She smiles at him. “Where are you sleeping tonight?”

“Here. Well in my van. I’m right at the beach for that dawn surf. That’s the best time of day.”

"It is but there's certainly other good times of the day.” She smirks at him.

“What were you thinking Everdeen?”

“Well, I quite enjoy late night where its quiet and a certain someone drags me out of bed to go skinny dipping.” She tells him, grabbing a fistful of his shirt and pulling him closer to her body.

She can feel his warm breath. “Hmm, that certainly was a good time of day. I say we do more of those late night adventures.”

“I like the sound of that.” She whispers.

His lips touch hers so softly. She can taste the beer on his breath and feel the ocean in his hair.

They stay like this for what feels like hours. Long kisses shared on the sand. It’s nothing more, just their mouths and tongues exploring, tasting. Familiarising themselves before the absence they’ll experience in the coming days. It’s a mixture of elements. It’s a kiss of hello, of goodbye and see you later. It’s shy kisses and secret kisses. It’s sneaky kisses on front porches and across the console of a car. It’s a kiss that drowns you but resuscitates you all at once. One that makes your blood course and is felt right to the tips of your fingers and toes and other places. It’s one that awakens the soul and your being.

It’s a kiss you’ll remember for your lifetime and describe to your curious daughter when she asks what your best kiss was. It’s the one you describe in detail to your make your best friend and sister jealous.
It’s what true loves first kisses are made of in fairytales.

“Katniss, we have to go!” Prim calls out.

They pull apart, breathless, wide-eyed and more alert than ever.

And she knows she wants to drown in a thousand of these kisses.

“Come on, I’ll walk you girls home.”

Peeta links his fingers through hers and they walk back to the house. It’s only 8 o’clock.

“Why do we have to go back so early?” Katniss asks her sister.

“Mom’s had a freak out. She doesn’t realise we’re literally right around the corner.” Prim rolls her eyes and slips her sweater on. “Madge is staying back, her parents don’t mind, it’s just ours.”

“It’s best if we go back. We don’t want them angry at us and ruin the rest of our trip, which they would be more than happy to do.”

Katniss slips her feet into her flip-flops. She shivers at the cool breeze and Peeta is quick to slip his hoodie off and hands it to her.

“Here.”

“But you literally don’t have another one.”

“I’ll steal one of Sam’s, it’s fine. I’ll walk you ladies home.” He laughs.

Katniss and Prim farewell everyone and Johanna joins them on the walk, mostly to keep Peeta company on the short walk back.

“So are your parents as bad as they really sound?” Johanna asks.

“They didn’t seem to care the last four years, as soon as I turned 18 and finished school they made themselves care. They didn’t want us making bad decisions or giving ourselves a bad reputation. I mean, they’re still not home half the time but when they are I try to be elsewhere.” Katniss explains to her.

“Geez, they care, how unfortunate for you Brainless.” Johanna teases.

“It’s not like I’ve been rebelling or anything. I’ve literally been taking care of Prim that whole time. They just don’t understand me.”

“Sucks, I know. But you’re 18, you have a say now.”

“No, they still think I’m too immature.” Katniss explains. “I’m not capable in making a decision about my life. Yet here they are making me go into medicine when they think I’m too young to make my own decisions. I don’t want to be hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt and have spent 8 years studying for a career I can’t do.”

“Want to hear my opinion?” Johanna asks. “Delete those applications, save up all your money and move over here to live with Madge. Experience a life in a van like Peeta and travel the country. If after a year you’ve decided you want to go into medicine or some other career then do it. Nothing says you’re mature and grown up then living in a van. Right Peet?”

“She’s right. I’ve grown up more than I thought I was capable of doing.”
They reach the gate of the house and stop briefly.

“Brainless, march in there and tell them straight away you’re not touching a scalpel until you’ve lived a little.”

“There’s no harm in that.” Prim agrees.

They hear the front door open to the house. “Katniss. Prim. Time to come in now.” Their mother calls.

Katniss rolls her eyes and Johanna holds back a chuckle. “Talk to them.” Johanna whispers to her and pushes her through the gate. “See you round Brainless and Brains.”

Peeta waves at Katniss with a smile.


“Night girls.” Peeta says softly and watches them step up the path and up the front steps to the house where their mother stands.

Katniss catches one last glimpse of Johanna and Peeta before the front door closes them in.

“We don’t appreciate you two running off without asking permission.” Their mother starts.

Neither girl responds. They kick off their flip-flops and move to the stairs. River is fast at their heels.

“I’m talking to you two.”

Katniss spins on her heel fast. “What do you want to say?”

“I don’t like that attitude. I’d like to see a little appreciation for what we’re doing for you girls.”

“Oh sure appreciation.” Rosie stares back with anger crossing her face. “I’d sure like to see some appreciation for the last four years of taking care of Prim while you and Dad didn’t bother coming home. I did a lot and I don’t get a thank-you or even a little bit of trust when I asked for it. I’m 18 Mom, I’m not a child.”

“We know you’re not a child Katniss.”

“But you still treat me like one.” She yells back. “You know what, forget it. It’s time for bed. Come on Prim.”

“Katniss don’t make us regret our agreement.”

“It’s a pretty shit agreement anyway. No matter what, I’m still going to medical school whether I like it or not.”

“Language.” Rosie scolds. “And have you been drinking?”

“No.”

She stomps up the steps. Prim not daring to follow.

She stands under the spray of the shower, washing away the day and calming down. She knows arguing wasn’t in her best interest, nor Prim’s or Madge’s.
River is waiting for her on her bed when she enters after her shower. He’s curled at the foot of her bed and crawls up to her side when she flops onto the mattress. He rests his head on her stomach and she pats the top of his head, scratching behind his ears.

Her phone buzzes at her side and she picks it up, looking at the screen.

*Peeta* - *I wish we could have spent the night together again. I enjoyed your company.*

*Katniss* - *Hopefully they’ll be back to the GC by Friday. I wish you were here now.*

*Peeta* - *Everything all right?*

*Katniss* - *I snapped.*

*Peeta* - *I’m sorry. Is there anything I can do for you?*

She ponders for a moment.

*Katniss* - *No. I’ll see you later this week.*

*Peeta* - *We can’t meet up sooner?*

*Katniss* - *It’s for the best we don’t.*

*Peeta* - *Ok, I’ll see you later this week?*

She doesn’t reply.

Her father shakes her awake early the next morning. It’s not even sunrise yet.

She’s sure she almost hisses at him for waking her up after a crappy nights sleep of tossing, turning and overthinking.

She changes into her bikini and slips her wetsuit on. Braids her hair down her back and quietly follows her father out to gather their boards and walk down to the beach.

They silently paddle out to sea and she longs to be with Peeta because she was sure her father was going to unleash about her behaviour last night.

But he doesn’t speak a word of it. He just releases the tension in riding the waves, challenging his body and pushing it as he chases the big waves.

Katniss felt even better once she got moving. A morning’s surf always made her feel better. It calmed her. It was her Zen.

Her father and her sit on their boards, both catching their breaths.

“Is mom still pissed at me?” She asks her father.

He shrugs his shoulders. He never gets involved in the mother-daughter arguments because he was usually outnumbered.

“I just wish I didn’t get treated like a child. I mean we were literally around the corner last night. We couldn’t ask you because you weren’t there and Paul said it was fine. He gave us a reasonable
time to come home. I’m 18, I want to feel like I’m an adult or at least trusted more than I already am. I’m old enough to make decisions over going out, what I wear or who I hang out with. Why can’t you and Mom give me more leniency?”

“We don’t treat you like a child.”

“You both do and you know it. I’ve been 18 for four months now. I’ve given it until now, knowing it’s new and scary for you and Mom but you have to realise, its time for me to make choices in life and you have to know, that its time for me to live and learn. I don’t want to live a sheltered life and have no memories to tell my children or gloat about to my friends. I want to live through some crazy moments before I settle down and make a serious choice about my future. You have plenty of stories from your youth, why can’t you let me create stories to tell my kids?”

“We’re trying to protect you Katniss.”

“I don’t need protecting Dad. I’ve got a thick skin, you know that.” She tells him. “I’m 18.”

“We don’t want you making bad choices.”

“You’re just making excuses.” She cries. “You’re the one who taught me you learn from your mistakes. I want to learn. Let me learn.” He remains silent. “Dad, you and Mom can’t make me go to college and study medicine. I have the final say in that.”

“We have an input in your future. Music won’t get you anywhere.”

“And if it doesn’t, then I’ve learnt. Please, let me do what I want to do.”

He doesn’t respond and stares ahead. She knows it’s hard for him to let his oldest go. Considering he still sees her as a young girl.

“No. We’re not discussing this here. We have an agreement. We’ll consider it after the vacation. You have a lot of making up to do for your behaviour last night. And don’t think we’ll forget about it. You acted like a spoilt brat last night.” He tells her. “You’ll have to apologise to your mother also.”

She rolls her eyes and scowls. “Fine.” She says through gritted teeth.

She turns her board and paddles back to shore. She doesn’t bother surfing back. She sulks up to the house, throwing her board against the fence and throwing her wetsuit over the clothesline. She stomps up to her bedroom and slams the door behind her.

She’d act like a spoilt brat if they really wanted to see one.

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By Thursday she’s tired of following the adults around and listening to them. She hastily apologised to her mother on Tuesday after lunch. It still didn’t allow the girls to head off exploring like they had planned to. Katniss missed Peeta the most and hadn’t heard a word from him since Monday night.

Even Madge hadn’t heard from Sam but they had an agreement when the parents were in town. It was a silent agreement they acknowledged.

She had itchy feet come Thursday and knew she had to get out without her parents right at her side. She needed some fresh air, a coffee and silence.
“I’m meeting the girls in town.” She tells her parents who sit on the back deck, engrossed in the paper and their iPad’s. They were heading back tonight.

“Okay, don’t be too long.” Her mother tells her.

“Where are you exactly going?” Her father asks.

“To town. We’re having coffee.”

“We have coffee here.”

She rolls her eyes. “I just want some time alone with the girls and good coffee. We’ll be back soon.”

Prim and Madge had gone to the farmers markets with Michelle and Paul.

She sends Madge a text to let her know she was leaving, meeting them at Sae’s. She has River on his leash and skates into town with River trotting beside her. He was content, his golden tail wagging and his pink tongue lolling to the side. He was happy.

Morning swims, walks and the sunshine brought him his happiness. He was much like her.

She lets River lead her on her skateboard through the crowds of people.

She turns the corner and stops short, dropping her bare foot to the ground and grazing her foot in the process. She’s sure she’s taken off all the layers of her skin.

She feels sick at what she sees.

River whines from beside her at the sudden stop and looks up at Katniss for answers as when they’ll be moving again.

She wonders what she did to deserve this.

River licks her calf, bringing her back. She shakes off what she had witnessed.

“Come on boy.”

She rides down the street, skating passed him and the girl he was cozy with. She doesn’t bear turn back to look at him but hears him say her name as she passes by.

She doesn’t stop until she was at the cafe. She picks up her board and heads inside with River. River was a welcome guest, as was any other dog.

“Mornin’ girl. Morning River.”

“Hi Sae. The girls here?”

“Not yet. Come on through.”

Sae leads her outside and points her to the empty table.

“Girly, what have you done?” Sae asks as she looks at Katniss’ foot.

“Oh, I grazed it. Stopped badly, I suppose.” Katniss tells her, inspecting the bottom of her foot that is bleeding, gravel imbedded into the skin. She plucks a couple of napkins from the dispenser and presses it to her bleeding foot.
“Let me get you something for that.”

Sae heads back inside and Katniss turns her attention down to the street. She catches sight of him clearly and he catches her. He tries to apologise with his face but she turns her back to him.

Madge and Prim come rushing through to the table.

“Katniss, I’m going to chop his dick off.” Madge announces a little too loudly.

“Shh, keep your voice down. People will think you’re crazy.”

“You know?” Prim asks.

“Yeah.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“It didn’t look anything to harmful.” Katniss simply tells them. “My foot though doesn’t agree.”

“That’s why you’re supposed to wear shoes when you skate.” Prim tells her, bending down to examine her sister’s foot. “You shouldn’t be defending him.”

“We haven’t made an agreement on what we are. I’ve known him less than a week and I’ve blown him off the last few days.”

“You need to speak to him.” Madge tells her. “So you’re on the same page.”

“This was just supposed to be a fling.” Katniss replies softly.

“This isn’t a fling, you two feel something for each other. Deeply.” Prim states. “But it’s up to you to decide.”

Katniss nods and Sae returns with a few medical supplies, leaving it to Prim to clean the wound and stick a large Band-Aid on the ball of her foot where most of the grazing had happened. Three of her five toes have their own Band-Aids on them.

Sae brings them coffee and Prim’s milkshake and a piece of cake each. Katniss remains silent as Prim and Madge bitch about their parents.

“Sam’s staying tonight, he’s coming round when they head back. He said we’re going to Cheeky Monkey’s tomorrow night. Prim, you’ll unfortunately have to stay home.”

Prim nods, she understands the girl’s need to go out and wasn’t a hindrance for them. She was quite happy to stay at the house, watch a TV series and pig out on junk food.

“You can maybe invite Jai over.” Katniss suggests. “Only if you promise nothing with happen

“You know we’re not like that. We just like each other’s company.” Prim tells them, pushing her straw throughout her milkshake.

“Do you want there to be something more?” Madge asks.

I’m 14, I don’t really know what I really want in life at all. Jai’s nice; he’s one of the nicest boys I’ve met. He’s friendship would be more appreciated than anything else. Besides, we’re back home in 7 weeks.”
“Don’t mean you can’t make memories or start something.” Madge tells her. “Besides, you’ll have more reason to come and visit me.”

“That’s true.” Prim smiles. “But, I just appreciate his friendship mostly.”

“That’s fine. It really is.” Katniss reassures her. “If only most girls your age were the same.”

Katniss’ phone sounds with a call. She silences it quickly.

“Are you going to answer it?” Madge asks and Katniss shakes her head. “Then let me.”

“No. Just leave it. I’m leaving it for a few hours. Things are said when people are angry and upset.”

“Won’t it be worse in a few hours?”

“No. Just let it go.”

Madge rolls her eyes and sips from her coffee as the phone rings out.

Katniss honestly didn’t know what she was going to say to him. She mostly needed time.

She looked out over the balcony and down to the street in hopes of finding him but his worn hat covering his blond curls was nowhere to be seen.

“We should be back Tuesday night. Any problems then call us, we’ll be straight down.” Michelle says kissing Madge.

“We’ll be fine Mom.”

“I know you girls will be. But don’t hesitate to ring us if anything is wrong. If you need some more cash for groceries…”

“We have enough. We’ll be fine, we won’t starve or anything.”

Michelle nods and smiles, picking up her handbag and slinging it over her shoulder.

Their parents kiss them goodbye, Rosie eyeing Katniss briefly, silently telling her to not to misbehave. Katniss fights the urge to roll her eyes and forces a smile as she hugs her mother goodbye. Her father soon had her engulfed in his arms.

“Remember our deal.” He whispers in her ear. She nods against his neck.

He pulls away and touches her cheek.

River was staying behind; he’d have more fun with the girls than being back at home. He’d be able to tag along to almost everything the girls did or be happy to laze in the sun in the backyard when they went on day trips.

They wave their parents off as Paul backs the Range Rover out of the driveway and into the fading afternoon light.

“Thank god.” Madge exclaims, closing the front door.

“I know. I don’t know how many more warning looks I can take.” Katniss admits. “That talk Tuesday was hard enough.”
Her mother had given her an attitude check talk Tuesday night after a tense dinner. Her mother warned her about boys and alcohol and drugs. It was almost like a birds and the bees talk all over again. Her mother even reminded her to use a condom if she was inclined to ‘show her flower’, as she had embarrassingly put it.

Katniss fell onto the couch, River already occupying the chaise and Prim patting him as he snoozed.

The doorbell sounds and Madge hopped down the hallway to see who it was. Katniss knew it was Sam in an instant as she heard her giggling as she opened the door.

Madge and Sam joined them in the living room, Netflix streaming and a beer in hand. Katniss though, couldn’t focus on the show, she just stared at the colours that merged together and thought back to earlier today.

To the surprised look on Peeta’s face. The wanting to explain what it was. The way his smile dropped and his eyes went wide. The arm that was wrapped around the girl, that fell to his side and he looked like a schoolboy in trouble.

She never experienced the hurt of a crush breaking her heart. Doing something unbelievable.

But yet again, there could be an explanation.

But he had his arm around her.

She’s exhausted, mentally and physically. She excuses herself and heads up the stairs to shower and fall into her bed. She lies on top of the covers and stared up at the ceiling, listening to the ocean come through the open window and the screen door of the balcony. She could smell the salty air and inhaled it deeply.

“Katniss!” A voice sounds.

She’s confused at first and looks around the room to confirm the noise.

“Out here!”

She turns her eyes to the open window and sees a shadowy figure outside the window.

It’s Peeta perched on the tree outside the window.

“What are you doing? You could hurt yourself.” She scolds him.

“Can I come in?” He asks, pointing to the doors that open to the balcony.

She nods and opens the screen and watches him carefully walk across the branch and drop down onto the railing of the balcony and dropping to sturdy ground. He was agile and careful on his feet, almost like he’s spent his life climbing trees and the side of buildings.

“Where’d you learn to climb like that?” She asks him, once he’s on steady feet.

“I used to sneak out of my bedroom of a night and head down to the beach. I had a tree just like that one outside my window.”

She smiles slightly, impressed that it was for the beach and not his girls he paraded around town. She turned her back to him and walked into the bedroom, dropping onto her bed.
“Look, I’m sorry for today. She’s an old friend.”

She crosses her arms across her chest and scowls.

He exhales and ponders what to say, dropping onto the bed. “Do you want the truth?”

She bites her lip and nods.

“I honestly thought you had blown me off. And I was starting to feel crazy about you. I already was the minute I saw you ride by. I couldn’t get you out of my head and hoped I’d see you around. And then we started to hanging out and I loved it, I didn’t want to let you go. I never have felt anything similar than what I did with your kisses and your touches. I was drowning, literally.”

He tells her, “Than Sunday happened and I felt we were connecting. We snuck off into the night and skinny-dipped and than lay together afterwards. I hardly slept that night because my mind and heart were racing. I was feeling so many things and I was overwhelmed that I had found you, my dream girl. I hoped we’d spend the rest of the week together. Then your message on Monday night confused me. I thought you had blown me off for the rest of your trip and I was hurting. I couldn’t accept the fact that that was it.” He admits, touching her foot slightly. “The girl, her name is Delly. She’s an old friend from home. I ran into her at my gig on Tuesday and she wanted to hang out. She’s just a friend, I assure you. We hung out as she was leaving today. She’s got a boyfriend herself.”

She scowls at him and he takes her hands between his.

“I suck at being single Katniss. That’s the truth.” He admits. “And I suck at relationships and reading things and saying no. I suck at communication and honesty. That’s the truth.” He tells her. “And the other thing is, I really really like you. I mean, it’s crazy how much I fucking like you. I’ve never felt such an intense connection with someone ever before and I want to get to know you more. I want to spend everyday of your trip with you. I want you to hit me for being upset or say something. Yell even. I deserve it for the torture I put you through, seeing me close to Delly like that.”

She stares at him, letting his words sink in and sorting through them, trying to understand them and what he just told her. They hadn’t spoken about their feelings or what they were. This whole thing was new and in the early stages.

But he was right the connection she felt was intense. It was unlike anything else she’s ever felt or dreamt of. And she feels she may have found someone who’ll really change her as a person.

“You’re right, you’re an idiot. But so am I. The text sent the wrong message. I was pissed off at my parents mostly and wanted to take it out on someone else. I should have clarified what I meant and what you meant to me. And I’m not going to lie when I say a million things ran through my head when I saw you with her. I overreacted. But we haven’t established anything yet. We’re still new to this whole thing… whatever this thing is.” She tells him. “And I’ll be honest in saying that I suck at relationships, intimacy and communication. Someone has to really know me to understand what I want. I’m not good with words; I’m better with actions. And you’ve only just met me to not understand the way I work.”

“I’ve figured you out quite easily. I know you suck at using words. You’re better at expressing your words via actions. I knew from the minute you stepped close beside me that you were expressing how you feel. And I’m good at reading people. You’re shy as well. You don’t ask for what you want. And you’d prefer to run than stay put. But it depends on the situation. Relationships you run. Your family you fight.” He says and moves closer to her on the bed. “And I know, inside you’re trying to forgive me. Take all the time you want…”
And she does.

She presses her lips to his, stopping him from speaking any more words. She was using actions to tell him what she wanted. She wanted him, even if he was an idiot or sucked at relationships.

It was partly her fault too.

She pulls away, breathless and smiles at him.

“I want more of this.” She tells him. “I want to spend every possible minute of the next 7 weeks with you. I just want you.”

He smiles against her lips. “I can do that.”

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Chapter End Notes

Song featured:
Home - By Edward Sharpe And The Magnetic Zeros

Look for an update in the coming days.

Reviews and kudos are appreciated.

Next chapter, a day trip down the coast and Katniss and Peeta have their first date.
“So, you two kissed and made up?” Madge asks as she stirs her third spoonful of sugar into her morning coffee.

“We did.” Katniss tells her and takes a sip of her own coffee.

Sam and Peeta are out the back with River, waxing the surfboards and Prim is down at the beach.

“So, what was he doing?”

“An old friend. They were just hanging around.” Katniss tells her. “And we suck at communicating.”

“And you’ve just forgiven him like that?”

“Honestly, nothing happened.” Katniss replies shrugging her shoulders like it’s no big deal.

“Okay then.” Madge retorts, rolling her eyes.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

Katniss leaves Madge’s side. She didn’t want the questions or judgment.

She seats herself down on the steps leading to the yard. River comes to her side, nudging his nose under her arm that rests on her knee for a pat and some attention.

Peeta smiles at her briefly before turning back to Sam and throwing his head back laughing at whatever nonsense Sam had just said.

Katniss finds herself smiling at how beautiful he looks in the morning light. He beams like summer sunshine and wide smiles. His eyes sparkle like the stars she chased this morning on her board.

They had spent the night together, his lips placing apologies on the soft skin of her neck, her face and her chest. She held him close and never let him go. He was gentle and without words, apologetic. She had reassured him they were fine and he still continued to paint her skin with apologies, long into the night and into the early morning.

He kissed her sensually and lovingly and awoken more of her soul and fire. His hands never strayed far from her body and he held her until the very early morning light where she slipped from his hold and ventured to the beach where she chased the morning stars and waited for him to join her.

They rode the waves together and watched the sun rise together. Peeta pulled her close to him on her surfboard and kissed her as the sun came up.

She never had anyone who kissed her until she was breathless. Kissed her until she was dizzy. Kissed her under the stars, the moon and the sun. Kissed her at sunrise and sunset. She never had
anyone whose kisses spoke a thousand words and mended her soul. She’s never had anyone who understood and could connect so deeply, that they knew exactly what to do and say. She’s never experienced anything like this in her life and she’s so overwhelmed at how wonderful it is.

She knows she’s going to have a hard time leaving this place after what she’s experienced so far. Her parents are going to have a fight on their hands come the end of the trip.

Prim appears from the surf, looking as refreshed as ever. Her hair was wet and the saltwater and slight wind had caused it to curl.

She too shone with the sunlight. She became alive under the warmth of the sun and was as beautiful as ever. She was much like a flower. The more sun and water she had the more beauty she showcased. She flourished and beamed. She was beautiful.

Prim steps around the boys and sits down beside her older sister, using the towel to dry her hair. She steals the mug from Katniss’ hands and takes a sip of the coffee.

“You don’t like coffee.” Katniss scolds, taking the mug back.

“I’m coming around to the taste of it.” She tells her sister.

“Great, that means sleepless nights and grouchy mornings when you’re cramming for exams and assignments.”

Prim giggles and walks inside with River trailing behind.

“Why is she so happy?” Peeta asks.

“She thinks I’m a comedian.”

“That’s a funny joke Miss America.” Sam teases. “Have you considered standup?”

“You’re so funny but I’m as charming as a dead slug.” Katniss tells them.

“Who told you that?”

“Some guy on Wednesday. He’s missing a few fingers and has a prosthetic leg, taken by a shark about ten years ago. He surfed with Dad and I at Main Beach.”

“That sounds a lot like Haymitch.” Sam speaks looking at Peeta.

“What’d you do to get that response from him?” Peeta asks.

“Haven’t you noticed how lively my personality is?” The boy’s snicker. “I was scowling and really peeved with my father after her pushed me into the water as a joke. He was swigging from a flask and held his board under one arm laughing at my expression from being pushed in. Dad started up a conversation with him and he told me to liven up. I was on holidays and I was in Byron Bay.”

“Yep, that’s Haymitch.” Sam confirms. “Did you wow him with your surf skills though?”

“Sure did. He took back the dead slug comment and said I was charming in my own way.” Katniss tells the boys. “He said he did see me hanging round you boys, said Peeta was a sucker for girls like me. Whatever that means.”

“Don’t take Haymitch personally.” Peeta reassures her. “He’s like this with everyone he meets. He’s just got to get to know you and he’ll like you. It took him a while to warm up to me.”
“And me. He’s partner though loves us kids. She always chastises him for his abrupt manner and behavior. She puts him in his place.”

“Where was she on Wednesday?”

“Probably not far. She runs a fashion boutique right near the beach.”

“And the flask attached to his wetsuit?”

“He’s had a lot of difficulties in his life. It numbs the pain.”

“Right. Maybe I shouldn’t have been so fast to judge him.”

“He’s used to it.” Sam tells her. “He’s loosened up a bit since he’s settled here but he’ll always be Haymitch. We’ll have to have dinner with him some night.”

“If he’s still conscious.” Peeta jokes.

“He should be. He loves any event we throw with free food.”

“Effie will love you though.” Peeta reassures her. “She’s got a soft spot for us kids. A real big soft spot. But don’t talk about them as a couple. They don’t like to acknowledge it. They’re just friends who live with each other.”

“And who share a bed.”

“That seems complicated.” Katniss admits.

“You’ll get used to it, trust us.”

They decided on a day trip to Lennox Head, which was south of Byron Bay. Peeta and Sam mostly wanting to take the girls to Seven Mile Beach, one of the best beaches in Australia. Rips were common, making it dangerous. The five of them were confident in swimming and surfing and had spent their lives navigating rips and bad surf. And Katniss and Prim were both trained in lifesaving.

The conditions today brought a good beach break. The winds picked up during the day, making the surfing conditions rough. But that was enough to entice the group of them to the surf. They thrived off of rough surf and extreme conditions.

Katniss rode with Peeta in his van. Madge was taking Sam, Prim and River.

The windows of Peeta’s van were down and the coastal breeze cooled them down as they headed south along The Coastal Road. Katniss embraced the ocean breeze and smiled. She’d forever love the sea and the ocean breeze.

She hums along to the music playing.

_You’re the fire and the flood_  
And I’ll always feel you in my blood  
Everything is fine  
When your hand is resting next to mine  
Next to mine
You’re the fire and the flood

She hears Peeta laughing and she turns to him, seeing a big smile plastered across his face.

“What?” She asks, smiling at him.

“You’re beautiful.” He tells her. “You’re radiant, actually.” He says. “You just shine. It’s a beautiful sight to see.”

She leans over in her seat and kisses his cheek softly and turns the volume up on his sound system and continues to hum along.

Since we met I feel a lightness in my step
You’re miles away but I still feel you
Anywhere I go there you are
Anywhere I go there you are
Late at night when you can’t fall asleep
I’ll be lying right beside you counting sheep
Anywhere I go there you are
Anywhere I go there you are

He pulls up in the parking lot, Madge pulling up beside him. River’s leash is clipped to his collar and the five of them drag their gear down to the beach. It was still a little early, the strong winds usually picked up just before midday. They set up their towels, lay their boards out beside each other and slap on sunscreen. Despite Katniss’ olive tone she has gotten sunburnt the last few days. The Australian sun was a lot harsher to the American sun.

Katniss lathers Peeta’s back and shoulders in the cream despite the wetsuits they’d wear. He returns the favour for her, his hands lingering a little longer on her hips and back. They ghost under the strings of her bikini and his fingers slightly graze the side of her breasts. His touch sends shivers down her back and her skin breaks out in goose bumps. His touch did unexplainable things to her body.

And just the night before as he apologised, the same thing happened. More of her body began to respond in ways that it never had before. His lips lit the fire to her being and his touches further fueled the fire.

She was alive. She was reborn. She was experiencing her sensual revolution.

He kisses her shoulder, her skin was warm from the sun already and she leans backwards into him for just the briefest of seconds.

She braids her hair and Prim’s, Prim braids Madge’s hair and the boys run River down to the water, throwing him his ball. River was also keen to get on one of the boards and be navigated through the crystal blue water, Madge having been doing this since he was a pup.

The girls follow the boys down the beach and they play a game of Frisbee with another group on the beach. Most of them backpackers. They were friendly and charming and staying at the local caravan park.

When the wind picks up, it calls the five of them to shore. River was exhausted, and retreated to the shade of the umbrella Madge had stuck in the sand, his tongue lolling out of his mouth.

They pull on their wetsuits and paddle out. The backpackers did the same and they rode the barrels, the breaks and had their own friendly surf competition, showing off tricks and style.
They were smiling and cheering for each other as they attempted the big waves.

Madge and Prim retreat back to shore. Sam strikes up conversation with the backpackers and brings River out for his surf.

Peeta and Katniss ditch their boards and their wetsuits and wade back into the water. They let the waves rock them gently and he couldn’t keep his hands off of her sun kissed body.

His hands sneak under the material of her bikini, grazed her sides, her thighs and her buttock. He wasn’t gentle like he had been earlier. But Katniss likes it. And even if they weren’t alone. It brings that much more thrill to it. The water comes to just below her ribs, the water just grazing Peeta’s waist. He stands with his back to the beach, shielding her, and his lips find hers roughly, his hands roaming her body.

He tugs at her braid before dropping his hands to her shoulders, letting them fall over the front of chest, squeezing her breasts and pushing the bikini away for access to her breast. He touches her nipple with his forefinger and then his thumb, pinching the sensitive bud. She shivers and he pulls her closer to his body, liking the reaction he had gets from her. His tongue was demanding and his free hand held her tighter to his body.

She could feel him straining against his shorts on her hip and she moans as he shifted his hips slightly so he was more aligned to her centre. He groans softly at the change and he moves his hands. The one on her breast, trailing down between them, over her ribs and belly. And he left it to linger on the top of her bikini bottoms. His other hand circles round to her buttock and he pulls her closer yet again. There was hardly any space between their waists and she could feel everything.

His hands inch further over the material of her bikini bottoms and she bucks slightly into his touch. His lips never left hers. They were locked together.

He sneaks his hand back over the top of her bottoms with a little more pressure and she moans into his mouth. He gently bites her bottom lip and presses his hand tighter to her centre. He strains further against his shorts and she daringly brings her hands down the front of his chest to his hips, pulling him tighter to her body and feeling even more of his hardness. He groans and presses harder over her centre, squeezing her buttock.

She wants more, more of his flesh and more of his kisses and his touch. She wants his hands on her bare skin, just like the night they had skinny-dipped.

He was a gentleman that night, hardly leaving her hips but she could see the hunger in his eyes, feel the twitches in his fingers as he resisted trailing them further across her body. Only with her permission did he seek more of her skin. Sprawling his hands over her ribcage, his thumbs grazing the flesh of her rounded breasts. Eliciting goose bumps and shivers down her spine. She was more daring that night, bringing her hands down between them to rest them low on his hips. He reacted, as she knew he would and she kindly returned the favour. Her hands covering his velvety flesh as their tongues lazily danced under the moonlight. They touched him together and he finished on her stomach. She kissed him longer and harder and politely told him he didn’t need to return the favour.

But he did when they returned to his bed. His fingers danced over her skin, down her waist and her hip and sought the heat of her core. She fell apart at his touch and felt boneless, even when he tucked her body beside his and kissed her goodnight.

He promised her in the midst of sleep pulling her under they’d have more time to explore each other. She knew she was moving fast with him but nobody else had this effect on her.
“This is a family beach!” They hear Sam call out to them. Peeta sticks his middle finger up at his friend and they pull apart slightly.

Their lips are swollen, their cores on fire. His eyes were full of lust. She was sure she had love eyes happening.

She smiles up at him and he smiles back, kissing her swollen lips softly and turning her in his arms so they can look out to sea. He rests his chin on her shoulder and wraps his arms around her waist and holds her to his body.

Once they calm down, they swim back. Peeta pulling her to the sand once they reach the beach. She’s reduced to a giggling mess and he kisses her again before helping her up onto her feet.

Madge and Prim are out tanning under the sun. Not a care in the world with music playing from one of their phones.

Peeta and her fall onto his towel and let the sun dry them off. They snack on the fresh fruit that they had cut up that morning and Peeta pulls out his camera taking shots of everything and everyone. She lazes under the warm sun, enjoying the beautiful day.

River runs up the beach and shakes off the excess water onto the girls who groan.

“River!”

The dog happily falls down beside Prim, his tail wagging and a huge grin on his face. Sam crashes down beside the girls laughing. He ends up straddling Madge’s waist to kiss her and she pushes him away.

“You’re ruining the tanning.” She tells him, smirking at him.

“You’re beautiful enough babe.” He tells her, laying down beside her on his stomach and kissing her lips again.

“This is a family beach.” Peeta tells them.

“At least I’m not initiating second and possibly third base.” Sam bites back.

“I don’t want to know this.” Prim grimaces.

Peeta chortles and slips down beside Katniss who has turned beet red.

“Geez, you’ve got your van Peet, if you two are that rowdy,” Madge tells them, lifting her glasses up to wink at Katniss and Peeta. “We’ll give you your privacy. You’ll have more privacy in the van than in the middle of the ocean.”

Peeta laughs off the comment and kisses Katniss’ red cheek. She catches his hand and pulls him back to connect their lips together.

“Oh get a room.” Prim tells them, rolling over onto her belly.

“Who wants some lunch?” Peeta asks them as he pulls away from Katniss.

“I’m right.” Madge, Sam and Prim reply.

“Katniss?”
She nods her head, sitting up on the towel. She pulls on Peeta’s tank top and follows him up the sand to his van to grab their skateboards. He slings his camera over his neck and shoulder and they ride into town, Peeta leading the way. He is barefooted and shirtless, living the carefree surfer life. She follows him on their boards barefooted also. Her foot was still healing from yesterday but she had lived her 18 years barefooted.

They pull up outside of the takeaway café, carrying their skateboards inside. The waitress greets them with a wide smile.

“Good surf?” She asks.


They end up with wraps and freshly squeezed juices. They sit at the small park and dig into their lunches with gusto.

“Let’s skip Cheeky Monkeys tonight.” Peeta suggests.

“What? Why?”

“I want to have a night with just you, no clubs or friends. I just want you and wherever the evening takes us?”

She smiles at him. “Where will we go?”

“I’ll cook for you.”

“Prim will be home.”

“I’ll cook for your sister too.”

“You don’t have to.”

“But I want to.” He tells her, his smile stretching across his face.

“Okay.”

“So it’s a date?” He asks.

She confirms. “It’s a date.”

“It’s not going to be anything to spectacular, I’m a bit out of practice.”

“I don’t care.” She tells him, grabbing his chin and leaning in to kiss him. “I just want a nice evening with you and maybe some wine.”

“I can do that.” He tells her with a smirk and kisses her again.

He pulls his camera out and snaps a candid of her while she watches children run around the park and under the water fountain. They are wild and free and smile like there’s no tomorrow.

She’s pulled to play with the children who play a game of tag. She chases them and listens to their giggles. She lets them chase her and plays badly so they can tag her.

The parents look on with smiles and enjoy the day’s sunshine. The kids run circles around Katniss and she drops back down beside Peeta breathless.
“Having fun?” He asks her.

She nods with a smile and waves goodbye to the kids who wave goodbye to her.

“Come on, let’s head back.”

They walk back to the beach instead hand in hand, carrying their skateboards. They enjoy the relaxing pace of the day rather than missing most of it by rushing. Something Katniss’ parents were prone to doing. They didn’t enjoy the simple things like the sunshine or the rain. They were go go go all the time. And Katniss felt that they were missing out on life.

He points out birds to her as they walk and he makes sure they walk further away from the black and white birds, known as magpies, as they were prone to swooping anyone.

“How do they actually get you?” She asks.

“Sometimes they do and it can hurt. They love bike riders especially, that’s why you see many riders attach zip ties to their helmets as a deterrent.”

“You Australian’s have such strange animals.”

“I know we do. The most deadliest as well.” He laughs.

“Well, it doesn’t make me love the country any less.”

He kisses her on the cheek and pulls her close to his body.

They decide to head back to Byron Bay and catch some waves there.

They travel back up the coast and park near Main Beach. They meet up with Peeta’s friends for an after lunch swim and soak up the late afternoon sun.

Annie joins them on the beach, having finished for the day and sips a smoothie and reads a parenting book.

“Have you thought of any names?” Katniss asks her.

“We have but we’re still not set on one name, especially until he is finally here.” Annie smiles.

“You’re free for next Thursday aren’t you girls?”

“We sure are.” Madge tells her.

“Good. We’re doing the shoot that afternoon. I can’t wait. The clothes arrived today.”

“Are they beautiful?”

“They are. So amazing. And the first few children pieces arrived as well. We’re quite happy with how those turned out. We’ll be requesting more.”

“You’re little boy is going to be so stylish.” Madge states. “He’s got beautiful parents and a mother with a good sense of fashion. He’s going to be like one of those babies straight off the runway.”

Annie laughs. “I’m glad he has a mother with style. He’s father isn’t very stylish.”

“Really? I thought he had a sense of style?” Katniss asks.
“All me. You should have seen him when we first met, he was a train wreck.”

“That’s not nice, calling me a train wreck.” Finnick states, coming up behind the girls.

“Well, your fashion choice was.”

“I’ll admit to that.” He tells the girls and kisses the top of Annie’s head. “How’s my little man doing?”

“He is doing a good. He’s been a very good boy today, not kicking me as much today which was very considerate.”

“What have I told you love, he’s just eager to get out into the ocean and swim to his heart content.

“That is probably true. He’s going to be part saltwater.” Annie jokes and rubs her stomach.

“That’s what Finnick’s parents say. He has saltwater swimming through his veins.”

“Nothing wrong with having the ocean etched into your soul.” Finnick states.

“No there’s not.” Katniss agrees with a smile.

“You girls want to feel him?” Annie asks.

“Of course.” Madge exclaims.

“Just here.”

Annie points to just below her belly button and the three girls touch her stomach waiting for the movement.

“Wow, that was hard.” Prim says giggling. “Arm or foot?”

“Arm. He likes punching me, especially when he can hear Finnick.”

“That’s not a sign for things to come is it?” Katniss asks jokingly.

“I hope not.” Finnick tells them. “I’m just going for a surf, love.”

She kisses him goodbye and he runs off down the beach to the boys who are out at sea.

“This is so amazing.” Katniss admits. “I mean I used to feel Prim in mom’s stomach all the time but I was only little then. I now understand it more that it’s more surreal.”

Annie smiles and touches her stomach right where her baby is punching her. “You girls want to become parents?”

“Hopefully one day.” Madge tells her.

“Maybe.” Katniss replies with a small smile.

“Definitely.” Prim answers. “But not until I’m 30.”

“That’s a sensible age.” Annie tells her chuckling. “But what can I say, I’m 21.”

“There’s no perfect time to become a parent.” Madge tells her. “It’s when you’re ready and I think you’re more than ready. I’ve known you for over a year now and I could see it from the minute I met you.”
“Thanks.” Annie says. “And before I forget, Finnick and I are marrying in a few weeks. We want you girls to be there.”

“We’d love to be there.” Prim tells her. “A beach wedding?”

“Yes. We’re just going to have a celebrant and marry barefoot in front of our favourite place on earth.”

“We’ll be there. We wouldn’t miss it for the world.” Katniss tells Annie with a smile. “Want us to bring something?”

“I want you and Peeta to sing for us.” Annie tells her.

“Anything in particular?”

“I’ll leave that up to you two to decide.”

“Prim you can join us.” Katniss tells her sister as she buckles her sandals.

“It’s fine, Jai’s taking me to the movies.”

“We’ll don’t be out too late. Straight home when it finishes alright.” Prim nods. “Good, cause I don’t want Mom and Dad to murder me.”

“Make sure Jai looks out for you. Friday nights can get crazy in town.” Peeta tells her.

“We’ll be fine. We’ll call you if something goes wrong.” Prim reassures them and Jai appears at her side.

“Ready to go Prim?” He asks.

She nods at him and turns back to Katniss and Peeta. “We’ll be back by ten.” She tells them. “Bye.”

“I’ll watch her. Don’t worry Katniss.”

“Bye kids.” Peeta calls out after them as they leave down the hallway.

Prim shoots them a look to be cool and they laugh out loud as they head out the front door. Madge and Sam would soon follow heading out for the night.

“I’m not pleased you blew me off.” Madge had told her that afternoon. “But have fun and I hope you get laid.”

Peeta was making them pasta. Nothing too difficult. Katniss would have been fine with grilled cheese, as long as she got to share it with Peeta.

They are sharing a bottle of wine and the company of each other.

“We’re off. We might see you when we get back.” Madge tells them. “Have fun you two.” She tells them and leans down to Katniss’ ear to whisper. “I have condoms in my bedroom if you need them.”

“Go.” Katniss tells her, slapping her hand gently.
“Use protection.” Madge calls out as Sam leads her out of the house.

“It’s been her life long mission to get me laid. Jokes on her, I lost my virginity before she did.” Katniss tells him with a smirk.

“Really?”

“By a week. I still get bragging rights.”

“You certainly do.” He grins and leans over the bench to kiss her. “More wine my lady?”

“Certainly.”

He fills her glass and turns his attention to dinner. She gets up, changing the song and opens the windows and doors further. River is on his bed in the living room watching them sleepily.

Peeta drains the pasta and brings it to the fettuccini that’s cooking on the stove. He stirs the pasta into the sauce and turns the stove off, dishing up dinner like a professional.

He sets the pan aside and they carry their bowls outside. An evening storm is brewing in the distance but a sense of calm is present. Katniss can also feel the heat and the electricity.

They eat dinner and drink their wine and watch the storm come closer to shore.

“She’s a big one tonight.” Peeta comments.

“She is.” Katniss agrees, sipping her wine. “We may have to venture inside if it is.”

He smiles at her and eats another forkful of pasta.

She curls up into his side and he wraps an arm around her shoulder’s bringing her closer to him.

“Dinner was lovely.” She whispers.

“If only I wasn’t so rusty, I’d be able to make you a more gourmet dish.”

“I would have been happy with grilled cheese. You do that, than you’ve won the key to my heart.”

“You’re big on cheese?”

“I am, shamefully.”

“Well at my parents bakery they make these cheese buns. They’re flakey and delicious, especially when they first come out of the oven. I’m heading home Saturday afternoon for Sunday, I’ve got a gig. Do you want to accompany me? I’ll ask my dad to put some aside for us?”

“You’re asking me to meet your parents?”

“Maybe. I just want company mostly on the long drive there and back.”

“I’m not good with parents.”

“I don’t care.”

She doesn’t need much convincing. “Okay, I’ll go with you.”
“Thank you.” He says pressing multiple kisses to her face.

He smiles and she smiles back at him.

River whines from inside and they turn their attention to the dog who has buried himself deep into the cushions of the couch, the storm not in his favour for the night.

Peeta carries their plates inside and she follows with their half empty glasses. She follows on unsteady feet, the wine having gone straight to her head. She sets them down on the bench and steadies herself on the granite.

“Let’s light some candles, turn the lights out and we’ll watch the storm.” She suggests.

He helps her light the many candles around the house and they switch the lights off. They are bathed in candlelight and the big streetlights and the occasional flash of lightning. The music’s volume is lowered and they settle on the floor with the doors and windows having been closed for the storm, they leave one door open to feel the breeze and smell the ocean. She sits between his legs and they watch the storm, the thunder and lightning getting nearer and the rain falling heavy outside. They sip from their wine and mould their bodies against each other’s. It’s familiar and comforting, his chest conforming to the curve of her spine.

They’re silent as they watch the storm. They lose track of time when the power goes out and how long it lasts for.

But when it’s passed the power still stays off she turns in his arms, her chest touching his waist.

“Dance with me.” She murmurs to him after their lips meet in a long kiss.

She’s not sure what’s brought this on but slow dancing with him is something that seems so natural, beautiful and sensual for them both.

He lifts her to her feet, places one hand on her hip and they clasp their other hands together to form the perfect slow dance stance.

They dance in time to the wind and the sea breeze, in a slow circle on the kitchen floor. Candles flicker with the wind and their eyes remain locked on each other. Wide eyes and small smiles.

They draw closer to each other, their lips being the first thing to touch in the slow dance. They move closer with each small step and their hips are soon touching. Her head starts to spin from the small circles they do and she leans her head down on his shoulder to stop the world from spinning. Her lips brushing the skin of his neck, soft like moth wings and they remain entangled in an embrace that she’s never experience before. It’s so intimate; she never wants it to end.

She can feel his lips on her cheek and she wonders if he can feel shivers up his spine as she touches kisses down his neck. Her skin prickles from the breeze or from him. She doesn’t know but they continue their slow step dance and he begins to hum for them. His throat vibrating as she rests her lips on his pulse point.

He draws her face out from his neck to touch her lips with his softly, letting their tongues explore each other’s mouths. She can taste the sea and the wine on his lips. She brings her hands to his neck and his hair. He holds her hips and touches her back. And they continue with a side-to-side sway. The music cuts back on and their bodies move to the soft beat of Ben Howard.

And promise me this:
You’ll wait for me only,
Scared of the lonely arms.
He lifts her in his arms, her legs wrapping around his waist with ease. He holds her effortlessly and carries her to the granite bench, setting her on the cold surface of the granite.

*Who am I, darling to you?*
*Who am I?*
*Gonna tell you stories of mine*
*Who am I?*

Their lips never leave each other; his hips grind into hers slowly. His hands roam under the skirt of her dress to her hips and hold her steady to him.

They pull apart, breaths ragged, their eyes dark and full of lust and want.

“Only if you want it.” He whispers so softly to her. She’s unsure if he really did speak.

“I do.” She replies and he smiles before helping her down from the bench.

She leads him upstairs to the spare room where her parents have been occupying. He turns her round to face him in the room that is bathed in soft moonlight from the clearing storm clouds. His lips touch hers and he guides her to the bed until the back of her legs hit the softness of the comforter and she falls down onto the mattress pulling him with her.

He runs his fingers up and down her spine. They’re facing each other with the moonlight streaming in through the open curtains. Their legs are entwined with each other and they are boneless. His fingers are the only deliberate movement either of them have committed to making. Her arms are wrapped around his body but she’s too exhausted to trail her fingers over his bare, sweaty skin.

She manages to open her eyes and look at him in the moonlit room. His mouth is set in a small smile; his eyes are closed but only just, he’s fighting the slumber that is calling him. His face says it all and she knows hers is the same.

She trails her hand up to his unruly curls and plays with the curls, curling her fingers through the strands of hair. They are soft to touch and she closes her eyes at the softness of them.

It was the most beautiful thing she had experienced. They took their time. They didn’t rush. They touched every inch of each other and ravished each other’s bodies with delicate kisses and touches. They let the moonlight guide them as they fell apart numerous times. As they drowned and then resurfaced, ready for more.

She is certain she wants to have this for the rest of her life.

He understood her on such a personal level, like they had been doing this for eternity. He could read her body language and determine what she wanted from the sounds and the reactions. Something most 18-year-old boys couldn’t do.

But it was like their souls connected and their bodies knew exactly what to do without a word spoken. It was instinct, a primal instinct. It was sensual and exotic.

They ravished each other for over an hour before finally connecting. They reached their final climax together, singing out words of pleasure. They remained connected for a long while afterwards, neither of them wanting to disconnect.

Prim had come home sometime during with Jai but they remained downstairs to watch Netflix and bask in the electricity the couple left behind on their chase for fulfillment.
He kissed soft kisses to her face when they pulled apart and they cleaned each other up before falling under the sheets, holding each other tightly.

He whispers to her as she succumbs to the exhaustion that’s pulling her under and she just catches what he whispers to her as he dances his fingers gently across her cheek.

“You’re so beautiful Katniss.”

Chapter End Notes

This has been one of my favourite chapters to write. I hope you all enjoyed our favourite couple finally... coupling.

Songs used:
Fire and The Flood - Vance Joy
Promise - Ben Howard

Come and find me on Tumblr - Herainab
Katniss trails her fingers up and down Peeta’s bare back. He’s still out to it, his blond hair curling over his forehead and over his eyes. He smiles that 100-watt smile in his slumber and she leans in, kissing him on the cheek.

“Mom’s on the phone!” Prim announces bursting into the bedroom. “Shit.” She curses, covering the speaker of the phone as she notices the state of undress of her big sister and her lover.

“What’s wrong Prim?” Katniss hears her mother on the other end.

“Nothing Mom, just stubbed my toe.” She lies, her eyes are still wide and Katniss is proud at her baby sister for managing not to stammer a response. She was at an age of secrets and lies and was much better at deception than Katniss was. “Here’s Katniss.”

She hands over the phone and apologises before winking at her sister as she steps out of the room, closing the door behind her.

Peeta wakes beside her, the sheet was barely covering anything and she knows Prim got an eyeful of bare skin.

A lot of bare skin.

“Hi Mom.”

“I didn’t wake you did I?” She asks. “You’re usually awake this time anyway.”

“I’m on holidays Mom. I’m enjoying the relaxation. Besides the surf isn’t going anywhere.”

In truth Katniss and Peeta woke at dawn for a surf but desires got the better of them and they ended up a tangle of limbs again and passed out before the morning light bathed their skin.

“Very well.” Rosie replies. “I was just checking in on you all.”

“We’re fine Mom.” She tells her mother as Peeta embraces her, kissing her neck. “Anything else you want to ask?”

“You three are behaving?”

“Mom.” Katniss groans and Peeta sucks her pulse point a little too hard, causing her body to writhe against his.

Peeta manages to line their centres up and she can feel him hard on her thigh.

“Katniss, we want to make sure you are keeping our end of the deal.”

“Mom, I’m doing everything you have asked me to do. I’ve been taking care of Prim and I’ve been following curfew. No boys, no parties or drugs.”

Most of it was a lie but her mother would never know. Neither her or parents were actively on Facebook and Peeta hadn’t tagged her in a single photo he had posted. And the shots were tasteful. Mostly of her back or her in the far distance.
“Good, well I wanted to let you know we won’t be coming next week. You’re father and I are going to head up the Coast ourselves for the week. Paul and Michelle are busy with work. We’ll be back the following week though.”

“Okay, sounds good.” She tells her mother as Peeta continues he’s descent down her body.

“I’ve got to go, we’re heading out. Remember to call us if something is wrong.”

“We’ll be fine. Talk to you later.”

“Have a great day.”

“You too. Bye Mom.”

“Bye Katniss.”

The line goes dead and Katniss throws the phone beside her. “You’re lucky you’re good at that.” She tells him. He laughs against her thigh, tickling the sensitive skin and brings her leg over his shoulder.

“Oh, look who it is. Finally decided to join us?” Madge teases from the kitchen, a mug of coffee in her hands. Prim is at the bench on her laptop. Sam outside on the phone. “How was your date?”

Katniss rolls her eyes and moves to the coffee machine. “It was great.”

“That’s good. You missed a wild night at Cheeky’s.”

“Really? What happened?” Peeta asks, sitting down beside Prim who blushes.

“Just the usual, backpackers and locals mixing, good music and a lot of alcohol. We’ll have to go another night.”

“Well they’re opened every night bar Sundays. I’m sure Prim wouldn’t mind us having another night out.” Peeta says.

“How was your night last night?” Katniss asks.

Prim shyly smiles up at her sister.

“Jai’s still here.” Madge tells them.

“What?” Katniss asks, her eyes going wide.

“No, nothing like that. It was late when we finished up and the police usually monitor the streets. I just told him to stay the night. He slept in your bed. Nothing happened.”

“Okay, that’s fine.”

“And I was going to ask you but you were… preoccupied.” Prim trails off, glancing at her sister and Peeta.

Katniss bites her lip and Peeta smiles an embarrassed smile.
“Oh you two are just too cute.” Madge states with a grin.

“I’m surprised you’re awake this early.” Katniss says to her cousin.

“Sam and I went for a morning surf.”

“So you didn’t have a big night?”

“Oh we did. We just sobered up quickly. Midnight swims sober you up so quickly.”

“Yuck.” Prim groans, sticking her tongue out.

“You’re 14, get your mind out of the gutter.” Madge tells her with a giggle.

Katniss pops bread into the toaster and hands Peeta his cup of coffee. Jai joins them downstairs, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

“Morning Jai.” Peeta greets him.

The boy freezes mid step. “Oh, morning…. I…”

“Jai it’s fine.” Katniss reassures him before he starts his apology vomit. “You’re welcome anytime.”

“Thanks Katniss.” He mutters and sinks onto the stool beside Prim.

The toast pops and Katniss spreads peanut butter on the slices and comes and sits down beside Peeta. She’s drawn to him like a magnet, her body needing to feel his. She knows they’ll be touchy feely the rest of the day.

He kisses her cheek and takes a bite of the toast and smirks at her, raising his eyebrows slightly in a suggestive manner as he makes monster-crunching sounds.

“Get a room.” Sam tells them as he enters the kitchen. “He’s never been like this Katniss.”

“Why do I think that’s a lie.” Katniss jokes.

“It’s the truth.” Sam replies. “He’s never been this crazy about a girl. Never really stuck around for peanut butter on toast and coffee.”

“Well, I’m sure he has and hasn’t told you about it.”

“Maybe but I’ve never seen him like this.”

Peeta blushes and Katniss feels butterflies fill her stomach. She kisses him on the lips. She’s never been this bold before with a boy, especially in front of her family, friends or strangers.

“Neither have I.” Prim adds. “She’s like a whole new person. I like this person. Maybe you should stay behind, you’re less grumpy here.”

Katniss sticks her tongue out at her sister and takes a bite of her toast.

“Anyway, we’re going to the Sunshine Coast tonight.” Katniss tells them.

“What for?” Prim asks. “Did you ask Mom and Dad?”

“Peeta’s got a gig. I don’t think they’ll care.”
“It’s your funeral.”

Katniss rolls her at her sister and turns back to Peeta, sipping her coffee. Peeta smirks from behind the rim of his mug.

They head out for a surf, competing against the weekend crowds that have flocked to the beach. The waves aren’t as big but it’s enough to satisfy the two of them. They retreat back to the sand, burying their feet in the sand. She warms her skin with the sun and he lies beside her, humming as he runs his fingers up and down her olive stomach.

“I want to hear you sing again.” He murmurs.

“What do you want me to sing?” She replies.

“One of your originals.”

She lies still and he draws closer to her body. Their heads are side by side and they watch the sky.

“As I sat alone, I heard you asking her to join you
As I fell down against my will
I begged Scarlet please, and I fell to my knees
Scarlet will never love you like I will
Scarlet will never love you like I do”

She pauses for a moment and hears him exhale the breath he’s been holding before she begins again.

“She blossomed in these woods, you’ll never know when you can find her skin
The night sky here, shows the stars brighter than she's ever seen
Trapped beneath her thoughts, she can see it all that this is all but clarity
But Scarlet please”

She finishes the song and feels him turn to face her. She stares into his ocean blue eyes and sees tears in his eyes. He doesn’t say a word. She’s rendered him speechless. Something that is so hard to do with Peeta Mellark. When words fail, actions speak. He kisses her with a long and beautiful kiss. A kiss that speaks the words he can’t say. It’s full of the emotions they both feel at expressing and hearing. It’s a kiss of amazement and a thank you. It’s passionate but not passionate enough to want anything more.

He pulls away from her, touching her cheek and kisses her quickly again.

“The birds certainly do fall silent.” He manages to say.

She smiles at him and pulls him back down to lay down beside her. She doesn’t want to do anything else today but be with him. She wants to feel his body beside hers and hear his heart beating.

She had done that the whole of last night. Slept with her head on his chest, listening to the soothing beating of his heart and the sound of the ocean. She knew it was the most beautiful and surreal thing to listen to and she knew she’d forever want to hear those two combinations. As well as him singing.

He doesn’t bother asking because he’s a musician, he knows all too well about heartbreak and
They pack up his van with their things. Madge and Prim sit on the front steps of the house with River sitting between them. Sam had left before lunch for his shift at the shack.

They’d make it to Peeta’s family home in three hours but they’ve decided to take it slow. Camp the night at a place Peeta frequents and wanted to share with Katniss. He mostly wanted a night alone with her, under the stars with some wine and music playing as they talk away at their hearts content. She realised they had so much still to tell each other.

She hugs her sister and cousin goodbye and climbs into Peeta’s van. He heads out of the driveway and to the road that will take them up the coast.

The music plays softly for them and they remain in silence for the first twenty minutes of the trip. She snacks on lollies and feeds him them across the console.

“I was home-schooled until I was in year ten.” He tells her. “That’s why I’m so weird and such.”

“You’re not weird.” She tells him. “Why were you home-schooled?”

“My eldest brother, Kyal, my parents didn’t see it suited him. He was having trouble with other kids and hated it. My parents decided to pull him out and home school him and they didn’t bother with Rye and myself. It was working well with Kyal and it worked well with the rest of us. It was easier with the bakery for my parents and we got to determine what we did. We were really smart and never fell behind. We had an area assessor who had to make sure we were on track and she was always pleased with our progress. Kyal and Rye were doing university courses by the time they were 15 and I was getting published in a surf magazine when I was their age. I finished school a year early.”

“So why’d you end up at school?”

“For the last two years of high school they put us back into mainstream schools. The work was a lot harder for my parents to teach and they saw it as a perfect opportunity to meet kids our own age and experience the school environment. They also thought it might look a bit better on our records if we’d at least been in the school system for 11 and 12.” He tells her. “I already knew a few kids from surfing and kicking about on weekends. I slid into school easily. I was just a weird kid though who hadn’t had a lot of experience with girls in my lifetime.” He laughs. “I used to go up and tell girls they were beautiful randomly or just be really uncool around them. That’s what 10 years of home schooling did to me.”

Katniss chuckles and imagines awkward Peeta still at school. If he had acne, how he wore his uniform, was his hair wilder than it was now and did the girls swoon over his body and his eyes.

“I bet the girls still liked you.”

“I went to a small school. I supposed I dated. Like I told you, I suck at being single and I figured that out as soon as I had these girls at my school, an endless option of girls. And once I started mingling with girls from other schools and such.” He admits. “Apparently girls love the surfer stereotype and that’s what I was. I surfed, played music and looked like a typical surfer.”

“That was the same with me. I was the one the boys ogled because of my interests and not a lot of girls I went through school with were the same as me, I was different and they liked that.”

“Did you like the attention they gave you?” He asks.
“Sometimes I did. I think it was to fill the void of my parents not being around all the time. I sought it in the wrong people, mostly as a way to rub it in my parents face and make them realise. But they were never around to notice the behaviour.”

He nods his head seeming to understand what she’s saying and he continues to drive.

“I was the same. My parents kept comparing me to my brothers. They had enrolled in university courses early before they even finished year 11 and were done much earlier. I was a little more distracted when it came to school once I got older. I never wanted to go to Uni like them. I just wanted to do what I do now.”

“And you like it?”

“I love it.” He tells her. “School did me good I suppose, taught me a little more and then handed me off into the big wide world.”

“Which is so much fun.”

He laughs and kisses the back of her hand that she rests on his thigh.

“What’d you brother’s study?”

“Kyal studied business and is in the middle of getting a business up and running. He’s on track to being an entrepreneur. He’s doing really well for himself too, especially at 25. Rye is a school teacher.”

“And it’s Kyal with the little boy?”

“Yeah, he met his partner Jacinta a couple of years ago at a surfing competition, she was pregnant when they first met with her daughter from a previous relationship that fell apart before she found out she was pregnant. Kyal fell in love with her and her daughter and she knows him as her father, her bio father is not interested at all.” Peeta explains. “Kyal calls it love at first sight. She’s a partner with him in their business. Her daughter is just over 3 and just as beautiful as my nephew.”

“How sweet. What are they doing?”

“Lily, that’s my niece, she had really sensitive skin as a baby and so does Harry. They’ve designed chic clothes, bedding and things from bamboo and it’s become this huge hit. Especially at markets and things. They’ve received attention for it and are on the path to expanding the line. They’re going really well with it. And looking at expanding into nappy creams and lotions.”

“That’s really good.”

“It is. We’re real proud of them.”

She smiles at him and listens to him tell her stories about his family and childhood. She adds in little bits about her childhood, facts that aren’t as important as other memories.

They stop off for an early dinner of fish and chips by the beach, a popular Aussie tradition Peeta tells her before they stop at a liquor shop and pick up some wine and some snacks and Peeta drives them in the direction of the campground, one that is always so quiet and has the warmest water running through a river that’s waist deep.

He parks the van close to the river and it’s a warm enough night to not worry about a fire or anything. The sun has mostly set and orange light filters through the trees and the vans windows. They sit on a log and drink wine from plastic cups and cuddle next to each other. He had made
sure to spray them down with insect repellent and they watched the stars come alive in the
darkening night sky.

They share kisses and go for a walk through the campground together, using the toilets and walk
back to the van hand in hand. They drink more wine and listen to music.

Peeta had told her he wanted to introduce her to some of his favourite artists, ones who had
inspired him with their writing talents. They were a mixture of artists, ones from different countries
and different genres.

“Oh, my dad loves Paul Kelly. Played him all the time in the bakery. He’s a storyteller. One that I
hope to be some day.” Peeta tells her as he selects a song. “I’ve grown up with him and have
started to appreciate him more that I’m older.”

Before too long
We’ll be together
And no one will tear us apart
Before too long
The words will be spoken
I know all the action by heart
As the night-time follows day
I’m closing in
Every dog will have his day
Any dog can win

She cuddles up to him and pulls the blanket up over her shoulders as she listens to his playlists of
inspiring artists. He abandons playing DJ and leaves the music playing on shuffle as his lips find
hers in the darkness. She moves to straddle him and grinds her hips against his.

She climbs from his lap and stands, holding her hand out for him and he takes it, letting her lead
him to his van.

She lightly traces the constellation of freckles on his back and he fights fatigue to keep his eyes
open, staring at her from his pillow. The sheets don’t cover their bodies that are still burning and
sweaty from their coupling. She kisses him and moves back to her pillow.

“You said your parents were hardly around to take care of you.” He whispers into the quiet cabin
of his van. She nods and trails her hand up to his hair. “Why?”

She shrugs her shoulders and twists the curls around her fingers. “I suppose being doctors is hard,
especially being really good doctors. My mother’s schedule was all over the place because babies
never run on a schedule. She works 9 to 5 in her practice tending to women’s health and
pregnancy. Then she’d be on call for deliveries or emergencies. Dad works in the same practice as
Mom. He’s a neurosurgeon. He was going to take a step back and do a lot of trials. This was
before my cousin Thomas was diagnosed.”

“Thomas?”

“Madge’s brother. My father discovered a tumour in his brain and diagnosed it with cancer. He
was only 4 when they discovered the tumour. He died when he was 6. There was nothing else
they could do.”

“I’m so sorry.”

She accepts his gratitude. “His death hit our family hard. My father delved into trying to piece
together what he did wrong, he blamed himself for a long while and we hardly saw him. So he just used work as his distraction. He picked up as many patients as he could and worked and worked. We were lucky to see him once a day. Mom cut back a bit but once I got my license she was back to working long hours and partnered with dad in a clinical trial with foetus tumours. They had odd working hours and I long accepted their choice to work than raise us.”

“And that began the cry for help?”

She nods. “Yeah, I wanted them to realise we needed them still. I wanted to get caught so they’d punish me or try to realise the effect their absence had on us.”

“I could only imagine.”

“And now since I’m 18 and deciding on my future they decide they want an opinion when I’m perfectly fine on deciding on my life. I can’t become the shell of what I am. I can’t watch patients die. I don’t care that it’s a high paying career; I don’t care about the benefits. I don’t want to become liable for people’s lives, watch young children die from untreatable diseases. I can’t do it. And I want them to know that, to back off and let me breathe. Watching Thomas die made me realise I didn’t want to be a doctor.”

He brushes her hair away from her cheek and wipes the tears from her cheeks. He kisses her lips softly and pulls back to look at her, his eyes soft and comforting. “Tell me about Thomas.”

She smiles and remembers her little cousin. “He was so cute and smart. Insanely smart. He loved counting and swimming. He had blue eyes, the same as Madge’s and curly blond hair. He was empathetic and curious from such a young age. He loved going to the beach and I used to take him on my board a lot. He loved the old family dog they had and was very affectionate. Our family loved him and he was the only boy grandchild. He was spoilt and loved when I played the guitar for him and sang him to sleep.”

He wipes the tears from underneath her eyes.

“He didn’t grow much once the tumour started growing. It ate away at his body and he remained the size of his four-year-old self. He was so spirited though during treatments and doctor visits. When he was five, his hospital visits increased and he started having seizures. He basically lived in the hospital from then on. His hospital room became his bedroom and we knew that the tumour was spreading and there was nothing they could do. So they started preparations but Thomas still remained his usual self but we knew on the inside he was hurting.”

“I remember visiting him in the hospital and I just watched him go down hill. He got his wish and our family took him to Disneyland. He got the VIP treatment and we all put on a brave face for him. It was hard to be so brave for him when he was acting so strong. He never complained and was always a good boy. We celebrated his sixth birthday, he was allowed out for the day and we took him to the beach. And his smile was so big and contagious. A month after his birthday he wanted out. He had had enough and was getting worse. He knew it was time to go and he was so tired of the treatment. His final scans confirmed that there was nothing more they could do than make him comfortable.”

“They were allowed to bring him home. He had asked to come home. They set him up downstairs, overlooking the beach. He had his dog by his side, lots of family, love and affection. Madge, Prim and I wheeled him down to the beach three days before he died. He was starting to feel a lot of pain and his pain relief had increased. He went downhill from there. He got to feel the water and the sand, feel the breeze and smell the ocean for one last time. That was the last time I saw him. I remember hugging him really tightly and telling him how much I loved him and I’d see him on the other side. He said he’d be a better surfer than me by the time we met again and I told
him I didn’t doubt that. He died on the 7th of October at 5:53am. The same time the sun started to rise, He died in his parents and sisters’ arms.”

Peeta embraces her tightly and she sobs, the tears threatening to spill as she spoke have started and show no sign of slowing down.

“I would have loved to meet him.” Peeta tells her, rubbing soothing circles on her back.

He holds her until the sobbing finishes, she knows he’s probably mad at himself for asking her about Thomas but she wasn’t. She had never cried like this to anyone before or shared her memories of Thomas.

Peeta was Peeta. And she knew if she never returned she’d have fond memories of him and the place that changed her, the place that awakened her soul.

He kisses her when she asks him to and then she pulls him outside the van. They don’t care that they are naked; she wanted to be careless yet again and make more memories with him.

They step into the river together. The moonlight reflects off of the water and the stars shine brightly above them. They swim in the water, cleansing their bodies and move back together. He holds her under the moonlight and kisses her deeply and with everything he’s got. A kiss that comes from deep within him. He holds her to his body and doesn’t let her go. His lips just touch her neck and she feels warmth gradually spread throughout her body. She never wants to let him go.

A rustling breaks them apart and they hear the echo of voices headed in their direction from other campers. A European accent cuts down the river to where they are and they see three campers, a girl and two boys stripping down behind scrub and trying to shush each other to not wake or alert themselves to other campers.

Katniss and Peeta swim out from the river, their moment of privacy interrupted and wrap towels around their bodies and bring the speakers and their wine into the van. She braids her wet hair and they slide under the covers of his sheets.

She traces her finger over the scar on his shoulder. She’s seen it plenty of times but never had the courage to ask him how he got it.

“How’d you get this?” She asks him.

He kisses her and begins to speak. “Let’s just say the floor to ceiling windows in my parents bakery wasn’t very strong with a toddler riding towards it on his trike.”

“You rode through the glass in your trike?” Katniss asks shocked.

“I wasn’t watching where I was going and crashed straight into it. I was pretty lucky that I had my helmet on and only a few shards actually got me. The other scars have faded in the last 16 years; just this one was the worst. I had about 40 stitches and my parents had a very expensive glass repair bill.” He chuckles. “It’s a story that’s always brought up and gets a good laugh from.”

“I bet your parents weren’t laughing when it happened?”

“No they weren’t but overtime it’s become a funny story.”

“I bet.” She replies with a wide smile.

He kisses her for no reason and she smiles at him.
“Sing with me tomorrow.” He says.

“Why?”

“Because I want to show the people of The Sunshine Coast how amazing you are.”

“What are we singing?”

“Whatever you want to sing.”

“Can we decide tomorrow?”

“Of course we can.” He tells her. “For now, I want to make use of this time alone.”

He rolls her onto her back and hovers over her body, kissing her lips. Her legs fall apart to accommodate him and she throws her head back against the pillow at the feel of him between her aching core.

He wasn’t busking until 1, which gave them plenty of time to get to his hometown. She wakes him as the sun starts to filter in through his windows and they couple as the sun rose and bathe their skin. They dress when they finally manage to untangle themselves and Peeta drives them out of the grounds with their stomachs rumbling and breakfast waiting for them at the bakery.

It’s just a twenty-minute drive to the bakery café and Katniss gets a look into Peeta’s childhood. He points out to her the different places he used to frequent and where his family all live. The little town was bustling with life at the early hour and many had started to flock to the beach to enjoy the last day of their weekend.

He parks round the back of the bakery where he grew up. The family having since turned the upstairs apartment they once lived in, into the workspace for Kyal. The family had bought a home a couple of streets over a few years ago.

“Come on.”

She follows him into the bakery, their fingers laced with each other’s. She’s surprised at how many people are here.

“This is a popular Sunday morning spot. Everyone surfs and then comes here for breakfast.” He tells her with a smile and waves to a few of the patrons. “It’s probably the best place for breakfast in a 30 kilometre radius.”

They walk to the back of the bakery and Katniss is in awe at how beautiful the bakery is.

“Good morning Miss Lily.” Peeta greets a toddler in a pink fairy dress that sits at a table at the back with a baby who looks to be little Harry.

“Uncle Peeta!” She squeals in delight and jumps from her chair and into her uncle’s arms.

“I’ve missed you Princess.” He tells her, squeezing her and kissing her cheek before letting her go.

Lily’s eyes flit up to Katniss and she smiles slightly before looking at her uncle. “Who’s that? She’s really pretty.”

“My friend Katniss. She’s from America.” He tells her with a smile.
Lily walks forward and Katniss kneels down to the girls’ level. She wraps her arms tightly around Katniss like she’s known her forever.

“Hello Lily, I like your dress.”

“Thank you. Uncle Peeta bought it for me.” She tells Katniss, touching the end of Katniss’ braid. “You’re really pretty.”

“So are you Lily.” Katniss tells the toddler.

“I thought I heard your voice.” A man beams and comes into view. He looks much like Peeta and she knows it’s his father.

“Hi Dad.”

“It’s good to see you.”

“It’s only been three weeks.” Peeta reminds him.

“It feels like forever.” He tells his son and spots Katniss. “And who’s this?”

“This is Katniss. Katniss this is my father Dave.”

“It’s lovely to meet you Katniss.” Dave says, kissing Katniss’ cheek.

“You too.”

“I hear an American accent?” He asks.

“She’s from Santa Monica Dad, she’s on a family holiday.”

“Well, I hope you like our country. And I hope my son has been treating you well.”

“It’s a lovely country and Peeta has been a great host.”

“That’s great. You kids want some breakfast?” He asks.

“Yes please.”

“Cheese buns?” He asks with a grin.

“Yes and coffee.”

“Coming right up.” He tells them.

Lily tugs on Katniss’ hand. “Will you sit with me?”

“Of course.”

Peeta greets his nephew Harry who is absolutely adorable. Harry gurgles and coos at his uncle.

A purple marker is placed into Katniss’ hand and a piece of paper pushed in her direction. Katniss smiles at Lily and checks out what she is drawing before she starts on her own.

She gradually meets more of Peeta’s family, his mother, his Nana and Pop, his brothers and Jacinta and Eliza, Rye’s girlfriend. His brothers press for more details about who Katniss is and with a knowing smirk they already know. They were his older brothers; they could read him like
She eats breakfast and drinks her coffee. The cheese buns were amazing and she asks for more. Jacinta sits with her kids and chats to Katniss, getting to know her a bit more.

“How’s it growing up in Santa Monica?” She asks as she brings Harry to her breast to nurse.

“It’s great. Great people and environment. I’ve been surfing everyday of my life. I have the beach at my backyard and a great appreciation for music.”

“She’s real good.” Peeta buts in and smiles at her before returning to his colouring. “Really good.”

“What do you sing?”

“Indie or folk. A little pop as well.”

“You write?”

“I do. I play guitar as well.”

“Just like Peeta here.”

“Well, that’s how I first saw him. He was busking the first day I got to Byron. He’s a very talented musician. Saw him play the next night and I’ve been mesmerised ever since.”

“He is really talented. Lily and Harry love hearing him sing.”

“Me too.” Katniss admits. “He even gave me a bit of a music education yesterday, showed me all his favourite songs and the ones he’s grown up listening to and now have an appreciation for.”

“Paul Kelly?” Jacinta asks with an amused smile.

“Yes. He’s great.”

“He is. Dave has him playing here quite a lot. He’s taught his kids a lot about music.”

Katniss smiles and sips her coffee. The café is still bustling with patrons and the rest of the family and staff throws off good vibes, they’re friendly and very kind. They greet everyone and go the extra mile. Dave telling people to check out Peeta at 1’clock, just out the front of the bakery.

They’ve set up under the shade of a tree. The street is packed with the lunchtime crowd. He sets up his case for tips and has a box of his EP for sale at the counter. He’s transformed into his usual busking self. Katniss watches from close by, his family sitting at the bar window, watching him from inside the bakery. Lily sits on Katniss’ lap, her hair braided in two braids, having asked Katniss to braid her hair. The crowd seems to gather and watch from everywhere.

“Thank you.” He tells them all. “I’ll like to call a close friend of mine to join me for the next couple of songs. She’s come all the way from America so please give her some love. Katniss Everdeen.”

Katniss switches Lily to the chair as she stands and comes and joins him with her guitar.

“You came home for the endless summer,

On the way, saw a different colour,

In the street, got a secret to repeat,
In my mind, you’re the ephemeral night.”

The crowd cheers for them as they finish their first song.

“I told you she was amazing.” He chuckles and smiles at her. “I’ve been blessed to meet her and have the opportunity to learn from her. I’ll be sad when she goes back home.” He admits to her with a saddened smile. “Enough of that, our last song with Miss Everdeen.”

“You know that I could use somebody
You know that I could use somebody
Someone like you, And all you know, And how you speak
Countless lovers under cover of the street”

“Thank you.” Katniss says to the crowd that applauds them and stands up, leaving Peeta to finish the set.

Lily climbs back onto her lap. “You were amazing Katniss. You and my uncle should sing together all the time.”

“Lily’s right.” Rye agrees and smirks at her. “You two have musical chemistry.”

She turns back to him and he catches her gaze and smiles at her. Singing the song directly to her. Dread sets itself in the pit of her stomach and she knows this will all be over before it really begins.

And she realises she doesn’t want to say goodbye to him.

She frowns and knows she wants to make everyday of the rest of her trip memorable.

She doesn’t want to be without Peeta.

Chapter End Notes

Songs used in this instalment:
Scarlet By Grace Pitts
Before Too Long By Paul Kelly
Endless Summer By The Jezabels
Use Somebody by Kings of Leon cover by Ziggy Alberts
The travelled down the coast late that afternoon, racing the storm home and on a high from two
days well spent. They had shared an early dinner with his family before they climbed into his van
heading back to Byron Bay. They had surfed, played some more tunes, she got to know the rest of
his family and listen to their compliments and stories about their son and brother.

They had taken Lily out on their boards, something everyone had done with her, and Katniss
marvelled at the joy of the toddler. She was a little water baby too. She didn’t want to be away
from it and was about to throw a tantrum when they gathered their things to leave.

Only Uncle Peeta could stop the tantrum and bring back the bubbly little girl.

He was in good spirits after seeing his family and she knew he cherished those visits, especially
when he was on the road and away from them during long periods of time. His absence had really
helped his relationship with his family.

She can’t help but stare at him during the drive home.

He was glowing.

He was beautiful.

He was as radiant as the sun.

“My brother’s said your voice is better than mine.” He teases.

“We’re apples and oranges. They can’t compare us.” She teases back. “But for the record, I think
we kicked butt.”

“We did.” Peeta agrees and lets out a hearty belly laugh.

The laugh warms her body and she’s glad she gets to share these moments with him.

He pulls into the driveway just after 9. Only Prim was home, Madge sleeping over at Sam’s for
the night. Prim was positioned on the couch with a book and Jai returned home for the night as he
had school the next morning.

“Hello Primrose.”

“Don’t call me that.” She frowns.

“Fine. How are you little sister?”

“Fine. I was enjoying the peace.” She tells her sister, slamming the book closed. “How was the
Sunshine Coast?”

“Beautiful.”

“Well you two are glowing. I bet you did a little more than just meeting the family.”

Katniss scowls and Peeta runs his hand over the back of his neck, blushing.
“Anyway, I’m going to bed. I hope you got all those… desires out. If not please let me know now.”

“Madge keep you up last night?”

“Jai stayed over, we didn’t really notice anything.” She admits. “And before you ask, no nothing happened and nothing will.”

“I just don’t want to see you hurt, that’s all.”

“I’m tough Katniss. You know that.”

“I do.” She says and embraces her sister, kissing the top of her sun-bleached hair. “I missed you.”

“Me too.” She sighs into her sister’s neck. “Night.”

They both say goodnight to her and fall down onto the couch, their bodies moulding against each other and sighing from the comfort of the couch.

“I’m exhausted.” Katniss tells Peeta.

He nods and draws closer to her body, wrapping his arm around her shoulders and kissing her temple. “What do you want to do tonight?” He asks her.

“Bathe and just curl up beside you.”

“I can do that. Would you like me to run you a bath?” She nods against his neck and he kisses her temple again. “Stay right here.”

He leaves her to be and she pats River, running her fingers through his golden fur and scratching the space between his ears.

“Your bath awaits.” He tells her, as he appears downstairs.

She smiles a thanks and stands up, shutting up the backdoors and locking them. Peeta disappears to grab some of his things and she locks the front door as he comes back inside. He leads her upstairs to the bathroom, revealing it to be bathed in candlelight and the bath water filled with bubbles.

“Thank you.”

He smiles and goes to turn on his heel. She grabs his elbow before he does and pulls him into the bathroom, closing the door of the bathroom behind them.

“Stay with me.”

“Always.” He replies.

They undress slowly, she piles her hair on top of her head and they sink into the steamy, bubbly water. She sits with her back pressed to his and he holds her to his body. They don’t speak. But find it more comforting than ever. Silence is sometimes the most beautiful sound.

She can hear the faint sounds of the ocean, music being played from next-door and his heart beating. She can feel it on her back and she sinks further into his body, his chest conforming to her spine.
He peppers her shoulders and neck with kisses and dances his fingers on the tops of her thighs and her waist and eventually links his fingers with hers.

This will be enough for them tonight. Close intimacy, linked fingers and the hearing of their heartbeats. Nothing more. Just like their first night they met, the shy arm slung around her waist. That was enough to make her shiver and feel the goose bumps spread through her bod and feel the heat spread to her fingers and toes.

They slip between the cool sheets of the bed and just stare into each other’s eyes. She was safe and she was warm. She smiles a small smile at him and he returns a smile. His eyes sparkled in the moonlight. He traces the freckles on her body with his fingers and lightly dances his fingers over her bare skin.

It calms her, makes her sleepy and so, very incredibly happy.

…

“Peeta. Wake up.”

“Hmm?”

“Peeta!” She shakes him.

He opens his eyes slowly and looks at her, trying to keep his eyes open. “What’s wrong?”

“We’re getting up.”

“Why?”

“The lighthouse.” She tells him. “Please, you promised me.” He nods and closes his eyes, cuddling the pillow. “Na ah. Not sleep time. It’s walking time.”

He mumbles and she kisses his cheek, climbing out of bed and grabbing clothes. She goes to the bathroom, using the toilet and finding a hair tie to secure her braid. Peeta climbs slowly out of bed to find his own clothes. She ties her sneakers to her feet and stands in front of him, kissing him softly on the mouth.

“Thank you.”

He smiles and slips his feet into his shoes. It’s still dark outside and sunrise isn’t due for another 45 minutes.

Peeta had told her the lighthouse at sunrise was the most beautiful thing he has seen in his life. He had tried to describe to her how spectacular it was and it was something you had to do at least once in your life.

He had explained how he had spent early mornings and late evenings sitting at the lighthouse and just watching the waves, waiting for marine life, watching the clouds and the stars. He was so inspired by this little place; he found it to be a muse.

Prim though hadn’t been too keen on the early morning and would possibly do it another time or just appreciate the photographs.

They slip out of the house, making sure to lock the door after them before heading along the street. Early morning commuters were leaving for the day, backpackers and tourists were catching early busses to their next destination or packing up their cars after time well spent in Byron Bay.
They walk hand in hand through town and towards the lighthouse. They stop for coffee on the way and appreciate the quietness of the early morning. This was their favourite time after all.

“I will make this early morning up to you.” Katniss tells him between sips of her coffee.

He smirks at her and kisses her lips, tasting the warm coffee on them. “I think you’ve already done that sweetheart.”

She smiles at him and he wraps his arm around her shoulder, pulling her closer to his body and leading her to the lookout.

They make it just as the sky starts to lighten. There were few people who had made the early more trek knowing the view would outweigh the sacrifice of sleep.

He guides them to the most easterly part of the lighthouse and she stands pressed against the railing. He stands behind her, her spine moulding with his front. His arms lock her there and they stand in silence watching the sun rise over them and beginning the new day in spectacular style.

Pinks, oranges and reds light the sky and she thinks today’s sunrise is the most beautiful she’s ever seen.

“Look.” Peeta points out into the water. “Can you see it?”

And she smiles. A whale has emerged out of the water showing off to its morning audience.

“They are beautiful.” Peeta speaks.

“They really are.” Katniss agrees and sinks further into his body, watching as another whale emerges from the water.

The few surfers sit in awe watching the great mammals travel down the coast. They know to respect them and give them their space and just admire them from afar.

He wraps his arms around her waist and holds her tightly. His lips touch her neck lightly and she leans into his lips as a shiver shoots down her spine.

Once the sun has risen and they’ve captured pictures he takes her hand and they head back to the main street for breakfast. He walks them into Sae’s and the old woman greets them.

“Mornin’ kids. Why you up so early?”

“Sunrise at Cape.” He tells her with a smile. “It was beautiful this morning.”

“It was. Take a seat kids, I’ll be out in a sec.”

They seat themselves outside and watch the world waking up.

It’s satisfying to her to see the world wake up and begin. To see people go about their normal routine and watch the world as a collective move together. It fascinates her greatly seeing the movements of the world and she takes it into appreciation to see different routines.

Like back at home, she had most of the neighbourhood figured out. She had by the time she was 13 and would wake early for a surf or swim. She knew what time the neighbour would arrive home for work after night shift and shut themselves out for a day of rest. Knew what time the street lights would flick off. When the person across the street would make her way down to the beach for her run. The other next-door neighbour yelling at her kids to wake up and how she’d
curse them for making them run late again. And the loud jazz music that Mr Nelson played from his kitchen, as he got ready for the day. She probably knew them as well as they knew themselves and she oddly found it comforting their routines and normalcy.

Prim found it strange on mornings she joined her, but Katniss shook it off. She was missing that sense of normalcy in her life and craved it in the people who made up her neighbourhood.

And like ants, people scurried their way through the streets, in and out of buildings, around other pedestrians and cars. Watching them chat on their phones, listen to music or chat with someone else. She watches the waves roll in and the early surfers emerging into the water. She likes to imagine their morning routines and their home life. It makes them feel like people rather than just strangers on the street.

“What are you looking at?” Peeta asks, turning to see what she’s been staring at.

“Just the people on the street.”

“Anything interesting?” He asks her.

“I do this thing back home, it may be a little tedious but it’s become familiar. I watch from afar, my neighbourhood going about their days. Watch their routines and their lives. I know what time everything happens and what their next step will be.” She tells him. “It brings a sense of normalcy to my life. I mean, I don’t have my parents at home all the time to bring that routine and familiarity. This watching does bring it and I feel normal. Even if it’s weird for me to watch them and know their lives…” She explains trailing off.

“I know exactly what you mean.” He tells her, squeezing her hand. “When we were kids we thrived off of routine and as adults now we still thrive off of it. We feel a little lost without out.”

She nods. “And when my parents are home I feel like they muck the routine I’ve created. So at least if I watch the neighbour begin or end their days I feel normal.”

He kisses her knuckles and smiles. “I like people watching to. Imagining what they like to eat, or listen to. Where they work and if they have hobbies. If they go out on Friday nights with friends or stay in with their partners, eating takeout and watching the latest released movie. I like to character to build and I’ve done it since I was little. You know I love creative writing? They brought me my characters and my imagination.”

“Prim called me weird for doing this.”

“She just doesn’t understand it.”

Sae takes their orders and they share a casual conversation while they eat their breakfast. Her phone rings from her pocket and she answers it quickly seeing her mother’s name on the screen.

“Hi Mom.”

“Hello dear, how are you?”

“Good.” She tells her mother, stabbing her fork into her pancake.

“You at the house?”

“No, Peeta and I went and watched the sunrise at the lighthouse. We’re just having breakfast now.”
“Prim’s not with you?”

“No, she’s at home. She was still in bed when we left.”

“Ok, well, we’re just checking to make sure everything is alright.”

“Everything is fine.”

“What’d you get up to last night?”

“Just had a quiet night in. Watched a movie, had a bath and went to bed.”

“Sounds lovely. You’re father and I are at the airport, we’re just getting to Hamilton Island. We’re going be there until Friday. We needed some alone time.”

“Gross.” She replies, crinkling her nose.

“If something happens ring your Aunt and Uncle. They’ll be there in a heartbeat.”

“We know Mom.” Katniss reminds her and hears the boarding call sound. “I’ll let you go. See you next week.”

“On Saturday. We’ll be down then.”

“Alright. See you Saturday. Have a nice time.”

“We will. Love you dear and don’t go leaving your sister alone to spend time with that Peeta boy.”

“Mom.” She warns. “He’s my friend.”

“I know. Just remember you’re on a family vacation.”

“Mom… get on your plane. I know it’s a family vacation and I’m spending equal amounts of time with my sister as I am with my friend. Goodbye.”

“Love you dear.”

“Love you too Mom. Bye.”

She ends the call and sighs as she sets her phone on the table.

“She can be painful.”

Peeta just smiles, leaning over to press his lips to her. “She’s just being a parent.”

She nods at him, understanding where he is coming from. She gives him a half-hearted smile.

“I’m just going to go and pay.” He tells her, squeezing her hand and standing to head back inside to pay.

She gulps down the rest of her coffee and takes another huge mouthful of her pancakes and follows Peeta inside. He and Sae are engaged in a conversation with another woman, probably 15 years older then Peeta. She resembles Sae a lot and the little girl who has got Peeta’s attention.

“How was it girlly?” Sae asks, smiling at Katniss.
“Excellent.” Katniss tells her and smiles at Peeta.

“Katniss this is Genevieve or Neve, Sae’s daughter.” Peeta says introducing the two women. “Neve, this is my friend Katniss, she’s out from America for a couple of months.”

“You enjoying it?” Neve asks, shaking Katniss’ hand.

“I love it. I’m going to have a hard time going back home.”

“I can imagine.” Neve replies with a soft smile. “Anyway, I’m just on my way to work. Enjoy you’re stay if I don’t see you again.”

“You probably will.” Katniss responds with a small laugh.

Neve smiles, kisses her daughter and her mother before racing out of the café.

“Who’s this?” Katniss asks.

“This is Summer.” Peeta says smiling. “I take Summer out surfing some days.”


Summer acknowledges her briefly but turns back to her own thing, finding the kitchen much more appealing than conversation.

“Don’t take it personally, she lives in her own world most the time.” Sae explains. “You might have to take her out on the board one day.”

“We will.” Peeta tells her. “Come on, let’s get going.”

They say goodbye to Sae and walk out of the café together hand in hand. The sun is warm and the vibe is present. They don’t bother stopping in any of the shops, they were craving to get on their boards.

Prim is awake when they arrive back, with her swimmers on, ready to go out for a surf herself. The three of them hit the surf together. Peeta grabbed River who sat at the back gate watching them with his pouty puppy dog eyes and took him out on his board, surfing a few smaller waves with the dog skilfully hanging on. River was delivered back to the safety of the sand and swam in the shallow water before laying on the warm sand drying off.

Prim finishes up, heading back to the house with River following closely behind and Katniss leaves Peeta soon after, drying off under the sun and tanning her already sun kissed skin.

She feels Peeta sit down on her pelvis, his cold wetsuit sending goose bumps over her body and the drips of water from his hair dropping onto her chest and sliding down the valley between her breasts.

Peeta lies down beside her, his pelvis touching her hip. Peeta’s eyes linger and Katniss can see the look of desire in them.

“You do things to me.” He tells her.

And she knows, she can feel his desire pressed to her hip as he kisses her deeply.

“Not here.” She tells him, pulling away slightly and breathless. “Let’s go and take a shower.”

He grins and they walk to the house, dropping their boards and wetsuits. Katniss shield’s Peeta
from Prim as she drinks a smoothie and chats with a friend back home.

The bathroom is practically flooded from their rendezvous. Her skin is on fire, especially the skin of her neck and collarbone where he sucked a little too hard. Her legs aren’t working and they’ve found themselves on the tiled floor of the shower, exhausted and unable to move.

That would have been the best sex she’s ever had in her life and she’s thankful for Peeta and his life of working in the bakery and surfing. He has muscles where most gym boys don’t. Muscles that she’s constantly admired as he dresses in the morning, when he waxes his surfboard or when he’s walking around without a t-shirt on.

He looks over her, he’s slumped beside her, her whole lower half feels like jelly and she can’t bring herself to move.

“Was that just me or was that amazing?” He asks her.

“It wasn’t just you.” She tells him, finding her voice. “I seriously don’t know if I’ll be able to do anything else today.”

He grins at her, nodding. “Need some help up?”

She nods and lets him pull her up onto her unsteady feet. He helps her out of the shower, closing the shower screen behind them before finding a towel. He wraps a towel around her body and hands her a second one for her hair.

She wears one of his singlets and a pair of her booty shorts. He just wears a pair of shorts. She towels dry her hair as best as she can before leaving it to air dry.

Prim was planning on a lazy day of sunbathing and reading. Katniss and Peeta were going to lie in the hammock, write songs, snooze, pig out on junk food and not overexert themselves to any great extant. And if they were horny they’d surely disappear upstairs for some time alone.

They swing with the breeze with their eyes closed.

There was nowhere they’d rather be.

Prim had gone into town with Madge to pick up some supplies, leaving the two of them and River to laze in the day’s sun.

Katniss climbs out of the hammock to use the bathroom and grabs them a drink and some more snacks and the joints Madge had stashed in her suitcase.

She feels the effects right away and sinks further into the comfort of the daybed they had moved to. Peeta takes a drag of the joint and sinks further into her side.

She’s calm and content. She always was when she smoked pot. She liked to feel the euphoria and channel that feeling in life when she was feeling anxious or upset. The feeling always calmed her.

They giggle, he giving her a long list of life lessons and they speak about everything, they question their parent’s motives and choices. They giggle wildly at jokes that probably aren’t even that funny and enjoy each other’s company.

Madge and Prim come home with burritos from the Mexican place and Madge can’t help but laugh at the state of the two of them and their newfound appetite and their affection and gratitude.

Madge and Prim leave them to be, retreating to the living room to eat lunch and have their own
time together and they cuddle on the daybed, gorging their burritos and snacks.

“Katniss.” Peeta says, grabbing her hand.

“Hmm?”

“Look at me for a second.”

She turns to look at him, swaying slightly as she sits up. She focuses on his face when the swaying stops and smiles at how beautiful he looks. She touches his face with both her hands.

“You’re so beautiful Peeta.” She tells him. “And so hot. You’re the hottest guy I’ve ever slept with in my entire life. And you’re got the best penis too. Thank you for having such a great penis.” Peeta laughs at her, a hearty laugh before he kisses her. “Sorry what were you going to say?” She asks him.

He places his hands on either side of her face and continues to stare at her.

“I think I might love you.” He tells her. “I just have so much love and so much for you that I have to tell you. I want you to know that I fucking love you.”

“We’ve only known each other for like two weeks.” She tells him.

“I don’t care.” He tells her and giggles.

She giggles to because the whole concept of him loving her is ridiculous, especially in the state her mind is at the moment.

“Katniss, I’m pretty sure I want to marry you to and spend the rest of my life admiring your wonderful body and making you come every chance I get.”

“We’re too young to get married.”

“Says who?” He asks.

“I don’t know.” She replies, shrugging her shoulders.

“See, fucking no one.” He states. “I just want to spend my life having sex with you, surfing and kissing you. And maybe even singing love songs to you.”

“Peeta, I have to go back home.”

“Is it because of my van? I’ll get a house if that’s the case.”

“I don’t care about your van. I’d live in the van with you.”

“Please don’t go back home.” He begs.

“I’ll try my hardest to stay here with you.” She tells him. “I don’t think I’ll be able to.”

He exhales and stares at her. “I fucking love you.” He tells her.

“I fucking love you more.”

“Impossible. I said it first.”

“I thought it first.”
“Really?” He asks. “Well then, you win.”

She wrinkles her nose and kisses him. “I am so happy right now.”

“Me too.” He tells her. “Do you want to have sex right here?” He asks. “No one will see us.”

“River will.” She points to River who happily bathes himself in the afternoon sun.

“He’s a dog, he won’t know.”

“Do you think dogs know things?” He asks, his mind going on a different tangent. “I mean, we do a lot of crap in front of our pets.”

“Like pooping.”

“Just what I was thinking.” He says. “We must be connected somehow.”

“I think we are. I think our souls have merged when we’ve kissed. It’s like we’re soul sisters.”

“Hey soul sister
Ain’t that Mr. mister...”

“Shit, I forgot the rest of the song.”

“That’s a song?” She asks. “That sounds like a pretty good song. Did you write it?”

“Yeah, I did. It’s called Katniss and me are Soul Sisters.”

“That’s cool. I like us being soul sisters.”

“But I don’t want to be a sister.” He pouts. “Let me be your soul mister, you can be my soul sister.”

“Yeah… I like that.” She tells him. “I really like that.”

“Do you want to have sex now?” He asks her.

“Not out there!” Madge calls out to them. “Upstairs!”

“She wants to join us.” Peeta chuckles.

“No I don’t. I’m just helping your dignity!” She yells. “Katniss and I are cousins.”

“Hasn’t stopped some people.” Peeta states, shrugging his shoulders.

She manages to get up onto her feet and looks down at him. “You coming?”

He nods and smiles at her, standing up beside her. “Oh, let’s take the cheezles with us.” Peeta suggests.

Madge, Sam, Katniss and Peeta get high the remainder of the night. Prim having great pleasure in watching the teenagers talk about life and speak the most random things. She takes away the other joints when it was getting late and ushers them inside when they finish the last joint and were giggling at nothing. She locks them inside and makes sure to leave them glasses of water and more
snacks for their munchies.

Peeta and Katniss had come down from their first high as they unsuccessfully coupled. They were too cloudy and high to realise what they were doing. They instead ate the entire bag of cheezle’s and cuddled in bed, chatting away like there was no tomorrow.

They lit another joint when they felt the euphoria starting to fade and sat on the beach watching clouds and the waves.

They had polished off two bowls of the spaghetti Madge and Prim made and were still searching for more. They walked around the corner to get tacos. Purchasing three each before ringing Sam and asking him to buy some more snacks for them that evening.

Sam was the best person in the world when he sat waiting for them in the kitchen after their walk home, the two of them getting slightly lost on their way home and meeting some cool backpackers at the backpackers and engaging in a long conversation with them all.

Madge, Prim and Sam just laughed at them when they arrived home two hours after they had left.

They then joined Madge and Sam on the back porch and they shared another joint between the four of them.

Madge’s phone rings and the four of them look at each other.

“Don’t answer that.” Sam reminds her.

“Prim!” Katniss calls out.

“What?”

“Come answer the phone. It’s Michelle.”

Prim comes racing into the living and answers the call.

“Hi Michelle.” She greets. “No, she’s in the shower. Yeah we’re perfectly fine.” She tells her aunt and sends her sister and cousin a ‘you owe me look’ which makes the four of them to giggle wildly.

“Oh man, my mother would kill me if she knew we were smoking pot.” Madge explains in between her fits of giggling.

Prim comes back into the living room handing back Madge’s cell. “You owe me. She said goodnight and she’ll talk to you later.” Prim explains. “I’m going to bed, keep it down.”

Katniss cuddles up with Peeta on the couch and Madge and Sam do the same. Madge turns on Netflix and the four of them turn their attention to old school cartoons as they ride out their high.

She’s safe, warm and content with him. And doesn’t want to be anywhere else.

She looks up at him smiling. He smiles down at her and kisses her nose.

He was as happy and content as she was.

“Take me to bed.” She whispers to him.

He smiles at her, kissing her lips.
They fall onto the soft sheets of the bed and stare up at the ceiling. It’s incredibly quiet and calm and wonderful in the world tonight.

They draw closer to each other, most of their clothes stripped off their bodies, their bare chests touching, their legs entwined.

They stare at each other, their eyes communicating everything in that moment. She lets out a yawn and he smiles at her.

“Sleep Miss America.” He coaxes her, rubbing her cheek with his thumb. “I’m not going anywhere.”

She manages to smile and finds herself being pulled into a state of unconsciousness with Peeta right beside her.

In the state before she goes completely unconscious she can hear him exhale and can sense the smile spreading across his face. She feels him hold her tighter, drawer her body closer to his and gently him press the softest of kisses to the side of her eye.

She has a dream.

It’s one of the first ones she’s had on their trip. It’s foggy, much like the state of her brain before she fell asleep. The bits she does remember are beautiful. Much like the sunrise, the colour of the ocean and the fluffy clouds.

She’s outside a beautiful house. There are overgrown trees, birds in the trees and the sky is so blue and clear. She can hear the sounds of the ocean in the distance, the sound of children playing and laughing and the sound of a guitar playing inside the house.

She looks around the yard and back to the light cream-coloured clapboard cottage. The cottage has wooden window sills painted green. The door trimming is the same green. The wooden porch looks tired and worn but holds lots of memories of the past owners.

She can imagine those memories. Stolen kisses, morning coffees, fights, make-ups, send offs, welcome homes, proposals, the sharing of good news, dances, first cuddles, first steps, first words, hugs, summer afternoons, storm watching, the reading of a good book, intimacy, first dates, heartbreaks, barbeques, music, singing, Christmases, New Years, new resolutions, Easter, celebrations, family photos, grazed knees and moving out. There’s a lifetime of memories imbedded in the grain of the wooden porch.

And the many inhabitants who have lived here, the families, young couples, babies, children, teenagers, young adults, adults and grandparents.

She’s overwhelmed with a sense of warmth that comes with the memories, nostalgia and family.

She looks around the porch, at the wooden furniture that’s seen better days or has been restored and imagines the memories that the previous owners shared with them. There are almost half a dozen surfboards leaning against a rack. Kids toys and a skateboard also rest on the wood.

The guitar pulls her attention and she smiles at the sound of the music coming from the guitar. She lets her feet pull her towards the house, up the tired steps that creak as she steps on them and up onto the back porch. She opens the screen door and steps barefooted onto the floorboards of the kitchen.

The house is small but she feels the homey vibe of the house. There’s pictures, drawings and laughter imbedded in the walls of the house. There’s love, laughter and happiness filling every
inch of the house.

She steps silently through the house, towards the sound of the guitar and looks into each room before finding the room the music comes from.

She is taken aback when she takes in the scene before her.

A man, in his mid-twenties sits on the worn couch. He has blond curls and plays a guitar left-handed. He strums the strings lightly and plays for the raven hair toddler and the blond baby who are curled together on the couch. He sings to them. A beautiful song she’s heard before.

“Do you love the ocean and could you love the ocean with me,
Cause I’ll be yours, cause I’ll be yours
These are the simple things, and I want you
These are the simple things, my love, my love.”

She leans against the doorway and watches the father and his two beautiful children.

The little girl looks up sometime during his song and smiles. “Mummy.”

The blond man turns around to the doorway and smiles. She notices the ocean blue eyes and the crooked, 100-watt smile.

When she wakes she startles him out of his slumber.

She thought the dream may have upset her but it told her things that she was trying to find the answers to. Like little pieces of her life journey puzzle were slowly starting to connect and join up.

“You alright?” He asks her quietly.

She nods and manages a smile. A sudden feeling of warmth spreading across her body.

“Bad dream?”

She ponders for a moment, unsure how to really answer his question. “No, it was pleasant.”

“Really? Can I know?”

She begins to tell him about her dream. She was unsure how she got there; she thinks she was lured by the sound of the guitar. She tells him about the beautiful vibe the house had and how much love had filled these walls, prior to the current owners.

He was smiling at her, conjuring up the house in his own mind and the colours and everything else she describes to him. The children. The family.

She tells him the rest of the dream and he cups her cheek with his hand.

“Do you love the ocean and could you love the ocean with me?” He asks as he sings.

“I’ll be yours.” She replies.

“These are the simple things, and I want you.”

“These are the simple things, my love, my love.” They sing together.
They share a passionate kiss, one filled with neck kisses, jaw kisses, mouth kisses and slight wandering of hands.

He pulls away from her and smiles.

“Did I tell you I loved you early today?” He asks.

“I think you did.” She replies, a blush creeping to her face.

He’s silent for a while.

“Well, I’m falling for you very fast Katniss. I think I’ve been in love with you the first day I saw you.”

She smiles back at him and kisses him softly before moving back to look at him.

“Is that OK?” He asks.

“Very OK.” She replies. “Because I’m falling quickly for you too. I never imagined I’d fall for someone during this trip.”

“You’re going home in just over 5 weeks.” He reminds her.

She frowns and cups his face. “Don’t think about it. Think about the present. Think about our next 5 weeks and the fun and mischief we’re going to get ourselves into. The memories, the music and everything else that is going to happen. The kissing, the sex, the late night swims and morning surfs. We’ll deal with my departure when it arrives.”

“I don’t want you to leave.” He admits, his voice cracking.

She feels the tears in her eyes and sucks in a deep breath. “Me either.”

He wipes the tears from under her eyes, the faint moonlight reflecting it. “Don’t cry my love. Like you said, we still have 5 weeks.”

“5 weeks. Then we’ll deal with all that stuff than.”

He kisses her lightly on her forehead and draws back, pushing a stray piece of hair behind her ear.

“Katniss. What are we?” He asks. “We’ve just admitted we’ve fallen for each other. Aren’t we suppose to be girlfriend and boyfriend before we admit that?”

She smiles. “I’m not one for labels. I just assumed we were in that place.”

“I don’t like labels either.” He tells her. “But for our own sake, are we in a relationship?”

“You are so dorky.” She giggles. “Yes, I think we are. For our own sake we are each other’s boyfriend and girlfriend.”

“My bae?” He asks.

“Don’t ever call me that again.”

“Point taken.” He chuckles and kisses her.

She smiles against his lips and links her fingers through his.
They lay in silence and listen to each other’s breathing and beating hearts.

“Katniss?”

“Hmm?”

“I like the simple things.”

“Me too.” She replies. “Land and sea.”

“Land and sea.”

Chapter End Notes

I’ve decided to do a double post since I didn’t update earlier this week.

Simple Things (The Ocean Song) by Ziggy Alberts was used in this chapter.

Let me know what you all thought.
Thursday morning, she strolls through the busy farmer’s markets. The first Thursday of the school holidays ensured the huge crowds. The shining sun also brought the families out in huge droves. She had arrived there early to not miss out on the best produce and spend some time on her own. She enjoys time alone and craves it.

Peeta had departed early that morning; he was meeting Finnick for a surf and a catch up before Finnick went to work and before he was due to play at the markets at 10 where everyone else would meet them.

She strolls through the stalls taking her time. There was no need to be anywhere.

She has two bags filled to the brim with produce and she stops by the Muffin Man stall as requested by Madge and picks up a dozen muffins. She orders herself a juice and sits out under the shade of a big tree, writing down the little piece of inspiration she had for a song she was working on.

Peeta’s name appears on her screen and she smiles answering his call.

“Hello.”

“Hey, I’ve just pulled in. Want to meet me?”

“Sure. Where are you parked?”

“Just near the stage.”

“I’ll see you in just a sec.” She tells him, ending the call.

She gathers the bags and walks towards the stage. She sees him leaning against the passenger door with his arms crossed across his chest. He smiles at her and she feels her heart flutter in response.

She walks faster towards him and their lips crash together when she reaches him.

He moans against her lips and she slightly bites his bottom lip, bringing on another moan and for his hands to pull her hips against his. She can feel the dampness of his board shorts through her dress and he pulls her tighter against his body.

“You taste good.” He tells her as he manages to break the kiss.

She shows him her juice, strawberry, pineapple and coconut and he takes a sip of the juice, smiling as he draws the juice up the straw and into his mouth.

She feels a rush of heat to her core and quenches her thighs together.
“And I brought muffins.” She tells him softly.

He smirks at her though and she knows only dirty thoughts are circulating through his mind.

“How much time do we have?” She asks him, the apex of her thighs aching and wanting nothing but him.

He pulls her into his van, closing the door behind them. He pulls her to the bed and draws the curtains of his van closed.

It’s quick and rough. Her dress hiked up to her hips, her underwear pushed to the side, her breasts exposed at the top of her dress and his shorts barely undone.

She swears she sees stars when they finish. Their bodies are still connected and his chest lies against hers. He’s too exhausted to move off of her just yet and she’s happy to have him against her chest. She can feel his heart beating erratically against chest and it feels wonderful.

It’s the first time they’ve been rough and quick. And she enjoys it, hoping for more of these moments with him. Especially when time wasn’t in their favour.

He pulls out of her and falls down beside her, trying to control his breathing.

Someone’s phone rings but whoever it was can wait. They are still in their moment and don’t want to be interrupted.

With their hearts beating normally again and their breathing no longer rapid, they make a slight move. She turns to face him, kissing him softly. A contrast to the pace they had set before.

She traces his chest that still glistens with sweat and he captures her finger.

“I’m sorry for not being there this morning.” He apologises to her.

“It’s fine. This definitely made up for it.” She tells him with a smile.

He returns the smile and kisses her once again. “Come on, I have a gig to play.”

She makes herself more presentable, pulling her skirt back down and straightening it out. She undoes her braid and watches him from his bed pulling on some clean clothes. He’s opted for his usual look, his ripped jeans and a button-up t-shirt. He slips his feet into his flip-flops and puts his Akubra on his head.

He stands before her, placing his hands either side of her thighs and kissing her.

“I’m going to be thinking about us the entire time I’m playing.” He whispers in her ear and she feels the wetness pool in her centre again. “Come on sweetheart.”

She slips her feet into her sandals and follows him out of his van on unsteady legs. He grabs his guitar and drum from his van and sets it beside the van.

Prim, Madge and Sam head towards them and Peeta makes sure to keep the doors open to air out the musky smell that had filled the cabin.

“We called.” Madge tells them.

“Our phone’s must have been on silent.” Peeta says with the shrug of his shoulders.

“You two can’t fool anyone.” Sam chuckles. “I hope it was amazing.”
“By the looks on their faces it was.”

Katniss blushes and kicks the grass with the toe of her sandal.

Sam helps Peeta with his gear and Katniss finishes her juice and camps out on the grass with the girls, Sam and the other audience that stops to listen to Peeta.

They dance partway through his gig, letting the music take over their bodies and soul. Everyone else is in the spirit of the gig and dance along, singing loudly and wildly, without a single care in the world.

And Katniss can mostly feel herself letting loose. The two and a bit weeks have started to change her, loosen her reigns and be who she really wants to be. She’s less self conscious and not embarrassed to express herself.

She was really starting to step out of her comfort zone and she was so ready to jump.

She smiles at him from the grass and he smiles back, stopping in the middle of his song.

“Sorry everyone, I became distracted by the most beautiful girl in the entire world.” He tells his crowd. “Katniss, stop distracting me with your beauty.” He winks at her.

She blows him a kiss, waving at him and he laughs.

“Come up and here and give me a kiss.” He tells her. She shakes her head, feeling a blush spread to her cheeks. “Please. Just one and I’ll finish the set.”

Prim and Madge push her forward and she steps up onto the stage. He pulls her close to him and kisses her. Not a simple peck but a long, drawn out kiss that brings upon the cheers from the crowd.

“Get a room!” They hear Sam call out to them and Peeta lets her go.

“Thanks sweetheart.” He whispers to her. “You can go now.” She sticks her tongue out at him and steps back down to their spot on the grass. “You should check her out on Youtube. She’s an incredible singer too.” He tells the audience. “Now, where was I?” He asks and begins the song he was playing before.

Prim leans in to her sister and whispers to her as she claps along. “He’s got the love eyes happening so bad for you.”

“Oh and you should see the jealousy in all those girls eyes.” Madge adds before Sam pulls her into his chest to dance.

Peeta kisses Katniss when he finishes, jumping down off the stage, pulling her body to his and kissing her deeply in front of everyone else again as the crowd applauds for his set.

He sells a few of his EP’s and chats to those who stay behind. Even a few ask about Katniss Youtube channel.

“Peeta, it’s so good to see you.” A tall dark man says, shaking Peeta’s hand.

“Thresh. It’s good to see you too.”

“We’ve had a last minute cancellation for tomorrow night at the restaurant. You interested?”
“Sure. Just text me through the details.”

“Thanks, you are a lifesaver. And everyone’s been requesting you to come back again.”

“I shall be there.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow. It was good seeing you.” Thresh tells Peeta before walking away.

“Who’s he?” Madge asks.

“He has the Treehouse in Belongil. They do the best pizzas there. You guys interested in dinner there tomorrow night?” Peeta asks.

“Of course.” Madge tells him. “Will Prim be able to come?”

“Yeah, she’ll be fine. I’ll ask Thresh to book us a table before I play and we can have dinner. Maybe we’ll see if the other’s want to come along too.”

“Where’s Belongil?” Katniss asks.

“Just around the corner from the house.” Sam tells them. “It’s about a twenty minute walk. It’s lovely there. The beach is beautiful.” He says. “Come on, let’s get home and ready for the shoot.”

Everyone rides with Peeta. Despite the lack of seatbelts. He pulls into the driveway at the house and they pile out. They gorge on the muffins and enjoy the warm sun. Madge takes River down to the beach for a swim and a run around. Sam accompanies her on the sand taking photos.

“Do you want to sing a song with me tomorrow?” Peeta asks Katniss.

“It’s your set. I don’t want to steal your thunder.”

“You won’t steal my thunder. I like to show you off.”

“One song only and no embarrassing me in front of them all. You should have seen the looks I was getting off those girls. I didn’t think I’d make it out of there alive.”

Peeta chuckles and kisses her cheek, brushing the few muffin crumbs from her lips.

“I would have protected you from them.” He whispers in her ear. She smiles at him and pecks his lips. “Come on, we have a photo shoot to prepare for.”

They pull up at the store, parking behind the back of it. The girls were closing the store for the afternoon for the shoot that would take place on the beach and later at Annie’s house.

They’d regroup at the end of the shoot for a barbeque and a few drinks to thank them for their time.

The three storeowners were happy to see everyone and they got started right away. Annie and Johanna getting the clothes sorted into piles on separate racks for each of them. Cashmere and her sister Cassia got the girls and the two boys made up and ready. Jai would be joining them when he got there.

Nate was photographing the shoot alongside Cressida, his partner at their photography business. She directed shoots and photographed herself. The two had found a niche in Byron Bay for photographing businesses and their products. They were always booked for shoots and admired for their beautiful and creative shots.
Katniss had done modelling before. Mostly as a favour for her creative friends at home who were aspiring photographers and needed a subject. It also helped Katniss out for promotional material for herself. She had been approached by some surfing companies at home asking to model for them. She was never that interested in posing but soon found a slight knack for it. Finding it fun and thrilling.

Prim had done modelling for her favourite store back home, an indie boho boutique that she frequented. She had the exact look they were after and had gotten some modelling experience from those shoots. Madge too was a photographer favourite. She became the model for an older friend’s portfolio and major works.

It was no wonder Annie had asked the girls; Prim having said they had experience and Annie then having searched the web for their shoots.

The boys had a bit of experience under their belts as well and the chemistry was there. Something Nate and Cressida were after.

Practice shots were done as they were getting ready and dressed. Their better angles were found and close ups were taken. Cressida took the girls out first for some more shots. The boys eventually joined them, even Jai who came to the store already looking camera ready.

They moved the shoot to Annie’s house when they got what they needed. And Finnick prepared the barbeque as sunset shots were taken on the beach.

They were exhausted and hungry at the end of the shoot and hopeful everything looked good. They were shooting their children’s gear tomorrow with a few young kids, toddlers and a couple of babies. Katniss would join them again tomorrow as Annie thought she had that maternal look about her. Cassia and Gloss, Cashmere’s siblings kids would be the models tomorrow.

They washed off the makeup and changed their clothes and gathered around Annie and Finnick’s backyard with friends arriving. Haymitch, the man who said Katniss was as charming as a dead slug arrived along with a blonde friend who Katniss knew immediately was Effie his partner but not really his partner.

Effie greeted them all and introduced herself to the newbies.

“You should have seen her when she was younger, she’s hardly recognisable. She used to be dolled up all the time, heavy makeup and up-dos. She used to organise big events and that’s how she met Haymitch at one of the surfing competitions in Hawaii. She’s dialled the look back and is natural all the time. She’s embraced this life of carefree looks and way of life and I think she looks more beautiful than ever.” Peeta tells Katniss as they head out to Peeta’s van. Katniss peaks a look over her should at Effie who is talking to Prim and smiles.

Peeta was right, she was absolutely beautiful as she was now, she wonders what brought her to be so into her looks and hide herself behind the makeup and hair.

A group of teenagers and kids play a game in the middle of the street, enjoying the school holiday freedom.

“What are they playing?” Katniss asks.

“Cricket.” Peeta tells her. “We’ll have to teach you and Prim how to play it. It’s heaps fun, especially with heaps of people playing.”

“How do you play?” She asks as he retrieves his guitar from his van.
“So you adapt it to how many players who have. They have two batters. The bowler will bowl to one of the batters and if the batter hits it they have to run to other stumps, which is basically home. The fielders have to either catch it on the full or hit the stumps to get either of the batters out. The batters have to at least run once and they can continue to run as much as they like. You can keep points if you like to determine who wins but it’s usually just a free for all.”

She nods and continues to watch the game unfold, the bowler bowling the ball to the batter who misses and it hits the bin that has been substituted for stumps.

“Are bins usually used?” Katniss asks.

“They’re usually three sticks. Wheelie bins are easier because you can drag them from off the street and can hear the ball hit it.” He tells her. “But you can substitute anything for stumps.”

Katniss watches as a young girl, not even 8 takes the plastic bat and stands before the green bin.

“That doesn’t seem far, the bin is taller than her.” Katniss says.

“Remember, Ruby only gets out if the ball hits bellow the line.” The bowler tells everyone, pointing at the masking tape line they have wrapped around the bin. The bowler and the girl look very alike. “And remember, Ruby is kind of awesome.” The girl smiles at the group of people playing and her brother walks back to the other bin. “Ready Rubes?” He asks.

The little girl’s head bobs up and down and the ball is bowled to her. She hits the ball with force and runs down the street to the other stumps as the fielders chase the ball. She laughs as she reaches the bin, over-exaggerating her crossing of the line.

“Come on.” Peeta says taking her hand and leading her back inside.

They grab their dinner and sit around the backyard, Cassia arrives with her three kids and another man arrives with his two, Katniss figuring it out to be Gloss. The five cousins have remarkably different traits and features but are still so adorable.

Katniss meets the five kids who she’ll be modelling with tomorrow. She holds Cassia’s baby Indiana, who’s almost 7 months old and has peach fuzz hair on top of her head. Her eyes are a magnificent green and they shine. Indi is charming and friendly making Katniss’ stomach flip-flop.

Peeta plays with the kids, the kids having met him before and heard him busking on the street. Gloss’ youngest Cruz is shy at only 15 months old but once he warms up to Katniss he is cheeky and friendly.

The older three ask for Peeta to play his guitar and he does, entertaining everyone at the goes down.

They are children of the tribe she thinks. The whole inspiration to Annie, Johanna and Cashmere’s children line. They are wild and free and fit into the tribe of adults who’ll lead them and guide them throughout their life.

Haymitch plays his banjo and the harmonica to assist Peeta in the jam and Katniss feels safe and welcome in the tribe. She knows she’ll always be welcome in the tribe. Even Prim. Madge had long been accepted into the tribe when she first moved here.

They farewell everyone when it’s getting late, Katniss seeing them tomorrow morning for the remainder of the shoot.

Sam drives Madge’s car and Peeta follows in his van. River greets them at the front door, his tail wagging and he bounces outside. Katniss takes him outside and sits on the back steps of the
porch. Peeta makes them a cup of tea each and hands her the ceramic mug. They listen to the ocean and the waves and don’t speak a word.

The others head up to bed. Exhausted after their day. Katniss though knew she would be up for a restless night. She strips out of her dress and Peeta pulls his shirt and shorts off, following her down the yard and to the beach. They step into the cool water with their underwear on and swim around for a while. Not going to far from the shoreline.

He wraps his arms around her waist as she stares out to the dark night sky.

He whispers in her ear, “What’s on your mind?”

She shrugs her shoulders and continues to stare out at the darkness. He rests his chin on her shoulder.

“Come on. You can tell me. You’ve been distracted most of the night.”

She turns in his arms and kisses him. “Let’s go inside and talk.” She tells him.

He takes her hand and leads her up the sand and to the house. They rinse their feet underneath the tap and pick up their clothes. Closing and locking up the back doors before switching the lights off as they headed up stairs to the bedroom. They strip out of their wet underwear and step under the stream of the warm water. They move well to shower off the sand and warm their bodies from the cold water. They dry off and slip under the covers naked.

He plays with her hair waiting for her to tell him what is wrong.

“I guess I’ve just been doing a lot of thinking.”

“About what?” He asks.

“My life. What I want. What I don’t want. I’m just so happy being with you and everyone else. I’ve found my clique, people who are interested in everything I’m interested in and who all understand me for who I am. They show general interest and don’t tell what’s right or wrong. They ask questions, want to know about my life, my songs… everything. I’ve fallen into your tribe and I don’t ever want to leave. And I thought for a second I was sure this was my life and it’d never end. I’d have all these people in my life, I’d watch the children dance to the music you played and watch them grow into their personalities. Then I realised, it’s all going to be over in 5 weeks. I’m not going to watch the children of the tribe dance, hear you jam and sing, surf with everyone and chat about our general interests and life. I’ll be flying back home to a place I don’t think understands me and I’ll never be part of this tribe. This is my home.”

“Katniss…” Peeta starts, his voice filled with sadness. “You know I’m more than happy for you to stay. I’ll give my arm and my leg, my voice, my soul… anything to ensure you stay here with us all. I don’t want you torn from your home.”

“You know it’s going to happen…” She tells him. “And I can’t control that.”

He brushes the tear from her cheek. She looks up to see a lone tear fall down his cheek.

“Peeta, what’s wrong?”

“They say home is a place, a feeling you get. I had that feeling of home growing up and being at the beach or anywhere I loved. Eventually that feeling, I started to loose and I knew my home wasn’t my home. My soul couldn’t settle in the four walls of my family home. So I bought my van in search of finding my home. I was chasing the sun, the seasons and the coast. I thought I had
found my home but I was so wrong.” He tells her and his eyes go wide. “The minute I met you, I knew I had found my home. I don’t think my heart is going to be able to take it if you leave me. I can’t let my home go. You have to fight Katniss. Fight for your tribe, your home. For me. Please promise you’ll stay with me.”

“Always.” She replies with tear stained cheeks and brushes his eyes free of tears.

They don’t bother surfing that morning. He insteads ravishes her body in the quiet of the morning and they both fall apart.

They had a tender night. They cried when they each had promised they wouldn’t think about her departure. Their talk having erupted something inside of each of them. Their tears fell fast and they sobbed into each other’s necks.

He kisses her delicately in the post haze and they remain still and sound.

“You looked really cute with Indi last night.” He speaks softly. “She’s an adorable baby.”

“She is.” Katniss agrees and turns, propping herself up on her elbow and tracing his chest with her fingers. “Those kids adore you.”

He smiles. “I’ve just known them forever. They always watch me play when they go to the markets or see me when I’m busking in the street. They’re very happy kids.”

She smiles and leans in kissing him on the lips. “You’re going to come and watch the shoot aren’t you?” She asks him.

“Of course I am. You killed it yesterday.” He tells her. “Let’s just say I was getting very turned on.”

She grins and kisses him, pushing him onto his back to straddle his waist. “What are we singing tonight?” She asks him against his lips.

“Whatever you want.” He replies and rolls his hips upwards telling her he is not interested in deciding on a set list right now.

Cashmere does her hair and makeup again and Annie helps her dress. The five kids are all dressed in different articles to showcase their children’s line. A blanket is spread on the sand of the beach and it’s early to beat the heat. They photograph the kids, Colbie, Zeke, Winter, Cruz and Indi, letting them do what they want and giving them a little bit of direction before they throw Katniss in with them. She holds Indi and wraps an arm around Cruz as Colbie presses her nose to Katniss’.

The kids are wonderful and tolerate the shoot, which is over in just under two hours.

They get the kids out of the clothes and they are taken down to the beach for a swim. Katniss changes back into her own clothes.

“You guys still coming tomorrow?” Annie asks as she zips the clothes into the garment bag.
“We are. We wouldn’t miss it.”

“Good. And we’re still heading to Ballina tomorrow?”

“Yeah, Madge and Prim were still keen.”

“Thank you. I would have gone myself but I hate driving.”

Peeta links his fingers between hers. “We better be going. See you tonight?” Peeta asks.

“We shall be there. Thank you so much.”

“My pleasure. It was fun to do a bit of modelling.”

They wave goodbye to them and Peeta takes her for brunch. They brainstorm his set list and decide on the song they’ll sing tonight. They finish up brunch and walk through the crowded streets back to the house.

“How was it?” Prim asks from her spot at the bench.

“Good. The kids were adorable.” Katniss tells them with a smile and sits down at the bench.

Peeta moves to the cupboard for a glass.

“I can’t wait to see the final images.” Prim exclaims.

“Me too.” Madge agrees. “I can’t wait to see your parents faces.”

“Why mine?”

“You were practically half naked.” Prim adds. “And some of the dresses were a little see-through.”

“Just be glad you can sign off on your own images.” Madge chuckles.

“They were tastefully done.” Katniss points out. “You couldn’t see any nipple or anything else.”

“There was a lot of side boob.”

Katniss shrugs her shoulders. It was done and her parents could scold her all they want. She’s been modelling swimwear since she was 14, she didn’t have a problem with it.

“You still looked amazing.” Peeta tells her with a smile. “And you looked the same today.”

“How were the kids?”

“Naturals. Indi and Cruz were their cheeky selves. The older ones played and modelled like they’ve been doing it for twenty years. I got a lot of cuddles, kisses and laughs. It was great fun.”

“Maybe you should just model instead. You’re parents have supported you this far with it.”

“Just like my surfing and singing.” She replies sarcastically. “They’d never allow me to model. Besides, I’m not the perfect model.”

“For some companies you are. Just think about it if the whole medical school thing turns to bust. I’m sure there’s plenty of art majors who’d appreciate you.” Madge tells her. “Make some money out of it as well.”
“Like I need money.” Katniss replies rolling her eyes.

“First world problems.” Prim adds. “Just be thankful you get to actually go to university.”

“Ok Miss Human Rights. I appreciate my opportunities. I’m not ungrateful. I would just appreciate a choice from my parents.” She tells her sister. “You’re lucky you actually want to go to medical school and that I’m the oldest. They’ve let you get away with far too much.”

“It’s alright Prim, I know how you feel.” Peeta tells her, patting her shoulder.

“Come on we have a set to practice for.” Katniss tells Peeta, taking his hand and dragging him upstairs.

Madge drove them down to the Treehouse late that afternoon with Peeta’s gear in the back of her trunk. They carry the instruments inside. Thresh greets them and directs them to the little corner stage.

Katniss admires the interior of the bohemian restaurant under palm trees and smiles at how warm the place felt. They had booked a big table for 20 and waited for everyone to arrive, Sam getting drinks for them all and they chatted away.

Everyone else arrived, Johanna, Annie, Finnick, Jai, Effie, Haymitch, Cashmere, Nate, Cressida, Cassia and her partner Ben with their three kids and Colbie tagging along. The three kids were making their way amongst everyone, greeting them and chatting away.

Their table is covered in pizzas and everyone finds their appetite right away. The kids settle down to eat and the group don’t hear a peep from the kids. The restaurant is at full capacity by the time they polish off the last pizza. Indi has made her way to Katniss and Peeta plays a game of peak-a-boo with the baby. She giggles an infectious giggle, one that makes Katniss’ heart swell. The baby cuddles into Katniss, something Katniss noticed today, her way of showing affection and Katniss presses a kiss to the baby’s head and bounces her slightly.

“Don’t get any ideas.” Johanna whispers in her ear. “I bet Mummy and Daddy wouldn’t be thrilled about that.”

“Who cares,” Katniss tells her, shrugging her shoulders. “I really don’t care anymore.”

Johanna narrows her eyes slightly. “Yes you do. If they take you away from lover boy you’ll care. You’ve got to fight.”

Katniss nods her head and turns back to Peeta and Indi who are engaged in a conversation that Indi wouldn’t understand.

Thresh comes out to ask them how their meal was and if they’d like dessert. The kids ask for dessert and a few of the adults do as well. Katniss and Peeta share the dessert calzone filled with Nutella and strawberries with ice cream. Katniss touching her belly when they’ve finished the dessert.

“I don’t think I can move.” She tells Peeta.

“I hope you can, we have a song to sing together.”

“I’ll be fine by then, just don’t press on my stomach in the meantime.”

“Understood.” He laughs and kisses her cheek. “Another drink?” He asks her.
“I’m fine with water.” She replies and he kisses her cheek, standing up to get drinks for those who wanted one.

Thresh comes up to Peeta once he returns to their table to tell him they’re ready when he is.

Peeta smiles at him and kisses Katniss.

“Good luck.” She says against his lips.

“I’ve got my lucky charm right here. I’ll be fine.”

He goes up to the stage, fiddling around with his cords and instruments until he is ready.

“Hello everyone, I hope you’re all having a lovely evening. My name is Peeta Mellark and I’m going to be supplying the rest of your evening with some music. I’ll be calling one of my friends up in a little while to join me and I hope you’ll welcome her.” He speaks into the mike.

Peeta starts off with one of his more upbeat tunes, which gets the crowds attention. People come in from outside to watch him, gathering around the bar and the doorways. The barman and kitchen crew watch from their stations and Peeta sets a magical spell on everyone in the restaurant and they are all mesmerised by him. He sets a good vibe for everyone and Katniss can’t help but notice the happiness spreading throughout the place.

After his fifth song he calls Katniss over. She joins him up on the stage, standing in front of the second mike.

“So everyone, I’d like you to meet Katniss. She’s come all the way from Santa Monica to sing for you all.” He tells the audience that laughs. “No, she’s been here for almost 3 weeks and will be here for several more. I asked her to come and join me tonight because she has a pretty sick voice. And she’s better than me.”

She scowls at him and he chuckles. “She doesn’t like me saying that. Anyway, we better get on with it. This is one of our favourite songs at the moment.”

“Hold back the river, let me look in your eyes
Hold back the river, so I
Can stop for a minute and be by your side
Hold back the river, hold

Lonely water, lonely water, won’t you let us wander
Let us hold each other
Lonely water, lonely water, won’t you let us wander
Let us hold each other”

They play out well until the middle of the applauding and he kisses her full on the mouth, bringing a few cheers from their table of friends. He lets her go and she sets her guitar back down on the ground and sits back on her seat at the table.

“I told you all she was better than me.” He tells the crowd. “You should check her out, she’s done some amazing covers and has some wonderful originals. The birds fall silent for Miss Everdeen here and I wish her a lot of success and happiness in this industry and I know I’d enjoy hearing her name in the future.”

“Encore!” An audience member calls out.

“We haven’t prepared anything but I’m sure if she wants to join me later on she can.”
He plays for another hour and brings Katniss for his last song. One she’s only just learnt in the last week.

“This one is The Ocean Song, Simple Things.”

He thanks everyone at the end of the song as they cheer for the crowd favourite. Katniss smiles at him as they take off their guitars and they chat to the people who come up to them to chat.

Some show general interest in Katniss and ask about her channel page and any other pages that will update them on her. She happily gives them her username and thanks them for their kind words.

Thresh approaches them as everyone starts to filter out and ask Katniss to do her own set the next Friday night. She tells him she’ll think about it and will let him know.

Sam helps Peeta pack up the gear and carry it to Madge’s car. Cassia and Ben had left a while before to get the kids home and to bed and the rest of them have hung around. They know they’ll have to head out soon with Prim and Jai who are underage.

They walk outside with everyone else, the bill paid for and Thresh having given them a slight discount.

Sam drives them to the house just as a late thunderstorm comes over. They race inside, leaving the equipment in the back of Madge’s car to get in the morning. They kick off their shoes and change out of their wet clothes.

“Everdeen, Mellark! You joining us?” Sam calls out to them from behind the door.

“Yeah, we’ll be a sec.” Peeta replies back.

They join them on the kitchen floor, a blanket laid out on the floor and the joint passed around to each other before it’s gone. The storm rages on outside and they enjoy the euphoria.

Peeta and Katniss stumble upstairs to bed. They felt the urge to couple the minute they fell onto the bed and let the moonlight emerging through the passing storm clouds moon guide them throughout the night.

He opened the window partway through and they let the sound of the ocean carry them as they connected, their bodies, their souls, their minds and their love merging into one as they cried out into the night.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve made up for my slackness and uploaded two instalments. These two were quite fluffy to say the least and let’s just say the fluffiness will not last forever. Enjoy it while it lasts.

Song used in this chapter:
Hold Back The River - James Bay

Come and find me on Tumblr - Herainab
Look out for another update next week. Until then, enjoy.
“What time are your parents arriving?” Peeta asks sleepily, faint morning light filling the bedroom.

“After lunch.” She replies, rolling over to bury her face into his neck. She wasn’t ready to face the day just yet. She was warm, content and satisfied being with Peeta. Her mind a little foggy from the pot they smoked the night before.

So much had happened in the 3 weeks since they had arrived and she knew her parents would be noticing a huge change from their first visit to this next one. Especially how close their daughter was with the blond busker.

His fingers dance up and down her back and she listens to his beating heart. This had become her favourite thing to listen to, especially when the sound of the ocean came through the open window as they cuddled together.

“We’ll have to clean up.” She whispers into his neck. “Change the sheets, take out the rubbish, and hide the evidence.”

“The used condoms especially.” He chuckles, tickling the skin of her neck.

“Yes, especially those.” She giggles and his hands find their way to her sides where he tickles her. “Peeta stop! Stop.” She screeches, trying to move away from him. “Please!”

A banging on their wall causes them to stop. “Seriously, I listen to the two of you all night. Please let me sleep a little longer.” Prim shouts from behind the wall.

The two of them chuckle and he hovers over her bare body. Their centres touching and she shudders at the feel of him.

“I’m in your sister’s bad books.”

“She’ll get over it.” She tells him with a smile.

He smiles and leans down kissing her softly. “I wrote a song while you were sleeping.”

“You did?” She asks him, kissing his neck.

“Want to hear it?” He asks, pinning her hands above her head.

“Yes.”

“It’s not a lot but it’s the start of something.” He tells her, letting his hands explore down her body finding her centre.

‘Cold ground with no shoes on, my old van in your front yard
Making love to you all night long, running my lips along your outlines,
Waking up to the morning light with you by my side,
These are the things that I want to get used to,
And you are someone that I want to get used to,’
She’s speechless and feels her heart beating erratically in her chest while a rush of heat pools to her centre at the feel of his fingers.

“That’s beautiful.” She manages to tell him.

He smiles at her. “Well, I’m glad you liked it.” He whispers to her and encases her lips in a kiss as his fingers find her heat.

They wake a little after 9, snoozing after their morning coupling. They were feeling boneless. They didn’t care that Prim banged on the wall part way through their coupling. She could sleep when they finished. And Katniss knew that she’d understand one day, the importance of time and being together.

He kisses her shoulder blade and rolls out of bed, walking naked to the en-suite to use the toilet. She admires his backside and smiles to herself at how lucky she is to have the chance to be with him.

She did feel fear at the weeks coming to an end in just five weeks but he has promised her he’d make every moment count.

He too was having a hard time getting over her leaving so shortly after just meeting her.

“Are we going for a surf?” He calls out to her.

“Can’t we just stay in bed?”

“Well, yes, if you really want to.” He tells her as he enters the bedroom, his front bare to her.

She tries to not blush at the sight of him bare in front of her but she’s betrayed by her curiosity. Heat pools again and she motions him to come and join her in bed, pushing the sheets away from her body.

“Again?” He asks her, raising his brow.

She nods, biting her lip and he struts towards her, stopping at her side of the bed. He leans down, reaching underneath her knees and pulling her towards him, pulling her across the bed and resting her legs over his shoulders as his lips trace the inside of her thigh seeking her heat. His tongue finds her centre and she’s gone.

She wouldn’t care if the world was ending outside.

A knock sounds at the door but neither dare move. They really don’t care who or what happens. The bedroom door swings open, even that doesn’t stop him. Katniss looks to see Madge standing there with a wide grin on her face. Her hands crossed across her chest.

“The rents left early. They just called to say they’d be about an hour.” Madge says. “I’d get a wiggle on if I was you two. Or not. I’d love to see your parents faces if they walked in on this.”

“I can’t finish with you standing in the door.” Katniss tells her breathlessly.

But Peeta seems to find this as a challenge and she bits her lip to stop the animalistic sounds escaping her mouth. She didn't want Madge to have the satisfaction of seeing her like this. His fingers and tongue are teasing and getting straight to the point. He’s not slowing down, not for no
one. She anchors him between her thighs with her hand.

“Well, I’ll let you two finish and start cleaning up. You may want to crack the window a bit more too.” Madge announces. “Go for gold Peet!” She cheers.

“Get out!” Katniss says through gritted teeth and yanks a pillow in her direction. The bedroom doors shuts with Madge chuckling.

Katniss knows she’s close. This boy had a gift.

He lets her finish and animalistic sounds escape her mouth loudly and she swears she hears three sets of laughter from behind the door but she doesn’t care. She has no care in the world.

She looks down at him and he smiles up at her. His chin and mouth glistening wet. He’s made her boneless again. She lets her head fall back onto the mattress and steadies her breathing, spraying a hand over her stomach. Peeta doesn’t dare move, letting her come back down to earth.

“You heard the rents are on their way?” She finally manages to say.

He nods and lies down beside her, pushing the stray pieces of hair away from her sweaty forehead.

“We need to shower.” He tells her. “We smell of sex and the ocean.”

“That’s not a bad combination.” She teases.

“No it’s not. I just don’t want them to pick up on what we’ve been doing if you’ve told them we’re just friends.”

“We’ll have to air out the bedroom.” She tells him and starts chuckling. “We’re a mess.”

“A beautiful mess.” He adds, kissing her lips. “Come on, let’s shower than we’ll tidy up.”

He helps her up from the mattress and pulls the sheets off, leaving the mattress bare.

The two of them shower, washing their hair and scrubbing their bodies in hopes of losing that sex smell.

They dress and clean their teeth. She tidies up the bathroom and removes the rubbish from the trashcan. She didn’t want her parents seeing the used condoms filling the trash.

Peeta has cleared the bedroom of their stuff, taking the sheets down to the laundry and his bag to his van.

“So, did you go for gold Peet?” Sam asks with a huge grin on his face.

Katniss for once doesn’t feel embarrassed. She feels her lips turn upwards as she comes to stand beside Peeta. Peeta looks down at Katniss and smiles.

“Well, you probably heard me winning.” Katniss tells them feeling particularly proud. She had learnt to be proud of her sexuality and she was. If she had a great orgasm she wasn’t afraid to talk about it. Madge had taught her this in their couple of years of becoming sexually active. And the few short weeks of being with Peeta had taught her how great it could be boasting. “So have you cleaned out your bathroom?” Katniss asks Madge.

“Yes.”
“Good. Cause I don’t want there to be any trace of what’s been happening here. I don’t want our parents assuming were just sleeping around and getting high.” Katniss tells her. “What else needs to be done?”

“Everything is quite alright.”

“Wow, how much pot did you smoke last night?” Prim asks as she comes into the living room.

“You can smell it?” Madge asks worried.

“Yeah. I’d get onto that.”

Madge flies to open the doors and windows of the house.

“Shit, why did we smoke it in here last night?” She asks, pushing them open as far as they will go.

“Cause it was raining.” Sam tells her. “Babe, it’ll be fine, the ocean breeze, the smell of coffee and maybe some incense will help mask it.”

“My mother has the nose of a pig.” Madge tells him. “She can sniff out anything.”

“Madge, it’s fine. The smell will be gone by the time they arrive.” Katniss reassures her. “Just burn some candles. It’s fine. We’ll air out the blanket and anything else.”

“But you know that’s the first thing she’ll be on the lookout for.”

“Stop being paranoid.” Katniss tells her. “Tell me where the clean sheets are?”

“Changed the sheets so Mom and Dad wouldn’t see what you’ve been doing?” Prim asks with a smirk.

“They bed needed clean sheets anyway.” Katniss tells her, sticking her tongue out at her sister.

“And they would have needed them after your sex marathon the last week.” Madge teases.

“Hey, don’t you start.”

“I’m not.” Madge says throwing her hands up defensively. “I’m just proud of you.” Katniss rolls her eyes. “The linen cupboard upstairs.”

Peeta helps her make the bed and replace the towels in the en-suite. He straightens the corners and she watches him with a smile on her face.

“You’re quite domesticated.” She teases.

“Yeah, my mother was pretty strict on us boys. Our beds had to be made before we could do anything. I learnt pretty quickly to not argue and do a good job so I could go surfing or skating. I supposed I haven’t broken out of the habit yet.”

“Don’t.” She tells him, snaking her arms around his neck. “Girls like to see boys doing this kind of stuff.” She kisses his lips softly.

“When can we be alone again?”

“Tonight. Finnick’s party, we’ll sneak off to your van.”

He smiles and kisses her again. “Good idea.”
They drink their morning coffee together on the back porch. Katniss resting her legs over Peeta’s lap.

“We going to do our cover today?” He asks.

“Yes, before we go to Finnick’s.” She tells him with a smile.

River gets up from his spot on the porch and disappears around the side of the house.

“Guess who’s home.” Madge speaks, rolling her eyes.

Katniss peels herself from Peeta as she hears the parents coming down the side of the house.

River announces the arrival of the parents, doing circles of the table and licking everyone’s hands and bare legs. Katniss’ parents come into view first.

“Hello.”

Prim rushes to greet her parents and Katniss follows her, embracing them. Madge’s parents arrive and Madge greets her parents.

“Hello boys.” James greets the two men and they both shake hands with him.

“Mr Everdeen.”

“James. I insist.” He grins. “You two been keeping an eye out on the girls?”

“We have been, like we promised.” Sam tells him.

“Good. I knew I could trust you boys.”

Katniss sinks back onto the chair, leaving as much space between her and Peeta. Her parents didn’t need to have any reason to question the relationship of her and Peeta.

“Did you surf this morning Katniss?” Her father asks.

“I was going to. I may have slept in this morning.”

“That’s so unlike you.” He chuckles.

“I know. I guess I was just tired.”

She looks over at Peeta who has taken interest in his coffee, trying not to smirk.

Madge’s father changes the subject, asking about what they’ve been up to and Madge and Prim easily answer the question, filling in the gaps.

“I’ve got to be going. I’m covering lunches at the shack.” Sam tells them all. “I can’t be late. Afternoon surf?” He asks pointing at them all and they nod. “Good. I’ll meet you all back here.”

He picks up his skateboard from behind the chair and is gone down the side of the house.

“Did he stay the night?” Rosie asks, her inquisitiveness already beginning.

“No. We went out and surfed this morning and he stuck around for coffee.” Madge tells her.

“How was the surf?”
“Great as usual.” Madge tells her father. “Anyway, we thought you would be home later, we made plans with one of our friends to take her to Ballina and go shopping.”

“That’s fine. We came back a little earlier than planned. You kids enjoy your day.”

“Daddy, can we take your car? It’s just a little roomier than my car.” Madge asks.

“Of course you can. Just let us grab our bags.”

“We’ll just finish getting ready.” Madge tells them, excusing them all.

Peeta follows them to Annie’s place in his van. He was always welcome to use their place as a parking space while he went into town or use their house to wash or do laundry. He knew where the spare key was hidden.

Annie appears in a stretchy cotton dress, the material stretching over her bump. Her long hair pulled up into a ponytail.

“You girls have fun.” Peeta tells them as he slides open his van.

“You can come with us if you’d like.” Madge tells him.

“It’s fine. I’ve got a bit to do today.” He tells her. “I’ll see you all back here.”

“Hey, you don’t need any help setting up for Finnick’s party do you?”

“No, he’s family is doing everything. And because of that, they moved it to their house which is fine by me.” Annie tells him, relief in her voice.


“Have fun. I’ll be thinking of you.”

“I know you will be.” She flirts. “You better have the song memorised.”

“I do.” He smiles at her. “Go. I’ll see you all later.”

Madge starts the car and they head down the coast to Ballina. This trip came about Annie needing to get down there to get more baby things and her wedding dress. The girls agreed to take her down there as Finnick wouldn’t have a free chance between now and when the baby is born in November to take her down there. He’s working as much as he can to save up and for more time off to spend with his son.

“How many more weeks to go?” Prim asks her.

“About 7.”

“Not long. You excited?” Prim asks.

“I am. I’m very excited.”

“Well let’s just hope he is here before we head back home.” Katniss adds. She was very excited to meet the little boy.

“Yes, I want you both to meet him. He’s getting his eviction notice in four weeks though. As soon
as I’m thirty-seven weeks he is free to arrive whenever he likes. Besides, I don’t know how much more room he has in there. The doctor says he’s going to be a tall baby.”

“Tall like he’s father.”

“Yes. He started running out of room weeks ago. There’s nowhere else for him to go.”

“But out.”

“I know and I already feel huge.”

“You look great. The sexiest pregnant woman I’ve ever seen.” Madge tells her.

“Thanks.”

Madge pulls up at the car park at the baby store and the four of them head into the store. The cashier greets them with a wide smile and offers her assistance.

“I’m just browsing for the minute.” Annie tells her.

“No worries. I’ll just be here if you need me.”

They follow Annie through the aisles.

“What do you need?”

“A carrier, they were out of stock in Byron. Um just little bits and pieces. I’m picking up the stroller as well. And whatever else comes to mind. I have the worst pregnancy brain ever. I’m forgetting everything and I’m scared for my wellbeing. Finnick’s banned me from using the stove if he’s not around because he’s scared I’ll burn down house.”

“Overreacting much?” Madge laughs.

“Probably but he does have a point. It’s something I’d probably do.”

“Well, seven more weeks and the fog will clear.” Katniss reminds her with a reassuring smile.

“But then I’ll be in new parent phase.”

“You will enjoy it.” Madge tells her. “It’ll be the best time of your life.”

“I know, I can’t wait to meet him.”

The girls browse and carry the things Annie decides to get. The cashier ducks to the back to get one of the guys to get the stroller and she scans the items Annie has chosen. She asks Annie questions about her pregnancy and she happily answers her. The guy from the back comes out with the stroller in the box and says he’ll follow them out to the car with it.

“Have a nice day.” The cashier tells them.

“Thank you.”

The boy gets the stroller into the back and Annie sets the bag in beside it.

They stop at a shop that had Annie’s wedding dress, picking it up. She tried it on for the girls and the designer and with the five of them thrilled. She looked incredible.
“Please tell me we’re going for lunch, I am starving.” Annie tells them, rubbing her belly as they walk to the car.

“We are. Where’s the best place?”

“There’s a little burger joint down near the beach.” Annie directs her. “They do the best burgers.”

“Burgers it is.”

They find a table outside of the cafe and place their orders with the waitress.

“You’ll never guess what I walked in on this morning?” Madge says.

“Please, do we have to?” Katniss asks.

“Yes.”

“Peeta going for gold?” Annie asks with a raised eyebrow.

“Yes. I mean literally going for gold.” Madge tells her.

“You have that look about you.” Annie tells Katniss. “That, I just had the best orgasm in my entire life and I can’t wait to have another one. So tell me, mouth or fingers?”

“Both.” Madge tells her and Katniss scowls. “What? You made it public knowledge. You could have locked the door or told me to not disturb you two.”

“You still would have entered the room.” Katniss points out.

“True. He seems like he is good in bed.”

“Is he?” Annie asks.

“By the sounds, he is.” Prim tells them. “You’ve kept me up every night with your loud sex noises, moaning and bedhead banging. It’s only fair we get to talk about you the next day.”

“She’s hit the nail on the head there.” Annie agrees.

“Prim, let me tell you this, when you’re older, you can get your revenge on Katniss. But it won’t be revenge because hopefully you’ll be having the best sex of your life, you’ll understand why your sister and her beau were going at it all the time.” Madge tells Prim.

“Madge is right.” Annie agrees. “You’ll understand one day. And also the two of them don’t have a lot of time together. They’re getting used to each other as much as they can before you head home.”

Katniss feels that pang of sadness settle in her stomach. She doesn’t want to leave so soon.

“That just means you’ll have to come for more visits.” Madge says. “Cause I miss having you by my side. You’re my partner in crime.”

“I’ll try my best to get back here as soon as I can and hopefully before college. If not I’ll be back for mid semester break and we can get into all kinds of trouble again.”

“I don’t doubt it.” Madge smiles. “We need to get the trouble out of our system before we’re responsible adults, saving people’s lives.” She states rolling her eyes.
Two candles light the living room of the house. The shutters are drawn and the only light is of the two candles flickering beside them. They sit facing each other on the ground cross-legged and with their guitars facing each other. He wears his worn hat, covering his unruly curls. He gives her his signature smile.

It was his idea to cover a song together. To do the cover in front of her parents in hopes of showing them how much music means to her. He came up with the idea while his lips traced the curve of her spine in bed while she fought to keep her eyes open, as her body was boneless.

“Let’s cover a song.” He whispers against her back. “We’ll do it when you’re parents are back. Show them how much music means to you.”

“Oh.” She mumbles back.

“And I’ve got just the perfect song.” He whispers again in her ear, his hot breath tickling the skin of her neck.

He had sat and watched her videos on her laptop. Madge letting slip about the covers she had done. He became a kid in a candy store once he found them.

But he chose Candles, one of her Bucket list songs to cover. She had covered it but it was missing one element and she never posted it. She wanted to step it up and do something different and she had let slip this desire.

They had practiced just that afternoon before they went for a surf out in Peeta’s van. She knew the song like the back of her hand, as did he.

Prim had set up the camera on the ground. They wanted to achieve a different effect. They wanted to suit the mood of the song and change the atmosphere of the room. They didn’t wear shoes. They were relaxed and ready.

“You ready?” He asks her quietly.

She nods with a smile and turns, scanning the room. Her parents, Madge’s parents, Madge, Prim, Jai and Sam were in the room. They were getting impatient wanting to hear them.

“Camera is on.” Prim tells them.

She turns back to him and smiles.

“1,2,3.” He counts and smiles at her.

She begins playing the strings of her guitar and he begins singing.

They can’t keep their eyes off of each other, she gives him a shy smile and he smiles widely at her.

She forgets about everyone in the room and focuses on him. They weren’t important at this point. It was just the two of them against the world.

And maybe they both lingered and smiled longer than ‘just friends’ did. But when she was in the zone, she went all out.

Her parents didn’t know they had something going on. They just believed he was a surfing friend
and friends with Sam. Her parents didn’t know that she snuck out to his van and lay with him long into the early hours of the morning. That they had skinny-dipped together, breaking laws and rules. That they kissed every opportunity they got. He filled the space between her sheets when the parents weren’t around. That he actively sought for her, drawing her body closer to his when barely an inch was between them. How intimately he knew her. How familiar he was becoming of her body and of her soul.

They didn’t need to know that.

But when the song came to a close, her shy smile and his longing gaze made the room electric. Their veins coursed with need and want and she knew they had blown the cover they had created. He was more than just her ‘friend’.

“So please just blow out all the candles, blow out all the candles
‘You’re too old to be so shy’
he says to me, so I stay the night
Just a young heart confusing my mind
And we’re both in silence
Wide eyed
Both in silence
Wide eyed
Like we’re in a crime scene”

He smiles at her as he finishes strumming the last few chords and she feels her heart surge, heat spreading across her body. She wants him right now and she could tell by the look in his eyes that he felt the same way.

Everyone claps for them and she leans forward, going to kiss his lips but moves to the corner of his mouth instead and embraces him.

“Thank you.” She whispers into his ear.

“You were wonderful. Thank you.”

“I think our cover has been blown.”

“Is that a bad thing?” He asks her as she moves away.

She shrugs her shoulders as the living room lights are switched back on and together they blow out the candles.

He helps her stand up and they rest their guitars side by side against the arm of the couch.

“Bravo. You two were spectacular.” Madge praises, hugging them both.

Katniss embraces her sister and moves to her parents, slowly. She’s unsure at how they will react. She’s good at reading them. She has been since she was little and she knows that they know everything.

“You did brilliant Katniss.” Her mother tells her.

Her father kisses her forehead and smiles at her. “Excellent.”

And she smiles at them but knows they will be having a talk to her later.

Her father shakes Peeta’s hand, and her mother praises him.
“It’s all your daughter. She’s a very talented girl. You should be proud of her.”

“We are.” Her father beams, wrapping an arm around Katniss’ shoulder. “You’re quite talented as well son.”

“He hasn’t been playing for very long Dad, nearly two years.”

“Well, you’ve got a gift.”

Peeta smiles a thanks at her father.

“You two ready?” Madge asks, coming to stand beside them.

“Yes.” Peeta tells her.

The rest of them follow behind before another word is said, grabbing their belongings. Peeta ushers Katniss out the door, bringing up the rear.

“Be home by eleven. I mean it Madge.” Her father calls out.

“We know.”

Katniss rides with Peeta, while Madge drives everyone else in her car, following Peeta to Finnick’s parent’s house.

“My parents are going to have a talk to me later.” She tells him.

“What about?”

“You. I could read their faces, they know we’re something more.”

“Does that bother you though?”

“No.” She tells him. “It’s just, they’ve always been funny about boys and dating. I’m 18 now so I don’t think it should bother them.”

“I think it’s time to live just for yourself Katniss. Screw trying to please them because honestly, you’re not happy if they are making your life miserable. You’re at that age of exploring, trialing and testing the boundaries even further. You’re legal to do mostly anything you like. They can’t treat you like a kid anymore cause you’re not and they can’t keep you from doing anything.”

She smiles at him. “Then why do I think you’re going to cause me the most problems with them?” She asks.

“Because, I’m all for following your dreams and adventure. I’m for testing the boundaries and showing you things that your parents don’t approve of and filling your head with ideas and plans.” He tells her with his mile wide smile. “I’m that boyfriend you’re parents dread.”

“I don’t see anything wrong about you. It’s not like you’re tatted up and in a criminal gang. You’re just a homeless hippie who lives out of his van, busks on street corners and chases the stars and races the sun home. I don’t see anything wrong with that.”

“Me either.” He laughs. “These next 5 weeks are going to be interesting.”

“Don’t say that.”
“I want to spend every minute with you. I don’t want to waste a day, if you’ll allow it?”

“I’ll allow it.”

He pulls into a driveway, carefully navigating through the fading afternoon light and up to the house. He parks his van and Madge pulls up beside him. Jai and Prim have gone quickly into the house. Sam and Madge wait for Peeta and Katniss to get out of the car.

“This place is beautiful.” Katniss admires, looking around.

“It is. It’s our home away from home.” Sam tells them. “Come on, let’s find the birthday boy.”

Peeta links his fingers through Katniss’ and they follow Sam and Madge, Sam’s hand resting on Madge’s hip.

“Mr. and Mrs. Odair.” Sam greets with enthusiasm. “How are we?”

“Hello Sam.” Mrs. Odair greets with a smile. “We are great. And you?”

“Good. I’d like to introduce you to Madge and this is Katniss.”

“Nice to meet you girls. You girls from Byron?” Mr. Odair asks.

“I’m originally from Santa Monica.” Madge says. “I live on the Gold Coast. Katniss here is from Santa Monica.”

“How lovely. You backpacking?” She asks Katniss.

“No, family vacation. Madge and I are cousins and we’ve come to visit.”

“How are you enjoying the trip?” Mr. Odair asks.

“It’s great. I don’t want to leave.” Katniss tells them.

“It’s a great place here. You kids go and enjoy yourself. Finn should be around somewhere.” Mrs. Odair tells them. “Nice meeting you all.”

“You too.”

Sam leads them out the back where the music is playing. A bonfire has been lit and people gather around talking by the fire. Annie is at Finnick’s side, Finnick holding a beer and his arm draped over Annie’s shoulders.

He greets them all with a hug and a handshake and tells them to help themselves.

“Drink?” Peeta asks her and she nods.

He leaves her side and Katniss listens to the conversation Sam and Finnick are having. She looks down the backyard to see Prim with Jai and a few of his friends chatting by the fire. Prim looks at ease and fits in well with the group of kids.

Katniss is fast on the way to being drunk. She was tense about her parents and mostly wanted to make the most of the night before she went home.

“Katniss, come to the bathroom with me.” Madge shouts into her ear, the music having been turned up louder as the night progressed.
She nods and hands her drink to Peeta, kissing his cheek. Madge helps her up and she steadies herself before they navigate their way to the bathroom. Madge had consumed a few drinks, which left her walking in a very wobbly line.

“Who’s driving home?” Katniss asks as they step into the bathroom, shutting the door behind them.

“Sam is. He’s got to be up early tomorrow.”

“What’s daddy going to think about him driving the Audi?” Katniss giggles.

“Daddy doesn’t need to know a thing.” Madge giggles and falls onto the toilet seat, almost toppling over. “Fuck, I’m drunk.”

“I know.” Katniss giggles. “Need a hand?”

“I’m fine.”

Katniss leans herself up against the wall and tries to get the room to stop swaying.

“You getting any tonight?” Madge asks.

“Peeta promised he’d would. Especially since Mommy and daddy are back. Why do they have to ruin our sleepovers?” She groans.

“Because they're our parents and they think they own us. They don't own anything. We're adults, we should be able to do whatever we like. Or who we like, where we like.” Madge states, standing up from the toilet on unsteady feet.

“Exactly. None of this, ‘no he’s bad for you’.”

“Or we don’t want you having sexual relations because of the consequences that could follow.” Madge says. “Well you know what? I’m a consenting adult. I know the risks of sex and love. And if I decide to go down that path than I’m the one who knows the risks.”

“We know the risks of sex. Unplanned pregnancy, heartbreak and STD’s.”

“You and Peeta would have cute babies though.” Madge states. “I think you should have his babies. You two were both very doe eyed with the baby yesterday.”

“Wouldn’t that piss my parents off.” Katniss giggles. “No medical school for me.”

“That sounds like such a good idea.” Madge says. “I don’t want to go to medical school.”

“Don’t. Do what you want to do.” Katniss tells her. “At least your parents are a little more lenient then mine. They should have adopted me.”

“I’m not so sure about that.”

A knock sounds on the other side of the door. “Girls, you alright in there?” Sam’s voice sounds.

“We’re fine.” Madge answers. “Just having a little girl talk.”

“Ok but there are people waiting to use the facilities.”

“We’ll be out in a second.” Madge tells him, drying her hands. “Come on. We still have 2 hours to party. And I’m making the most of it.”
Katniss trails behind her and out of the bathroom. Sam has a firm hold on Madge and Madge reaches her hand out for Katniss and guides her through the house.

Peeta is in the same spot as she left him, her drink still resting in his hand. He smiles at her as she comes into view and guides her down beside him onto the bench.

“We thought you might have gotten lost.” He whispers in her ear.

She shakes her head. “Just having a little girl talk.”

“About?”

“Our parents.” She tells him. “She did point out we’d have cute babies though, that would really piss my parents off.” She giggles.

“Well, it would.” He agrees. “But I think you’ve had a little too much alcohol to be thinking right.” He laughs, pressing a kiss to her temple. “How about we have this conversation when you’re sober.”

She nods and rests her head on his shoulder. Finnick hands him over a bottle of beer.

“Drink up. I need you drunk my friend.”

Peeta doesn’t admit it but he is close to being drunk to just like Katniss is. Shots of tequila and vodka were dispersed amongst the guests and no one was allowed an empty hand, free from any drinks.

Peeta drags her away from everyone else. Wanting a moment with just her. They can still hear the music and the voices. He has her pressed up against the side of the shed where the music is playing. Peeta’s lips are on hers, his hands resting beneath the skirt of her dress. He rests them on her buttock and brings her legs to wrap around his waist. Their centres pressed together. She can feel the hardness of his erection and the heat rushing to her core.

Blink-182 comes onto the system, Finnick’s favourite preteen band.

‘Come on let me hold you, touch you, feel you
Always
Kiss you, taste you all night
Always’

She kisses him goodnight. He’s already tangled in the sheets on his bed in the back of his van with the moonlight streaming through the window. He’s sleepy, drunk and coming down from the high the two of them reached together moments before.

Sam knocking on the window pulled them apart for the night.

“Come and see me tomorrow.” She tells him as she picks up her sandals and kneels towards him, sneaking in one last kiss before they part for the evening.

“I will.” He replies softly. “Night beautiful.”

“Goodnight.”

She closes the door of his van as carefully as she could and climbs into Madge’s car. Prim riding shotgun and Madge and her rode in the back, the windows open, letting in fresh air in hopes of sobering them up a little before they arrived back home.
Katniss had sobered up quite quickly. It wasn’t the alcohol coursing through her system it was Peeta.

“You have a hickey.” Madge tells her, touching her collarbone. “And one there.” She points to her neck. “Have fun hiding those.”

Katniss didn’t care. Her parents could see them all they liked.

Sam and Prim spoke the whole ride home, Sam giving her advice on life and love.

She opens the gate to the driveway and Sam idles the car in slowly, parking beside the Range Rover. The outdoor light was on for them.

Madge had fallen asleep on the ride home and Sam lifts her body into his arms and follows Prim inside. Katniss follows quietly behind, trying her best to not wake up the parents but every step she takes, the floor creaks or she crashes into something. Prim guides her up the stairs and to their bedroom, handing over her pyjamas. She left her sister to see Sam out and comes back after checking on Madge, setting water and aspirin on Madge’s bedside.

Prim slips in beside Katniss in the twin-sized bed, Katniss already sleepy and close to falling asleep.

“Prim?”

“Yeah?”

“I have a feeling.” She tells her baby sister.

Her baby sister turns to face her. “What kind of feeling?”

“I don’t know. I just do.”

“It’ll pass.”

“Promise?”

“I promise.” She says. “Just sleep Katniss.”

Katniss closes her eyes but reopens them to look at her sister.

“Thank you.” She tells Prim who just smiles and draws closer to her older sister.

Chapter End Notes

Songs used in this chapter:
Used To by Ziggy Alberts
Candles by Daughter

I had envisioned this cover to be the style in which Katniss and Peeta sang Candles. Just the chemistry and the setting just overall makes it beautiful. - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_-NuLoq0Hk

Come and find me on Tumblr - Herainab
Her parent’s morning chatter is enough to worsen the headache she has. She knew the minute she went to bed she’d have a hangover the next morning.

She winces as they talk and move about the kitchen. She feels as if they are talking louder than usual and she wishes she hadn’t drunk so much last night. She pulls her hoodie further over her head, concealing the hickey’s Peeta had given her the night before.

She slips off her stool and heads back upstairs. Madge was yet to appear, Prim was still tucked up in bed. Katniss’ body clock having woken her up and once she was up there was no way she was going back to sleep.

She sees Prim is awake and falls down on the bed beside her.

“I have the worst headache.” She groans, covering her face with a pillow.

Prim chuckles, setting her phone down and removing the pillow from Katniss’ face.

“Let’s go sweat it out then.” Prim suggests. “Come on, morning run and a big greasy breakfast. We’ll get out of here for a few hours.”

Katniss nods and Prim rolls out of bed, changing into her running gear. She leaves Katniss to rouse Madge, seeing if she wanted to join them. Katniss pulled on her running shorts and sports bra. She laced her sneakers and set some money in her pocket along with her phone.

“Come on, let’s get this over with.” Madge groans as she appears in the doorway. She looks worse than Katniss.

Their parent’s are shocked when the three girls appear downstairs with their running gear on and tell them they’re going for a run.

The morning sun beats down on them and they push their bodies, trying to sweat the alcohol out of their system and feel a little bit better than they were feeling.

“I won’t be able to avoid mom and dad for too long.” Katniss tells them, she was starting to tire.

“Did they say something to you this morning?” Prim asks. “See the hickeys?”

“No. I think they’re waiting for the opportunity. Probably when Peeta comes over. This is going to feel like the birds and the bees all over again.”

“But it’s even worse because you’re 18, not 12.” Madge adds.

“What will they say to you?” Prim asks as they come to a stop, walking along the beach instead. They had been running for fifteen minutes flat, the terrain of the sand causing their legs to burn.

“I don’t know. I just sense it’ll be the two of us, how close we’re getting, and Peeta. I don’t know, they just like to have serious discussions, pointing out how unacceptable my behaviour has been.”

“Well, just be honest with them.”
“I’m not telling them we’ve been sleeping with each other. I’ll just say we’re dating and he’s slept over a couple of times. Because I’ll get the, ‘boys only think about sex’ lecture and be careful that he might have other ideas. And why didn’t you ask our permission for him to sleep over. I can already hear it.”

They stretch their muscles and feel much better than they had half an hour ago. They lightly jog up from the beach and across the pavement to a café for breakfast. Sae’s wins out again and she greets the girls, telling them to grab a table.

“Where are the boys?” Sae asks, dropping off their drinks.

“Sam’s working.” Madge tells her.

“Peeta stayed at Finnick’s last night. Our parents are home.” Katniss adds.

“Oh, so no running round with the boys… I see how it is. You girls are acting like angels.” She chuckles. “I understand.”

“The parents have figured it out.” Madge adds. “Katniss here is about to get a lecture from her parents about Peeta and her.”

“Do they think he’s in a outlawed motorcycle gang or something?” Sae asks. “Peeta’s a parents dream. Send them round here and I’ll have a talk to them.”

“They’re just protective. Over protective. They don’t want me being led astray.”

“Too late now girlie. The heart chases what it wants. You’re heart’s already too far gone.”

“It’s more the once we get back home aspect.” Katniss explains to Sae. “They want me to go to medical school. They’ll think about a music course if I don’t misbehave on this trip, showing them how responsible I am. I think I’ve stuffed up my chances.”

“Oh girlie, you still have the final say in your education choices. You’re 18, follow your heart.”

“That’s what everyone has been saying to me. They just don’t understand.”

“Well for your sake I hope they do.” Sae says, touching Katniss’ shoulder.

Katniss sinks down in her chair. The more people told her to follow her heart the more it weighed her down.

Katniss didn’t have much of an appetite for her bacon and egg roll. She picked at it and Madge polished it off for her having worked up an appetite.

“We can look around for a while if you don’t want to go back home.” Madge suggests as they leave the café and head down towards the beach to walk along the sand home.

“I think I want some time alone.” She tells them. “If that’s alright?”

“Of course. We’ll hold them off, you sit on the sand and watch the waves.”

They take off their sneakers and socks and walk barefooted home along the beach. Katniss sits down out of view from the house and the girls go ahead. She stares out at the ocean and enjoys her time alone.

A body sits down beside her and she turns to see her uncle.
“Hey Kitty.” He begins. “What’s wrong?”

She bites her lip in hopes of suppressing the tears that are threatening to fall but the two words have opened the floodgate and they stream down her face. Her uncle wraps his arm around her shoulder.

“You feel like the world is against you?” He asks her and she nods. “Even if it feels like it is, I assure you it’s not. The odds are in your favour.”

She sobs into his chest and he rubs soothing circles on her back. He had comforted his niece a few times in her life. And he never spoke; which he learnt was the best way to comfort his niece. Just holding her and rubbing her back calmed her down and when she was ready to speak she’d speak.

Today the heaviness she had been feeling building up brings the tears flowing hard and fast.

It’s almost half an hour when the sobbing has stopped and her tears have stopped. Her throat and eyes are sore from the crying. Her stomach aches as well.

“He, I’ve got it.” She hears and turns to see Peeta approaching them.

Paul nods at Peeta and stands up, patting Peeta’s shoulder.

“Look after her mate.”

“I will sir.”

Paul walks back up to the house and Peeta sits down beside Katniss, embracing her body tightly. She can feel his steadiness, his warmth and she never wants to let him go.

“They haven’t spoken to me yet.” She speaks softly.

He nods, and lets her go. Touching her face softly. “I know. Madge texted me, told me you were down here.” He kisses her forehead. “Do you want to go into this one together?” He asks. She nods and he smiles at her. “Come on then, let’s get this over with.”

He helps her up onto her feet and carries her sneakers in for her. They walk hand in hand to the house. Her parents are seated on the back porch, almost like they are waiting for her.

“There you are.” James says, smiling and then looks at Peeta and their linked fingers. “Peeta, how are you?”

“Good thank you, Mr. Everdeen.” He replies.

“Let’s go inside for just a second.” She whispers to him.

“Katniss, we’d like to have a talk with you.” Her mother says.

“I know. Just let me go inside first.”

Her mother scowls slightly and Katniss leads Peeta inside the house. She takes him upstairs, dropping her shoes in her bedroom and she embraces Peeta, kissing him quickly.

“They’re going to be full on, unfair and criticise you. You sure you’re ready for this?”

“Katniss, I’m ready for this. I can handle your parents.”

She smiles in relief that he’s not backing out now and kisses him again, pulling his body closer to
hers. She wants to feel more of him.

He pulls away from her. “Come on, we have a talk to have.”

She fills up a glass of water for herself and Peeta and they seat themselves outside, in front of her parents.

“Katniss, we’d like to have this conversation with just you.” Her mother tells her.

“No, Peeta can listen. I want him here.”

“Katniss.” Her mother warns.

“Rosie, she’s an adult, she can make her own decisions.” Her father tells her mother.

“But when it’s about him.” Her mother says to him in a hushed voice.

“Mr. and Mrs. Everdeen, let me tell you about myself.” Peeta interrupts them. “I grew up on The Sunshine Coast. I have two older brothers and lived with my parents. They run a café bakery. I was born overlooking the Mudjimba surf lifesaving club. I’ve grown up surfing, skating and working in my parent’s bakery. I was home schooled until year 10. When I was 14 I was being published in a surf magazine. I got my first guitar when I was 17, two years ago and I’m a self-taught musician and I make a living out of music. I live in a van and I have for almost two years now. My two years have made me grow up quickly. I’m not here to use your daughter. I think she’s beautiful and an amazing person. And I know I want to spend every day of her holiday with her before she returns home.”

James clears his throat and sits forward. “Well, you seem like a nice boy Peeta…”

“We just don’t want you leading our daughter astray. She can’t have any silly thoughts put into her head about her future. She has to think seriously about it.”

“And I am.” Katniss tells them.

“But when you’re hanging round these homeless townsfolk who don’t have stable careers, live out of their vans and spend their days surfing, it puts ideas into your head. Ideas we don’t want in your head.” Her mother states and looks directly at Katniss’ neck, seeing the hickey.

“Mom, don’t insult Peeta.” Katniss says through gritted teeth and repositions her ponytail. “He’s the nicest boy I’ve met in my entire life. He has a lot going for him and just because he lives out of his van doesn’t make him a decent person. His status doesn’t change the way I feel about him, or see him. You taught me to never judge a person before I got to know them. I’ve gotten to know him and might I say I really like him. He’s admirable what he’s doing. I bet you couldn’t see yourself living out of a van and not caring about status. He’s gained perspective and I think you should have some.”

“See what I mean, silly ideas have been put into your mind.”

“Are you even hearing what you’re saying?”

“I’m your mother Katniss. I’m right.”

“I’m 18. I’m an adult. And I should have a choice in my future.”

“No. Not if we’re paying for your college. We’ll have a say in what we fund you in. We don’t think music is a wise choice.”
“I got accepted into music. There’s a future for musicians.”

“You’ll have more of a chance being a doctor.”

“I don’t want to be a doctor. I can’t watch people die, day in day out. I don’t want to become a shell of myself. Please let me decide what I want to do for my future.”

“No. When we get home, you’re accepting one of the offers for premed and that’s that.”

“You said we’d talk about it when we got home.”

“I think this conversation had to be had now before you let yourself think you’re going into music. You’re going into medicine and that’s that. No more arguing.”

“Dad!” Katniss pleads, looking at her father who has remained silent.

“And we don’t appreciate having boys around the house. Think of your sister.” Rosie adds.

“You’re unbelievable. You’re ruining my life.”

“And this thing you two have going, nip it in the bud. It can’t go any further.”

“We’re in a relationship Mom.”

“I don’t care. End it now. And you two are not to be seen together anymore. You’re a bad influence on my daughter young man! No more coming round here! You’re to stay away from my daughter, understood?”

Katniss can’t believe her parents. She looks between the two of them for confirmation of them not being serious.

“Rosie!” Paul warns her from the back door. “You can’t forbid them to see each other.”

“Paul, this is a private conversation.”

“She’s 18 Rosie. She’s not a child.” Paul reminds her. “She’s allowed to make her own choices.”

“This is for her own good. I don’t want her having a broken heart or worse.”

“She’ll have a broken heart if you forbid them to see each other. They care for each other, don’t you see that.”

“He’s just like every other 18 year old boy. He just wants nothing but sex. He’s bad news.”

“He is not.” Katniss states, getting choked up. “Peeta is different to other guys. He’s different.”

“Katniss, we’ve put our foot down. This is the final say. You broke our promise. You can spend today together but after that it’ll have to be a goodbye.”

“Rosie.” Paul says, shaking his head. “You can’t.”

“Paul, I’m her mother.”

Katniss looks at her parents in disbelief and pushes off the seat and past them, rushing inside, past the rest of her family who have heard everything.

She rushes up the stairs, slamming the bedroom door shut behind her and falling onto the bed,
bursting into tears. She can hear the arguing coming from downstairs and she cries harder.

The bed sinks at the weight of the person and she knows its Peeta straight away. She rolls over to cry into his chest and he holds her, soothing her. Comforting her from the tears.

“I’m so sorry Katniss.” He whispers into her ear and she sobs harder.

The arguing seems to stop and her tears stop flowing.

He kisses her hair and anywhere else he can with comforting kisses and she buries her face into his neck, gripping his shirt in her first. She doesn’t want him to let her go. She never wants him to let her go.

“Stay with me.” She pleads into his neck.

“Always.” He tells her. “Forever and always.”

They lay together for an hour, unmoving. The bedroom door opens again and she knows it’s her father right away.

“Just leave me alone.” She tells him, not bothering to look up from Peeta’s chest.

“I just wanted to know if you wanted some lunch?” He tells her. She squeezes her eyes together tightly and wishes she were elsewhere. “Ok, well if you get hungry there’s lunch waiting for you.”

Katniss exhales a shaky breath into Peeta’s chest and grips his shirt tighter. The door closes and her father disappears back downstairs.

“This is so unfair.” She says into his chest.

“I know.”

“They can’t forbid me to see you. They’re hardly here to watch my movements.”

He kisses the top of her head and she peaks out from his chest.

“We’re still going to see each other aren’t we?” She asks.

“Of course we are Katniss. I’d never leave you.”

“We still have Annie and Finnick’s wedding song to practice.”

“We’ll practice it. Don’t worry.”

“And my gig at the Treehouse.”

“Katniss, it’s fine. We have it all organized. We can still talk when your parents are here. We can work around it. We will.”

“I’m good at climbing trees too.” She smirks.

He smiles at her and kisses her. “I just don’t want you getting into any more trouble than you already are.” He admits.

“What will they do, ground me? Send me back home? I don’t think so.” He smiles at her and brushes her hair away from her face. “Please don’t let them take you from me.” She pleads.
“Never Katniss. I won’t let them.”

“Promise?”

“Promise. Always.”

Madge and Prim come into the room sometime later. Katniss can tell it’s getting on into the day and neither of them have moved. Scared that if they move that’ll be it.

“They are being so unfair.” Prim says. “So unfair.”

“It’s fine Prim.”

“It’s not. Mom, I don’t know what’s come across her.” She admits. “And dad, he didn’t say a word. He just let her continue. At least Paul tried to stand up to her.”

“She’s stubborn.” Katniss reminds her sister, sitting up from Peeta’s embrace and leaning against the headboard. “She always has been.”

“I don’t think they’re going home this week.” Prim tells her. “I think they’ll go home when Paul and Michelle come back.”

“Well they can’t keep tabs on us the whole time.” Madge states. “How are they to know where we are and who we’re with?”

“They’ll know.” Prim tells her, rolling her eyes. “Byron is a small town though, there’s a big chance you two will run into each other.”

“We have it figured out.” Katniss tells the girls. “Don’t worry about it.”

“You know if you obey their orders, Mom will think she’s won this. You need to fight her back.”

“I’m so tired Prim. I have no fight left in me.”

“Katniss, you’re never like this. They’re treating you like a child.”

“Oh well. They’ll have no control of me once I move to college and I’m out in the real world.”

“Katniss…” Prim starts.

“Don’t Prim. It’s easier this way.”

“No it’s not. Don’t think for a second it is. You’re 18 Katniss. You’re no longer a child. It’s time for you to live your life. Live your life. Please.”

“I will.” She tells her sister, lowering her voice. “I don’t want to give them any more ammunition.” She whispers. “Please, if you love me, you’ll keep your mouth shut.”

“Ok.”

“Promise?”

Prim nods. “Just don’t let them win.”

She smiles at her sister and squeezes her hand. “I won’t. I’ll be fine. We’ll be fine.” She tells them smiling.
Peeta nods confirming this and kisses Katniss’ cheek.

The four of them manage to leave the privacy of the bedroom and Katniss grips Peeta’s hand with all she’s got. Paul is the only adult downstairs.

“Hey kids.” He greets them.

“Hi Daddy. Where is everyone?”

“Gone into town to do some shopping.” He tells them with a smile. “I thought I’d stick around here, see if you all needed anything?”

“We’re fine Dad.” Madge replies.

Paul looks at the two star-crossed lovers, the now forbidden lovers with sadness. Much like a Shakespeare tragedy. Katniss knows he wants to say more but he’s unsure at what to say to the young lovers.

“Want some lunch?” Katniss asks Peeta.

He nods and she takes him to the kitchen. They pull out the leftovers from lunch and make themselves a wrap each. They cuddle on the daybed outside with River at their feet. Madge and Prim have gone to the beach for a swim.

Paul sits down out with Peeta and Katniss and looks out the ocean and finally finds his words.

“Katniss, your mother is being unfair.”

“What Mom says, goes right?”

“Katniss, she needs to understand you’re 18. You have a choice regarding everything in your life. Including school, boyfriends, friends, career and extracurricular things. She needs to understand this.”

“She still thinks I’m a 12 year old.”

“And you’re not. You’re growing into a young woman. She has to let you go. We’re finally accepting to let Madge go and your parents need to do the same. They need to accept you for you who are and respect your wishes and goals.”

“I just hope they’ll come around.”

“I know my sister, she is stubborn. She’s got your Nan’s stubbornness. And let me tell you, your mother was nothing like she was now when she was your age. She was a free spirit. She was with all the wrong guys, uninterested in college, which I will tell you our parents were pushing us to medical school. She was more interested in travelling and adventuring. She didn’t think about her future rather than the present. She went to college but saw it more as a social thing. She changed courses 3 times before finally settling with a premed course. That’s where she met your father who was exactly the same as her. Uninterested in his own parents wishes and didn’t really want to settle with medicine. He was in my course and that’s how they met each other. Your dad used to have a motorcycle, a bad hair cut and used to speak like he was a hillbilly. Our parents worst nightmare.” He snickers. “But they accepted him because they saw how much your mother loved your father. It was love at first sight and they were married before she graduated college.”

“So why can’t she accept Peeta?”
He shrugs his shoulders. “I don’t know how to answer that. It’s something you’ll have to talk to her about. But I think she’s being harsh and unfair on you two.”

“It’s a bit hypocritical.”

“It is. And we both felt the pressure from our parents to follow in their footsteps despite us not really wanting to. I’m glad I did but you don’t deserve that pressure. You should be allowed to do what you want.”

“Exactly my argument. If music fails, then I’ve learnt. I just don’t want to go into medicine. I can’t do it.”

“I know. Want me to have a talk to your parents?”

She shakes her head. “No. It’s something they have to see for themselves. I have a gig booked at the Treehouse on Friday. I’ve been doing modeling, surfing and adventuring. They need to see I am doing what I love. This is what I want.”

Paul smiles. “I know it is. Fight for it Katniss. I almost gave up everything and lost this life.” He reaches over and grabs her hand. “I can see the light in your eyes. If this is what you want than fight. Fight hard.”

He gets up leaving Katniss and Peeta to be. Peeta squeezes her knee and she leans her head on his shoulder.

“He’s right.” Peeta tells her. “You have to fight.”

She nods. “I will. Just let me get through this trip.”

He kisses her on the forehead. “Will you come back here?” He asks.

“You’ll have a hard time keeping me away.”

The young lovers are torn apart before dinnertime. Her father having pulled Peeta aside to have a chat to him. Peeta returned even sadder than before. She knew exactly what her father said without asking.

“Time to say goodbye to Peeta.” Her mother announces as they sit on the back porch.

“Can’t he at least stay for dinner?”

“No. We’re having a family dinner.” She tells her daughter.

“It’s fine. I’ll go to Sam’s.” He tells her.

“Bye Peeta.” Her mother calls out.

Katniss clutches to him tightly, not wanting it to end.

Peeta holds her, embracing her for a long moment.

“Katniss, come on now!” Her mother calls out.

She kisses him; she doesn’t care if her parents watch this. It’s full of pain and hurt.

And it’s probably the most painful kiss she’s ever shared with someone.
Even though it’s only for now, it still feels like it’s forever.

They pull apart, tears streaming down both of their faces. He manages a smile and pecks her lips a couple more times.

“Time to go.” He tells her.

They stand up from the chair and walk through the house, past everyone. She walks him down to the front door. They share one more painful kiss on the threshold and he kisses her knuckles, places a butterfly kiss to the side of her eyes. He kisses every inch of her face.

“I love you Katniss Everdeen.” He tells her. “I want you to know that.”

She hiccups a sob, nodding at him. “You love me?”

“I love you.” He tells her.

She feels her heart beat faster in her chest and the rest of her feels empty. She brings his hand to her heart and he smiles at her. “I love you too!”

He smiles at her, at her declaration and grips her hand. “I’ll see you in my dreams Miss America.” He tells her. “Thank you for teaching me so much.”

“Don’t go.” She pleads.

“It’s not forever.” He reminds her. “Maybe in the future I might come and visit the Californian Coast and I might run in to you. You might be busking by the street or riding a wave. I’ll be sure to look for you.” The tears fall faster down her face and she can’t speak. “Bye Miss America.”

He departs with one last kiss. His lips are damp from her tears, his neck also covered in her tears. His own face covered in his own tears.

He doesn’t say a word as he walks down the steps and down the pathway to the gate. She falls onto her knees, her whole body numb as he climbs into his van and drives away.

“Katniss?” Her father says, touching her back.

She flinches away. The only person she wants more than anything in the world is gone.

“Katniss. Come on now.” Her mother pleads, coming to stand beside her father. “This is ridiculous.”

“Leave her alone.” Michelle tells them. “She needs time.”

Her mother and father retreat back into the house and leave Katniss to grieve on the threshold.

When her legs are no longer numb she stands slowly, closing the door and sitting down at the table with the rest of her family. The dinner plates have been cleared and they share dinnertime conversation.

Her aunt brings Katniss her dinner and squeezes her hand briefly before sitting back down at the table. Madge and Prim give her sympathetic looks while her mother and father show no remorse.

She can hardly keep her dinner down, it sticking in her throat on the way down. It takes her several attempts to swallow each bite.

They don’t bother engaging her in their conversation.
She leaves her dinner half eaten, unable to stomach the rest. She takes her own plate to the kitchen where Madge and Michelle are scrapping the dishes and stacking the dishwasher.

“Come on, let’s go an get some gelato and watch the sunset.” Michelle suggests. “I think some time out of the house will do you some good.”

“I won’t be allowed to.” Katniss speaks.

“Come on. I’ll take you girls.” Michelle tells her. “We’ll walk, enjoy the fresh air. It’s my shout.”

Katniss manages to nod and goes and puts her shoes on, placing one of Peeta’s sweatshirts on and pocketing her phone.

Michelle tells the others she’s taking them and rebuffs Rosie’s offer to join them.

“No, it’s fine. I want to spend some time with the girls alone.”

“Straight there and straight back.” Rosie tells her. “I don’t need them out and about this late at night.”

“They’ll be fine.” Paul tells her.

“Bye.” Michelle tells them, dousing any more conversation.

Madge holds River’s leash and they navigate the street. They walk past Sam’s house, seeing Peeta’s van in the driveway and Katniss feels her stomach knot. Prim squeezes her hand and supports her big sister. Michelle and Madge are the only ones speaking.

Michelle shouts the girl’s gelato, buying them triple scooped cups and they sit on the sand on Main Beach watching the sunset. Michelle wraps her arm around her niece offering her own comfort and they watch the sunset.

But it makes Katniss cry even more. The sunset. It’s his favourite colour.

And she doesn’t know why she’s crying so much; she’s still going to see him. But she feels it’s because of her parents and their behaviour. Their thoughts on the busker, the boy who wouldn’t hurt a soul and is so gentle, kind and caring. Who is thoughtful, who expresses his mind and soul in his writing and songwriting.

Her busker who loves her so much, she’s the first girl he’s sure he really loves.

“You can’t let them dictate your life Katniss.” Michelle whispers in her ear. “You can’t let him go. You love him. Anyone would be blind to not see the love you have for each other. I know it hurts.”

Katniss lets the fat tears roll down her cheeks and soak her aunt’s cardigan. Her aunt wipes the tears from Katniss’ cheeks and looks deep in her eyes.

“Promise me you’ll see him when we’re gone.” Katniss nods and hiccups. “That kind of love, you only get it a few times in your life. Embrace it now and don’t let it out of your grip.”

“But…” she begins to say.

“No buts. You see that boy every chance you can. You promise me.”

“I do.”
“I’ll cover for you baby girl. I’m on your side.”

She smiles at her aunt and lets her aunt kiss her forehead.

“So are we.” Madge tells her cousin.

“Fight for what you love.” Michelle tells her brushing a stray piece of her hair behind her ear.

They walk back along the beach home. The light fading as they approach the house. They walk by Sam’s house and Katniss looks at the house hopeful to get a glimpse of her busker.

She does hear a guitar being played, carrying out to sea and she knows it’s him.

She dodges her parents and showers, getting into her pyjamas and under the covers of her bed, listening to his Soundcloud page.

She uploads their cover to her channel, linking her other social network accounts to the cover. She tags him in every post, and watches as her phone lights up with likes, comments and shares.

She listens to his calming voice and lets him carry her, give her strength to survive the separation.

Prim comes to bed and cuddling up to her sister when her phone lights up with a message from Sam.

Katniss, it’s Peeta. I’ve left my phone at your house. Don’t think that I’m ignoring you. I don’t want to ignore you. I want to know if you’re okay mostly. This fucking sucks so much.

She replies to him quickly. I know you’d never ignore me. And I agree. This fucking sucks. I just hope this is a nightmare and I’ll wake up and you’ll be at my side.

Meet me at midnight.

Where?

The beach.

I’ll see you at midnight.

At midnight.

Prim looks at her curiously.

“Can you go and look for Peeta’s phone?” She asks Prim.

“Of course.”

Prim leaves to go searching for the phone and her father steps into the room instead.

“I don’t want to talk.” She tells him.

He comes and sits on the bed beside her. “I though Peeta might be looking for this.” He tells her, handing over Peeta’s phone.

“He will be. Thank you.”

“I’m sorry this has had to happen.”
“I’m sure you are.”

“Listen, I’m sorry but we are protecting you.”

“You aren’t. It feels like my heart has been ripped out of my chest. I really like him. I’m falling for him.”

“You can’t fall for anyone in three weeks.”

“You can. You and Mom did.” She tells him, looking at him right in the eye and seeing no emotion. “Just leave me alone.”

She stays awake, staring at the clock of her phone. Just before midnight she slips out of the bed. The house has been quiet for a couple of hours now. She pulls on his hoodie and opens the door to the balcony. She climbs down the tree and moves quietly around the house to the back gate. She jumps the gate and walks along the sand until she finds him. He’s facing the water; his shoulders slumped like he’s lost the biggest battle of his life.

Her hears her approaching and turns; a smile spreads across his face, grateful that she actually came.

She falls down beside him and embraces him, wrapping her arms around his neck tightly.

They fall apart and she hands him his phone.

“Thank you.”

“No worries. I uploaded our cover.”

“Sam said. We sound good.”

She smiles at him and cuddles into his side. He wraps his arm around her body and they sit on the cold sand as the sea breeze blows.

They sit for a few hours. Not speaking. They share kisses, long kisses and lingering touches.

She kisses him one last time, when the night is fading into early dawn.

“I should get home.” She tells him.

He nods and stares at her for one last moment before they go home. He squeezes her hand and offers her a reassuring smile before they depart.

She walks back along the beach, turning back to wave goodnight to him. He waves back sadly and they turn their backs on each other.

She climbs the back gate and can’t help but feel as if someone has been watching her. She brushes the sand off of her feet and climbs back up the tree, onto the balcony and slipping back to the bedroom. She strips off the hoodie and slides back into bed, staring up at the ceiling. She can still taste him on her lips and feels his soft touch on her body.

Her phone lights up and she checks the message.

P – I wrote a song. Plug your headphones in.

She smiles and reaches for her headphones, plugging them into the jack of her phone. She clicks on the video and listens to the strumming of his guitar and then his singing.
“Lets find some beauty in the silence before we go,  
some beauty in the silence before we leave,  
cause nothing makes me nothing nervous,  
nothing makes me nervous like you,  
so lets find some beauty in the silence before we go,  
some beauty in the silence before we leave,  
cause nothing makes me nothing nervous,  
nothing makes me nervous like you close to me,”

She smiles, feeling her eyes fill with tears.

K – What did I do to deserve you?

P – I ask myself that same question every day. Sleep well my dear.

She scrolls through their messages, going to the first text that really meant something meaningful to the both of them.

I’m sorry but I fell in love that night. My mind has since been filled with thoughts of only you and the way you looked at me. The sound of your voice and the warmth of your skin became the only home I’ve ever known because I felt more at home in your arms that I ever did in my own house. I fell in love that night, the night your eyes met mine.

She felt her heart beat pick up and she knew, she was never going to let her busker go.

Chapter End Notes

Song used in this chapter:
Sleep Well - Ziggy Alberts

The storm has hit. Let me know what you think.
We’re also reached the halfway mark of the story. It's sad to think it's almost finished.

Look out for an update later this week.
The early morning was still. The waves roll onto the shore. There was no wind and the sun was fight with the moon. It was a stark contrast to the night before.

The night before they had had the biggest storm since they had arrived. The power cut out sometime after dinner and didn’t come back on until almost midnight. The storm brought everything, the wind, hail, thunder, lightning and a heavy downpour.

Palm leaves were stripped from trees and the hail had broken windows.

The house had no damage; her father though had gone to help the elderly couple next door patching their windows and give them some company while they waited for their grandson to get there.

Katniss thought the storm was a metaphor. The huge storm that blew through, it had much resembled Sunday and her mother sweeping through like a tornado, destroying everything that was new and good.

The two of them were still not speaking.

Tornado Rosie had hit and the recovery, well that could take weeks or months. Katniss was stubborn and good at holding a grudge.

Katniss still felt there would be one more storm and Sunday was just the calm before the storm.

And when it would hit? Katniss did not know.

She straps her board strap to her ankle and heads out into the cold water. She hadn’t seen Peeta since their midnight meet-up, he had taken a trip down the coast for a couple of day and she misses him like crazy. She misses his warmth, his kisses, his eyes, his voice and his smile. She misses everything and she can’t wait until tomorrow, when her parents were going back to the Gold Coast.

The girls had decided on visiting one of the theme parks and her parents were going to go back to the Undersee’s Gold Coast home. Her parents knew things needed to calm down in the house, Katniss needing her space and time before she could finally speak to them again. Also her parents and the Undersee’s were booked in for a long weekend on one of the luxurious islands without the girls.

And Katniss was thankful because she needed Peeta more than anything right now. Madge was also going a little stir crazy without Sam’s company also.

Prim’s tolerance was also being tested and near breaking point. She had listened to Katniss’ whining and bitching every night and morning. She was trying to be a good sister but there was only so much patience she had before it snapped.

She paddles out to sea and surfs, leaving all her troubles behind and starting the day fresh. Hoping to leave all the anger and the tension at sea and have a good day. Her hormones hadn’t helped this week. She had a serious case of PMS and her hormones and moods were uncontrollable. She was crying, angry, happy and sad. She was gorging herself with food and starting to breakout from the stress. She was a mess and had called Peeta crying on numerous occasions and he asked if she wanted him back there with her.
That boy was too good to her.

The sun has risen when she surfs back to shore. She carries her board back up the sand and sets it in the sand as she undoes her leg strap and wrings out the water in her braid. She stares out at the ocean and wonders if Peeta was doing the same thing.

Cause as long as he could see the water he was home. He was comforted. But she wondered if he felt as lonely as she did staring at the ocean and not being able to look to his side and see her standing there, or turn around and look at the house, knowing she was sound asleep inside.

She wraps her arms around herself and bites her lip to stop the emotions that were starting to bubble.

She had to be strong; her crying benefited her parents and their arrangement. It made them feel better that it hurt her so much.

She picks up her board and carries it back to the house. She had a Facetime session with Nan and Pop Undersee. Maybe them seeing her so unhappy would cause them to knock some sense into their daughter and son-in-law.

She peels off her wetsuit, wraps a towel around her body and fetches the Ipad and warm clothes.

A message was waiting on her phone from them letting her know they were ready when she was. She made herself a coffee and sat on the daybed out on the back porch with River curled beside her.

Her Nan’s sweet face appears on the screen and she smiles at her.

“Hello sweetheart.”


“Just making himself a cuppa.” She tells her. “How are we?”

“Good. It’s so beautiful here. Madge is lucky she gets to holiday here. You’ll have to come and visit, spend a week on the beach and meet the townsfolk.”

“We’ve been talking about it.” She says as her Pop sits down.

“There’s my sweet girl. How’s the surf?”

“Excellent Pop. I’ve just been. They’ve got the best waves I’ve ever surfed.”

“So does that mean you’re not coming back?” He asks with a smirk.

Her smile turns into a slight frown and her grandparents notice this.

“What’s wrong dear?” Her Nan asks. “I thought you were enjoying your time.”

“I am.”

“What’s happened?” Her Pop asks. “We can read you like a book Katniss. You’re mother and you are very alike. What’s happened?”

She decides if she’ll spill the whole truth. If she’ll tell them her parents have banished her lover and told him he’s not good enough for their daughter. That they’ve dictated the rest of her life.
“Is it your mother?” She asks. Katniss bobs her head slightly in response. “What has she done?”

Katniss decides to spill. She tells them everything, leading up to the trip, reminding them of the whole college thing and medical school. She tells them everything. Peeta, the fights with her parents, the banishing of Peeta and that she’s going into medicine no question asked.

Her grandparents are in shock at what has blown up in just the last month.

“What’s this boy like?” He asks.

“He’s wonderful Pop. He’s a singer-songwriter, he’s lived out of a van since he finished school last year and has travelled up and down the east coast. He’s parents run a bakery that overlooks a beach a couple of hours from here. He’s so kind and gentle and wonderful. You’d both love him.”

“And why has she said you two aren’t allowed to be together?”

“Because he’s put silly ideas in my head. He’s going to influence my bad behaviour and decision to not attend college or study medicine. I decided I didn’t want to study medicine long before this. He’s teaching me about perspective not leading me astray.”

“You sound just like your mother.” Her Pop says. “But we accepted your father the minute she brought him home because we could see the love she had in her eyes for him.”

“Then why is she like this to me? She thinks I’m going to have my heartbroken or something worse.”

“I don’t know Katniss. Have you spoken to her?”

“Yes and she just says it’s for my own good.” Her grandparents both frown. “I miss him so much. It’s not fair.”

“We’ll have a chat with her later.”

“No please don’t. It’ll just make it worse.”

“Ok but if you want us to have a word with her than we will.” Her Pop says.

“Oh, is that the boy in your video?” Her Nan asks.

Katniss nods and smiles at them. “That’s Peeta. He’s incredible.”

“He’s good on the eyes too. He might need a haircut though.” Her Nan tells her, winking.

Katniss laughs at her Nan’s enthusiasm. “He doesn’t have his mother pestering him. But he’s just living the free life at the moment, he’s writing songs for his album and just spending some time alone.”

“Katniss, I haven’t seen your eyes light up like this since you got your first guitar.” Her Pop states. “You really like him, you go get him. Screw what they say. Follow you heart. And you deserve to be happy; I don’t think you’d want the rest of this trip to be ruined if you can’t be with the boy. Have some fun and make the most out of these next few weeks cause you’ll be back here before you know it.”

Katniss smiles at them, promising she will make the most of the time remaining. She fills them in on everything else that has been happening before they end the call. Katniss promising to send them through some pictures and videos from the gig she’s doing at the Treehouse on Friday night.
Her father finds his way down the stairs and greets her and she mutters a soft hello to him.

She eats her breakfast on the porch, her father on his Ipad reading the paper and catching up on news back home. She texts Peeta, the only communication they have had since Sunday. Her mother joins them soon after and Katniss gets up and leaves, going back inside.

She changes out of her swimmers and into other clothes before falling onto the bed beside Prim, waking her out of the pretend sleep she was having.

“Wake up. I need a buffer.”

“One more day.” Prim mumbles to herself. “You better buy me gelato or something else.”

“Any thing you want.”

Prim slips out of bed slowly, leaving for the bathroom. Katniss’ phone buzzes and she pulls it from her shorts smiling as she sees Peeta’s name.

P – *This absence isn’t doing me any good. I keep writing really sad songs.*

K – *My poor baby.*

P – *This time alone is terrible. I never wish for this type of time alone on anyone. Sam Smith was really onto something.*

K – *Stay with me for Friday?*

P – *Always.*

K – *I mean the song we’re going to sing together. But yes, always.*

They were up early Thursday morning. Katniss up before sunrise for a surf, her father joining her but keeping his distance and words to himself. They were on the road by 7.30 and at the Undersee’s house by 9. They dropped off James and Rosie and River, swapping Mr Undersee’s Range Rover for Madge’s Audi and they headed out to Wet n Wild.

Sam, Peeta and Jai where meeting them there. Peeta having gotten home yesterday with Jai tagging along before he was back at school the following week.

Madge pulls up beside Sam’s Black Forester. The boys were already out of the car, sitting on the tailgate of the car.

Katniss jumps from the car the minute Madge put it into park and was embracing Peeta tightly. Her arms wrap around his neck. He holds her tightly around her lower back.

“I missed you so much.” She whispers into his ear.

He squeezes her gently and they pull apart. He smiles at her, pushing a stray piece of hair behind her ear and leaning down to capture her mouth in a long kiss.

“Get a room.” Jai tells them, standing up from the tailgate and going to greet Prim and Madge.

He steadies her hips and holds her there for a moment, as their lips remain connected.
“Come on, we don’t have all day.” Madge tells them.

They pull apart, slightly breathless and a small smile comes to their faces. He kisses her lips quickly and runs his thumb over her cheek.

“Come on.” He tells her, reaching for her hand.

They grab their gear from the cars and head towards the entrance. There wasn’t many people there just yet which was a good thing but she knew as the day went on the crowds would pick up.

They hold hands as they walk to the entrance. They hand over their pre-purchased tickets and are let into the park with wristbands attached to their wrists. They make their way to the lockers, placing all their things into the lockers which are side by side, stripping out of their extra clothes and their shoes and placing them into the lockers before locking them up again.

“What do we want to go first?” Jai asks. “Should we go hard first or start simple?”

“You decide Jai.” Sam tells the eager teen who walks side by side with Prim.

“The super 8 it is.”

Jai leads them to the Super 8, one where the six of them can race each other down the slide. They get straight onto the ride and race each other down the slide. Peeta wins the first go and the competitiveness comes out in everyone and they decide to race again. Katniss wins the race despite everyone else claiming her to have cheated.

They spend a good couple of hours exploring the park, riding the many rides. Sam and Madge stop for a break and make their way to the lockers to get some cash out while Jai and Prim head off on their own. Katniss and Peeta head to Calypso Beach to the Lazy River. They each grab a tube and float around the river, the two of them chatting away and filling each other in about the last couple of days.

At the end of the ride they link their fingers together and head to the lockers. They use the toilets first and then grab some money to get some lunch. Madge and Sam are still seated at the table, their rubbish in front of them. Peeta and Katniss order lunch and go and sit down with Sam and Madge.

They catch sight of Prim and Jai and they stop to get some food themselves.

“Thank God Mom and Dad have gone back.” Prim states as she shoves a fry into her mouth. “I don’t think I would have survived another day of Katniss moping around.”

“You’ve been moping around?” Peeta asks.

“She sure has been. She has not scowled once.” Madge tells him.

“When are they coming back?” Sam asks.

“We’re not sure. Possibly next week. They’re going to one of the luxury islands this afternoon for a long weekend, they won’t be back home until Monday afternoon, Dad and Mom have work the rest of the week. So I assume possibly Saturday.”

“That’s Annie and Finnick’s wedding.” Jai adds. “They’ve got to let you come to the wedding.”

“Mom and Dad said we could.” Madge tells them.
“Not ours.” Prim says quietly.

“I’m sure they will.” Katniss reassures her. “We made a promise to them and I don’t want to break that promise. I’ll get us there.”

They spend a few more hours at the park and when they get bored they call it a day. The six of them were going to spend the night at the Gold Coast with the parents having left for Bedarra Island, an adult’s only luxury island.

They grab their things from the lockers and leave the park. Sam hands over the keys to Peeta and Sam takes Madge’s keys to drive her car. Prim and Jai climb into the back seat of the Forester and they follow Madge’s Audi back to the Gold Coast. They had organized a party for tonight with all of Madge’s friends as a way to acquaint her cousins and Byron friends.

Peeta follows Madge down the driveway and into the underground garage and they climb out of the car, grabbing their gear and heading inside. Madge shows the boys around the house as she shows them their rooms and Katniss and Peeta fall onto the queen-sized bed together; Madge announcing to the rest of them were going to go pick up some supplies.

Katniss curls up beside Peeta, letting him wrap his arms around her body and pressing a kiss to her forehead. The afternoon breeze blew in through the windows and Katniss closes her eyes, relishing in the warmth and feel of her busker.

She opens her eyes slowly to look him in the eye and he smiles at her. She kisses him deeply and shifts to lie on top of him. He ran his hands up her thighs and under the dress she had thrown on over her swimmers, squeezing her arse, bringing her to grind against his centre.

She moans into his mouth and he rolls his hips underneath her with his centre rubbing against hers.

“I have my period.” She tells him, moving away from his lips as his fingers make their way inside her bikini bottoms.

He smiles at her. “If you don’t want to do this than that’s fine. I can wait.”

She stares at him and leans down kissing him. “Let’s get in the shower.”

The warm water fell over their bodies, Peeta holds Katniss up against the marble wall with her legs wrapped around his waist.

She missed this. She missed him letting ravishing her body.

He thrusts up into her deeply and she leans her head back against the cool marble as he places kisses along her collarbone, chest and neck.

They fall apart together, not lasting long at all from the anticipation and the few days’ absence. He holds her up against the wall as they came down from their high; her body not stable enough to be placed back onto solid ground just yet.

Their bodies were connected together in such an intimate way, his head resting on her chest, right near her heart, her head fell down, her lips resting beside his ear. Their bodies moved in tandem as they tried to steady their rapid breathing and she could feel his heart beating against her body. She touches his hair and traces her fingers down his spine as the water rains down on them.

He lets her back down onto her steady feet and they finish showering, washing their hair and their bodies before turning the water off and wrapping towels around their body.
They dress and head downstairs to find everyone else back from the shops. The music was already playing through the integrated speakers and Madge and Sam were rearranging furniture as Prim and Jai put drinks into the fridge.

“How many people are we expecting?” Katniss asks, stealing a cider from the fridge motioning to Peeta if he’d like to share.

“About fifteen. It's just a small gathering.”

“So nothing that will be so uncontrollable that our parents will find out?”

“No. This house is soundproof and we don’t have any neighbours on one side at the moment and the other’s are away. We’ll be fine.”

The house is bustling with people over an hour later. Katniss has forgotten most of their names and is much more interested remaining at Peeta’s side. Prim and Jai have taken off to the pool to swim with a few of the others and Madge and Sam sit in one of the alfresco areas with a group of her friends. They drink and snack on food. Peeta makes easy conversation with a few of the guests and Katniss just remains at his side.

She’s just thankful she finally has him with her again. And she’s sure the other girls who gawked at Peeta when they arrive have gotten the idea that Peeta is extremely unavailable. They approach him with caution and chat about only safe topics.

Prim and Jai head off to the media room to watch a movie, the crowd of drunken teenagers not their thing. Madge gathers everyone out in one of the alfresco areas for a game of truth or dare. They were all a little buzzed from the alcohol they had consumed and itching to let loose a little more.

Madge starts off spinning a bottle, the fairest way to play the game they decide and it lands on one of her school friends.

“Truth or dare Bristol?” Madge asks.

“Truth.”

“Boring.” Madge states with a grin. “Okay, is it true you let Brent take you on Principal Davis’s desk on muck-up day?”

The blonde girl blushes. “True.”

“You dirty kiddies.” Madge exclaims. “And at a Private school, you’re lucky you two didn’t get caught.” Madge points to Bristol and Brent who have shifted in their seats uncomfortable.

The game is off to a start; questions and dares are said throughout the group. Katniss and Peeta missing out on hard-hitting truths and dares. But they know if Sam or Madge land on them they are screwed.

They get out of the game unscathed. Madge and Sam never getting the chance to embarrass them. When the game starts to wind down Katniss takes Peeta’s hand and they escape upstairs with half a bottle of vodka. Locking the bedroom door behind them, Peeta pulls Katniss down onto the bed beside him.

“Truth or dare?” She asks him.

“Truth?”
“You’re favourite thing about me?” She asks him.


She smiles as he kisses her and can taste the vodka on his tongue as he runs it along her tongue.

“Truth or dare.” He murmurs against her lips.

“Dare.”

“Dance for me baby.”

“Slow or fast?” She asks.

“Slow. Nice and slow.” He replies, before sucking her bottom lip into his mouth.

“Only if you let me tie you up.”

“Deal.”

She smiles against his lips and moves away from him smirking. He takes a long swig of the vodka and she rifles through their bags for something to tie him up with.

“I’ll be back.” She tells him and ducks out of the bedroom.

She finds a shoestring in one of the cupboards. She returns back, forgetting to lock the bedroom door. She brings his hands behind his back and ties them loosely with the shoestring.

“Is that alright?”

“I’ve always had a fantasy of you tying me up.”

She kisses him full on the mouth and gets up from his lap and directs him to a lounge chair that sits in the corner of the room. She grabs her phone, searching through her music for the perfect song.

‘I like the way you work it
No diggity,
I gotta bag it up’

Peeta’s eyes go wide and dark, full of lust and desire as she performs his dared lap dance. She smirks at him as she straddles his lap, Peeta at a loss without his hands. She grinds against his centre and he groans at the contact and wants to be free from the confines of his binding.

She’s manages to strip herself down to her panties and bra and watches him squirm in the chair as the music plays out and into the next Chet Faker song.

“You’re not allowed to leave it there.” He tells her.

She smirks, hitting next on her phone and the Divinyls begin.

*I love myself, I want you to love me
When I feel down, I want you above me
I search myself, I want you to find me*
I forget myself, I want you to remind me

She crashes back onto his lap, her mouth crashing onto his with such intensity, he moans into her mouth and she grinds her hips in response. The moan spreading throughout her body, to the tips of her fingers and toes.

I don't want anybody else
When I think about you, I touch myself
Ooh, I don't want anybody else
Oh no, oh no, oh no

“Untie me.” He moans against her lips.

She shakes her head, giving him a seductive grin as she reaches down between them, popping the button of his jeans open and sliding down his zipper.

“You are going to be the death of me.” He exhales as she slips her hand inside of his boxers.

The door to the bedroom opens and Katniss turns her head, looking over her shoulder to see who it is.

“I was just wondering where you two were.” Sam explains. “I'll leave you two to be.” He grins at them, shaking his head at their state.

The door clicks shut again and Katniss turns back to Peeta smiling at him.

I close my eyes and see you before me
Think I would die if you were to ignore me
A fool could see just how much I adore you
I'd get down on my knees, I'd do anything for you

“Where were we?” She asks with a smirk.

River’s barking stirs her from her slumber. The two of them are sprawled on the mattress of the bed, the sheet hastily covering their naked bodies.

Her mouth is dry and she feels her head pounding. She groans, looking over at Peeta who is passed out.

She nudges him with her hand, her cold hands touching his bare back and he stirs awake, jumping at her touch.

“What time is it?” She mumbles.

“Hmm?” He asks, groggily opening up his eyes to look at her.

“Time?”

He fishes for one of their phones and reads the screen.

“7:30.”

“It’s too early.” She mumbles. “And my head hurts.”
“You did down that bottle of vodka.” He reminds her.

She groans and he pulls her body to his, wrapping his arm around her bareback and kissing her shoulder.

“Why’d you let me do that?”

“I had my hands tied, literally.” He chuckles against her skin as he peppers kisses along her bare skin.

She manages a laugh and turns to face him. He kisses her lips and draws back.

“I need to brush my teeth.” She states.

“Me too. Oh well. That’s what true love is about right?”

She smiles at him and kisses him before drawing back quickly.

“You alright?” He asks her.

“Just queasy.”

“What about a shower?”

“No, let’s just try and sleep a little more.”

He smiles and they reposition themselves, cuddling each other and letting their still tired state to bring them back under.

Peeta closes the trunk door of the forester and moves to Katniss’ side as they wait for Madge and Sam to finish locking up the house. River is already in the Madge’s Audi waiting for the trip back down the coast and to his favourite place.

Madge and Sam arrived in the garage, Madge throwing a bag into the trunk.

“Let’s go.”

They have the windows and sunroof open as they drive down the coast. Music plays through the stereo and the four of them enjoyed the tunes and the sun.

Katniss plans her set list for the night as Jai and Prim chat, Jai had the ability to keep the conversation flowing, mostly about random things and facts.

Katniss smiles at the friendship they have formed and hope the two of them remain friends when the thousands of miles separate them. She smiles over at Peeta who has his right arm resting on the sill of the window and his left hand steering. She reaches over, resting her hand on his thigh and he turns to smile at her.

It’s the same smile that has rendered her weak since she’s met him. The crooked, 100-watt smile that is electric and beautiful. It makes her stomach fill with butterflies and her heart beat pick up faster.

It’s probably the most beautiful thing she has seen in the world and on lonely nights she’s sure she’ll remember his flashy smile and everything else about him.

They head out for a quick surf when they get back to the house. The midday waves are huge and challenging, something they needed to rid the alcohol out of their system.
Johanna joins them for a late lunch of fish and chips and they sit on the back porch eating. Peeta and Sam having made a hot chip sandwich.

“That is so weird.” Katniss tells them.

“It’s not.” Sam replies.

“It’s the only way to eat hot chips. Hot chips between two buttered pieces of fresh bread and lots of tomato sauce.” Peeta replies, taking a bite of his sandwich.

Katniss grimaces. “It’s just a whole lot of carbs.”

“We burn it off.”

“Katniss it’s not different to a potato chip sandwich.” Madge adds.

“I never really got on board with that.” Katniss responds and pops a chip into her mouth.

The three Australian’s and the half Australian laugh at her.

“What?” She asks, getting defensive at their laughter.

“You’re just adorable and it’s fine that you don’t like our Australian traditions.” Peeta tells her, kissing her cheek. “Madge, have you got milo?”

“Yeah I do.”

“Would you like a milo?” Peeta asks Katniss.

“I’ll just have some of yours.”

“Milo is great.” Johanna replies. “I know it seems repulsive but it really is great. Especially a warm milo on cold winter mornings when we’ve been out surfing in freezing temperatures. Madge, you like milo?”

“I’ve grown up with it. Mom used to always buy it and import it over because she was the same, has grown up with it. And they don’t sell it in the US. It used to always be milo on her ice cream though.”


“Tim Tams are popular in the US, they have been for years now.” Katniss tells them. “And I’ve been having them since forever whenever I was at Madge’s house.”

“We used to go through them like they were going out of fashion. Dad had a sweet tooth for them.”

“And our other question. Vegemite?” Peeta asks.


“Did you eat it just scrapped on? Cause most people make the mistake of putting it on like Nutella.” Peeta says.

“It was scrapped on.” Madge explains and shudders. “Nope, never again.”
“What about you two?” Johanna asks.

“Never again.” The two sister grimace. “We tried it the same day as Madge. Michelle thought it’d be fun to see our reactions.”

“It’s alright, Peety boy doesn’t eat it either.” Johanna explains. “He’s very un-Australian in our group.”

“Oh, the Tim Tam Slam.” Sam explains. “We’ll have to show you ladies the Tim Tam Slam. Madge knows what I’m talking about.”

Katniss cocks an eyebrow at the boy.

“We’ll show you what it is.” He reassures her.

“Okay.” Katniss responds a little unsure.

Their table at The Treehouse is packed again. The same group from last week has joined them plus a few extras. The kids are chatty and the adults are even chattier. The oldest kids are mostly excited because of their school holidays ending Colbie and Zeke explain. The two are excited to get back to school on Tuesday to see their friends. Their mouths run a mile a minute and they entertain Katniss and Peeta as they have seated themselves close to the couple. Little Indi is the centre of attention again and Katniss happily holds the little baby who is not fussed.

The couple listens to the kids and Peeta captures them in stories he tells them about surfing, his travels and the time he came close to some dolphins. Katniss listens to him and she’s even pulled in by his stories.

He’s a born storyteller, through his writing, his stories and his singing. He’s taken her on stories through everything he’s ever told or sang to her. Even his covers of songs, they take her on a journey and he captures her. He’d have the ability to lead a revolution with his voice.

The group devours the pizzas that are placed on their tables and everyone is in good spirits for the upcoming weekend. They drink booze and chat about anything.

And Katniss feels even more a part of the tribe.

Thresh comes and tells her it’s about time for her to head up on stage and she kisses Peeta’s cheek. She carries her glass of water to the small stage and fiddles around with the strings of her guitar and steps before the mike. She feels a rush of nerves and takes a deep breath as the audience turns to her.

“Hello, I’m Katniss and I’ll be your entertainment for the evening. I will be calling my good friend Peeta up here in a little while to help me out. I’m a little rusty, I haven’t done a gig for quite a while now so I apologise if this whole things turns terrible.” She laughs. “I hope you enjoy the rest of your evening.”

She starts off with a cover, engaging the crowd’s attention before moving into her own original. The same one she sang to Peeta on the beach.

She calls him up to the stage, the crowd cheering for him as they are obviously used to the busker.

“Isn’t she great.” Peeta says to the crowd. “I think she’s become my favourite voice in the entire
world.”

She blushes at him as she takes a sip of her water. Peeta places his guitar on and strums his fingers
over the strings to make sure the tune is right and smiles at her.

“You will all know this one.” Katniss says into the mike. “This song means a lot to the both of
us.”

“Oh, won't you stay with me?
'Cause you're all I need
This ain't love, it's clear to see
But darling, stay with me”

The audience cheers and hollers for their folky styled rendition of the song and Peeta kisses her on
the lips.

“He'll be back, don’t you all worry.” She reassures them as he steps down from the little stage.
“He’s kind of awesome too.”

She plays out her set, taking a ten-minute break to allow everyone to use the bathroom and grab a
drink. The kitchen staff has moved back to their post, bringing out desserts and clearing tables.
The bar staff pour and make drinks like they are competing for their country and everyone is back
at their tables in under ten minutes as Katniss steps back onto the stage with Peeta joining her.

Everyone is silent when they notice the pair on the stage. Katniss is thankful for the great audience
who isn’t rude and gives her their attention or respect. She’s come to notice this town loves their
live music and show their appreciation for it.

“Now, I’m a bit of a sucker for Angus and Julia Stone.” She explains to the audience. “And Peeta
showed me this song just the other week and I fell in love with it. I think it’s hit me so deeply
because I come from a different country, thousands of miles away and I know the feeling of being
so homesick and missing home. You can travel the world, trying to find solace, perspective or
time alone. And you can travel the world, find the ones who you connect with, make a million
memories and find someone who you find yourself falling in love with someone so unexpected
that you never want to leave. You just want that person to be by your side forever. The biggest
wish is for them come on and get home.” She explains.

“This is for all those people who have experienced the absence of their loved ones and have just
wanted them to hurry up and get back. And we thought it was a nice fit with the school holidays
ending and life going back to normal for a little while. This is called Get Home.” Peeta explains.

“Just as long as you gon’ get home, you get home
Just as long as you gon' get home, you get home
'Cause she's a million miles away
Oh, a million shores away
And all I can think about, sailing back
Having you here by my side

Oh, stay here with me, don't go!
Oh, stay here with me, don't go!”

She smiles at Peeta as they finish the song and he leans over, capturing her lips in a sweet kiss.
She feels the tears pool in her eyes and he wipes his thumb delicately underneath her eyelids. He
offers her a small, comforting smile and asks, “Stay with me?” the audience claps dying out.
“Always.”
She’s sprawled out on his bed in his van. They’ve taken off down the coast for a couple of days and Peeta is showing her what it’s like to live in a van.

They were also in need of some time together. He felt the urge to make up the days they were apart and cheer her up. He had a gig planned at Coffs Harbour on Sunday afternoon and thought it was a perfect opportunity for them to escape and be together.

They had left mid-Saturday morning after her successful gig and travelled down the coast in his van. He had a few mates that lived in Coffs Harbour and was interested in jamming with them.

It was Saturday afternoon and they were parked in one of his mate’s backyards, one that was directly across from the beach.

Peeta was on the floor of his van, playing around with his guitar and writing what he had created.

She was boneless still, they had coupled the moment he pulled the van into the backyard and the friend told them he was ducking out for a little while. The urge had overcome them after a sexually tense drive down, Katniss dirty talking while Peeta drove. He held the urge and didn’t pull over the van in a rest stop and take her in the back of his van.

The minute their seatbelts came off they fell onto his bed, his jeans undone and her dress hiked up.

She had teased him the trip down, stripping herself of her panties and baring herself to him a few times. She could tell he was painfully hard and held out until they arrived at Coffs Harbour.

He huskily called her a tease as they connected and connected his lips to her neck and collarbone.

Peeta was on the floor of his van, playing around with his guitar and writing what he had created.

He had climbed out of the bed, pulled his jeans on and left her to be while he strummed away with his guitar and wrote from the floor. She watched him from the bed and listened to the soothing sound of his guitar playing and the humming he did in time with his playing.

She watches him concentrate, the creases on his brow as he writes and concentrates. He was fascinating and she could watch him all day.

He looks up at her and smiles. “You alright there?”

She nods at him with a small smile and climbs out of his bed find his white button up he discarded earlier and her panties. The button-up is so worn she’s sure he can see her dusky nipples through the shirt.

He motions for her to sit in his lap and she crawls into the space and he locks her in with his guitar. He kisses the back of her neck and burrows his chin into her shoulder as he strums the tune he had been playing before.

“You stuck?” She asks him.

He nods against her shoulder and she leans forward to look in the journal he has been writing in. A line has been scribbled down and she was sure he was trying to find inspiration for the line, see I can’t promise you things, but I can promise you these, hands I can hold I can hold.

“Want some help?” She asks him, turning to face him.

Hands I Can Hold

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“Want some help?” She asks him, turning to face him.
He smiles a thanks and captures her lips for a soft kiss.

He sets his guitar aside and they move to the comfort of the bed, leaning up against the cabin. His legs are spread out in front of him and she sits cross-legged beside him. He has his phone playing the recording of the tune he was playing before, he had the tune down packed, just not the lyrics to go with the song.

She questions him, asking him about hands he can hold. What hands mean to him and everything he associates with hands.


She jots down those words in a margin she’s drawn up and begins to write whatever her brain is thinking, slopping the ink to form words.

She can feel him watching her and her own songwriting process. She’s varied her process, depending on inspiration and themes. This way was for when she had a line and associated everything with this line.

And she had never co-written before which was a whole new experience in itself. He was a poet, he wrote songs in the form of poetry and it made his songs that much more beautiful.

“So keep the things we can’t breath without, and I’ll seek a woman like you.” He speaks and she writes down the line.

“We’ll reach for hands with which I can learn.” She adds.

“And we’ll keep these hands I can hold I can hold.” They say together and smile.

They finish the song in ten minutes. And Peeta assures her that nothing will change. He loves it how it is. She feels warmth spread throughout her body and she’s proud of the two of them for writing a song together. Something she’ll forever remember on the sunny afternoon, wearing only his shirt and a pair of panties and sitting in the back of his van.

He wears a wide smile and sets the journal aside as he straddles her, unbuttoning the buttons of her shirt. It falls open, revealing her olive chest and waist and he kisses her, a kiss she feels right down to her toes and everywhere else.

“I love you Peeta.” She tells him between kisses.

And she watches his smile stretch, she’s sure it’s going to split his face in half. He doesn’t say anything and can feel the gratitude and happiness in his kisses and touches.

Darius is 23. He’s a red head and has known Peeta for just under two years. They met at a surfing competition, Darius was a volunteer at the event and overheard Peeta entertaining the crowd of waiting participants. Darius had gone to university studying teaching, having just finished last year with a degree and taught at one of the high schools as a music teacher. He plays in a band on drums but can play guitar and the keyboard as well. He’s an environment activist and volunteers his time keeping the beaches at Coffs Harbour clean and litter free.

He inspires his students to be better people and is the friendliest person Katniss has ever met before. He also teaches music after school to disadvantaged and troubled students, giving them an escape and something to look forward to. He donates his time and never complains about the lack
of recognition he receives in doing these community projects.

He still lives with his mother and two younger sisters. His mother is also kind and Katniss can see where he gets the kindness and selfless attitude. His sisters are beautiful teenagers who are sixteen and fifteen. They both have beautiful green eyes and auburn hair. They have a constellation of freckles on the bridge of their noses and cheeks and have fair skin. They both could pass as twins, and just like their mother and brother, they are kind.

Katniss and Peeta meet them briefly as they return from fifteen-year-old Jill’s Netball grand finale. Jill returns with a win and Darius boasts about his baby sister who has been selected in many state and representative teams. She’s been invited to train at the Institute of Sport in Canberra next year.

That’s where Darius had been this afternoon, watching his sister play her grand finale as a supportive brother.

Jill and his mother only stick around for half an hour before they head back into town for Jill’s team celebration at the local club who supports the team. Grace hangs around for a little while before her friend comes to pick her up for a sleepover.

Darius shows them around the house, showing them where the bathroom and kitchen is and telling them to help themselves.

Peeta’s other friend Thom arrives, he had been jamming with Darius for a few years now and welcomed Peeta into the Coff’s group they had.

Katniss noticed Peeta was involved with many different groups everywhere he visited. He had made connections and strengthened his ties up and down the east coast. Something she knew helped him out when he needed a driveway to park in or a hot shower. It made the travelling easier and less lonely which Katniss could imagine this type of living being.

A few more of Thom and Darius’ friends arrived. Ones that Peeta had met before having mucked around with, whether it was surfing or playing gigs in town.

Peeta hitches a ride with Thom to the supermarket for some supplies and Katniss remaines behind with Darius and the other three boys, Jake, Hayden and Todd who were between the ages of 19 and 22.

The three boys were in the pool, fooling around like young adults and showing off to Katniss despite her lack of interest.

“Just ignore them. They’ve never been able to approach girls without making a fool of themselves.” Darius tells her with a chuckle.

Katniss smiles and lays back in the pool chair, Darius occupying one beside her.

“So you’re from Santa Monica? How lovely.”

“It is but I think Byron Bay is better.”

“Everyone always says that about their own hometown. I think its lovely here but I love Byron as well.”

“It’s just something about the town.” Katniss explains.

“You’re right. That town is magic. It’s hard to explain what it is.” Darius agrees. “You and Peeta are very close.”
She smiles at him. “Yeah we are.”

“I bet you never imagined to fall in love.”

“No, maybe just a fling or something.”

“When are you going home?”

“Our plane flies out on the 29th of October. We’re halfway through our vacation.”

“Do you want to go back?”

“No.” She tells him. “It’s then off to college and real life.”

“I bet Peeta isn’t making it any easier.”

“No. He’s the one who has inspired me to follow me dreams but that won’t be happening.”

“Why?”

She explains to Darius about her parents and their rule regarding Peeta now. She tries to not get choked up telling him and he offers her a comforting smile.

“Well, we’re in a bit of a pickle now.” Darius says to her.

Katniss giggles, despite the tears welling in her eyes and he squeezes her hand before offering her some advice.

“You’ve probably already heard this from a million people but you need to do what you want not what they want. It’s not you who’ll be happy at the end of the day if you do what they tell you. It’s time to live for yourself, live a little, explore the world and learn about yourself. Make mistakes, drink a little too much, watch the sunrise and sleep all day. Sleep under the stars and laugh a little too hard. This is the perfect time to be who you want to be Katniss before the real world takes you by the hand and thrusts you into the world of responsibilities and real problems. Live your life and don’t look back.”

“It’s not that easy.”

“Well, I always tell my students there’s a solution to everything. Don’t overthink and look at it at a different way, not the way you have been the whole time. The answer is always there, you’ve just got to believe in yourself.”

Katniss smiles at Darius. His students were real lucky to have him. He was wise, kind and a remarkable person. Someone the school was lucky to have.

He resembles Peeta in everyway and Katniss was thankful she’s met these people.

Thom and Peeta arrive at the house with a case of beer and food for the barbecue. Peeta joins Katniss on the pool chair and cracks open a beer that the two of them share.

They listen to the other’s trash talk and tease each other but Katniss didn’t care. She had her lover and that’s all she wanted at the moment.

They eat a dinner of steak sandwiches and sit around the backyard. The boys start jamming with their instruments and living the carefree life they were currently cruising through. Todd’s girlfriend arrived with their baby daughter after a day with her grandparents and Katniss and Leah get to
talking as the boys continue to jam and pass around little Evie.

“You and Peeta together?” Leah asks.

“Yeah.” Katniss replies with a shy smile.

“He’s a good boy. A keeper as well. If I was you I’d never let him go.”

“I’m not planning to. Even when I’m thrust back home.”

“You’re not planning on staying away for too long are you?”

Katniss shakes her head. “I hope to back be within six months.”

Little Evie is handed to Katniss and she holds the little girl who is too cute for words with big brown eyes and blonde hair covering the crown of her head. She sports chubby cheeks with dimples that make Katniss want to smother them in kisses.

“Peeta’s playing at the markets tomorrow isn’t he?” Leah asks.

“Yeah at midday he is.”

“We’ll see you there then. We usually head to the markets, one of my friend’s has a popular food stall. We go and support her and the rest of the community groups there. We usually spend way too much money and eat too much food.”

“The food is to die for.” Katniss says, feeling her mouth salivating. “The ones in Byron, are amazing. The muffin man stall. Geez, there’s no words to describe those muffins.”

“They’re great aren’t they? Todd’s brother lives at Byron and we go to visit almost every weekend. I craved those muffins throughout my whole pregnancy. Todd didn’t hear the end of it and I used to have to wait until we went there to purchase the muffins. We usually bought a couple of dozen and froze them so I had a supply.”

“That’s a really smart idea.”

Leah smiles and touches Evie’s nose and little Evie sticks her tongue out at her mother.

“You’re a cheeky baby little Evie.” Her mother coos and kisses Evie as the baby gurgles.

Katniss smiles at the interaction and catches Peeta look over at her, smiling at her. Whatever he was thinking, Katniss was sure to ask him later.

The rain brought Katniss and Peeta to his van. The others deciding to leave. They stripped their damp clothes off of their bodies and Peeta pulls out his guitar and bass drum. He sets up his laptop and thrusts her guitar into her hands telling her what chords to play, he shows her what lyrics he wants her to sing and she smiles at him.

He was inspired to record the song right then and there with her and the rain falling outside.

He hits record on his laptop and they begin playing their instruments, Peeta reading the lyrics they had composed earlier, adding in his drum every few counts.

She strums along with him and joining him when he had told her to, acting as more a backing vocal than a second voice.

“So she said to me, give me words that I can fold,
& I’ll keep them in my pocket above my shirt
& above my heart & above my home,
these hands I can hold I can hold,

*Turmeric in teas & wisdom of our own,*
*There is plastic in our seas*
& *there is plastic in our homes, in our homes,*
*These hands I can hold I can hold,*

*Hands I can hold, I can hold*
*Hands I can hold, I can hold”*

They play through the song perfectly, not missing a beat and she joins him as a more dominate voice for the ending of the song.

He smiles at her as they finish and he chuckles slightly as he ends the recording.

He wears a wide smile and replays the recording. They curl beside each other, their bare thighs and waists touching as they listen to them sing the song they had written together earlier in the day.

They keep it on replay as they couple with the rain falling outside the van.

Darius is in awe of their recording and let’s them record with his proper recording gear after Peeta’s gig at the markets today.

Jill and Kim, Darius’ mother compliment them on the song and sing the tune as they move around the kitchen making a cooked breakfast and Jill making them all coffee, practicing her barista skills.

“You should sing it today Peeta and see the crowds reaction.” Jill suggests, placing the cup of coffee in front of Katniss.

“That’s a good idea.” Kim says, turning to look at the three young adults. “It’s still a relatively new song, I’m sure there’ll be some bumps along the way. I say your best audience is your actual audience.”

“I still think it’s pretty good Mum.” Darius tells his mother. “I think it’s record ready.”

“Okay, don’t listen to the talent scout.” Kim states with a wide grin.

Kim had been a music talent scout. She had a keen ear for music and went into the profession after injuring her vocal chords, ultimately ruining her singing career. She lived in the suburbs of Sydney and met with potential candidates for the label she worked for. She listened to demo after demo and up and coming Youtube stars. She then went on to become a selector for talent programs, travelling to Sydney a few times a year to select kids into talent development programs and the School Spectacular. That’s how she met her children’s father who left her when Jill was just a tiny baby for one of his clients. One that Kim had scouted as a 17 year old.

To say it wasn’t a kick in the gut was an understatement. The couple didn’t last long as the girl got picked up overseas and she stated to fall asleep in her managers bed.

Darius smiles at his mother. “Fine you win.”

“I should, I’m your mother. And when you do win it’s only because I feel sorry for you.” She teases.
“Thanks Mum.”

Kim dishes out each of them a pancake each as she returns to cooking more.

With full bellies they get ready for the day and head to the market site. Darius drives them into the grounds and parks near the stage, Peeta not due on for a bit over an hour.

They roam the stalls, running into Leah, Todd and Evie. Katniss and Peeta head back to the car to get the gear out and do a run through of the lyrics, Katniss joining him up on the stage for a couple of songs.

“We’ve got it baby.” He states, leaning over to kiss her.

He carries his gear to the large mat they had set up for the performers and Peeta sets his drum up and hooks his and Katniss’ guitars up.

She finds Darius and the other’s who have come to watch him play and he introduces himself to the crowd, smiling at the familiar faces and begins playing his set.

Katniss joins him on stage, putting her guitar on and smiling at Peeta as she adjusts the mike.

“They’re together.” Jill tells her sister.

“Romantically or sexually?”

Jill elbows her sister. “Don’t just ask her that. It’s rude.”

“We’re in a relationship, does that help?” Katniss replies with a small smile.
“The sex must be good.” Grace says looking between Katniss and Peeta. “It has to be.”

Katniss smirks and turns back to Peeta as they snicker with laughter.

“I can see it on your face. You lucky girl.” Grace whispers.

“Grace had a huge crush on Peeta.” Jill tells Katniss.

“Did not.”

“You so did.”

Katniss smiles to herself and Kim scolds the girls for being too loud.

The crowd is cheering for Peeta when he finishes his set and Katniss helps him sell his EPs. They listen to the audience praise them and ask them especially about their new song. No one has a bad word to say and Katniss and Peeta are thrilled they love it as much as they do.

They pack up his gear and Peeta kisses her cheek. “I’ve just got to use the toilet. I’ll be a second.” He tells Darius and Katniss.

He powerwalks off into the direction of the stalls and Katniss and Darius watch the brother and sister duo playing. They can’t be as old as twelve. They are adorably cute and their cuteness helps them get away with the mistakes they make.

Peeta is back five minutes later with a smile on his face and they watch the kids finish off the song they are in the middle of. Darius drives them back to the house and they pack the instruments into the van and decide to head to the beach for a couple of hours. Jill and Grace are already down at the beach with their friends.

Katniss dress in the space of the van and can feel herself floating.

“Why are you so happy?” He asks, knotting her bikini top.

“I feel like I’m on cloud nine. The song was a hit.”

He kisses her bare shoulder and she steps out of the van as Peeta undresses and pulls their boards out from underneath the bed. They’ve decided against their wetsuits and meet Darius out the front who is leans up against his own board. The beach is all but five steps away and they find Jill and Grace and their group of friends set up on the sand, lying on their towels with music playing from one of their phones. The boys are playing a game of Frisbee. They drop their towels and strap their boards to their ankles as they head out to the surf. Katniss can feel eyes on her and turns to see all of Jill and Grace’s friends watching them. The girls checking out Peeta. The boys checking out Katniss.

Katniss shakes her head and follows the boys into the water and out to sea.

The waves aren’t as big as Byron’s and it’s a relatively easy surf. The teenagers still watch them from the beach, the boy’s game of Frisbee forgotten.

“We’ve got an audience.” Peeta mentions as they turn their boards around to face the sand.

“We do.” Katniss agrees and leans over to kiss Peeta.

Peeta deepens it and chuckles against her lips as they hear a collective of gasps come from the sand.
“That’ll give them something to talk about.” She tells him and breaks away from him as she catches sight of a wave coming in.

She falls off her board as she nears the end, having lost her balance. Peeta is at her side in an instant and he motions for her to join him on his long board.

She ditches her board and hops onto his board and they paddle out to sea together.

“Don’t get too excited.” She tells him with a giggle.

He kisses her shoulder and leans down to her ear.

“I’m always like this sweetheart. You do this to me.”

She turns to meet his lips and they wait for a wave to ride in tandem. The maneuver the board efficiently through the surf together and don’t once fall off. The waves have died down and their surfing has finished for the day. They laze on his board out on the sea, facing each other and gentling rocking with the tide. They share kisses and chat, her legs resting over his thighs and hips.

She brushes his curls away from his forehead and he captures her wrist. Placing kisses on her fingertips and her pulse. The kisses are gentle and delicate and she feels goose bumps cover her body.

“I love you.” He murmurs against her wrist.

“I love you too.”

He kisses her lips gently and shifts her closer to his body, his hands resting on her hips, his fingers digging into the flesh. She can feel him responding underneath her core and she moans against his lips. The limited clothes they are wearing not helping. She can feel everything.

“Let’s get out of here.” She tells him.

He paddles them back to shore and she climbs off his board, he carries it up the sand to the teenagers who have pretended to lose interest in the couple. They wrap their towels around their bodies and Katniss picks up her board and they run back to the house. Darius caught up with a few of his other friends.

They abandon their boards outside of the van and close themselves into the van. Their wet swimmers are discarded in a matter of seconds and they lay themselves on a towel, as water droplets still cover their skin.

His lips taste of the ocean and sweetness and she melds further into him.

He drives them to a quiet camping spot later that afternoon after thanking Darius and his family for their hospitality. They wanted a night in peace and quiet, shutting the world away for just a few hours.

They eat a dinner of chicken salad and drank wine under the fading sunset. Music plays softly from the car and they enjoy the quiet. They had a campsite that was free of people. It was a long weekend but they had managed to miss the crowds who camped at the more popular sites. Katniss told Peeta she could forego a toilet for one night for the chance to be alone.

The time alone had left her thinking a lot. Thinking deeply about her future. Peeta had noticed her lost in thought and asked if she was all right. She told him she was.
“Just don’t think too hard.” He told her with a small smile. “Or too much. Overthinking can be the worst sometimes.”

She agreed and stopped thinking, focusing on now as they drove out of Coffs and to the camping spot. She had today still to get through.

He tops up their glasses with the rich red liquid and sets the bottle down beside him. She takes a small sip and exhales. It was a lovely evening; Peeta telling her it was still in the early-twenties and the temperature not expected to drop any more during the night. It had caused for humid evenings, the sheets kicked off of their bodies and the vans windows opened to quell some of the humid air that hung around in the cabin.

They watch the sun go down and lie on the blanket he laid out for them. He props their bodies up with pillows as she sits in between his legs. He kisses her bare shoulders and neck and she cuddles further into him.

“I bought you something today.” He mumbles against her skin.

“You did?” She asks.

“I did.”

“When did you buy me this thing?”

“At the markets.”

“But I was with you the entire time.”

“No you weren’t.” He replies, kissing her neck and then reaching into the van and placing the bag into her hand. “Open it.”

She tears open the paper bag and pours the contents into her hand.

A necklace falls into her hand and she smiles at how beautiful it is. A silver dog tag, the word Always engraved on one side and their names, the date and where they met on the other side. Something that touches her so deeply.

“I have one as well.” He tells her, kissing her cheek. “I didn’t give you what else I bought today.”

He hands her another bag and she tears it open, letting the necklace rest on her lap. Inside the bag holds the charm she had been looking at today. A silver bird surrounded by a ring, holding an arrow.

“I was looking at this.”

“I know. That’s why I went and bought it for you. It’s one of a kind.”

“It must have cost you a fortune.”

“Price doesn’t matter when it comes to you.” He tells her.

“It’s beautiful. It really is. Thank you.” She tells him, running her finger over the bird that holds an arrow.

He kisses her cheek and takes it from her, sliding it onto the chain of the dog tag and then slipping the necklace over her neck. She admires it around her neck and turns and kisses him.
“Thank you. I love them.”

“I knew you would.”

She kisses him and pulls away.

“Where’s yours?”

He touches his, fishing the necklace out from his shirt and showing her the matching dog tag. “Right here.”

She touches his dog tag, her fingers running over the engraved letters.

*Always.*

*Katniss and Peeta*

05.09.15

Byron Bay

Australia

She kisses the cold metal of the dog tag and kisses his lips.

“I had it made for us last week. The guy at the store makes them specially and I had him lined up to make two for me to get today for us. It was just luck that he had this charm as well.”

“I’ll never take it off.”

“Me either.”

They cuddle on his bed in post haze bliss. Their heads were heavy from the wine and the long lovemaking they had started, having started on the blanket outside of the van and finishing in the comfort of his bed.

He runs his fingers up and down her back softly and she watches him from the pillow as she tries to keep her eyes open.

“Will you return to me?” He asks her so softly she almost misses what he had says.

She nods. “Within six months, I promise.”

“If not, I can come to you.”

“I’d like that.” She replies, opening her eyes further.

“We’ll never be apart Katniss.”

“Seven thousands of miles won’t keep us apart.”

“We’re connected by the sea my love. I’ll be right there with you, even when I’m not.”

He kisses her softly and draws back with a small smile. He lies closer to her, their nose practically touching.

“There’s no chance you can stay is there?” He asks.

She shakes her head. “I would if I could. There’s no convincing my parents.” He gives her an
understanding smile and brushes her hair from her face. “If there was any chance I would.”

“I know. We’ll be together Katniss. I assure you of this.”

They lie in silence, their shallow breathing the only sound to fill the cabin of his van.

They stare at each other, communicating with just their tired eyes.

“I stayed here when we were apart last week. I needed time alone. I did venture in and see Darius and that but I ventured back like a lost dog who felt some sort of connection to this place. I felt hope when I was here. I felt like you were with me, like you were imbedded in the trees or the air and I swear I could hear you.”

“Were you high?” She asks with a grin.

He smiles, his eyes crinkling at the corners. “Yes.” He replies laughing. “Let’s just say I had some very long conversations with the trees.”

She laughs, shaking her head and imaging Peeta doing exactly that.

“I’m never getting high without you again. I had such a negative experience taking it alone. The withdrawals were the worst. I was angry and crying and didn’t feel the euphoria I had reached with you. It highlighted my loneliness and I never felt more alone in my life, even though you were just a text away.” He tells her. “Our time apart doesn’t sit with me so well.”

“We won’t be apart. I’ll still spend nights with you and days. My parents can’t be keeping tabs on me all the time.”

“I don’t want you getting into trouble anymore than you are.”

“Don’t worry about me Peeta. I’ve been sneaking around for a couple of years now.”

He smiles at her and kisses her nose.

“Just don’t hurt yourself climbing down that balcony.”

“I’ll use the stairs if it means that much to you.”

“Thank you.”

They link their fingers together and he kisses the back of her hand.

“I wish your parents weren’t like this.”

“Me too. I hope they’ll come around before we leave.”

“I hope so too.”

He connects the freckles on her back with his finger and hums to her.

“Katniss?”

“Hmm?”

“I know you’re only young and probably having made up your mind yet… but do you want kids in your future?”
“Maybe. I haven’t really thought about it as much.” She replies. “What about you?”

“I know I do.” He says. “People change though. I know my eldest brother never imagined himself a father, now he has two kids and he wouldn’t change it for the world.”

“Why do you ask?” She asks.

“I just think you’d be a good mother is all,” He tells her. “I’ve seen you with all these babies and kids the last couple of weeks and you’ve been radiant. You glow and you’re so happy around them. It’s like you’re made to be one.”

She smiles at him and remembers her dream she had last week.

“Remember my dream I was telling you about?”

He nods, “Yes, the house with the kids.”

“And you.” She adds with a soft smile as she feels her heart fill with warmth and love. “I think you’d be a great father.”

She wants to tell him she’d love the kids to be his. Blond haired children, who run free and wild under the sun. Ones who laugh when he tickles them and carries them high on his shoulders helping them reach the sky. The children who have eyes as blue as the ocean and have sea foam in their veins. Children who love their mother and father endlessly and bring them so much joy and love, she wonders why she ever doubted becoming a parent.

“What’s going on in your mind?” He asks.

She smiles widely and leans in capturing his lips with hers.

“Just you.”
First Day Of My Life

He wakes before her that Saturday morning. She’s so beautiful when she’s sleeping. He kisses her softly on her cheek and rises out of the bed quietly. He wasn’t very successful when it came to sneaking around but Katniss was dead to the world this morning, giving him the opportunity to be a little loud.

He tiptoes into the adjoining bathroom, closing the door behind himself. He splashes his face with cold water and looks out the window of the bathroom. It was still dark out with the sunrise due soon.

He decides against waking Katniss and steps into his swimmers, scrawling a note for her to join him if she wakes while he’s gone and he tiptoes out of the room and down the stairs. He finds his wetsuit and steps into it. He finds his board and heads down the yard and to the beach. He feels the cool metal of his dog tag against his chest and he smiles.

He straps his board to his ankle and paddles out into the fading evening light. The water is cool and the tide is high. Waves powerfully crash to shore.

This was his favourite kind of surf.

He paddles out, watching the moon and the stars and thought about his moon and stars up in the house, tucked under sheets of soft cotton and protected by his warmth that still lingers in the bed.

He surfs until the sun starts to rise and his heart is beating wildly in his chest. He’s pushed himself and feels great as he collapses on the sand beside his board and watches the sun a little while longer.

His mind goes back to the past week. A week free from tears and emotions as Katniss and him weren’t separated and forced apart. He had slept better than he has before and was comforted with his lover beside him. They spent some days apart to be with his own friends and leave her with Madge and Prim but she understood that. She wasn’t a clingy girlfriend and still wanted her own space. He to enjoyed his own space and it made seeing each other again so much better at the end of their time apart. It made the nights amazing as they spoke about their days, filling each other in and sharing kisses and touches they had missed during the day.

He had never loved someone as much as he loved Katniss Everdeen. He didn’t believe in soulmates or true love.

But he knew she was something different. Someone who he’d like to spend the rest of his life with.

Maybe it was love at first sight. Something forcing them together. Something he’d never be able to understand or explain.

He just knew he was grateful for her coming into his life.

He hears someone approaching, kicking sand up as they near him. He looks back and smiles as he sees her making her way down the sand with two mugs in her hands. She was glowing like usual and he smiles at her.

She stands before him and from his spot on the sand he can see up the skirt of her dress that blows in the wind. He caught sight of a pair of white half-cut pair of underwear she wore.
She smirks at him and he grins shyly. “You pervert.” She calls him, giggling.

He sits up and she sits down beside him, handing him his mug of coffee.

“Hey, you’ve come down here wearing a dress, what am I supposed to do, not look?” He teases.

She shakes her head, leaning over to kiss him. “Good morning.”

“Morning.”

“Surf nice?” She asks, running her fingers through his damp, sand filled hair.

“Very. You should go before we have to at the wedding.”

“It’s alright. I can miss out today.”

He kisses her again, tasting the warm coffee on her lips and sucks her bottom lip into his mouth. She moans against his mouth and runs her free hand through his hair. He holds her in place by her hip, drawing her body closer to his.

“There’s people around.” She murmurs against his lips.

“Let them watch.”

She draws away from him, kissing his cheek and sipping her coffee. He wraps his arm around her shoulder and drinks his coffee.

“Ready for today?” He asks her.

She nods and gives him a smile. He kisses her again and stares out at the ocean. Even though he was trying to not think about it, their time together was drawing closer to an end than they had wished and he dreamed her leaving. They had two and a half weeks together before she was back on a plane, flying thousands of miles away.

Her parents would be back today, leaving on Wednesday. Katniss reassured him that they wouldn’t be apart. She’d still see him, use the tree outside of her window and meet him at midnight on the beach or in his van that he’d park around the corner. They’d still spend their days together and make every moment count until the ocean separated them.

She takes his hand and leads him back to the house.

The wedding for Annie and Finnick wasn’t until later this afternoon. Peeta would be going to Finnick’s house where he’d be getting ready and the girls would come here to help the bride get ready. It was going to be a small intimate ceremony. Both their families and their friends would be in attendance. They had two people in their bridal party and little Zeke and Colbie as their ring bearer and flower girl. They asked the guests to come barefooted.

The girls had seen Annie in her dress. Katniss had told him how beautiful she looked in the piece. Something he’d have to wait and see because she wanted everyone to be surprised.

He couldn’t help but imagine Katniss in a wedding dress as he slept that night. She was a vision of beauty in his dream and he held that memory close to himself to think of when he missed her.

Madge, Sam and Prim were awake and tidying up the house for the impending arrival of the parents and the bride. Katniss and Peeta helped them vacuum, do the dishes, strip the bed, clean bathrooms and make the house presentable.
He helps her make the bed they have been occupying for the last week and he kisses her long and hard as he slings his bag over his shoulder. He knew he needed to scram before the parents arrived because it wouldn’t help Katniss one bit. Her parents had reluctantly let the girls attend the wedding as it was, Katniss only convincing them as she had made a promise to Annie and didn’t want to let her down.

He kisses her goodbye at the front door of the house, Sam and him vacating the premises to head to Finnick’s.

“I’ll see you in a few hours.”

They climb into his van, waving goodbye to the girls as he drives them out of the driveway. They stop in at Sam’s house to let him pick up his clothes and they head across to Finnick’s.

Katniss and him were playing most of the ceremony and some of the reception. They had planned out their set and made sure it suited them to a t. They didn’t want to disappoint the couple or the guests. They had practiced the set endlessly and were up late last night assuring everything was perfect. They’d play a simple guitar tune for important moments of the ceremony, the acoustic version of their favourite love songs.

Johanna was leaving her house with two garment bags held high.

“Morning boys.” She greets them.

“Jo, you excited?”

“I couldn’t be more thrilled. And everything is set and ready. Sae is closing early for the reception. The reception, they’ve done a beautiful job of it. I can’t wait for you boys to see it.”

“Sae is always too good to us.” Sam says.

“She is but she loves us all.” Johanna adds. “You boys get inside. Finnick’s just down at the beach with Jai. He needed to relax a bit.”

“Is he alright though?”

“Yeah, peachy. He’s very excited.” She replies. “Just don’t get him too drunk or let him get high. Water, drink plenty of water and make sure he puts on deodorant.”

“We will. Go and get the bride-to-be ready.” Peeta tells her.

“4 o’clock.”

“We’ll be there.”

The boys step into the house with their clothes and other gear. Haymitch is napping outside on the verandah and Finnick and Annie’s fathers are gathered in the kitchen chatting away and watching a game of cricket.

Sam and Peeta sit with them, joining in on the conversation. Finnick and Jai soon arrive, wide grins on their faces. Jai heads upstairs to shower first and Finnick and the other’s crack open a beer and sit before the cricket.

Peeta’s phone vibrates and he pulls it out to see who it is. Katniss’ name flashes on the screen.

K - Remember don’t get too drunk.
P - We’re just having our first beer now. Effie is about to drop us off some lunch and she’ll be over with you girls. How’s the bride?

K - Bride is good and relaxed. She’s a little nervous which is to be expected. The mother’s are getting along nicely. My parents are due to arrive soon and will vacate the house for a few hours. Everything is smooth sailing.

P - What I like to hear. Go and join in with the girls and I’ll see you in a few hours.

K - You’ve got my guitar?

P - I do. Everything is ready.

K - I’ll see you in a few then.

P - But if you get bored feel free to send me some dirty texts.

K - Incorrigible you are… but you’ve been a good boy so just you wait. Besides you were up before I was this morning.

P - I was just saving it for tonight after the wedding. I love you.

K - I love you too. I’ll see you soon.

He pockets his phone as Effie arrives with lunch. Nate follows her into the house with Gloss and Zeke and they dig into lunch.

Effie leaves Haymitch with a kiss on the cheek and reminding him to shower before the wedding and leaves for Madge’s house with Cashmere.

The group of them is buzzing with excitement and Peeta can’t help but notice the wide smile Finnick has on his face.

At 3, the men start getting ready. They leave Zeke out of his little suit until the last possible minute. Finnick’s father and Finnick disappear upstairs, most likely a father to son chat filled with encouragement and lots of loving words. Annie’s father goes for a chat as well, most likely threatening Finnick to not hurt his little girl. But Annie’s father has a wide smile on his face as he appears back in the living room.

Peeta goes upstairs next and closes the door slightly behind him and looks at Finnick in the floor length mirror.

“You ready?” Peeta asks him.

Finnick nods and turns to his friend. “I’ve wanted to marry her since the day I met her. I mean, she crept up on me but I had this feeling that I couldn’t quite wrap my head around until I knew I loved her and that feeling was I wanted a lifetime with her. I’ve never been so sure about something in my entire life.”

“I know. You’re a lucky man and she’s a lucky girl. I can see how much you love her.”

Finnick smiles and slips his necklace over his head. The one that Peeta hasn’t seen him without.

“Annie gave me this.” Finnick explains and smiles at the tribal necklace, he kisses it and tucks it into his white shirt.
Finnick wore white pants and a white dress shirt, rolled to the elbow and the top button popped open. Jai and Zeke were in exactly the same except their dress shirt were a light blue.

“I’m going to be a father in a few weeks.” He exclaims as he picks up the ultrasound picture of their expectant baby.

“You are. That little boy is going to be so loved.”

Finnick smiles as he kisses the ultrasound picture and sets it back on the dresser. “I just can’t believe I’m going to have everything I want in the space of a month. I’m going to be married to Annie and then have a little boy. Life can’t get any better than this.”

“You’re a lucky man.”

“You are to. I mean, you’ve got Katniss. She’s wonderful.” Peeta smiles at Finnick. “You need to make it work man, she’s someone you can’t let go. I know how crazy you are about her.” Finnick says. “She’s the one.”

“I’m 18 Finnick, you don’t find the ‘one’ this early.”

“Yes you do and you have already.”

“She’s going back home in two and a half weeks.”

“I know she is.” Finnick exhales. “Don’t let her go. Follow her wherever she goes. Be the one and never let her go.”

“Her parents aren’t that keen on me.”

Finnick smiles at him. “That’s never stopped any man before. Don’t let her parents take her away from you.”

“I won’t.”

“Remember, always.”

Peeta smiles. “Always.” He exhales and touches his own necklace.

“She’s good man and I wouldn’t miss an opportunity to be without her.”

“6 months. Within 6 months we’ll be together again. I just have my album to finish.”

“How is it going?”

“I’ve written almost everything now. Just a few more songs and time to cull.”

“You deserve great success.”

“As do you.”

The door opens and Haymitch sticks his head into the door. “Five minutes and we’re going to head down there.”

“Thanks Haymitch.” Finnick replies as his neighbour steps out again. “Come on, I finished the nursery last night, I want to show you it.”

Finnick leads him to the room next door and opens the door. Peeta picks up on the surf and sand
theme right away and smiles at the nursery. It’s a beautiful grey and white nursery that he can see
the baby sleeping in. Even one of Finnick’s surfboards has been suspended up onto the wall as a
feature, their son’s name will eventually be added to the space of the board.

“You’ve done a great job.”

Finnick smiles and closes the door. “Let’s go and get me married.”

It’s quarter to four when they leave the house. Peeta drives, parking at Sae’s and collects his and
Katniss’ guitars to take down to the beach. He passes Mr. Undersee and Mrs. Undersee.

“Peeta, on your way to the wedding?” They ask him.

“Yes, just had to drop the van off.” He tells them, smiling at them.

“You look wonderful. Have a good evening.”

“Thanks for letting us use your house.”

“It’s no trouble at all.” Paul replies and Peeta catches sight of Katniss’ parents browsing through
racks outside of a shop.

“I should be going.” He tells them softly.

Michelle turns around and turns back, nodding at him. “We’ll see you around.”

Annie and Finnick’s wedding.

He smiles at the sign placed at the entrance to one of the sandy pathways and leaves his shoes in
the basket that is starting to fill with shoes. Madge’s Audi is parked nearby and he can see the girls
in the car still, touching up their makeup and fixing their hair.

Peeta heads down the path to where the ceremony is to be held. A few guests have arrived already
and Finnick stands at the front beside the celebrant with Jai at his side at the front of the structure
that will hold the guests. Little Zeke and Annie’s father had left for Annie. Peeta places his and
Katniss’ guitars down at the stools where they’ll play.

Madge, Katniss and Prim arrive with Finnick’s mother. Katniss bypasses straight for Peeta and he
swears his jaw has hit the ground.

She looks absolutely stunning in her silky maxi dress the colour of sunset. The skirt blows in the
afternoon wind as does her hair that has been curled slightly and a crown of flowers set on top of
her hair. And not fake flowers, she’s wearing a fresh flower crown filled with bright coloured
flowers of spring.

He kisses her passionately when she reaches him and he doesn’t care if he messes up her lip-gloss.

“You look amazing.” He tells her as they pull apart.

“So do you.”

He traces the chain of her necklace and sees it tucked between her breasts. She touches his
necklace and kisses him quickly.

They set themselves on the stools, making sure their guitars are in tune and wait for the signal
from Annie’s mother. The guests have gathered and Finnick stands waiting for his fiancé and
mother of his unborn baby.
Annie’s mother and father make their way down the path and nod at Katniss and Peeta to begin. They strum the strings, creating a soft acoustic piece for the bridal party to enter with. The sound of ocean plays backup.

Johanna walks her way down the sand and to the front, followed by Zeke and Colbie. Zeke in his suit and Colbie in her flower girl dress that is the colour of sand with sunflowers in her hair and flowers of spring in her bouquet.

Annie is next to arrive and she’s as beautiful as ever. Her dress is made of off-white lace and is bohemian style. It highlights her baby bump and she looks like an angel as she walks down the soft sand and towards her husband-to-be. Flowers are in her hair, much like Colbie’s. Finnick’s smile stretches wider and wider as she approaches him and Peeta thinks it’s the most beautiful thing he has seen in his life.

They play out the tune until the celebrant nods in their direction and they watch from the side as the ceremony begins. The guests are in an array of brightly coloured clothes that shine under the afternoon sun and they watch as the two lovers commit their lives together.

The ceremony is quick and beautiful and the two lovers share a kiss as they secure rings on each other’s fingers and everyone claps for the newly united couple. Katniss and Peeta play as papers are signed. They ask the guests to join them at Sae’s in less than two hours as photographs are taken of the couple and the wedding party.

Peeta kisses Katniss as they finish playing for the guests who still linger.

“What was that for?” She asks.

“You are just so unbelievably beautiful and amazing and I just wanted to let you know.”

She kisses him again and takes his hand. “Come on.”

“Where are we going?” He asks.

“For a walk along the beach.”

They link their fingers together and walk down to the water. She lifts her dress slightly as the warm-water rushes over their feet. They share kisses and follow the shoreline for a long while. The sun is still quite high in the sky and won’t set just yet as daylight savings have begun.

Little hands touch his thigh and he looks down to see Cruz with a grin on his face. He lifts Cruz up onto his shoulder, the toddler giggling widely and he kisses Katniss as Cruz claps his sand covered hands in sheer delight, showering the couple in sand.

“I love you so much.” He murmurs.

She smiles against his lips and she jerks as another little body crashes into her. Winter stands at her side with a smile and Katniss lifts the two-year-old up onto her hip and tickles her side.

Winter and Indi wore matching dresses and little Cruz looked dapper in his brown khaki’s, white shirt and little suspenders. The suspenders didn’t last long on the toddler and were taken off as soon as the ceremony ended.

Katniss kisses him again and Winter giggles from Katniss’ side. Peeta tickles her even more and she wiggles to be let down from Katniss’ hip, initiating a game of tag. He thrust Cruz to Katniss and chases after the wild girl who runs circles along the sand and around her parents, aunties and
Katniss stands with Cruz still on the shoreline and Peeta can’t help looking at her as he chases the almost three year old.

He catches her and lifts her up, tickling her widely and she giggles infectious giggles, making Peeta smile more. He finally stops his tickling and lowers Winter to the sand who collapses on the blanket beside her mother and baby sister. Peeta lifts little Indi into his hands as she reaches up for him and he carries her down to Katniss who is alone now, Cruz having run off to play in the sand.

“And in comes baby Indi.” He announces as he nears Katniss who turns and smiles at him and the baby.

“Hello cutie.” She coos, tickling Indi’s cheek.

The baby wants Katniss immediately and Peeta hands the baby over who smiles a toothy smile at Katniss and touches her flower crown. He thinks she’s going to yank from Katniss but she doesn’t, she lowers her hand to touch Katniss’ olive cheek and stares into Katniss’ silvery eyes with her intense green eyes. It’s like they are communicating and Indi stares at Katniss in amazement for a long while.

Katniss kisses the baby’s hand and then her forehead and runs her hand over the baby’s peach fuzz hair. He kisses the baby’s cheek and then Katniss’.

She cuddles the baby as they watch the waves and leave the water to meet up with Cashmere, Cassia, Gloss, Ben and Glimmer.

Cassia has her Ipad out and is flicking through her photos.

“Have you guys seen the photo shoot yet?” Cassia asks.

“No yet.” Peeta tells her and kneels on the blanket.

Katniss kneels down beside him. The Ipad is handed over and the two of them look at the images.

“It turned out great.” Katniss says.

“Absolutely beautiful.” Cashmere states. “We couldn’t be happier. You look gorgeous Katniss.”

Peeta catches Katniss blush and he kisses her cheek. He goes slower on the photographs of just the two of them and is taken aback at how wonderful Cressida and Nate had captured them, how he can see the chemistry the two of them have. He also goes slower on the pictures of Katniss and the kids. She’s like an earth mother, so beautiful, natural and glowing.

He hands the Ipad back with a smile. “They’re excellent. Summer catalogue is going to shine.”

They decide to pack up and head towards the reception. Zeke and Colbie have long finished and Nate and Cressida have taken Finnick and Annie for their own shots. The reception was due to start in half an hour.

Katniss carries Indi and Peeta carries Cruz. The other three trail behind the adults, chasing each other. The marquee structure has been taken down and the crew is packing up, lugging it to the trailer that waits.

They find their shoes in the basket and Cashmere carries the empty basket towards the shop. Cassia grabs the stroller and a baby bag and the group of them head to Sae’s. The kids hold an
adult’s hand as they move through the people that are out and about for the Saturday night. Some
of the guests have arrived at Sae’s already and champagne and finger food is handed around.

They wave at Prim and Jai who sit at one of the tables engaged in conversation. Madge and Sam
chat with Johanna.

Cassia and Glimmer get their kids settled at a table and give them each some food to snack on and
a drink each. Indi is strapped into her stroller with Ben going to heat up the youngsters’ dinner.

“So, I’ve been meaning to ask you guys, I mean it’s alright to say no but would you guys like to
watch the kids next Thursday?” Cassia asks. “I’ve got to head to Coolangatta and Ben is working
at Coffs Harbour for a couple of days. I can get my parents to watch them, it’s not a big deal but if
you were interested.”

“Sure.” Katniss replies smiling. “We’d love to watch them.”

“Thank you. Zeke will be at school so you don’t have to worry about him. It'll just be Winter and
Indi. I should be back by 9 maybe 10. Zeke will be with Gloss and Glimmer for the night.”

“That’s fine.” Peeta tells her with a smile.

“Thank you.” She says, kissing both their cheeks. “I’ll chat with you two about it later.”

“We can’t wait.” Katniss replies and smiles at her as she goes to attend to the kids.

“I’m playing at the markets on Thursday.” He reminds her.

“I know. We can take them along with us. They do like hearing you play.” She reminds him,
kissing him on the cheek. “Come on, we’ve got some music to play.”

The sun is starting to set slowly outside. The outside has been transformed with a little dance floor,
the doors pushed open wide and a corner for the two of them to play music. Fairy lights light the
outside and he thinks the whole thing is amazing. He’s already riding on a romantic high after
today; he knows he won’t be leaving Katniss tonight without sharing his love with her.

They play for the guests that have arrived and catch sight of Annie and Finnick arriving outside of
the building. Wide smiles are on their faces. Peeta smiles at Katniss as they play a long
instrumental of songs and watch as the bride and groom enter the reception to a big cheer. More
champagne is dispensed and everyone is soon seated at their tables for speeches and dinner.

Everyone wishes them a happy life and luck on welcoming their son due in a matter of weeks.
Dinner has conversation still flowing and Katniss and Peeta get up to play for the couple’s first
dance with the band that have gathered as well to accompanying their playing.

“We’d like to wish Annie and Finnick a happy marriage and happy life. I’m so glad I’ve got to be
apart of your life and hope I’m there for a long time to come yet.”

“Yes, thank you to you both for being so welcoming.” Katniss adds. “I’m glad I got to meet you
both and I can’t wait to meet this little boy of yours. And don’t worry I won’t be gone for long. I’ll
be back.” She chuckles. “So here is to the couple.”

They start with Only Love for the couple who move slowly around the dance floor. Guests join
them soon after and the dance floor is filled, people spilling off the floor. The kid’s dance with
their parents and everyone else and the sun sets on the reception.

Katniss leaves him to use the bathroom as he entertains them all with a couple of songs and she
comes back with Colbie wanting to dance with her. Peeta watches from the corner and strums the
ending of one of his own songs.

“So this next one is called, first day of my life. I’d like to dedicate it to my sweet girl who has been
at my side playing for most of the evening. She doesn’t know I’m playing this song.” He tells
everyone and smiles at Katniss. “It’s also dedicated our guests of honour.”

Katniss looks at him wearily and he begins to play the beginning of the song. Colbie remains with
Katniss their hands joined as they dance.

“Yours is the first face that I saw
I think I was blind before I met you
Now I don’t know where I am
I don’t know where I’ve been
But I know where I want to go”

He watches her move around the dance floor with Colbie but she watches him, listening to him
carefully.

“And so I thought I’d let you know
That these things take forever
I especially am slow
But I realize that I need you
And I wondered if I could come home”

He doesn’t finish playing the song, he leaves it to the band and makes his way to Katniss, Colbie
stepping aside for Peeta.

He cups her face with his hands, his guitar slung over his back and he kisses her passionately,
expressing the love and romance he is feeling. They don’t care about the guests who watch them
with grins. They are in their own world; it’s just the two of them on this magical evening
celebrating the love of two people. He wants to celebrate his love with his girl too. The girl who’ll
soon be leaving him to return back home.

He doesn’t care that it’s only for a short time. He doesn’t want to be apart from the girl he wants to
spend the rest of his life with. She is his everything and he knows he won’t survive without her.

“We have to make this work.” He tells her breathless.

“We will.” She replies. “I promise you.” She fishes for her necklace. “Remember, always.”

He draws her in for another kiss as the band plays for them all.

“I can’t survive without you.” He tells her.

“Me either.”

“You’re the first person I know I am truly in love with. Not that stupid crappy high school love.
This is real love.” She smiles at him, her eyes filling with tears.

“Real or not real?” She asks him.

He places her hands on his chest, above his heart that is beating wildly and tells her, “Real.”

When the wedding starts to wind down he takes her to his van. Prim and Madge were still at the
wedding and would wait for them.
He lays Katniss down on his bed, the two of them having moved to one of the quieter lookouts next to the beach.

And she stares at him in the moonlight, tracing his cheek and his neck down to his chest slowly and gently.

He kisses her gently and tenderly and shows her he means everything he said to her at the reception. They’ve shared tender words of love but it’s never meant anything to them until right now.

And after, he knows they’ve never made love like that before. He thought he knew what it meant and thought they had made love but somewhere inside of him he knows they connected like they’ve connected before. They were slow and tender and reassured each other of their feelings and words they had shared.

She lies curled into his chest and he inhales the smell of her shampoo and her body. He can faintly smell the perfume she wears, the ocean and the fresh flowers. He could taste the champagne on her lips and himself.

He held her tightly in his arms, drawing every last inch of her as he could before she left for the night.

“Peeta?” She whispers.

“Yeah?”

She’s silent for a long while before she speaks again. “I’m scared.”

“Of what?”

“What will happen when I get home.”

“What do you think will happen?”

“I don’t know. I just feel as if they will tear us apart.”

“Not possible.”

“It could happen.”

He touches her cheek and sees the tears in her eyes. “Katniss, I will never let anything happen to us. I’m not scared of your parents and you shouldn’t be either. If they love you they’ll see how much I…. this means to you. No parent would ever disallow their child happiness for their own.”

“Peeta.” She groans.

“It’s true Katniss. They’ve put on this tough act now but what happens when you decide to move out? Travel? They can’t own you forever Katniss. They have to let you go and they have to realise this. If they love you, they’ll let you go.”

“It’s not that simple, you’ve met them.”

“And I can see the good they have in their hearts. They love you and just want to see the best in you.”

“That’s you. Why can’t they see that?”
“Denial.” He says. “Listen, we’ll keep our arrangements while they’re here and just hope that they come around. And if this all fails, I’ll be on my way over.” He smiles and catches one of her tears. “Just know, I’m not going to leave you. I’ll fight for you Katniss, even if it means smuggling you back into the country just to be with me. Marrying you to keep you here with me.”

“You’d do that?”

He nods. “We’ll be together soon Katniss, have patience and it’ll all come together.” He tells her. “You’ll probably want a break from me any way.”

She shakes her head, “No, I don’t ever want to be apart. Those days we’ve spent apart have been hell and we’ve still been in the same country.”

He brushes her hair away from her face and smiles at her.

“It’ll be always very soon. I promise.”

He drives her back to the reception and Madge and Prim come out of the building. They had a curfew of midnight tonight and it was quarter to twelve now.

“I’ll see you tomorrow.” He tells hers, kissing her lips and holding her close to his body for a moment. He wanted to be able to feel and smell her one last time.

Madge kisses Sam goodnight and Katniss closes the boot of Madge’s car. She snuck in one last quick kiss and climbs into the backseat of the car, winding the window down and waving goodbye to him.

He blew her a kiss as Madge pulls out from the curb and he watches the headlights disappear into the night.

Sam sighs and leans up against the outside of Sae’s. Peeta joins him they watch the various people walking the streets.

“This is harder than I thought.” Peeta admits.

“You’re doing a good job.” Sam tells him. “Katniss’ parents, don’t listen to them, they’re idiots in my eyes. Even Madge has agreed. They can’t keep the two of you apart.”

“I know. It’s just, those comments about me being a bad influence hurt.”

“I know they did but you're not one. You’re one of the most admirable people I know. I admire what you’re doing and don’t think I’d have the balls to live in a van especially the minute I finished school.”

“I think anyway could. It just takes perspective and a little bit of courage and you’re doing the unthinkable.”

Sam smiles at him and looks up at the night sky. “Perspective is a wonderful thing.”

“Have you gained any perspective regarding Madge?”

Sam shrugs his shoulders, “She’s brilliant, don’t get me wrong, it’s just…”

“You suck at relationships and taking things further. I know but you feel something for this girl, you have since you met her. The girls’ heart can only be dragged around for a little while longer before it snaps and you lose her. Don’t let the thing you love go. You’ll regret it.”
“But what if we breakup down the track?”

“Stop thinking about the future and think about now. You’re always thinking about the ifs and the buts. You can’t live that, especially in a relationship. Think about what you have with her now and decide. I think you owe her and yourself a favour if you hurry up and decide what you two are and if there will be more. I mean you two are in a relationship. Just man up and call her your girlfriend already. If it falls apart, it falls apart. It’s life Sam and it’s going to hand you crap every once in awhile.”

“I just don’t want that to happen.”

“It might not. Just for once think about the girl and the now. You might not get that,” He says pointing up at the wedding. “But you will learn a little. Your heart will grow and man it feels good to tell someone you love them.”

Sam sighs and turns to his friend. “How do you know you’re in love?”

“Because nothing makes sense without her.”
She dreamt of vows, music, love and fairy lights. She dreamt of Peeta, his lips, his kisses and his eyes. She dreamt of her future. Their future, tiny babies and children who were chased around the sand and laughed until their stomachs hurt and tears fell down their cheeks.

It was a pleasant dream and left her wanting more.

She wakes to the sound of her father; it was still early and dark outside.

She lies in bed deciding if she’d go out to the surf but she was too cozy in bed and drowsy from the lack of sleep.

She closes her eyes and soon finds herself pulled back into a slumber.

She wakes from a dreamless slumber and checks her phone. A few messages sat on her lock screen. A few from Peeta, one from Annie and from Cassia.

She reads Cassia’s message thanking her for agreeing to babysit the girls on Thursday. Annie’s was a generic one she sent out to everyone, thanking them for their time, love and support and how grateful her and Finnick where to have such wonderful members in the tribe.

Peeta’s messages made her heart flutter.

*Sam asked me how I knew I was in love. And I told him, ‘nothing makes sense without you’.*

*You’re probably sleeping but I hope this puts a smile on your face and makes your day. I love you and you’ve made me a better man in just a few weeks.*

*Meet me for brunch. If I can’t wake up beside you, staring into your eyes I want to at least share a meal with you and stare into your eyes and remind you how much I love you.*

She replies to him, telling him how she loves him, how he did put a smile on her face and she’ll look forward to brunch with him.

Prim is still sound asleep and Katniss slips out of the bed. She gathers clothes and carries them to the bathroom. She can hear the adults up and talking downstairs and she devises what she’ll say to them.

She comes down the stairs dressed, showered and feeling refreshed. She’s in a great mood for once and is able to engage in a conversation with her mother.

“What are you so cheery about?” Paul asks her.

She shrugs and pours herself a glass of water, hoisting herself up onto the bench, her legs swinging against the cupboards.

“Have a good day yesterday?” Michelle asks.

She nods. “It was wonderful and the wedding and reception was just beautiful. Annie and Finnick are such a beautiful couple. They’ll have a wonderful life together.”

“How long have they known each other for?” Her father asks, dropping his morning paper.
“Five years.”

“Oh, they’re high school sweethearts, how romantic.” Michelle gushes.

Katniss nods and flits her eyes in her mother’s direction. Rosie shifts in her seat and scowls slightly. Katniss hides her smirk as she takes a long drink of her water.

“How long until the baby is born?” Paul asks.

“They’re due November. The first week.”

“Not long to go.”

“No, not long at all.” Katniss replies. “And I think it’s amazing what they’re doing.”

“They’re that type of couple you’re always jealous of, the ones who you can see the love they have for each other and just know it’ll work. You only see it a few times. It’s rare but it happens.” Michelle adds.

“So true.” She agrees and watches Michelle turn her gaze to her sister-in-law and than back to her niece.

“Oh, young love. It only feels like yesterday when I met Paul.”

“Yeah? Was it love at first sight?”

“I wouldn’t call it that but I knew I felt something for him. I kept having dreams and finding myself smiling randomly about him. I knew a few weeks into dating him that I loved him and would spend the rest of my life with him.”

“I didn’t know people could fall in love with someone so quickly.” Paul begins to say. “But it happens. Its unexpected but it happens.”

Katniss smiles at her aunt and uncle and looks over at her parents. Her father engrosses himself in the paper and her mother’s attention turns elsewhere.

“What about you Mom? Did you fall in love with dad right away?”

“Are you kidding me? She heard him sing one night at the college bar and she fell for him instantly.” Michelle explains. “They weren’t even dating then and she was already head over heels for him.”

“You don’t say.”

“The next thing we know she’s on the back of his motorbike and they’ve taken off for the weekend down the coast. She had only known him a week and was already jumping onto his motorbike and riding down the coast. I thought it was reckless but I could see the love they had for each other.” Paul tells his niece. “She introduced him to Mom and Dad the week after and told Dad she was going to marry him. You know Pop; he’s a bit protective of his children and always has a thing to say. But he didn’t say anything, he told her to make sure she buckled her helmet and to enjoy the ride cause it was going to be a long one until the final sunset. He told her to make the most of it.”

“That did not happen.” Rosie claims defensively. “You’re telling lies.”

“Rosie, it happened.” Michelle says. “I remember it as clear as anything.”
Katniss watches both her parents go red, caught in a lie, and she smiles to herself.

“Stop filling her head with silly stories.”

Paul shakes his head, rolling his eyes.

“Want me to get Nan and Pop on the phone?” Katniss asks flashing her phone.

Rosie huffs and storms out of the room and James clears his throat nervously and follows after his wife.

Her aunt and uncle turn to her. “We’re trying to help kiddo.” Paul explains.

“I know. Thank you.”

Michelle smiles at her niece and kisses her cheek, noticing the chain and touches it. “What’s this?”

Katniss fishes the chain out from underneath her clothes and shows her aunt. “Peeta gave it to me. He has a matching one.”

“That boy is just too good.” Michelle exclaims, looking at the dog tag. “Don’t you think Paul?”

“He is. Don’t ever let him go.”

“I won’t.” Katniss replies softly and tucks the chain into her clothes.

“Get any pictures from yesterday?” Michelle asks.

Katniss nods and shows her aunt the photos she took. Her favourite one was the one at sunset at the edge of the balcony. Her dress looked like it was on fire with the setting sun. Peeta and her had shared a long kiss that she felt everywhere within her body.

“You two are just gorgeous together.” Her aunt gushes as she looks at the other images.

Katniss takes her phone back quickly when she realises one of the last pictures they took. It wasn’t something that she wanted her aunt to see. Considering the state both her and Peeta were in.

“Sorry, just…” She stammers.

“You have an inappropriate image?” Her aunt asks with an amused grin. Katniss bites her lip and blushes. “Don’t worry dear. I don’t mind. You two are young and in love, you’re allowed to document it.”

Katniss sets her phone down beside her and embraces her aunt. “Why couldn’t you be my mother?” She asks softly.

“I’d be honoured to have you as my daughter.” She replies. “You should feel lucky though.”

She scowls as she lets her aunt go. “I don’t.”

“It’s just a rough patch.”

“One that will last until the trip is well and truly over?”

“Hopefully not.” Michelle replies hopeful.

“Why do Mom and Dad get the love and support for a quick get together and Peeta and mine’s
has been thrown under the bus?"

“Who knows, only you’ll know if you speak to them.”

She frowns and her aunt touches her cheek. “It might help.”

“They won’t listen.”

“Make them.”

She expels a heavy breath and sighs. “I’m going to brunch. I don’t want to ruin brunch by speaking to them. I’ll have a chat with them when I get back.”

“Who you going to brunch with?” She smiles at her aunt. Her aunt already knows the answer. “Well have fun and don’t be too long unless you have somewhere else to be.”

“Just tell them I’m meeting with Johanna and Cashmere.”

“Will do.” Michelle says and kisses her forehead.

Katniss goes and gets her shoes and her purse and leaves the house. She walks to town alone, enjoying the fresh air and the quiet. Peeta was meeting her at a different café this morning and she followed the directions to the café. He waited for her outside the café. Dark circles were present under his eyes and she knows he’s hardly slept. Katniss not being by his side would be the major contributor to his lack of sleep.

She kisses him before speaking a word and he holds her steady against him.

“Morning.” He whispers against her lips.

She smiles at him and he takes her hand, leading her inside. They sit in a quiet corner together with their fingers still entwined.

“You’re glowing.”

“I must have had a good sleep.”

“Without me?” He asks.

“You were still there with me.”

“A good dream?” He asks with a small smile.

She nods her head and tells him about her dream. She watches the smile on his face grow wider as she relays the dream and he’s soon flashing his 100-watt smile and he no longer looks exhausted.

“Sounds like a pretty nice dream.”

She smiles in response and leans across the table to kiss him.

They speak mostly about the wedding, both of them still on a high from the day before. Katniss can feel her cheeks hurting from smiling so much. Something about the day just made her feel alive, renewed and she had this warm feeling inside of her.

They run into Glimmer and Gloss with Colbie and Cruz and greet them as they sit down at the table beside theirs for a morning coffee.
“The ceremony and the reception was just beautiful.” Glimmer gushes, touching her heart. “It’s one of the best weddings I’ve been to.”

“That was one of my firsts.” Peeta tells her. “But it’s certainly raised a bar.”

“Oh and you two. You two are magical. I’ve never seen two people shine so brightly before. You two just connect and it’s beautiful to see that happen. I think you two should just join forces and make music together.” Gloss tells them.

“Thanks. It was instant.” Peeta remarks and smiles at Katniss. “It just clicked.”

“I bet the loving is good.” Glimmer whispers to them with a grin. Katniss feels the heat come to her cheeks. “Sorry, it just looks as if you two have connected in that way and have made good music. Enjoy it and keep doing whatever is working.”

“Glim, leave them alone. You’re embarrassing them.” Gloss tells his partner with a smile. “Don’t mind Glimmer, she says what she thinks and likes to make people uncomfortable.”

“Like you can talk.”

“You do it quite a lot.” Gloss reminds her. “Not everyone is like you, love.”

She rolls her eyes, flicking her fishtailed braid over her shoulder. “Just make the most of what you’ve got. I’d hate to see it end.”

“Thanks.” Peeta tells her, his voice cracking slightly.

Peeta pays for their brunch and they walk hand in hand to the beach. It’s crowded for the Sunday and they find a space that is far away from the crowds. She sits in between his legs, leaning against his chest as they watch the waves roll onto the shore.

“Where’d you stay last night?”

“With Sam.”

“You two had a little talk?”

“We did. I told him to pull his head out of his arse.” Peeta tells her. “I mean, he’s my best mate but he needs a reality check. Madge is a beautiful girl. She’s good for him and he’ll lose her if he keeps going the way he’s going.”

“Madge doesn’t like to talk about her feelings much but I know this is bothering her.” She says. “A girl can only handle so much.”

“I know. I told him that. I mean, he’s loved her since they’ve met, it’s undeniable.”

They don’t say much in their time together and he walks her halfway home.

“I’ll see you at midnight.” She tells him.

“I’ll be waiting.”

She walks along the beach home, stepping in the hot sand as she navigates her way home.

Madge is in the hammock when she walks through the back gate. Her headphones on and eyes closed as she sways in the breeze.
Katniss touches her arm, bringing her back into the real world.

“You scared me.” She claims as she lifts her headphones off of her ears. “Where have you been?”

“Brunch.” Madge rolls her eyes and reaches for her headphones. “Talked to Sam today?”

“He’s taking me to dinner.” She says. “Anything else you want?”

“Wake up on the wrong side of the bed did we?”

“No.” She huffs. “I’m just tired.”

“Why?”

“Leave me alone or I’ll tell.”

“We’re 18 not 8.”

Madge rolls her blue eyes and places her headphones back on her ears before closing her eyes.

Katniss leaves her to be, not wanting to disturb her anymore and heads inside. She steps over River who lies in the sun that filters in through the open French doors and looks around for everyone else. Her father sits on the couch with a book in his hand.

“Hi.” She says to him.

He closes his book and removes his glasses. “How was brunch?”

“Scrumptious.”

“Yeah?” He asks.

She nods and moves towards him, sitting on the cushion two down from him.

“You enjoy yourself last night?”

“I did. It was nice. It’ll probably be the last time we’re with everyone before we leave.”

“You’ve made some good friends here haven’t you?”

“I have. I’m part of the tribe Dad.”

“They really are nice folk around here.”

“They are. They are the friendliest people in the world. I don’t think I could find a friendlier place.”

“The reception has been warm. We might have to come back here for another visit.”

“I’d like that.”

He smiles and places his book and glasses on the coffee table.

“Katniss, truthfully, we’re you with Peeta last night?”

“Will I get into trouble if I was?”

“It’ll be just between you and me.”
“How can I be sure?”

He sighs. “Don’t worry about it.”

She rolls her eyes and stands up to leave. “I was with Peeta last night. This is a small town Dad and the chances of running into him are high. He’s best friends with Finnick and Annie. I am friends with them as well and we were asked to sing at their wedding. I wasn’t going to say no because of this rule. I wasn’t forfeiting their happiness for your gain. I much preferred to bare the brunt of your scolding than see the disappointment on their faces. I’m an Everdeen, I don’t back out of promises I make. I don’t want to owe anyone anything and I make sure I repay my debts. So go ahead and scold me and tell me how defiant I am for being with Peeta.”

Her father exhales and edges forward on the cushion. “I won’t scold you. And yes I do understand you can’t avoid him completely, this isn’t home where our population is 18 times the size of here. You’ll run into him. It’s what you do when you run into him. I want you to be a bigger person and remember our agreement. No running back to that boy or slipping.”

She feels the anger building up inside of her.

“We have two and a half weeks left. I’m sure you can follow our rules for that much longer.”

“And what do I get out of this?” She asks through gritted teeth.

“Respect, independence and freedom. We’ll treat you like an adult if you can follow our rules. And maybe we’ll let you choose your preferred premed course.”

She bites her tongue before she lashes out and turns on her heel and darts up the stairs. She finds a pillow and screams loudly into it, the pillow muffling the sounds of her screaming.

She texts Prim when she feels lightheaded, asking where she was. Her sister seemed to calm her when she needed it the most.

P - I’m in town. I can come home if you want me to.

K – No, it’s fine. I can wait.

P – You sure? Cause I can come home.

She brushes the tears from her cheek.

K – I’m sure.

She follows the coast home. The moon is starting to descend in the night sky and the stars twinkle. She left all her love with her busker but inside she feels empty. She feels numb and alone. Even though her love is just a few hundred metres away.

What will she feel when he’s thousands of miles away?

She wraps her cardigan tighter around her waist and navigates her way to the house. She’s foggy and her mind clouded.

She slides the back door closed behind her and does a quick scan of the downstairs before she steps silently across the floor and to the stairs. She lifts her foot to step onto the stairs and a deep
“Where have you been?” She swallows the lump in her throat and exhales the breath she had been holding. “Katniss, where have you been and don’t lie to me.”

She turns to face her father who has emerged out of the darkness. “For a walk.” She lies.

“This late?”

“I couldn’t sleep.”

He studies her for a moment, taken in her dismayed appearance.

“Why are you clothes wet?” He asks.

She touches the tip of her damp braid. “I went for a swim.”

He cocks his eyebrow at her and she feels like the world is going to implode. She feels like he is going to catch her on a lie and realise she had been with Peeta for the last three hours and that their dash into the ocean was to awake them and refresh them after their session of sex, weed and cheap wine. It was a plunge to clear their heads and mask the smell.

He stands down, his imitating stance and hard face disappearing.

“Go to bed.” He tells her. She nods and turns to take the stairs. “We’ll have a chat about this in the morning.”

She forces the second lump down and takes the steps two at a time. She shuts herself into the bedroom and strips herself of her clothes. Prim’s sleepy voice startles her.

“You got caught?” Prim asks.

Katniss nods as she pulls on one of Peeta’s shirts.

“What’d he say?”

Katniss climbs under the covers beside her sister.

“He didn’t say anything. He’ll have a talk to me in the morning.” She explains. “He doesn’t know I was with…”

Prim nods her head and rubs her eye.

“Go to sleep little duck.”

“You’re playing with fire Katniss.” She whispers.

“Than watch me burn.”

Late Tuesday afternoon Katniss wanders down the stairs, her hair was still damp from the beach and her skin was sun kissed. Her phone pressed to her ear, Peeta on the other end.

They had not long just departed each other but they couldn’t be apart. Madge, Katniss, Peeta and Sam had gone south to Ballina for a day of surfing while the adults and Prim went to a small town
just out of Byron Bay.

“I had a great day today.”

“Me too.”

“One more day.”

“One more day.” She exhales into the receiver and notices her mother on the back porch with a book in her hands. Everyone else has vanished. “I’ve got to go.” She tells him softly. “I’ll talk to you later.”

“Everything all right?”

“Yeah. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

She pockets her phone and heads towards her mother. She knew she’d find out nothing if she didn’t ask her. Her aunt kept pushing her to find out.

“Hi Mom.”

Her mother looks up and smiles at her daughter. The afternoon is warm and there is a slight breeze blowing in from the beach and clouds starting to form for the late afternoon storm predicted.

“How was your day?”

“Good. I think Prim has been scarred for life.” Her mother tells her.

“Why?” Katniss asks, sitting down beside her mother.

“Let’s just say these people don’t have a lot going for them.” Her mother explains.

“Well you did take her to the drug capital of the world.”

“We did but it is a lovely town.”

“So why has she been scarred?”

“We were offered drugs at nearly every store front.” Her mother laughs. “And we stopped to have a conversation with a few people, the guy asking where we were from. Paul was friendly and polite and the woman they sat with had a brown paper bag with cheap liquor in it and was talking to herself. Well we think she was. Prim dragged us away when the mumbling got louder and filled with profanities she thought was aimed at her.”

Katniss smiled, imagining how the town would have freaked her sister out.

“She’s ensured us she’s never touching cannabis and will remain motivated.”

Katniss knew the idea was bizarre because her sister will always be motivated and driven; she’d never fall into the nightmare of drug abusing and unemployment.

“I’m not defending them but most of them don’t have a role model. They’re stuck in that cycle.” Katniss tells her mother.

“I know. It’s not their fault and the cycle can be hard to break. We parked near the school and I
couldn’t help but feel sorry for those kids who didn’t really have much going for them.”

They sit in an awkward silence for a while. Katniss deciding whether she’ll ask her mother the one burning question. She chews her bottom lip and begins to crack her fingers.

“What is it Katniss?” Her mother asks, setting her book back down.

She expels the breath she had been holding and asks, “I know you don’t want no questions asked about Peeta but I just have to know why your being so harsh on me. Your parents gave you freedom and accepted you for what you wanted to do. Pop didn’t bat an eye at you and Dad, and gave you his blessing after you’d only been with dad for two weeks. Why is it different with me and Peeta?”

Her mother groans softly. “Katniss, you promised there’d be no more questions.”

“I did but this will be the last question I ask. I just need to know why?”

Her mother closes her book, setting it down beside her and she turns to her daughter.

“I want you to be motivated and driven. You have so much potential and I don’t want to see it wasted. Your Pop could see the good in your father and knew how crazy I was for him. He could see how determined your father was to make it into medicine and create a stable life. I wasn’t caught up in some silly dream or was love-struck by the fact that he played in a band and rode a motorbike. I truly loved him for all the other parts and knew I couldn’t be without him. I could see us with a stable future built on realistic dreams and goals and real love, not just some holiday fling.”

Katniss scowls and feels her blood boil. “This is not some holiday fling.”

“You’re father and I see it as one.” Her mother states. “No more questions.”

Katniss can feel the anger and she knows there’s no stopping her now.

“I am not wasting my potential on something you think is silly and childish. And Peeta is determined. He is the most determined guy I’ve met my age. He’s determined to make a living out of his music and he has started to. It’s still only early but he’s soaring. And he has a stable life. And I am so crazy for him and I always will be. I’m not caught up in some love-struck obsession because he’s a musician. I know it’s a cliché but I love Peeta for everything he is, his musician side, he’s surfer side, he’s homeless side and who he is as a person.” She fumes. “And this is not some holiday fling. I fell in love with him and I want to be with him. He’s the guy I want to spend the rest of my life with. It’s real.”

“You’re 18, what do you know about love?”

“Everything. Peeta has shown me. Everything you and dad have shown me.”

“You’re being juvenile Katniss. There’ll be no more discussion about Peeta or how much you love him. How driven he is and how you want to be a musician. It’s not happening. I knew coming here was a bad decision, it’d fill your head with silly things.” Her mother claims. “This discussion has finished.”

“You won’t even listen to me.”

“It’s for you own good.” Her mother tells her, picking up her book.

“This is so unfair.”
“No it’s not.”
“I’m 18.”
“I know.”
“I can legally make my own decision.”
“We know and we know the number to the bank to cut you from us financially.”
“I have my own savings.”
“It won’t get you very far.”

She feels tears building in her eyes and she doesn’t want her mother to see because her mother knows how much this means to Katniss. She knows how much her daughter loves the busker much like Rosie had loved her musician when she was just a little older than Katniss.

Katniss just doesn’t understand how her parents can be so mean about this.

She stomps away from her mother and back upstairs to her room. Cuddling the pillow to her chest as she lets the fat tears roll down her cheeks, as she doesn’t feel understood or heard.

Dinnertime is quiet. She eats as quickly as she can, scrapes her plate and stacks it into the dishwasher before she escapes down to the beach where she sits until it is late and cries silently as she watches the waves roll onto the sand and watches those late night swimmers and beach walkers.

Her sister calls her in when heavy raindrops start to fall and holds her tightly when she’s showered and changed into her pyjamas.

“I hate seeing you like this.” Prim admits. “Tell me what I can do?”

“Just being here helps.”

“You’ll win this Katniss.”

She smiles gratefully at her sister and brushes away the blonde bangs. Madge had disappeared to Sam’s for the night, leaving the sisters to comfort themselves.

She meets Peeta at midnight like promised and he ravishes her until she is boneless and satisfied, the pain from earlier long forgotten and Peeta’s words cheering her up.

He kisses her at the door of his van and watches her disappear into the night. She slips upstairs and climbs into her bed unnoticed. Prim out to the world.

She curls into the pillows, cuddling them to her chest and retraces the moments with Peeta. Remembering his loving hands, his lips, his hold and his touch. The way he feels pressed against her bare skin. She falls asleep with him on her mind.

The next day couldn’t come quick enough.

The parents were leaving them for another week and the girls would be free from their constant
watch and rules.

Her father didn’t speak to her about her late night disappearance and neither did her mother. Her father having kept quiet.

But she was still upset with her mother after yesterday afternoon and the pain of her words were still raw this morning when she woke up feeling down, even after her midnight meet up with Peeta.

The three girls sit at the kitchen bench while the adults finish packing their things.

Katniss replies to Peeta and then sips her coffee and tries to not think about the fact that they were leaving in two weeks.

Their days in Byron Bay ending too soon.

Madge is too engrossed in her phone, she had arrived back an hour earlier after leaving Sam’s.

The two of them had finally made it official, much to Katniss and Peeta’s relief. Her parents were accepting of the dreadlocked boy and let their daughter test the boundaries of their newly titled relationship, despite almost fooling around for a year without the word ‘love’ spoken in that entire time.

“If anything happens…” Michelle starts.

“We know ring and you’ll be here in a heartbeat. We know Mom.”

“I’m just making sure.” Michelle smiles. “Give me a hug.”

They embrace Michelle, letting her kiss their foreheads as Paul enters the kitchen, wringing his hands together, ready to get going.

“We’ll be back next Friday but please try and come home for a couple of days. Mum and Dad want to see Prim and Katniss and there’s also some cool things we can take them to.”

“We’ll have a talk and think about it.” Madge tells her mother with a smile.

Michelle kisses the girls each again and leaves them to head upstairs, obviously forgetting something.

Her father follows in behind her mother and she can see the look on her father’s face means trouble.

“Katniss.” He calls her over and leads her to the backyard.

She follows his steps to the grass and waits. She knows everyone had picked up on the words Katniss and her mother had shared yesterday afternoon and she was waiting for her father to scold her.

“We didn’t have our chat after the other night.” She nods. “I didn’t tell your mother. But I need your word. You will not see Peeta at all, unless it’s an accidental run in. You promise me this?”

“I promise you.”

“And no more midnight walks or swims. It’s not safe for a young girl to be wandering.”

“Dad, you know I could take someone down.”
“I do but I don’t want you wandering when we’re not here.”

“Got it.”

“If I find out you’ve been with Peeta, I will be mad.” He states. “There will be consequences.” She bites her tongue; lashing out would do no good for her. “And you’re mother told me about yesterday.” He begins. “Katniss, this is for your own good. Forget the boy and focus on your future.” He tells her. “And never disrespect your mother again.”

Katniss opens her mouth to protest but decides against it. “Yes.” She grunts.

He embraces her awkwardly, Katniss feeling the tension between them and he turns for the house. She takes a moment to herself and finally follows him. She doesn’t actively seek her mother to embrace her goodbye and neither does her mother.

The girls send the parents off and Katniss bares a smile and a wave. A scowl makes it way to her lips before their front wheels have hit the road and she feels the anger start to surge.

She retreats to the backyard with River at her side and pats his soft fur as she tries to fight back the conflicting emotions building within her.

But a comforting voice carries up the backyard and where she sits with her head bowed.

Katniss is on her feet and jumps from the top of the steps into his arms. He catches her and spins her as he kisses her. A bag is at his feet and she smiles.

“You’re home.”

“I’m home.”

He squeezes her body tighter and she inhales the smell of her Peeta and his warmth.

She’s no longer confused with conflicting emotions; she’s content because Peeta is here at her side.

In the dead of the night she hears his voice just breaking through the haze of sleepiness she’s been woken from.

The evening is humid and the cracked window does nothing for the two lovers.

“Katniss?” He whispers, bringing her out of her daze of consciousness.

“Hmm?”

It’s silent for what feels like hours. She focuses her eyes on his eyes and he looks deep in thought, trying to tell her what he woke her for. He worries his bottom lip as he thinks and she runs her finger gently along his lip. He lets his lip go and kisses her finger softly.

“What is it? You can tell me.”

“I hate how I’m coming in between your parents and you.”

“Don’t.” She pleads. “Please don’t. You’re not the reason this has happened. This has been brewing for a long time.”

“But I’m the reason you’re not allowed to study music.”
She stops him with her lips.

“Stop. I was never going to be allowed to study music. It was just a ploy to get me to behave. I realised this ploy before we left for here. I overheard them a few nights before we left, my dad asked when they were going to break it to me that they wouldn’t fund me going to college for music. My mother said after this trip had finished so then I wouldn’t step out of line. They just wanted me to behave this trip.”

“I kind of hate your parents.”

She gives him a saddened smile and he understands her hurt in just that smile.

“I grew up in a household that encouraged dreams and creativity, to be a little brave and step into the deep end. We always had encouragement even if it was the craziest idea and my family would be there to watch or praise us even if we did fail. There was never a time an idea was shot down. I think it has made us who we are today. We accept failure and strive for success, even if we know it won’t work. We always feel proud of ourselves and our family is proud no matter the outcome. I’m not afraid to fail this venture, my album and the life I have established here. I don’t care if it fails. But I know I’ll be distraught if we fail, this will be the greatest loss I have ever faced and I don’t know if I can recover from such a great failure.”

“We won’t fail because I won’t survive without you either.”

“We have to make this work Katniss.”

“We will.”

“How?”

She takes his hand and presses it over her chest; right where her heart beats and the chain of her dog tag dangles.

“I can feel it right in my chest.”

“Real?”

“Real.” She confirms.

He kisses her, his hand remaining on her beating heart. She melts into him and savouring the moment of passion and love that is surging.

“What if I ruin things with your parents?” He asks her, his breathing rapid.

“This is worth it.” She tells him. “And if they really love me than they accept you. My Pop accepted my dad and seeing how much they loved each other, told her to strap in cause it was going to be a long ride until their last sunset.”

Peeta smiles at her and pecks her lips. “I want to strap in. I’m ready for the ride.”
“Katniss!” A tiny body screams, slamming themselves into Katniss, wrapping their arms tightly around her waist tightly.

Katniss embraces the toddler, running her hand over her sandy blonde hair. Winter squeezes the teenager with all she has before looking up and smiling widely at Katniss.

“Hello Winter.”

“Hi Katniss.” She replies softly. “Are you and Peeta watching Indi and I today?”

“We are. You like that idea?”

The girl nods her head with a wide smile and unlatches herself to embrace Peeta. Peeta lifts her up into his arms and smiles at Katniss as the toddler wraps her arms around Peeta’s neck, burying her face into the crook of his neck.

Cassia greets them on the front porch with Indi on her hip in a ring sling and waves them in.

Cassia and Ben live in Belongil, in a beautiful new house that overlooks the Belongil Beach and is wrapped in large glass windows. The yard is small but when you have the ocean just a skip and a hop away, it makes up for it.

“This house is beautiful.” Peeta compliments Cassia.

“Thanks.” She replies and kisses both of the teenager’s cheeks. “If we build another house we’re avoiding this many windows. Come on in.”

They step into the house and Katniss does a quick scan of the open planned house. She feels a sense of warmth and knows Cassia and Ben have made this a home for themselves and their three children.

“Zeke’s already gone to school.” Cassia explains and leads them into the kitchen. “I have a list of where everything is here. Some phone numbers and such as well. Don’t hesitate to call me if you have any trouble with them but they should be good girls.”

“We don’t doubt it.” Peeta says smiling at Winter as he sets her on the granite counter and pokes the toddler’s little nose.

“There’s plenty of breast milk in the fridge for Indi. She likes it at about room temp. She is on solids and I have her lunch and dinner already made and in the fridge. There’s also dinner in there for you guys, one less hassle for you.”

“Thanks Cassia, we could have made dinner and everything.”

“It’s fine.” She brushes Katniss off with a smile. ‘I’ll leave my car here for you guys if you wanted to go into town, it’s just easier with the car seats and things. The stroller is in the car too. Um, the nappy bag is here.” She points to the colourful bag. “Indi likes the sling as well or her carrier. The carrier is easy to put on and no doubt you can get her to sleep in it. You’re the same height as me Katniss so you’ll have no problems. If you have any questions just text or call and I’ll be able to help you out. Winter is toilet trained, just make sure she goes before bed. And the big questions, have you changed a nappy before?”
“I have.” Peeta tells her.

“Yes.” Katniss says.

“Ok, that’s settled then. Um, other than that, you should be fine. Bedtime is between 7:30 and 8.”

A car horn sounds outside and Cassia smiles. “That’s Jo. You sure you two will be fine?”

“We’ll be fine.”

Cassia smiles and takes Indi out of the sling and hands her to Katniss.

“You headed to the markets?” Cassia asks.

“Yes, if that’s alright. If not I can stay here while Peeta plays.”

“No, go. The kids love the markets and the sunshine. If you want you can take them to the beach but maybe in the afternoon when it’s cooler.”

“We’ll think of something.” Peeta tells her with a confident smile.

Cassia kisses her daughters and picks up her oversized handbag and hands over her car keys.

“Be good girls and I’ll see you tomorrow. Be good for Katniss and Peeta.”

Winter smiles at her mother. “Go, go.”

Cassia laughs and kisses Winter’s forehead. “She’s been looking forward to this all week. I’m going, don’t miss me too much.”

Cassia is gone with a wave and another goodbye and they listen to the front door click closed. It was just after 8 and Peeta was due at the farmers markets by 10 to play. Katniss felt the nerves rush to her stomach at the fact that they were responsible for two kids under the age of 3 for over twelve hours.

“You alright Katniss?” Peeta asks with a hint of worry in his voice.

“Yeah, I just realised we are responsible for these two for quite a while.”

“We’ll be fine.” He reassures her with a smile and kisses her lips.

“Yucky.” Winter says from the counter.

“Let’s get you naked girls dressed?” Peeta suggests. “I don’t think we can take two naked girls to the markets with us.”

Winter nods her head with a big smile. “Yes you can.”

“Says who?”

“Indi.”

“Indi says you can go to the markets naked?”

“She did.” Winter tells Peeta trying to be serious but a hint of a giggle cracks through.

Peeta tickles Winter and watches her screech and giggle in sheer delight. Indi giggles from
Katniss’ hip and bounces, wanting to be in on the attention.

Peeta lets Winter go and tickles Indi, blowing raspberries on her cheeks and her bare stomach and peppers the baby’s face in kisses. Indi is in hysterics as much as Winter is and Katniss feels her heart surge and warmth spread throughout her body.

“Come, let’s find you girls so clothes.”

Winter leads them upstairs to the bedrooms and into the first bedroom that has light purple walls and a toddler bed in the corner with a stripped bedspread that has been kicked down to the end of the bed. Toys have been stacked in baskets around the room and light filters in through the big windows.

A pile of clothes sits stacked on top of a grey dresser and Peeta moves to the pile to rifle through.

“What do you want to wear today Winter?”

Winter studies the pile of clothing before picking out a blue kaftan styled dress with white stripes.

“Excellent choice.”

“Indi has the same dress. Can you put her in that?”

“Of course we can.” Peeta tells the toddler and sets her on the ground. “Do you need to go to the toilet?”

“No.”

“Alrighty, arms up.”

Winter throws her arms up in the air and Peeta naturally slides the dress over her head and onto the toddler’s body.

“Can you do my hair pretty like yours?” Winter asks, touching Katniss braid.

Katniss nods and hands Indi over to Peeta. They head to the bathroom and Katniss finds a hairbrush and ties. She runs the bristles through Winter’s hair and gets rid of the knots before she parts her hair into two. She braids Winter’s hair into two braids down her back and ties them off with two ribbons.

“You like?” She asks Winter.

“I do.” Winter tells her and embraces Katniss.

They find the matching dress Winter was talking about and Katniss dresses Indi into the matching romper.

Peeta plays with Winter, engaging in the play with her dollhouse while Indi sits in her walker close by. Katniss packs the diaper bag, making sure they have plenty of snacks, milk and anything else they could possibly need on the venture out. She’s sure she’s over packed but you could never be too careful when it came to outings with babies and toddlers.

“You ready to go to the markets?” Peeta asks Winter.

She nods her head enthusiastically and Peeta kisses the top of her head.

“Alright, you go and put your shoes on and we can get going.”
Winter disappears to grab her shoes while Peeta picks up Indi from her walker and hands her over to Katniss.

“We’ll grab my guitar and that on the way.”

Katniss shifts Indi higher up onto her hip and grabs the bag and her phone. Peeta is back with Winter who has a hat on her head, one that resembles Peeta’s Akubra but in black and she wears a wide smile.

Peeta locks up while Katniss carries both girls to the car, getting them into their car seats buckled into the Santa Fe. Peeta starts the car and drives them to the house; Madge’s car is in the driveway still, as is Sam’s van. Indi chews on an owl rattle and Winter sits with her feet propped up and her doll in her hand.

“Is this is your house?” Winter asks, sitting up to look at the house through the front window.

“This is Katniss’. ” Peeta tells her.

“Can we go in?”

“Maybe on the way back.” Katniss tells her, turning around to smile at her.

“Okay.” Winter replies and smiles back at Katniss.

Peeta has his guitar, EP’s and bass drum loaded into the back and drives them to the market site.

“Can we get muffins?” Winter asks, a hopeful grin on her precious little face.

“Yes Peeta, can we get muffins?” Katniss begs, dropping her bottom lip.

“Sure we can.” He tells them and leans closer to Katniss. “I love that begging by the way.” He whispers to her.

She smirks at him and shakes her head. “Remember though we have to get her to bed tonight, not a lot of sugar.” Katniss reminds him.

“Roger that.”

He helps Winter out of the SUV and goes to the back to pull out the stroller.

“How about the carrier?” Katniss suggests before he digs through the instruments for the stroller.

“I just thought just in case.”

“Then we can grab it then.”

He helps her with the carrier, double checking the straps and buckles before she slips Indi inside. He buckles the back chest strap and she pulls the straps tight with Indi snug inside. She presses a kiss to the baby’s head and snuggles her to her body, inhaling the intoxicating baby smell and she feels like she is in heaven. Peeta locks up the car, slinging the baby bag over his shoulder and holding Winter’s hand as they walk through the stalls. They buy a juice and the promised muffins from Mr. Muffin.

Peeta leaves the girls to set up with Sam going to help him out and Madge and Prim join Katniss as they stroll through. Winter gravitates to Prim and holds her hand as they walk and is eventually carried around. Indi is sound asleep against Katniss’ chest and Katniss smiles at the soft sleeping
noises that sound from the baby’s mouth.

“That suits you.” Madge tells Katniss as they look through a table of jewellery. Winter pointing out all the pretty necklaces to Prim. “I mean you’re a natural. You always have been.”

“Doesn’t mean I’d be a good mother.” She replies.

“All mother’s are good mother’s.”

“Not all.”

“You know what I mean.”

“What I’m saying is that you’d be a good mother. You practically raised Prim and you’re very maternal. You’d be a wonderful mother to hopefully beautiful little surfer babies who are children of the tribe. Who love to sing and dance and laugh. I can see you as that mother and I hope I get to see you become that mother.”

Katniss shrugs her cousins’ comment off.

“Besides, having little busker babies would really piss your parents off.” Madge laughs.

“And goodbye to my inheritance.”

“Who cares about money? People are just greedy these days and think the world resolves around money. There’s more problems then just how much money you have.”

“People are poor Madge.”

“Yes because of the way the world works. There are our parents who save lives and their annual salaries are what take people fifteen plus years to earn. There’s a lot of professions in the world that deserve to be paid more than just peanuts and there’s a lot of changes that can be made to ensure no one goes hungry or homeless but its all about greed and status. I’d be more than happy to earn 80 grand a year just being a teacher. I don’t need this million-dollar salary where I can afford flashy houses and cars that I get rid of each year for a nicer more expensive car. I don’t care about the latest gadgets or designer clothes. I just want to be in a career that I’m rewarded with how much I enjoy it and the fact that I have a partner at home.”

“We’ve unfortunately grown up with it, status and being wealthy. That’s the only way my parents see.”

“Which sucks.” Madge states.

“It does.” Katniss agrees and kisses Indi’s peach fuzz. “I don’t want to live a life of ignorance. I don’t want to become that person who turns her nose up at people who are less fortunate than me, who didn’t get to live the life I did. We were born lucky Madge; we don’t know what it’s like to starve, to have to decide if we want warmth or to eat for the next week. To work three jobs and still be poor, to not be able to afford college and work to learn. We’ve grown up with good health care, new clothes, vacations, good education, expensive food and luxury. I want perspective Madge, I want to know what it’s like to live with just the bare essentials, a few CD’s, my guitar, surfboard and sleep in the back of a van. I want to experience this life and be happy because I can’t see myself being happy as a rich doctor with a flashy car, doctor boyfriend and feel broken inside because I didn’t get to live out my teenage dream or because I left behind the guy I thought I’d marry. I don’t want to become a shell of myself.”

“Than don’t.” Madge demands. “Don’t let them make you turn into that person because I won’t
forgive you if you leave behind your dreams.”

“You have to follow your dreams also.”

“I will.”

The cousins embrace, careful not to squash baby Indi. Winter tugs on Katniss’ hand and pulls her attention to the toddler.

“Look.” Winter says pointing to the table with charms to add build a bracelet.

“They’re beautiful.” Katniss tells her with a smile. “Do you want to get a bracelet and pick some charms?”

“Can you as well?” she asks

“You want to get a matching bracelet?” Winter nods with a toothy smile. “Okay, chose what band you want first?”

Winter searches across the bands for one. They’d be too big on her wrist so Katniss steers her towards the adjustable bands.

“This one.” Winter points to a purple band.

“Good choice. I think I’m going to go with this.” She tells Winter, pointing to a forest green band. “Now for the charms. I think it has to mean something our bracelet.”

Winter nods, her green eyes shining and they search through the charms.

“We need one to represent the sun, the earth and the moon.” Katniss explains picking out the sun, earth and moon charm. “Something that represents the land and the sea.”

“Oh, an elephant.” Winter exclaims picking the elephant charm.

“Beautiful. I’m going to go with a lion.” She tells Winter plucking out a charm of a lion. “Now for the sea.”

Winter choses a dolphin while Katniss choses a turtle.

“Now we have the sun, moon, earth, land and sea. We need some love and some colour.”

They pick out two heart shaped charms and a couple of beads. Winter’s being a red colour and green for Katniss. Katniss choosing a purple stone and finds an orange stone that changes in the sun.


Winter finds a beautiful charm of ballet shoes. She knows how much Winter loves dancing and being free. Katniss finds a music note and adds it to the pile.

“I think we’re covered.” She tells Winter and turns to pay for the bracelet and charms until she is stopped by two dandelions. Hope. Rebirth. Spring.

“And hope.” She tells Winter adding the last charm to the pile. “We can’t forget about hope.”
Winter smiles at Katniss and the stall keeper adds up everything, Katniss reaching for her purse. She knows she may have overstepped it but she wanted it to mean something and especially for Winter when she grows up.

The lady bags the charms separately and the bracelet, handing it over to Katniss before taking Katniss’ money.

“Thank you.”

“Enjoy.” The lady tells them. “You have very beautiful kids.”

Katniss flushes slightly and smiles a thanks, she didn’t want to explain who these kids were and took Winter’s hand as they headed to the stage. The act before Peeta was due to finish and Sam and Peeta were chatting beside the stage.

Winter runs to Peeta and he lifts her up into the air and embraces her. Katniss notices the wide smile on his face and the pure happiness spread across his face.

Katniss grabs a rug from the back of the car and lays it out on the green grass, under some shade. The girls sit on the rug and Winter comes running back to sit with them. Katniss and Madge place the charms on to the bracelets and Madge places Winter’s bracelet on the girls’ wrist, tightening it on her little wrist and tying it off. The good thing was Winter would be able to get a new band when she got a little bigger. The charms just all fit onto the bracelet and Winter stares at it, studying each charm.

“And maybe we can get some more charms later on.” Katniss suggests.

“Can I show Peeta?”

Katniss smiles and Winter is back up on her feet heading towards Peeta showing him her bracelet and Katniss can hear he explain that she has the same.

Madge ties Katniss’ bracelet on.

This was her land and sea. Another memento of Byron Bay and her trip.

Winter was back again, exhausted from her run and asks for a drink. Indi sleeps soundly in the carrier and they watch Peeta quickly set up as the crowd gathers for Peeta’s set.

He had become a fan favourite at the markets and his fans never let him down.

He plays his own songs and new covers, Katniss and he had chosen the night before. He liked to keep it original and fun and not bore his audience. And he knew some classics would win over the older crowd.

“This is Tiny Dancer, sing along if you know it.”

Indi had woken herself up and sits in between Katniss’ legs, watching Peeta play. Winter sits with Prim and they rock side-to-side cheering for Peeta.

“But oh how it feels so real
Lying here with no one near
Only you and you can hear me
When I say softly slowly”
Winter pulls Prim up onto the grass and the two of them dance together. Indi was up on her unsteady feet bouncing as Katniss sings along with Peeta.

“Hold me closer tiny dancer  
Count the headlights on the highway  
Lay me down in sheets of linen  
You had a busy day today”

He plays out his set to a wild cheer and Sam helps him with his gear. He sells his EP to a few people and chats away to those who stick around.

Indi is pressed to Katniss hip chewing on a rusk and Katniss watches Winter play. Madge, Prim and Sam had headed off to grab lunch before Sam leaves for his shift at the surf shack.

Winter and Indi are still alive and Katniss is thankful it’s been an easy run so far. Peeta says goodbye to the last of the girls who speak to him and he makes his way to Katniss and the girls, kissing her softly.

“You did well.” She tells him.

He smiles at her and takes baby Indi, kissing the baby’s chubby cheeks and cuddling her.

“Shall we get them home?” Peeta suggests.

The girls are strapped into their car seats and Peeta drives them out of the lot and to the house. He drops off his gear and pulls into the driveway of Cassia and Ben’s. The midday sun is hot and beats down on them and they make a move to get the girls inside and out of the sun.

They play with the girls until it’s lunchtime. Peeta feeds Indi her prepared lunch and Katniss and Winter eat toasted avocado, cheese and chicken sandwiches. Cassia checks in on them and Peeta assures her they are fine and are behaving very well.

They play some more after lunch with a puzzle and baby dolls. Peeta carrying around one of Winter’s dolls made Katniss’ heart swell more and the way he interacted with Winter and Indi as the baby demanding attention as she zoomed around on her belly.

Peeta and Winter settle on the couch with a movie, the two of them cuddled in with each other.

Indi and Katniss settle on the back porch for some quiet time. Indi sits in her walker and zooms around on the fenced off back porch as Katniss tries to write. Indi soon has Katniss’ attention and Katniss sits with the baby, bottle in her left hand feeding Indi and pen in the other as she writes. She sings to Indi the songs she’s written and hums soft tunes to her as she starts to slowly fall asleep.

She closes the back porch door behind her and steps into the living room where Indi’s cradle is where she lowers the baby into the soft bedding and pulls a sheet up to the waist of the baby and admires her sleeping form before she turns around and feels her heart swell. Peeta and Winter are sound asleep, Winter curled into his chest with her fist gripping the soft cotton of his button up shirt.

She’s quick to snap a photo of the pair and sends it off to Cassia telling her everything is fine with a heart eye emoji.

She cleans up lunch, unpacking the baby bag and goes on a self-tour of the house. Checking out family photos and the different rooms around the house. She finds wedding photos, the kids baby photos and normal family stuff. She checks out Zeke’s bedroom, seeing the boys’ interests before checking out Winter’s room again. Indi’s soon to be bedroom was half completed, acting mostly
as half a storage room and half a nursery.

She searches through the drawers filled with baby clothes and tiny onesies, socks and little beanies. She holds out the onesies and imagines something so tiny fitting into the clothing. She folds back up the clothes and shut the drawers. Indiana was spelt out on the wall above a white crib, which looked un-slept in. Obviously the baby hadn’t once slept in the crib since she was born.

She gave up her search and heads back downstairs. She finds the beach bag filled with the girls swimmers and towels and she knew they’d head down to the beach for the afternoon.

She sits at Peeta’s feet with her notebook and writes, letting inspiration carry her away.

When Indi starts to stir, Katniss realises almost two hours have passed. She looks over, and notices Peeta and Winter look as if they are about to wake up and she goes to Indi.

“Hey baby girl.” She coos to her softly, rubbing her tummy and smiling down at the infant. Indi looks up at Katniss with her wide eyes and a soft smile. “Hello pretty girl.”

She lifts Indi up out of the cradle and cuddles her to her chest, softly kissing the top of her head and rocking her gently in her arms. She turns around to see Peeta awake and staring lovingly at the two of them and she knows exactly what he is thinking. She smiles back at him and walks towards him, leaning down to kiss him.

“Sleep well?” She asks softly.

He rubs his eyes and nods. He looks down at Winter who is stirring. Katniss watches the toddler open her wide green eyes and smile at Peeta.

“Hi Winnie. Sleep well?” He asks her. She nods and places her thumb in her mouth as she tightens her grip on Peeta’s shirt. “Do you want to go to the beach?” He asks her. She nods slightly and he kisses her hair. “Ok, we’ll go when you’re ready.”

Katniss lifts Indi to smell her bottom and holds the baby away from her nose.

“You need a change cutie.”

“Want me to do it?” Peeta asks.

“I’ve got it, you got the last one.”

She lays Indi on the ground next to the basket of baby supplies and onto the plastic mat. She unsnaps the sticky tabs of the diaper and peels it back, trying her best to not gag at the smell. She cleans the poop from the baby and ensures she’s clean before placing her in a clean diaper.

Katniss dresses first into her swimmers before Peeta does. They get Winter into her swimmers and rub sunscreen into her skin. Peeta grabs the stroller from the car and they set Indi inside. He carries Winter on his shoulders and Katniss follows him with the stroller.

They lay out a blanket and Katniss sits Indi on the blanket. Winter takes Peeta’s hand, leading him down to the water and she watches as they wade into the water. Peeta never lets go of Winter’s hand and the toddler sticks close to his side.

Katniss has Indi in her swimmers, hat and lathered in sunscreen. She carries her down the sand and to Peeta and Winter who are waist deep, with Winter on his hip. Indi squeals as the water rushes over her feet and the waves crash onto the shore.
Peeta kisses Katniss, catching her off guard and pulls away smiling his signature smile.

They swap kids and Peeta takes the baby while Katniss takes Winter back to the shallow water. They play chase and Katniss lifts Winter with every wave. Peeta takes Indi back to the sand and they sit in the shade with Indi having lost interest in the surf.

“Want to play in the sand?” Katniss asks Winter.

Winter nods and runs up to the sand where her bucket and shovel are waiting. Indi sits propped up on the blanket. Winter plops herself in front of the sand with her bucket and starts digging.

“I’m just going for a swim.” Peeta tells Katniss with a soft kiss.

She watches him from the blanket and admires the muscles of his back, shoulders and arms as he walks away and swims out to sea. She squeezes her thighs together knowing how inappropriate it was to think about him naked when they had two kids to babysit. Indi gurgles from beside Katniss and she digs into the bag for a snack for Indi.

Peeta is back, water dripping down his body and she watches the droplets disappear into his shorts. She bites her lip and hopes he can’t read her mind.

He towels off the water and drops onto the blanket on the other side of Indi.

“I know what you’re thinking Everdeen.”

“And?” She asks.

“You are a dirty girl.” He whispers, leaning towards her to capture her lips. “I think I’ll have to punish you later on.”

“What will you do to me Mellark?”

“You’ll find out.”

She quenches her thighs together again and exhales as he chuckles. He pops a piece of pineapple into his mouth and she can imagine only dirty things.

The afternoon is lazy and relaxing. They watch Winter and occasionally take turns playing with her. She’s pretty independent and prefers to be left alone as she immerses herself in her underwater kingdom and rules the kingdom as a beautiful mermaid who rides a dolphin lead by pink and purple sea turtles.

Indi drinks from a bottle, cuddling into Katniss’ body and fighting off sleep. Peeta and Katniss chat about anything and enjoy their time together.

“Oh what a lovely family.”

They turn to face the elderly couple, the woman having spoken to them.

“Thanks.” Peeta replies.

“Just beautiful. What are their names?”

“That over there is Winter and this is Indiana.”

“Beautiful names for beautiful girls. Are you planning on anymore children?”
“We’re pretty happy at the moment but never say never.” Peeta tells them with a kind smile.

“You two remind me of myself and Alfie when we were younger. We had our children young and always took them to the beach of an afternoon.”

“How many kids do you have?”

“Four. Two boys and two girls.” She says. “And now they’ve gone and had their own families and it’s been marvelous.” Peeta and Katniss smile at the couple. “Enjoy the rest of your afternoon and your beautiful children.”

“We will. You too.”

They walk off and Peeta turns to Katniss with a smirk. “It was easier playing along than telling them the truth.”

“Don’t worry, I did exactly the same thing today.” She tells him with a soft smile. “They really are cute kids.”

He smiles and looks to Winter before turning back to her. Indi is mostly asleep in Katniss’ arms. Katniss doesn’t move to lay her down, keeping the baby in her arms.

“What are you thinking about?”

“Not a lot.” She admits.

“It’s alright if you’re thinking about it.” He tells her. “Cause I certainly am.”

She watches his smile grow wider and she knows how happy it has made him.

“Well, we’re not going to have any now, I’m still too young.” She tells him.

“No, I wasn’t asking. Not for at least five years or so. The van isn’t a very safe baby rearing place.” He says. “But maybe when I finally settle down with a house.” He explains with his eyes shining.

They bathe the girls after dinner, ridding them of the sand that still stuck to their bodies. Peeta is the king of the kids and has Winter laughing hysterically as he tells her silly jokes.

Katniss returns with their towels when she’s sure they’ve had enough water.

“Look at your skin, you’re all wrinkly.” Peeta tells Winter, touching her fingers as he wraps the towel around her body.

“Oh no, I’m going to turn into a fishy.”

“We can’t have that. What will we tell Mummy?” He asks the girl.

She shrugs her shoulders with a cheeky grin and he lifts her from the bath. Katniss takes Winter and Peeta takes Indi.

Katniss helps the toddler into her pyjamas and brushes her hair before braiding it in a single braid down her back. She carries her downstairs to the living room. The curtains and blinds pulled down to trick the girls into thinking it’s dark outside. Indi is in her onesie and on Peeta’s lap,
smelling deliciously of baby powder and lotion.

Katniss prepares Indi’s bottle and leaves Peeta to entertain the girls. He tells them a story with both girls cuddled into his side. He has his audience captured and enchanted and tells them the story of a princess that sounds a lot like Katniss.

She listens from the kitchen as he tells them of the sadness this princess feels, as she just wants to surf and be by the sea. He adds in elements of evil parents and mermaids, bad guys and a prince.

The story ends with the prince surfer saving the princess and they ride off into the sunset with their own little princess babies he names Winter and Indi.

Katniss nurses Indi with her bottle while Peeta takes Winter upstairs to her bed and a promise to sing her to sleep after a story.

Katniss can hear his voice sounding down the stairs and into the living room and she feels an overwhelming sense of calm and happiness. She imagines Peeta as a father, singing his tired or scared children to sleep. Cuddling them until they feel safe and softly kissing their heads as he exits their bedroom as another day comes to a close. She imagines his tenderness with his infant child, cradling them and being overcautious with the way he holds them.

She can just see the smile on his face and the love surging throughout his body.

She pats Indi’s back as she falls asleep mid-feed and once she’s satisfied, she takes Indi upstairs to Cassia and Ben’s room. There’s a Moses Basket on the bed and Katniss lays Indi down inside of the basket, placing a kiss to her forehead and tucking the blanket up to her waist. The baby stirs having been laid down and Katniss rubs her belly and sings to her.

“’Cause she’s a million miles away
Oh, a million shores away
And all I can think about, sailing back
Having you here by my side

Oh, stay here with me, don’t go!
Oh, stay here with me, don’t go!”

Peeta encases her in his arms as she watches Indi fall into a deep slumber. Her kisses her neck softly and leads her out of the bedroom, closing the door behind them softly.

She checks in on Winter who is sound asleep, with a satisfied smile on her face. Katniss hopes she’s dreaming of happy things like mermaids and dolphins. She spies her new bracelet on the bedside table and smiles, touching her own.

Cassia arrives back a couple of hours later. Both girls having remained sound asleep since they had put them down. She thanks them as she tries to hand them money but they decline the money. She wishes them a goodnight as they walk on home.

The air was warm and they bypassed down to the beach. It was clear of people and they swam under the moonlight before they went home. Prim and Madge were up binging on Netflix with Sam passed out beside Madge, his head resting on her waist.

Katniss and Peeta disappear upstairs for a shower and they climb under the covers without any clothes on. They listen to the thunder rumbling and watch the lightning illuminate the room.

They kiss a long sensual kiss and barely share a word.
“After today, I know I don’t want to miss out on that.” He says softly as she cuddles into his chest, her ear resting on his heart.

“On what?” She asks.

“Family. The opportunity to love more than one person. I don’t want to ever miss out on that feeling of unconditional love. I want to create tiny humans who I inspire and show the world to. Tiny humans who I take out on the board and play the guitar at night. Tiny humans who I couldn’t imagine my life without. I want that more than anything in the world.”

She smiles against his chest and listens to his heart. The beating had picked up slightly and she could tell how much this meant to him. How in love he was with the prospect of becoming a father and raising his own.

“Even if I only get one, I’d still be a happy man.”

She shifts to look him in the eye. She smiles at him and presses her lips to his before she pulls away slightly.

“I want to make you a happy man one day.”

He smiles and kisses her once again.

“You already have.” He replies. “You’ll make me an even happier man when we’re together forever. No distance.”

She brushes his curls from his eyes and studies his face for a long while. Images flash right before her eyes and it feels incredibly right.

“I don’t want to be with anyone else, just you. Forever and always.”

He smiles and says, “Land and sea.”
“What do you want for you birthday?” Katniss asks him softly in the quiet of the morning.

He turns to her and smiles. “Nothing.”

“Come on, you must want something?”

He shakes his head and pushes a stray piece of hair behind her ear. “We never celebrated Christmas, birthdays or anything else.”

She scowls, “You’re not making it easy.”

He chuckles and kisses her nose. “The only thing I could possibly want is you. That can be your gift to me.”

“Please, I bet there’s something more exciting than just me?”

He shakes his head with a grin. “Nothing is as exciting as you.”

“You’re no fun. Can’t you at least give me this?”

“No. I don’t want you spending money on me. You’re company is all I want.” He tells her. “I want to spend every possible minute with you. You leave me in 11 days.”

“I know.” She scowls. “And we won’t be able to spend all day everyday together.”

“No, so for my birthday I just want you. Okay?”

“Ok.”

“Thank you.”

She kisses him and pulls back away from him. “So you’re family doesn’t celebrate birthdays or Christmas?”

“Yeah we don’t. It’s not because of religious reasons it’s just we feel presents mean so much more when they’re not expected. I come from a large family and we just accept it. I think these holidays have lost their true meaning and are seen just for their dollar signs. I mean, what’s the fun in buying Christmas presents when you are stressing about how much it costs you? There’s no fun in that.” He explains. “I’d just rather spend these days with family and celebrate our happiness and good health.”

Katniss smiles, “I wish a lot of people were like your family.”

“I’m sure there is.”

“But I’m happy I got you.”

He smiles and kisses her deeply. “I love you so much.”

The girls venture into town after a slow morning. Peeta had a busking commitment during
lunchtime and had left to entertain the Sunday afternoon crowd. The girls thought we’re on the quest to find Peeta a birthday present. Katniss had taken his words into consideration and was getting him more of a departing gift than a birthday gift. She wanted something that reminded him of her while they were apart.

And she just wouldn’t admit it was a birthday gift, despite the part of her that screams she’s a bad girlfriend if she doesn’t get him a present. She wouldn’t be able to sleep at night without exchanging a gift.

And she had the perfect gift in mind.

They entered the music store, one that she had ventured into the day before with Peeta. They still sold old cassettes and records. They had second hand musical instruments and old school speakers, sound systems and players. Peeta had purchased second hand CD’s to give Katniss a bit of a music education and to fill her IPod with songs that he loved and had grown up listening to. They had ranged from thirty years to recently. Songs he felt she had to have and listen to. They were all Australian artists and she knew she was going back home with an almost full IPod having asked him to copy his entire library to her IPod.

On their excursion to the music store she found him eyeing off one of the second hand ukuleles. He had run his finger over the strings of the ukulele and she knew he wished he could add her to his family. He walked away from the ukulele, his shoulders slightly slumped and she knew how much he wanted it. And she understood the appeal of a second hand instrument. One that had been loved by another person before, used and abused. It told a story much like old houses and cars. This uke had a story and Peeta wanted to continue its story. Give it another fun filled ride with lots of memories and stories. To play her until his fingers bled or tears fell down his cheeks.

She understood that side of a musician. They appreciated instruments and whether they were second hand or brand-new. They were made to survive until the end of time. They were resilient and strong. They were made to be played and played, repaired and replayed. They were like a best friend and a companion when nights were lonely and the road was long. When ideas struck and emotions ran high. They were loved dearly and saw many things. They sat through music lessons, gigs and expression.

Musicians would be lonely without their instruments.

A teenage girl with long dreadlocks and tattoos stacking the CD’s into the bins, smiles up at the girls entering.

“Hey girls, how are we?”

“Good.” Katniss replies with a smile.

“Need a hand with anything?” She asks with a smile that is so big Katniss feels it is forced. She knows the girl would much rather be with her friends on a Sunday rather than working.

“Yeah I was interested in one of the ukuleles you have for sale.”

“Of course. Come this way.” She says, leading them to the wall of ukuleles. “For yourself or someone else?”

“For my boyfriend. It’s his birthday this week and I know how much he wanted to add a ukulele to his collection.”

Katniss pays for the ukulele, a beautiful solid mahogany baritone designed uke with a beautiful sunset design on the front of the uke. One that is usually expensive. This one was a rare find and if
she had let it go, she would have missed out.

It’s wrapped and bagged and the girls leave the store. Peeta is set up down the corner from Cashmere, Annie and Johanna’s store. They drop the uke into the store while they watch Peeta busk. He has drawn a crowd like he usually does and Katniss is hypnotized like she always is.

“See you at the house.” She tells him in between his songs and he waves them goodbye.

Katniss wakes at dawn. Peeta is sound asleep and she feels desire pooling in her belly. Peeta is pressed up beside her, his evidence of arousal pressed up against her hip. She rolls onto her side and snakes her hand down the panes of his bare waist. She grips him and hears him moan in his sleep. He grows harder in her hand and she watches him as he stirs.

“Katniss.” Peeta mumbles, grabbing her wrist to stop her.

“Hmm?”

“Do you feel alright?” He asks her.

She stares into his eyes confused. “Yes. I’m very turned on.”

“No not that, I feel funny.”

“Because of me?” She asks, letting him go. He shakes his head. “Good, cause the last time a boy said he felt funny while I was giving him a hand job he told me he was gay.”

Peeta chuckles for a second before wincing. She turns the side table lamp on and notices a very green looking Peeta.

“What’s wrong?” She asks him.

“I don’t know. I don’t feel good.” He tells her.

She touches his forehead and feels how warm he is.

“Where do you feel sick?” She asks him.

“I’m shaking so much. And my stomach hurts.”

“You have a fever.” She tells him softly. “Do you feel nauseated?” He shakes his head. “Well, if I’m correct you have a stomach bug. We’ll just wait it out all right. Want me to get you anything?”

“Some more blankets.”

She nods and kisses his forehead.

She finds herself some clothes, climbing into them before finding him some pyjamas from his bag and throws the blanket over his body. “Sit up for a sec, we’ll get you in some clothes.”

She helps him to the edge of the bed, steadying him as he sways slightly.

“Steady there.” She tells him, gripping his elbows.

He looks terrible already and she feels sorry for him. She puts him into a shirt, some boxers and
slides a pair of his pyjamas pants on. She lays him back on the mattress and pulls the sheet over his body. She finds the duvet they had kicked off a few nights ago and tucks it around his body.

He shivers under the blankets and she kisses his sweaty forehead. She comes back with a washer to wipe away the sweat from his forehead and goes downstairs to get him some fluids for when he wakes.

And as she turns off the bathroom light she feels slight stomach cramps and a headache forming right behind her eyes. She squeezes her eyes closed for a second and a feeling of nausea washes over her. She grips her stomach, standing still wishing for the feeling to go away.

And when it does she walks slowly down to Prim’s bedroom and falls down beside her.

“Prim. Prim.”

“What?”

“Peeta and I are both sick.”

“From what?”

“I think we’ve got food poisoning.”

She sits up, rubbing her eyes and turning the lamp on.

“Where do you feel sick?”

“I have a headache. Pains in my stomach. I’m nauseated.” She tells her sister. “And Peeta has the shakes and a stomach ache but not nausea.”

Prim touches her forehead and frowns.

“You’re warm as well. Get back down to bed. The best thing to do is try and sleep. See how you feel when you wake.”

Katniss nods and gets up off the bed and back to her room. She lies down on the bed and realises Peeta is not there.

“Peeta?” She calls and can hear him in the bathroom. “You all right in there?”

She finds him hunched over the toilet, hugging it with his head inside the bowl. She rubs his back gently and sits down behind him.

She offers him a glass of water when he sits away from the bowl.

“Small sips.” She reminds him and grabs a wet washer to clean his face. She rinses it before dabbing his forehead.

“You don’t look too good either.”

“I think our fish tacos are agreeing with us.”

“Food poisoning?” He asks and she nods.

They manage to climb back into bed before the sun starts to rise and they cuddle each other as they bundle the blankets over their fever stricken bodies.
She’s woken to her stomach and is out of the bed as quick as she can to make it to the toilet. The contents of her stomach are emptied into the bowl and she waits, feeling as if she’ll throw up again.

She feels a hand on her back and her hair is pulled away from her face.

“So the two lovers are sick?” She hears Madge say from behind her. “That’s why I skipped out on the fish tacos.”

Her stomach lurches again at the mention of fish tacos and she empties whatever else is still in her stomach.

“Sam and Prim have gone to get you guys some supplies. I called Mom and said you were sick. She offered to come and take care of you but I said we had it. We’re not going to the Coast today.”

Katniss manages to sit back on her ankles and face Madge. Madge cleans away her face like she had done for Peeta earlier. A glass of water is handed to her and Katniss takes small sips.

“You and Prim should go. Peeta and I will be fine. Get out of the house cause I’m sure you don’t want to put up with us.”

“We were looking for an excuse to not go.” Madge tells her, braiding her hair again.

“Go. Please. Its just food poisoning. It should pass in a couple of days.”

Madge secures the braid in an elastic and rinses the washer.

“You feel better?” Madge asks, pressing the washer to Katniss’ face.

“No.”

“Go back to bed. I’ve got you guys some Panadol to hopefully relieve the body aches.”

Peeta is stirring when Katniss hits the mattress. He peaks one of his eyes open to look at Katniss and touches her cheek.

Madge gives them Panadol and they wash it down with water. Madge gives them half a cup of ginger tea each and they drink it slowly in hopes of relieving their upset stomachs. Sleep pulls them back under.

Peeta’s body is no longer beside hers when she wakes later on. It’s just after 12 and she feels worse.

“Peeta?” She calls and notices the bathroom door closed. She gets up slowly from the mattress and moves to the door, knocking. “Are you alright?”

“My bowels are betraying me.” He calls back. “Please don’t come in.”

“Do you need anything?”

“A new digestive system.”

She smiles. “I’ll see what I can do.”

Prim enters the room with a tray of supplies. “We’re about to head off. You sure you two will be fine?”
“We’re taking River with us. Sam is close by if you need him. Remember to remain hydrated, lots of water or ginger tea. There’s plenty of aspirin and when you’re fever breaks try and take a shower, you’ll feel better. And strip the bed. Hopefully it’s just a 24 hour thing.”

Katniss nods at her sister and Prim feels her forehead.

“You’re still hot. Try and sleep. That’s really the only thing you can do until the virus is out of your system.”

Katniss nods and let’s Prim guide her to the bed. Prim gives her a cup of ginger tea, more aspirin and Pepto Bismol.

She tells her to take care of each other and ease their way back into eating slowly. A supply of food is downstairs as is everything else.

She catches Prim studying her, eyeing her every few seconds.

“What’s wrong?”

“You sure it’s just food poisoning?”

“Yes.” Katniss tells her.

“You sure?”

“Prim, its food poisoning, nothing else.” She says through gritted teeth.

Peeta comes out of the bathroom a little while later and Prim gives him some Pepto Bismol, aspirin and ginger tea.

She tucks them into bed, leaving them with a soft goodbye.

The rest of the day they take turns emptying their stomachs or bowels. They take care of each other, reminding each other to rehydrate or take more aspirin. They drink their ginger tea and sleep.

She ignores her phone ringing as she tries to sleep and would deal with the caller later.

Their fever breaks just before midnight and they manage the strength to strip the sweat soaked sheets and their clothes. They shower under warm water, feeling a lot better and make the bed terribly. They drink more water and snack on crackers. She returns her mother’s phone call.

“You feeling better?”

“Yeah, my fever has broken. My stomach still feels a bit iffy though.”

“Just rest honey.” Her mother tells her. “Are you sure you don’t want me there?”

“I’ll be fine. Its just food poisoning.” She says. “I’m feeling sleepy now, I’m going to go back to bed.”

“Just call if anything is wrong. We’ll be down in a heartbeat.”

“I know. Night Mom.”
Katniss sets her phone down and smiles at Peeta who is catching up on everything he’s missed on his phone.

Katniss climbs out of bed and comes back into the bedroom with his uke behind her back.

“I got you a present.” She tells him.

He frowns at her. “I told you I didn’t want one.”

“I know but it’s not a birthday present and it’s unexpected.” She tells him. “Here.”

She hands him the wrapped ukulele and he unwraps the paper and opens up the box the uke is in.

She watches him smile as he takes the ukulele out of the box.

“You like it?”

“I love it.” He tells her. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I knew how much you liked this one because your eyes lit up.”

He smiles and kisses her deeply. He pulls her down beside him and knocks the box and paper off the bed as he plays around with the uke.

She’s woken to the birds outside the cracked window. Peeta had opened it before they fell asleep last night. Their fever broken and the air became stuffy in the room. Peeta is sound asleep beside her and she watches him sleep. She feels better this morning and knows they have mostly recovered. She sips her water and heads to the bathroom. She studies her appearance in the mirror and notices how much livelier she looks. She’s not as green either. Her stomach isn’t doing flip-flops and it’s calm.

She retreats downstairs and makes herself a cup of ginger tea. She eats a banana and enjoys the warmth of the sun.

Peeta finds her a little while later, he cuddles into her body and they enjoy the morning sun.

“My family invited us to dinner tomorrow night.” He tells her. “They wanted to see you before you go back home.”

She feels her insides fill with warmth and she smiles at him.

“And because it’s your birthday right?”

He nods and kisses her cheek. “Right but I think they mostly want to see you.”

“Are we going to stay there?”

“I thought we could drive back here and watch the sunrise together because we only have a few more more together before you leave.”

“I’d like that.” She tells him. “But I will be back. I promise you that.”

“What are we having for dinner tomorrow?”
“There’s a really lovely pub about twenty minutes from home. Good food and environment. They usually have live music on Thursday nights. It’s a very family friendly place.”

“Sounds great.”

The two of them spend the day resting and lazing around. They binge watch Netflix and don’t overexert themselves. Her mother checks in and Katniss tells her she is feeling much better and that she’s just tired. Her mother tells her to rest and keep replenishing fluids.

She puts the sheets in the washing machine to wash and does a load of their clothes once the sheets have finished. Peeta helps her set the sheets on the line outside to catch the afternoon sun.

Sam drops by to visit them, a request from Madge to really make sure they are fine.

“Tell her to stop her worrying. She just thinks I’m lying to my parents so they won’t come down here. We’re fine.”

“I’ll tell her that.” He says smiling. “So who’s up for some fish tacos?”

Katniss and Peeta feel their stomachs drop and feel nauseated as Sam chuckles to himself.

“I’m just kidding but if you’re going to chuck, I’d appreciate it if you did in the toilet or something.”

“You’re a dickhead.” Peeta chastises.

“You still keep me around.” Sam reminds him, shrugging his shoulders. “You guys want anything special for dinner?”

“We’re fine.”

“Ok. I’ll tell Madge you two are still alive and that fish tacos are off the menu indefinitely for the foreseeable future. Catch ya’s.”

He heads off down to the beach to follow the coast home.

Peeta pulls out his ukulele to practice and play around while Katniss prepares them a simple dinner of chicken and rice. They needed to regain their strength and eat something hearty.

She moves to the tune he plays and listens to him sing along to the tunes of songs played with ukuleles.

“Lady, running down to the riptide
Taken away to the dark side
I wanna be your left hand man
I love you when you’re singing that song and
I got a lump in my throat ‘cause
You’re going sing the words wrong”

He smiles at her and nods his head for her to join him. She smiles and joins him.

“I just wanna, I just wanna know
If you’re gonna, if you’re gonna stay
I just gotta, I just gotta know
I can’t have it, I can’t have it any other way
I swear she’s destined for the screen
Closest thing to Michelle Pfeiffer that you’ve ever seen, oh”

She kisses him softly and is grateful he’s enjoying his present.

They eat dinner on the back porch as the sun starts to set and listen to the waves. They walk along the beach after dinner, his arm around her shoulder and they enjoy the feel of the sea breeze on their faces.

They retreat inside, feeling tired and tidy up the house before they move upstairs to shower and head to bed. Her body aches and she’s exhausted.

They shower together and she puts on one of his shirts, he leaves her to brush her teeth and comes back with his uke and a huge grin on his face.

“What’s wrong?” She asks him as she spits the toothpaste into the sink.

He begins to strum the strings of the uke.

“You lose your heart,
I'll lose mine,
show me your love and I'll feel fine.
We'll stay close and never part,
I'll always love you, cross my heart.”

“Show me an L.
Show me an O.
Show me a V,
And finish with an E.
L.O.V.E. I love you and you love me.
L.O.V.E. that's the way it's meant to be.
L.O.V.E. I love you and you love me.
L.O.V.E. I love you and you love me.
L.O.V.E.
Love”

“Where on earth did you get that song from?” She asks him with a smile that has spread across her face. His song was infectiously cute, dorky and adorable.

“A kids television show I used to watch as a kid.”

“And what was this show called?”

“Hi-5.” He tells her. “It was very education. Be glad I remembered this song.” He tells her with his 100-watt smile.

“Come here.”

She kisses his deeply, thanking him for the adorable kids song. She pulls away from him and smiles. “Now clean your teeth Mister Mellark.”

“That makes me feel old.” He tells her.

“Well you’re an old soul.” She tells him, pinching his boxer-clad butt. “And if you have any other cute songs then feel free to play for me because there’ll be no sex tonight.”
He smiles. “I’ll think of something.”

She climbs into bed, sliding into the middle of the queen bed and waits for him to join her.

He turns the lights out on his way and slides in beside her, leaning up against the headboard with his uke on his lap.

“Show us what you’ve got.” She tells him softly.

He plucks the strings of his uke and sings her snippets of cheesy love songs he’s put to the tune of the ukulele. She smiles at his enthusiasm and knows its money well spent, even if he doesn’t properly learn and just plays her cheesy love songs.

“This next one isn’t cheesy.” He tells her.

“I don’t mind.”

“I’m trying to beat my misery
I don't want to go across the sea
And if I could take you everywhere
There'd be no cause for my despair

And I know we won't touch for months
And your smell will evade me
But our love could survive a war
Without the slightest sore
And I know I can't taste your skin
With an ocean between us
But our love is a dinosaur, hear it rawr
Hear it rawr”

She feels the tears prickle her eyes and Peeta knows instantly he chose the wrong song.

“I’m so sorry.” He apologises quickly, his smile fading as he brings her to his chest. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to make you upset.”

He’s head is between her thighs the next morning. She grips his curly locks between her fingers as she comes to it and Peeta pushes her legs back, spreading them further apart.

She moans at his touch and is grateful for this. The few days of not having sex, she had truly missed, as had he.

She comes screaming his name and sinks into the pillows as he collapses on her chest. He presses gentle kisses to her ribcage and is spent.

“Thank you.” She tells him, drawing him towards her to kiss him. “Happy birthday.”

He smiles at her and slides up her body to draw her to his chest. “I couldn’t imagine spending my birthday any other way.”

She kisses him deeply and passionately and brings her hands to his unruly curls.

“What would you like for breakfast?” She asks him.
“I’ve already had what I wanted.” He tells her with a grin.

She fake scowls and finds herself blushing. “That’s not a very sufficient breakfast.”

“It’ll get me through the day.” He smirks.

Her phone rings and she lets out a groan.

“It’s too early.” She mumbles into his neck.

He chuckles and leans over her to grab her phone.

“It’s your mother.” He tells her, handing her the phone.

She touches the screen answering the call. “Hi Mom.”

“Hi Katniss. How are you feeling?” She asks.

“Better, much better.” She tells her mother and feels Peeta’s hands trail down her stomach, over her hip and down her thigh. “I think it was just a 24 hour bug.”

“Good. That’s good. Just make sure you’re replenishing your fluids and such. Don’t go too hard too fast.” Her mother explains.

Peeta’s fingers find her centre and Katniss gulps a breath. “I will Mom.” She tells her, coughing.

“Ok, well we’ll be home tomorrow. The girls will be making their way back this afternoon. Just be safe and remember our rules.”

“Yes Mom. I’ve got to go. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Will do. Have a nice day dear.”

She ends the call and throws her phone down beside her and rolls into the mattress. “You’ll get me into trouble one day.”

He smiles and kisses her lips.

They drive up the coast that afternoon. Music plays through the speakers and the fresh air makes her feel more alive.

It had been a lazy day. She made him a breakfast of French toast and they ate that on the back porch with coffee. She hadn’t realised how much she missed coffee and sex.

And she had gotten both her fixes today.

They went for a surf and went into town to meet his friends for lunch. None of them exchanged gifts, understanding his no gift thing.

They walked back to the house and changed their clothes before climbing in his van. He played her Australian classics and she kept her hand on his thigh as they went to the Sunshine Coast. They had passed the girls on the way.

They arrived at his parent’s house just after 5. They had just closed the bakery for the day and his father met the couple out the front of the house.

“Happy birthday son.”
“Thanks Dad.”

“And I hope Katniss has been treating you well?” He asks.

“Dad, she’s been treating me like a king. We survived a bout of food poisoning together and she bought me a ukulele.”

“She’s a keeper.”

“She sure is.” Peeta agrees, wrapping his arm around her shoulders. “She’s one in a billion.”

“Come on in.”

His mother greets them, hugging her son before retreating upstairs to get changed and ready. Peeta and his father sit on the back porch as Katniss freshens up. Applying some makeup, fishtail braiding her hair and changing her clothes. Peeta walks into the bathroom, trapping her between the sink and his body and he smirks at her as he kisses her neck and brings his hands down the front of her waist and trailing them lower.

“What do you think you’re doing?” She asks him.

“You’re just so beautiful.” He tells her, kissing his way along her collarbone.

She melds into his body and moans softly, turning her head towards the partly open bathroom door and the voices sounding down from the hallway.

“You’re parents are just down the hallway.” She mumbles.

“I know. I just wanted to show you how much I love you.”

“You can show me that when we get home tonight.” She tells him, turning to meet his lips. Capturing them in a kiss as he squeezes one of her breasts, pinching her nipple through her clothing.

“You kids ready to go?” They hear his father say from outside the door.

“Yeah, we’ll be a minute.” Peeta tells his father.

Peeta kisses her neck once more, slightly sucking on the skin before he let’s her go. Dropping his jeans and pulling on a pair of shorts. He changes his shirt and slips his feet into his flip-flops.

“Am I too dressed up?” She asks him.

“No, not at all. You know how casual I am.”

She nodded and smiled at him as he dropped a kiss to her lips.

They followed his parents and grandparents to the pub. He angled parked out the front of the pub and they headed into the pub. It was busy for a Thursday evening, people enjoying a drink or dinner in celebration of the almost-end of the working week.

The rest of his family were already inside, seated with a drink in front of them. Lily was in Peeta’s arms the minute she caught sight of him, her arms wrapped tightly around his neck.

“Happy birthday Peety.”
“Thank you sweetie.” He tells her, kissing her rosy cheeks.

She lets go of her tight grip and smiles at Katniss.

“Hi Lil.”

“Hi Katniss.”

“You look beautiful tonight.”

“Thank you.”

Lily greets her Nan and Pop and her great Nanna and Poppy.

Peeta greets his brothers and sister-in-laws and kisses his nephew’s chubby cheeks. His family embraces Katniss and they sit down at the table. Lily sitting on Katniss’ lap as she colours.

“So one week left.” His mother says.

“One week.” Katniss sighs and frowns. “I really don’t want to leave.”

“We know you don’t sweetie.” His father speaks. “But if you don’t get on the plane, Peeta will definitely take care of you.”

“I know he will.” Katniss replies, touching his cheek softly and smiling at him.

Lily touches Katniss’ necklace as the conversation carries on.

“This is pretty.” Lily says holding the dog tags.

“You gave it to me. He has the exact same one as well.”

Lily smiles and looks over at Peeta neck where the chain peaks out of his shirt.

“You two are in love?”

Katniss nods at Lily. “We are.”

“Will you two have a baby?”

“I don’t know Lil, I have to go back home very soon.”

“Well, if you don’t go will you?”

“Possibly in the future.”

Lily smiles and leans towards Katniss ear to whisper. “I think you should marry him.”

“You’ll have to talk to him about that.”

Lily smiles, “I will.”

Dinner is served and they devour their meals. Katniss and Peeta drinking water, their stomachs still not stable enough of any alcoholic beverages and Peeta needed to have a 0.00 blood alcohol limit due to his licence type.

“Have you enjoyed your trip?” Eliza asks Katniss after they finish their meals.
“I have. It’s been the best trip I’ve ever been on. I’ve made so many memories and new friends. I have gained the perspective I was searching. I also know what I want to do in my life now.”

Eliza smiles at Katniss. “That’s good, finding out what you want to do at this age. I hope you’ll follow your dreams.”

“I will. I promise. Even if I have to jump a few hurdles.”

“Girly, if you haven’t jumped a few hurdles along the way than the dream was way too easy.”

Peeta blows out his candles with the help of Lily. The caramel mud cake is beautiful and his father had made it that afternoon.

Lily gives Peeta a birthday present, insisting that Peeta needed something and one that she picked out herself.

It’s a new hat, one to replace his very worn hat he wears now.

“Lily, I love it. Thank you.”

“Can I have your old one then?” She asks, pointing to his hat he wears.

“Of course you can. It’s a bit big for you.”

“I’ll grow into it.” She beams and takes his old hat off his head and places it on her head, the hat falling down over her eyes.

“Yes you will my Lil.”

She looks like a mini Peeta and Katniss takes a photo of the two of them together. Harry is thrown to his lap and she takes another photo of Peeta and his niece and nephew. Her heart beats faster inside of her chest and she’s fast to set the photo as her screensaver.

His family is sure to take photos of the couple together. They pose against the wall of the beer garden and soon Peeta pulls her attention to him.

“Hey.” He speaks softly, touching her chin. “I’m really glad you’re here with me.”

“Me too.” She replies softly and kisses his lips.

They forget the cameras and his family as they embrace each other. Lily crashes into their bodies and Peeta lifts his niece up. Katniss touches Lily’s nose and smiles at her.

She embraces his family as they stand out the front of the pub. They hug her, saying goodbye to her.

“You better come back.” Jacinta says as she lets Katniss go.

“I will.”

His father produces a small gift bag.

“You didn’t have to get me anything.”

“I know but we had to.” He tells her.

She looks into the gift bag and pulls out the square jewellery box. She opens the lid and sees a
solid silver bangle inside with a compass engraved on the outside.

“Thank you.”

“Read the inside.” His father tells her.

She reads the inscription.

*Go confidently in the direction of your dreams.*

“Peeta’s told us about your family. We want you to know that we believe in you and we want to see you succeed. Screw what anyone says Katniss. Show confidence and never forget who you are and what you want in life. We’ll be here every step of the way.”

“Thank you.”

Peeta drives them home. They arrive after 2am and quietly sneak into the house. She wears the bangle and feels her heart begin to ache.

She had tried to not let it get to her but now in her final week, the emotions were starting to build up and she was running out of room in her body to hold in all the emotions.

They change out of their dinner clothes and into more comfortable clothes and lie out a blanket on the back porch. Madge and Prim were sound asleep upstairs, while Peeta and Katniss plan to lie under the stars and watch the sunrise together.

But the tears start to fall from her eyes hard and fast and she knows it’s going to take Peeta all he can to stop her from crying.

He comforts her, soothing her as best he can. Her body is wracked with sobs and her body shakes against his.

“I’m so sorry for crying on your birthday.” She says between sobs.

“Don’t apologise Katniss. This has been the best birthday ever.” He whispers into her hair. “Remember I love you so much and our separation won’t be forever.”

When the tears have stopped falling they undress each other silently and he slides into her.

She needed to feel more. Feel as this was real and the promise of them being together soon in the future.

He kisses her forehead after they fall apart and kisses her deeply.

“This will be real very soon my love.”
She stares at the bangle on her wrist and twists it. She fingers the compass and smiles to herself.

*Go confidently in the direction of your dreams.*

It’s only Katniss’ mother and father who had come to Byron Bay. Michelle and Paul would be down for the weekend with Michelle and Paul tied up with patients until Saturday afternoon.

“Katniss?” Her mother says, interrupting her daydreaming.

“What?”

Her mother sighs, “We were wondering what your plans were for the last few days.”

Peeta had made plans for them for the final few days. Everyday was filled with some activity or gathering. Everyday was booked with things for them to do and she was grateful because she didn’t want to spend days with her parents while Peeta was in town. She wanted to spend every possible minute with her lover before the sea separated them.

“Oh, um, we were going to circus tomorrow night. There’s going to be a barbeque on Sunday afternoon and I’m not sure about the remainder of the time.” Katniss tells her.

“And she’s got her gig tonight.” Prim reminds her mother.

“Right. Well seems like you kids have it all planned out.”

“We just want to make our final days count.” Prim adds with a smile.

“Well we won’t cramp your style.” Their father adds. “Enjoy your time kiddos.”

Katniss’ mind wandered to Peeta and their departing kiss this morning. She was running off only a couple of hours of sleep as they watched the sunrise together and headed down to the beach for a swim before coupling on the back porch and going to bed as the sun started to rise.

Madge woke them up, telling them her parents were on their way and for the last time changed the sheets of the bed, cleaned the bathroom and cleared the bedroom of their things. He kissed her in the middle of the room as a way to tie up the memories associated with this room. They held each other until the last possible moment and broke away.

“I’ll miss this room.” He admits. “We had a lot of fun in this room.”

“We really did. Our first time was in here.”

He had smiled his perfect smile and left her with a departing kiss as he climbed into his van and drove away. She felt an array of emotions bubbling inside of her and made a promise to herself that she’ll try to keep them at bay.

She disappeared upstairs to her shared room with Prim and laid down with River. She put her headphones on and fell asleep listening to music.

Her father shook her awake when it was late afternoon and asked if she wanted to go out to surf.
She had taken him up on the offer and they surfed together. She tried to forget her troubles and really enjoy herself.

They had decided on dinner at the Treehouse before her gig and it’d be a smaller gathering with just the four Everdeen’s, Madge and Sam. Peeta had skipped out on this one but met her later that night.

“Now, for one last time before she heads back home, Katniss Everdeen everybody.” Thresh introduces Katniss to a loud applause from the audience.

Katniss steps up to the stage, putting her guitar on and smiling at everyone.

“Hi everyone, like Thresh said, this is my last gig here in Australia before I fly back home next Thursday. Thank you for your warm reception and thank you all for making Byron Bay so wonderful. It’s cheered me up. Made me slow down and has chilled me right out. I’ve never met such lovely people before and you have all changed my way of seeing the world. I thank you all so much.”

She begins her set with one of her originals and throws in a couple of covers. She can’t help but notice the way her parents smile at her from their seats but she knows this is it. There’s no more discussing this life. She’ll be accepting one of her college offers and that will be it. No more surfing, music or travelling. No more time alone and self-discovery.

The next three years will be dedicated to study, science and college.

Then she’ll be off to medical school and then starting her life as an intern, climbing the ranks and working long, crappy shifts and that will begin her working life. She’ll rarely have time for music, surfing or travelling until she is renowned and can afford to travel and have a near empty schedule, filling it with those patients she chooses and travelling for most of the year.

Her bangle clangs against the front of her guitar and she remembers;

*Go confidently in the direction of your dreams.*

While she sings she adds up how much money she has in her savings. If that will cover her plane ticket back here to Australia and enough for a van of her own. She adds up how much extra it’ll cost to ship over her things; the things that mean the most to her. She makes a mental note of all the things she needs to do between now and when she’s back on Australian soil.

Back to her busker and her lover.

She can do this and she doesn’t care if her parents put their foot down.

It’s time for her to live.

She smiles at the crowd as she plays out the final chords of Only Love. It was her go to gig song. She never passed the opportunity to play one of Ben Howard’s songs and Only Love always put her in a good mood.

“All right, I’m going to slow this down quite a little bit just before I take a little break. This is a song I’ve been working on for a little while now. I don’t think it’s nearly complete but I wanted to share it with you all before I left your beautiful country. Many of your own artists have influenced my songwriting in the last two months and I’ve taken a slightly different direction to my usual style. This is called, *I’d go anywhere with you*, and it’s dedicated to all of you. Thank you for your beautiful country.”
“I know you’re wandering,
I’m sure you must be scared
Our world stopped turning,
The clock don’t seem to care
Don’t give up, don’t back out of me
Enough’s enough, if we stay we never leave”

She feels the tears well in her eyes and she tries her best to push the emotions away until she finishes the next couple of minutes. She avoids eye contact with her family and focuses on the table in front of her of backpackers who she’s captured since she started playing.

A lone tear slide down her cheek and she continues playing as she tries to not think about Peeta and the emotions of the song start to drown her.

“You know I’d go with you anywhere,
Just get me out of here
You know I’d go with you anywhere,
You got to get me out of here.
You know that even if we lose it all,
We had something beautiful, something beautiful
You know I’d go with you anywhere,
So just get me out of here, ye-yeah”

She finishes the song without her voice cracking and the audience response is huge. They holler and cheer for her and she quickly wipes away the tears.

“Thank you. We’ll take a ten minute break and I’ll be back.” She tells them all, her voice cracking as she speaks into the mike.

Prim is at her side the second her guitar has been sat down and leads her outside, out of view from her family. Katniss wipes the tears away and takes the drink her sister has offered her and breathes in the fresh air.

“Do you think they noticed?”

“No.” Prim tells her, smiling at her. “You were amazing.”

Katniss sips her water and inhales a few deep breaths, trying to quell the emotions that are building inside of her.

She feels a steady hand on her back and a familiar warmth comes across her body. She turns her head and sees Peeta standing there.

“You’re not supposed to be here.” She tells him as she wraps her arms around his neck.

“I know but I couldn’t skip your last gig.”

“Where have you been sitting?”

“Out here. I’m with Jo, Haymitch and Effie. They wanted to see your last gig.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re doing great. Almost had Haymitch in tears with the last song.”

“I almost let my emotions get the best of me.”
“True artists do. It’s okay to let your guard down, especially to your audience. You connect with them so much more.”

“I just hope my parents don’t question the song choices from the set.”

“They’ll forget. I’m sure you’ve played plenty of songs like this?” She nods. “So it’s nothing different.”

She stays in his arms for as long as she can. She lets him cheer her up and inhales his beachy smell.

“Time to get back up there, babe.” He whispers in her ear, placing a kiss just below her ear. “I’ll be watching.”

She kisses him softly on the lips and Prim leads her back into the restaurant. She turns to look out the doors to where Peeta is and amongst the sea of people he is lost. She takes a long sip of her water and places her guitar back on and smiles at her audience.

Peeta’s arms engulf her later that evening. She played her gig longer than she planned and threw in some songs that she hadn’t prepared but ones that her and Peeta had sung together in the last seven weeks. The audience had given her a wonderful sendoff and she thanked them for their kindness.

She was close to breaking point as she packed up her instrument and asked to go home right away. She didn’t say goodnight to her parents and shut herself upstairs in her room.

She dialed Peeta’s number and the minute he connected the call she was sobbing into the receiver. He told her to meet him after midnight down at the beach.

He held her tightly as she began crying in his neck.

He held her like he always did and soothed her, whispered things to her and never let her go.

Together they lay on the sand and looked up at the stars together. He still had a protective arm around her and her sobbing started to subside.

“Everything is starting to get too much for me.”

“I know it is.” He replies softly, kissing her temple. “And I wish it wasn’t. I wish the remainder of this trip was easy on you.” She nods and tightens her grip on his shirt. “Tell me one thing though, have you found some perspective in this time alone?”

She nods against his chest. “I have. I have learnt so much about myself, life and how I want to live in this beautiful world.”

“And will you reciprocate and follow through?”

“I hope so.”

“Good because you are becoming your true self and I’ve loved the progression. I’ve noticed it in the few short weeks we’ve spent together. And from that first night we hung out to now, you seem like your true self and I think I love you even more than the first night. I mean, I fall in love
with you more and more each day. You’re my true love.”

She kisses his neck and settles back in beside him, feeling her cheeks dampen with tears that stream down her face. The moon is full and the stars are vivid. The Wreck, a popular surf spot shines under the night sky.

”Tell me about the wreck?” She asks him as her tears continuing to fall down her cheeks.

He squeezes her tighter to his body and begins to tell her about The Wreck and old legends of Byron Bay.

“Get your arse up we’re going to the Jai’s.” Prim tells her the next morning, almost kicking her out of bed.

“I just want to sleep.”

“You wouldn’t be so tired if you didn’t sneak out and come back after 3am.” Prim scolds, pulling at her blanket. “You can sleep when you’re dead.”

“Thanks.” Katniss grumbles

Sam drives them to Mr and Mrs Odair’s house. They were having a small gathering where they were having a couple of drinks and an escape from the parental figures. Finnick and Annie were joining them, Annie on maternity leave and counting down the final days until Baby boy Odair arrived. Zoe, Finnick and Jai’s sister was also joining them with a few of her friends.

Sam explained to them that they always seemed to hang out at the Odair’s house, it was designed to give them the privacy and space. They always seemed to have a good time and a lot of memories had been made there. It was a common regrouping place and Mr and Mrs Odair didn’t mind the group of them that migrated to their house. They were always the first to offer.

A few cars were already out the front of the house and the four of them head on inside. Peeta was due to join them after a midmorning busk in the street. It was a beautiful day with the sun shining and the sky was a beautiful blue. Katniss stared longer at the sky, letting the sun hit her skin and she froze the moment, locking it inside of her memory to access when days were cloudy, the sky was dull and the sun had disappeared. On days when she felt sad and lonely and counted down the days until Peeta and her were back together.

They headed down to the double-storied shed, set up as the kids hangout space with couches, a ping pong table, sound system and fridge stocked with food and drinks and a small bathroom. A TV was mounted to the wall and Jai and Zoe’s boyfriend versed each other in a game of Call of Duty. Upstairs housed open space with mattresses and space for when they had friends over.

Music was already playing from the speakers, a mixed playlist and she took the soda from Madge as they were introduced to Zoe’s Uni friends and they greeted Zoe’s boyfriend again, having met him prior at Finnick and Annie’s wedding. He sang as a reggae singer part time and was undertaking an early childhood and primary education degree at Uni, already halfway through his course. Zoe was studying nursing, hoping to eventually specialize as a midwife or NICU nurse.

Annie and Finnick arrived, Annie glowing more than when they had last seen her. Her belly had dropped and Katniss could tell she’d have her baby boy any day now.

“You have four days mister.” Katniss tells Annie’s very pregnant belly, running her hand over the
“He’s gotten his eviction notice already. He has until the first week of November.”

“You’ll go before than.” Katniss tells her. “I say you’ll have him by next Friday at the latest. You’re going to become a Mom.”

“I know.” She smiles and touches her stomach. “I can’t wait.”

Zoe greets her sister-in-law, gushing over her expectant nephew and tells the baby she’s got a timer on him too.

The gathering is relaxing and Katniss enjoys the company, laughing and speaking to everyone. She versus Finnick in a game of table tennis.

“You’ve got a good eye, Everdeen.”

She turns to see Peeta in the doorway, a smug look on his face, and she drops her paddle and jumps into his arms, wrapping her legs around his waist and kissing him.

“Hey, you’re corrupting my son.” They hear Finnick exclaim behind them with a chuckle in his tone.

“Oh leave them alone Finnick.” Annie tells her husband. “That’s how we got our son.”

Katniss giggles against Peeta’s mouth and he sets her down on the ground, pressing his lips to hers quickly before they join the group.

Katniss takes a good moment to remember the scene and captures plenty of pictures for later.

Peeta takes her hand, leading her out of the shed and down the yard.

“Where are we going?” She asks him.

“You’ll see. Not too far to go now.”

She grips his hand tighter and lets him lead her.

She hears the sound of running water and a river comes into view. She smiles at him and can see the thin sheen of sweat on his forehead.

“Take off your clothes.” He whispers in her ear as he finds the buttons of his worn jeans.

It’s highly risky skinny-dipping in the middle of the day but she doesn’t care. She just wants him.

“Just keep an eye out for snakes.” He tells her as he hangs his shirt over a fallen branch.

“You mean like the real thing or…” She asks slipping the straps of her bra off her shoulders.

“Both.” He winks at her and she giggles, dropping her panties and laying them over her discarded clothes.

They wade into the waist deep river and Peeta ducks underneath the water to wet the rest of his body. He comes back up beside her and pulls her body flush against his.

She locks her hands behind his neck and holds him there as they share a long kiss under the shade of the trees lining the riverbank, protected from the sun and everyone else. She feels as if they are
in their own little bubble and it’s just the two of them in the whole entire world.

She likes that idea, just the two of them and smiles as she kisses him. He runs his hands down her back, to rest of her hips and she keens against his body.

She’d really like if it was just the two of them.

The circus was Madge’s idea. It was the last night for the circus and she had a soft spot for circuses. Katniss can count on two hands how many times Madge has dragged her to see the circus when they were back home. Madge loved the music, the entertainment and the atmosphere. And she always had a wide smile on her face when she left the big top tent, basking in the event.

“I just feel happy when I’m there. It’s indescribable. And it was Tommy’s favourite thing.”

She was right. Thomas loved the circus as much as his big sister. Katniss was sure Madge still went to feel closer to Thomas and keep their promise. Katniss knows she promised Thomas in his final moments to never miss a circus; she’d attend them for the both of them.

The boys were accompanying the girls that night. They had a dinner of fish and chips at the park where the huge red and white tent was set up and played on the park equipment as they waited for the box office to open. It was still light outside and the six of them chased each other around like kids. They forgot about their worries and focused on the now and each other’s company.

The three boys went and purchased their tickets from the box office while the girls grabbed their cardigans from the cars. They met the boys as the crowd started to arrive and usher’s began to show everyone to their sections. They had bought general admission and sat right up the back, giving the families the closer rows.

They pressed up beside their significant others; even Prim and Jai were close to each other despite their refusal to call it a relationship. They sat against the edge, Jai beside the railing and their bare thighs touching. Katniss smiled at the teenagers and whispered to Peeta to check them out.

“Young love. It’s adorable.” He whispers in her ear and presses a soft kiss to the shell of her ear.

The lights dim as the music begins to sound and the ringmaster enters the ring. Peeta’s fingers dance across Katniss’ bare thigh, disappearing underneath the skirt of her dress and she clenches her thighs together.

“Peeta.” She warns him in a hushed whisper.

“It’s all right babe, just relax and enjoy the show.” He speaks. “Oh, and did I mention how much I love you wearing dresses?”

She silently curses him and he chuckles to himself as he turns his attention to the ringmaster introducing the performance and setting up the story. His fingers ride high on her thighs and she tries her best to focus on the show and not the dirty things she wants Peeta to do to her.

Making it through to intermission proves to be a hard task and the second the lights came on, she’s gripping his wrist and pulling him down the stairs and out of the tent towards his van. The air is heavy with humidity and the electricity they had created. Her panties are damp and she knows he is painfully hard inside of his worn jeans.

He fumbles with unlocking his van and she cups him through his jeans as he manages to open the
door.

“How long is intermission?” She asks as she climbs in behind him, slamming the vans’ door closed.

“Fifteen…” He begins to say but she cuts him off with her lips.

“Fuck me hard and fast Peeta.” She demands against his lips, slipping her panties down her legs. “I don’t want to miss the third act.”

“It’ll only be the second act.”

“This is the second act.” She tells him, pushing him back against his bed and unbuttoning his jeans.

“Oh.”

They creep back into the tent; just seconds after the show begins again. She knows they reek of sex but she doesn’t care. He carries their bucket of popcorn and they settle back down beside Sam.

“You two are so obvious.” He says to the couple with a hearty chuckle. “I suppose enjoy it while you have it.”

A fire is already burning, music is playing and everyone is already chilled out and deep in conversation. They've gathered in Nate's backyard for the barbecue and everyone has arrived to send off the Everdeen girls. It's still late afternoon and the sun is still high in the sky.

"Come on, you can't leave the country without having played a game of beach cricket!” Peeta exclaims, grabbing the sister’s hands and following the group of players down to the beach.

Half of them remain in the backyard too caught up in conversation to join the mass cricket game.

"Okay, rules.” Sam yells, marking a line with his foot in front of the stumps. “Two batters. It’s hit and run. The rocks are out as is where Gloss and Ben are with baby Indi! And the water is out. We’ve got little ones, we want to make it far." Sam explains to them all. "Hit the stumps and you're out. And you can't get out on your first go. One hand, one bounce; the batsman has hit the ball into the ground, but it has only bounced once, they can still be out, but only if the fielder catches the ball with one hand! All right, let's play!"

Colbie and Zeke get to bat first. Sam bowls and the rest of the players field.

"Try and catch it on the full or hit the stumps." Peeta tells the girls.

"I don't want to get the kids out." Katniss tells him. “I want someone else to be the bad guy.”

Peeta chuckles and they play fair for the two kids. Zeke gets caught out and Colbie is bowled out. They replace the batters and continue on. A few backpackers eventually join the game as do some surfers.

Katniss catches Jai out and takes her mark at the bowlers’ end, while Finnick bowls to one of Jai’s friends. When the friend had hit the ball everyone yells for Katniss to run to the opposite stumps. She's completely clueless but after a while she picks up how to play. She delivers hard hits and
runs across the sand. Peeta replaces Finnick as the bowler and smirks at Katniss as he takes his place beside the stumps opposite her.

"Don't go too easy on your girl." Sam teases.

"Yeah just cause she's pretty doesn't mean you can give her a fair go." Johanna adds.

"You're all a bunch of trash talkers" Peeta replies and bowls to Katniss, doing a run up and showing off his competitive side. She gets a hard hit behind the ball and gets two runs in, her other batter getting stumped out by Prim who plays wicket keeper.

Peeta eventually catches Katniss out and a chorus of 'ooohs' sound.

"Guess who's not getting laid tonight." Madge says to Sam who snickers with laughter.

"Hey, there are kids around." Katniss tells her cousin pointing to the little ones who have given up playing and are cartwheeling up and down the beach.

They play until they are called for dinner and everyone piles their dinner plates with food after working up an appetite from the game. They deem everyone a winner to settle the argument and invite the backpackers and surfers over for dinner. Peeta and Katniss sit with Annie and Finnick and chat away to them. The group jams and remains their usual self as they sit around a bonfire and make the night the best they can manage.

"Can I have everyone's attention please!" Finnick shouts to the gathering. "Thank you. As you all know, our two Everdeen sisters will be leaving us on Wednesday to fly back home to the States!" He says to the group who boo. “I know, it sucks but I know that we've all been a big part in making their trip memorable. I would just like to thank the girls for making the last eight weeks memorable for us and it's been really great getting to know you both. We've learnt a lot and I know the local surfers will be glad you’re not showing them up in the surf.” He snickers. “We hope this isn't a goodbye forever and we hope to see you two back here, tearing up the surf and showing us locals how to really surf. I personally want to say how much I've enjoyed our newfound friendship and I'm really going to miss having you two around." He says. "And on behalf of everyone here, hurry back to us please, it's been a pleasure. We also hope you girls have enjoyed your trip and the best wishes for the future. Until we meet again!" He holds up his beer and everyone else follows suit. "To the Everdeen's" "The Everdeen’s."

They take a sip from their drinks and cheer. Katniss watches Haymitch climb up onto his chair and Effie steadies him.

“Now, I know I insulted you when I first met you Sweetheart, said you had as much personality as a dead slug but I’m really going to miss having you ‘round here.” He explains. “You’ve taught me to just let go and be free. That a good surf can ease your troubles away and sometimes just slowing down and admiring the view is the best thing for your wellbeing. I mean it’s on our official town sign, cheer up, slow down, chill out. Sometimes you don’t appreciate what you have until its gone and I know your departure must be hard but please for the sake of us locals, please come back. You’re the best surfer I’ve ever met.”

“Hey, that’s not fair.” Sam exclaims in a teasing tone.

“It is. Sweetheart here beats all of you.” He chuckles. “So Sweetheart, don’t forget us and come and knock us off our boards when you’re back here.” He says smiling at Katniss. “And for the sake of clearing some things up, Effie and I are married. We got married yesterday after a ten year
engagement.”

“Haymitch.” Effie scolds, flushing red.

“Finally!” Everyone exclaims. “About time!”

“You two going to have a family?” Sam asks.

“I’ve already got all you kids to take care of. You are all my family.”

“Um, Haymitch.” Effie interrupts, pulling him back down to whisper in his ear.

Everyone watches curiously and Haymitch’s eyes go wide and he shoots up out of the chair and onto the ground with his fists in the air.

“I take it back, we’re going to have ourselves a baby! Screw you all!”

He seals his lips to his new wife as everyone cheers and hollers for the couple, the matriarchs of the group. The ones who have been there from the start, watching over all the kids of the tribe.

The tribe all started with the two of them and it was going to continue to grow and thrive, thanks to the new announcement of a new tribe member. And the new member would be so loved, as was all the members.

Katniss really didn’t want to leave the tribe.

“Katniss and Prim,” Nate starts, standing before the sister’s. “We’d like to officially welcome you two to the tribe. You are official members and will always be welcome. Welcome to the tribe!”

The music is turned up as the celebration and farewell continue. Katniss dances with the kids, memorizing their features and tiny smiles. Hugs them tightly and kisses their sun kissed cheeks.

Peeta finds her on the makeshift dance floor with Indi. Katniss kisses Indi’s cheek and stares at the baby for a long while as the baby stares back with a hint of a smile on her tiny lips.

She tickles Indi’s cheek as the song changes into Ben Howard’s ‘Under the same sun’. Peeta wraps his free arm around Katniss waist and holds her as close as he can without squishing Indi. They find a comfortable dancing position as the makeshift dance floor fills with the tribe members and guests who sing their hearts out.

“And I hope like a child
Widow of the sea
I hold these arms around you
All around me”

Katniss and Peeta dance together and sing to baby Indi in their embrace, along with everyone else. She holds back the emotions and relishes in the moment.

And her Peeta.

“Will you be there when the day's done
Will you be there
Under the same, under the same sun
Under the same sun”

They hug everyone goodbye and thank them for coming out to see them off, Katniss hoping to see
them soon.

But her heart aches the more she says goodbye to everyone.

“Katniss, you Okay?” Peeta asks and she just shakes her head, tears filling her eyes.

Monday morning Peeta whisks her down the coast to Lennox Head. He wanted one full day with her alone.

Her parents had let the girls stay out until midnight as they were just around the corner. Madge was the one who had done the convincing and succeeded. They were walked home minutes before midnight and Peeta kissed Katniss goodbye, telling her to be strong.

And now, he rested his hand on her thigh as they headed down the coast. The sun was beating down already and Peeta had planned for a day on the sand. Surfing, music, each other and a good pub lunch.

Madge and Prim were holding the fort, saying she had gone with Johanna for the day and allowing the lovers a moment together.

They carried their gear down from the car park and to the beach. They found a secluded spot, tucked away from those who’d likely use the beach. They pitched a beach umbrella, shading them from the sun and laid out a picnic blanket. He had a cooler of snacks and drinks to get them through the day.

They rode the waves at high tide until they reached that euphoria, feeling their hearts racing, their lungs burning and smiles as wide as the sea on their faces. They dragged their boards back up the sand and dumped them and collapsed on the picnic blanket. She watched water run down the panes of his chest and into his board shorts and she squeezed her thighs together.

He didn’t seem to notice as he fiddled with his dock and music started to play softly. He pulled out his camera and photographed her as she laid half in the sun and half in the shade. She pulled silly faces for him and tackled him onto his back, straddling his waist as he shot the shutter.

She was sure he had a memory card filled with just photographs of just her and the almost 8 weeks they’ve been together. He’’s hardly been without his camera and she knows of the candid’s he’s taken of her as she’s been in that stage of asleep and waking, with the morning light seeping in through the curtains.

He told her she was just hard to not photograph and continued on his assignment of capturing everything she did.

She thinks it was mostly for when they were apart, to remember everything they did together and she understood that.

They ate fresh fruit and lazed on the blanket and made no effort to physically do anything.

This was her favourite thing to do. Just be with her lover and enjoy each other’s company. To feel their skin beneath her hands and inhale their scent and memorise it.

And in a moment alone they shielded themselves away from the deserted beach and coupled until they felt that familiar euphoric bliss. She soaked up that feeling because she knew it would be one of their last times together.
They dressed after detangling themselves and carted their gear up to his van and they headed to the pub for lunch.

There were few patrons in the pub and they got a seat right at the front overlooking the beach. The sea breeze blew in and they shared a table with a group of backpackers who were keen to get to know the couple.

They ate their lunch and drank a beer with the backpackers who were all from Europe. They were on their way to Byron Bay for a few days before continuing their journey up the East Coast, finishing in Cairns.

They asked them to join them in a game of pool and a surf before they continued on their way.

Peeta and Katniss were terrible at pool and laughed off their failed attempts at trying really hard. The Europeans beat them and they paid their tab before heading to the beach. The backpackers had explained they had learnt to surf along the way, one of them only knowing how to surf. Katniss and Peeta were patient and tried to not laugh at their surfing attempt.

Katniss left the Europeans in awe as she navigated the waves that had picked up and so calmly and beautifully rode the waves.

“You’re real good Miss Katniss.” George, the Englishman compliments. He had a thick Chester accent and was extremely pale and clumsy. She wasn’t sure if she made him nervous or it was just his nature.

She smiled at him as she swam back to them. Peeta wore a wide smile like usual and it made the warmth grow in her stomach.

“How long have you two been… um… like… a couple?” Jake, the French backpacker asks in his very broken English.

“Not long. 6 weeks.” Peeta tells them.

“It seems like you two have been together forever.” David, the Welshman says. “I would have said at least six months or so.”

Peeta shakes his head and smiles.

“Well, you suit each other very well.” Nina, the Greek beauty tells them.

“Thank you. We just felt that instant spark.” Peeta explains to them with a beautiful smile on his face.

It’s after midnight when she feels her shoulders heavy with the weight of the world and she navigates her way down to his van, which is parked close by. He’s waiting for her, leaning against the door of his van.

“Can you just hold me?” She asks him.

He nods and takes her to the comfort of his bed, wrapping his arms around her body as she sobs, feeling as if it’s the end of the world.

He sings to her as he holds her to his chest.

“You know that even if we lose it all,
We had something beautiful, something beautiful
You know I'd go with you anywhere,"

Chapter End Notes

Only a few more chapters left of my first WIP. It's been a beautiful ride.

Please comment and let me know your thoughts and such. I like to read your theories and love for the story.

Next chapter I hope to have up by next week.
Look out for the Everdeen's final day in Byron Bay.
They paddle against the tide and out to sea at dawn. The six of them paddle against the tide, chasing the last bit of the night and the stars before the sun guides them home.

It was a usual tradition within their tribe, when one of their members leaves; a predawn surf would be the send off. Those who didn’t surf, sat on the beach and watched while the others surfed the tide.

And Peeta had explained that when one of the members had passed away from a car accident, they took her board out to sea and burnt it as a final farewell. She had been a sucker for the sea and always wanted to be buried at sea.

Much like Peeta who wanted to die a fool by the sea.

But today, they made it a smaller farewell for the girls. Just the six of them wanting something special for just their little group. The six of them having made a lot of memories together.

They sit on their boards in silence, letting the tide rock them and they stare out into the great ocean.

“Seven thousand miles of this will be separating us.” Katniss exclaims to Peeta quietly. “Why do you have to be so far away?”

Peeta shrugs his shoulders, not wanting to disturb the silence of the early morning.

“Just remember, if you can see the ocean then you’re not far from home.”

“But you’re my home.”

“And I’ll be waiting for you right here. I promise you.”

She nods and inhales the smell of the salty air.

She was home.

They watch the sunrise from the beach and wait long after it’s risen to make a move. Peeta holds Katniss in his arms, never wanting to let her go.

She knows he’s been trying to hide the emotions he feels with her leaving and hasn’t showed them to be brave for herself. Katniss has been emotional and she knows he feels that if he breaks than it will hurt her even more.

And that was somewhat true. Seeing him cry would be the worst thing in the entire world.

But she froze this moment, the sunrise, the blue sky, the birds and everything else and knew she wanted to live in it forever.

She turned to kiss him and caught sight of Prim and Jai cuddled together awkwardly.

Prim had said Jai had kissed her on Sunday at the barbeque and not just a peck on the cheek a goodbye kiss with maybe a little bit of tongue.
“He took me down to the beach and we watched the waves for a long while, talking about everything. He asked me if I wanted to go home and I told him not really. He said he couldn’t believe the 8 weeks were up and wished we had at least another week.” Prim told her as they climbed into bed. “Then he asked if he could kiss me.”

“And what did you say?”

“I just nodded.”

“And how was it?”

“Amazing. I thought it would be a shy peck but no. There was a little bit of tongue and fingers running through my hair.”

“I’m happy for you.” She told her little sister. “What happened after that?”

“He just said he was going to miss me a lot and gave me a necklace. Nothing too flashy but one similar to his.” She shows Katniss the necklace. “He really likes me Katniss.”

“I knew he did. You could tell. Did he tell you this?”

“Yes. He said he really likes me. He called me beautiful and then kissed me again.”

“What’d you say to him?”

“I liked him back.”

Madge and Sam were in their own world and with no troubles on their backs. They were free to be together and grow romantically. To date and hangout without being told they were a distraction who put silly ideas into each other’s heads.

Peeta tightened his grip on Katniss’ waist, as if he knew what she was thinking and kissed her shoulder that was bare from the towel they were sharing.

“Don’t think about it.” He whispers into her ear, pressing a kiss to her ear.

She takes his advice and falls into his chest further and they watch the waves.

They make their way into town for breakfast at Sae’s with Jai leaving for school shortly after, promising to come and see Prim this afternoon when he finished school.

Sae said farewell to the girls, hugging them both and giving them a little present to take back home.

“You didn’t have to Sae.” Katniss tells the woman.

“I know but I had to give you two a token before you left us.” Sae tells the girls. “I’ll be thinking of you two and I’ll be sure to ask these guys for updates.”

“I’ll be back.”

“And I’ll be waiting, you come back and I’ll give you a free breakfast.”

“That’s just an incentive to come back for a free breakfast.” Peeta says smiling.

Katniss smiles and embraces the woman and lets her go, letting Prim embrace Sae goodbye.
“Have a safe trip back and enjoy your last day.”

“We will.”

They wave off Sae and head down the street.

Sam had organised for the four of them to get tattooed as a reminder of their trip. They had booked in last week for the four of them to get a tattoo and the four of them had been busy deciding on what to get. They unanimously decided on a matching theme of land and sea and were left to their own choosing of what they got.

Katniss had let Peeta choose her tattoo, giving him her complete trust in his choice. He had only given her the tattoo design that morning and told her to Google it when she got home. But he assured her that the tattoo would connect them whenever they were apart.

Sam and Madge went first. Madge sat in the chair, her chest pressed to the chair as the tattoo artist started to tattoo underneath her right shoulder blade. Sam lay on his stomach as the artist tattooed the same spot but underneath the left shoulder blade. They were getting a matching tattoo of the world map. Madge would have half of the world map and Sam would have the other half. Madge would have Australia and Sam would have America.

It was a cutesy couple tattoo representing their other halves country of birth.

Katniss was getting two wrist tattoos. Peeta’s design on her right wrist and more script on the other wrist. She had let Peeta design another tattoo she was sure she would get in the coming months. That designed one would take at least three sessions to complete and she knew she’d want to surprise Peeta with it when she’s back with him.

She climbs into the chair after Madge, laying out her wrist to the tattooist and lets him tattoo the coordinates onto her wrist.

And she knew her parents would see the tattoos but at this point she was beyond caring about her parents and their thoughts. They had already taken away most of her freedom from this trip and when she’d arrive home. She wanted to express herself and do something for herself.

The artist finished up her two tattoos and she smiled down at the black ink on her wrist. She smiled at the tattooist and admired the ink on her wrist just as Peeta had finished up.

“How you girls feeling?” Peeta asks, fiddling with the left sleeve of his shirt.

“Great. Didn’t hurt as much as I thought it would.” Madge replies. “What about you boys?”

“Great.” Sam says. “So do we get a look?” He asks.

“Hold your horses. I’ll show you later.”

“I can’t wait until Mom and Dad see this.” Prim states as they step out onto the street. They had been given a slight discount, the boys a friend of the artists.

“What are they going to do, ground me? Make me laser it off? It’s too late for that now. It’s permanent.”

They head for lunch, dismissing their parents offer of meeting and sit on the beach with fish and chips and listen to a DJ, play from his little pop up DJ booth in the car park at Main Beach. They watch the children play on the equipment and the parent’s watch on. They watch the surfers at the beach and tour groups kayaking out to sea.
They laze at the park for a couple of hours and Peeta’s phone buzzes with a text just before three. He reads it aloud to everyone with a wide smile.

“I’d like to introduce you to the next best surfer in Byron Bay, Ziggy Logan Odair, born 9:23 am this morning. The little dude can’t wait to get out on his board and show the tribe up. Mum and bubs are doing really well.”

“He’s here?” Katniss asks.

“He is.” Peeta tells her, squeezing her closer to his body and passes the phone around the circle to show off the photo of the newborn baby.

“Oh he is adorable.” Katniss gushes, studying the newborn’s picture.

“He is. He looks a lot like Annie.” Madge claims.

“He’s not even 8 hours old, he doesn’t look like anyone.” Sam states. “Babies don’t look like much but squished up, old people.”

“Well, I’m glad I know where you stand about kids.” Madge laughs.

“Hey, don’t get me wrong, I love babies and they are cute. I mean ridiculously cute. Some just look like old people when they are born.”

“Well when you’ve been pushed out of a canal that is only just big enough for you, you’re not going to be looking your cutest.” Madge says. The rest of them laugh as Sam blushes. “That’s what I thought. But I still love you baby and you’re a male so I don’t expect you to understand the changes our body goes through to push out something the size of a watermelon.”

“Can we not talk about this, I am going to be sick.”

“I know where you’ll be in the delivery room, right outside leaving your partner to do all the work.” Peeta teases.

“No, I’ll be involved as much as I can be. I want to witness it, I just don’t want my lunch to reappear.”

The girls roll their eyes at Sam. “Oh Sam, you poor baby.” Katniss says and turns to Peeta. “Do you think we can meet him? I want to meet him before we go.”

“I’ll text Finn and ask him.” Peeta replies and types a reply. Receiving one back instantly. “He said to come now if we’d like.”

“We need to grab his gift then.” Katniss says.

They arrive at the doorstep of the Odair’s. Two father’s of the new parents are out the front with Jai with huge smiles on their faces and a celebratory beer in hand.

“Hey kids.” Mr Odair greets.

“Hello, Finn said it’d be alright if we come by and meet the next best surfer.” Peeta tells them.

Mr Odair and Mr Cresta chuckle. “Go on in.”

The five of them head inside quietly, Jai joining them. A doula is just packing up her things in the living room where the mother’s are seated with Zoe who are also celebrating with a drink.
“Hey kids, how are we?”

“Good. Congratulations.” Madge tells them, kissing their cheeks.

“Thank you.”

“The first grandchild?”

“Yes for both of us.”

“He’s going to be one spoilt little boy.” Peeta adds.

“He already is.”

“You all made it.”

They turn to see Finnick standing there with a wide smile on his face. Katniss can see the pure joy on his face.

“We did. Is now a good time?” Peeta asks.

“Yeah of course. You can all come up.”

“You sure? We don’t want to disturb Annie or Ziggy.” Katniss adds.

“No, it’s fine. He’s out to the world. Come on up.”

They trail behind Finnick, up the steps and down to the master bedroom, the door is slightly closed and Finnick opens it quietly for the group of them, revealing Annie seated on the bed with Ziggy in her arms.

Katniss thinks she looks absolutely amazing having not long delivered. Ziggy is sound asleep and loosely swaddled. The window is wide open and the afternoon sea breeze filters into the room.

“Congratulations.” Katniss says softly to the new parents, kissing Finnick’s cheek before moving to Annie’s side, leaning over to tickle the boy’s tiny cheek. “He’s so beautiful.”

“Would you like to hold him?” Annie asks.

“If you’re sure.”

“Of course. Take him.”

Katniss accepts the little bundle into her arms, settling him in the space of her arms and she is in complete awe.

Peeta comes up beside her, admiring the sleepy newborn and he smiles down at the baby before smiling up at Katniss. He kisses her cheek and they stare at the baby a little while longer before he is passed to Peeta. Katniss tucks the loose fabric of his blanket back and traces his crown covered in dark hair.

He is passed around to everyone else who is in awe of the newborn and he ends up in his uncle’s arms.

“We’ve already told Jai he’s got the first diaper change.” Finnick tells them, sitting down beside Annie.
“Bull.” Jai says.

“Shh, he’s sleeping.” Finnick scolds his brother with a chuckle.

Jai sticks his tongue out at his brother and hands the newborn back to his sister-in-law.

“We got you a little something.” Madge tells them, handing over the wrapped gift.

Annie manages the newborn and tears at the paper of the present.

The five of them decided he didn’t need clothes or toys and instead decided on a print to put into his nursery. Peeta had created it. It was all about the elements of earth. It depicted Byron Bay and everything that made Byron what it was. A little message was incorporated into the print;

*Remember, live in the sunshine, swim in the sea, drink the wild air. Love Katniss, Madge, Peeta, Prim and Sam.*

“It’s beautiful. We’ll put it up in his room, it’s too special not to display.” Annie tells them, admiring the print with a grateful smile.

“We were going to get him his first surfboard but we know you’ve already bought him it.” Peeta chuckles.

“He has, the minute we found out it was a boy he was down at the surf shack ordering and customizing the board.” Annie tells them all with a small smile.

“What can I say, I want him to be the best surfer in Byron and the minute he can stand is when I’ll be taking him out for his first surf.”

“He’s not even a day old and you’ve already deciding his future for him.”

“Yep.”

“Give him a break first, he’s already got so many other things to accomplish before that.” Katniss tells him with a smile.

Finnick smiles, chuckling lightly.

“Did I see a bit of ink Katniss?” Annie asks, leaning over slightly in Katniss’ direction.

“Oh yeah, we got inked today.” Katniss tells her with a smile.

“Show me.”

Katniss moves closure to Annie, showing her both her wrists.

“What does it mean?” Annie asks.

Katniss shrugs her shoulders. “I need to Google it to find out. But I can’t until I’m back home.”

“So you let Peeta decide on this tattoo without you evening knowing what it means?”

“I trust him. It’s coordinates to somewhere.” She tells them. “And this is *Follow the Ocean*, I mean my heart is with the sea. And one of Peeta’s songs is called that. It was also the first song I heard him sing.” Katniss explains and Annie touches her heart.

“It’s beautiful. Meaningful.”
“Now show me yours.”

Peeta shoes off the lion he had tattooed on his left forearm. It was to represent the strength and courage of his time alone. Along with his search for perspective.

“Katniss helped me with this.” He explains, looking down at the ink and smiling.

“That’s so cool, is it finished yet?” Finnick asks.

“I’ve got a session or two to get the colouring done.” He explains.

“Oh and you got the same coordinates as Katniss.” Annie says almost shocked as she touches the coordinates underneath the lion.

“I did.”

“What does it mean?” Annie asks.

“I’m not telling you guys.” Peeta says smiling. “Not until Katniss finds out herself.”

“You tease.” Finnick chuckles. “What about you two?”

Madge and Sam show off their world map tattoo and they sit around, chatting with the new parents. The men are engrossed in their own conversation and soon disappear downstairs for a beer.

“You had a homebirth?” Madge asks, tickling Ziggy’s foot.

“Yeah. I wanted something relaxing and wanted to be at home. The doula Mags, Cassia recommended her. She had Winter and Indi as homebirths and raved about the experience. She just said it was much more relaxed than the hospital when she had Zeke. She was stressed out and didn’t cope, Zeke was in distress as well. The girls’ births were much more relaxed and it proved to be a calmer experience. She had Zeke close by and home and it made it that much more pleasing.”

“How was the birth?” Katniss asks.

“I was only in labour for about 8 hours. I was dilated two centimetres for the last week and knew it’d be any day. It was great.”

“You feeling good?”

“Really good. I feel amazing.”

“You look amazing.” Prim tells her.

“I’m so glad he arrived before we left.”

“Me too. I wanted him to be here. I tried my hardest. I did a lot of demanding, telling him to come out so you could meet him. Promised him a lot of love also.”

Katniss takes the newborn into her arms and holds him, admiring his features. His tiny nose and lips. His long, dark eyelashes and his seashell-like-ears. He had long fingers that he had balled into a fist. His chest rose and fell slightly as he snoozed. He had full cheeks already and round eyes. He was still balled up, not ready to release his limbs and move them around.
Katniss was amazed at how beautiful and alert they were from the minute they entered the earth. How quickly they could function when they came into the world. How their lungs worked, sucking in deep breaths of air. How their fingers wrapped around the hands that held them and their ability to nurse right away. They were amazing little things and Katniss knew she’d never want to go without.

“I might have to steal you and take you back to the States. I’ll still teach you how to surf, I’ll be a better teacher than your daddy.” Katniss coos to baby Ziggy as he wraps his tiny fist around her finger. “I can teach you how to skate and play the guitar. I’ll be sure to bring you back here but I’ll raise you with a Californian accent.”

“Don’t listen to your godmother Ziggy.”

“Godmother?” Katniss asks, fearing she misheard Annie.

“Finn and I discussed it, we want you and Peeta to be his godparents. We feel as if you will be a good influence on him and will teach him a lot about life and the world.”

“You’ve only just met me.”

“And I know you’ll do a good job. We’ve become close Katniss in the last 8 weeks and I know you’ve become an important person in my life. You’ve taught me a lot and I want you to be there to teach Ziggy. He needs someone like you in his life.”

“Thank you.” Katniss hugs Annie, mindful of Ziggy and kisses her godson’s cheek. “Hey little man, I’m going to show you the world.”

“It gives you more incentive to hurry back here.”

“I don’t want to miss a thing.” Katniss tells her with a smile. “I promise I’ll do a good job.”

“I know you will.” Annie says smiling.

“Come on, we better get a picture of you and your godson.” Madge states, reaching for Katniss’ phone.

Katniss hands over her phone and holds little Ziggy. His eyes have peaked open slightly and he tries to assess the situation.

“Hey Little man. I’m Katniss and I’m going to show you the world.” She whispers to him, kissing his round cheek. “I won’t let you down. I promise you.”

Katniss and Peeta walk hand in hand as they follow Prim, Sam, Madge and Jai. She was drunk on the intoxicating baby smell and her godson Ziggy. Her heart filled with desire and want. She remembered the baby smell, memorising the afternoon, the sounds, the sights and the smells. She was now sure the afternoon ocean air would remind her of her godson and her last day in Byron Bay.

They parted ways at Lawson Street. Prim, Sam, Madge and Jai headed to another restaurant in a cover-up for Peeta and Katniss. The young couple took a seat at a Tapas restaurant, as the sun was still a couple of hours away from falling behind the ocean. They drank wine and ate beautiful food, reminiscing on their day and their new godson. Katniss had been quick to switch her phone’s wallpaper to her and Peeta with their new godson.

She felt the emotions begin to build within her and she knew she’d be unable to control her emotions in the dwindling hours they had together. Peeta had planned a few final things for them.
before she went back to the house for ‘bedtime’ and before she’d meet him in his van for their final night together.

He dragged her down the street to buy gelato. They strolled the street with their gelato, stopping on the corner of Lawson Street to eat their gelato and watch the Tuesday nightlife. He took her down to the beach where a drumming circle had formed and children and adults danced and sang to the music the drummers made as the sun started to set. Live music sounded from pubs, restaurants and stores, and everyone made sure to enjoy their evening, walking slowly and checking out the sights.

They had agreed to meet the others at Lawson Street at 9. Peeta held her hand and they went back to the corner where they had first met Peeta. They sat and waited and she curled into his side as they listened to the sound of the faint drumming. She felt safe and content but felt overwhelmed the more she let her mind wander. She just wanted to freeze time and stay in this moment forever.

She had found a togetherness in Byron. One you find in no other place. She felt safe and protected everywhere she went, day or night. She loved how people jammed on every corner, not so much for the incentive of money, but for the enjoyment of jamming and to hopefully meet some likeminded people. This is why Peeta jammed and busked, he just wanted to meet likeminded people and make someone happy. He had met so many people and the most important people in his life right here in Byron.

This beautiful, little town had also become a part of her. She had met people who had become a part of her life, important people who had their own story to tell and their own inspirations. They were beautiful people who looked at the world a little differently. They lived life, remembering to do it by slowing down and most of them had found perspective.

A majority of the tribe was made up of people on a quest for time alone who stumbled into Byron and never looked back. They established their lives here, made connections and found their desires. They planted roots and never left, having found what they were looking for. This became their life and they established themselves.

Katniss knew she’d found everything she wanted in this little town and she’d be back in a heartbeat.

She thought this would be temporary. She’d find a fling, meet a few backpackers and temporary connections with the neighbours and locals.

But she was so wrong.

They kissed under the Lawson Street sign, promising to see each other in a couple of hours. He took Jai back to the Odair’s house and the girls and Sam went back to the house.

The adults had gone for an early dinner in Ballina and were back by the time the teenagers walked through the front door.

River greeted the four of them, pressing his nose to their bare thighs and wagging his tail as he bounced around.

The adults were out the back with a glass of wine each and ate from a platter of fine cheeses. They were celebrating the end of a great vacation and memories. Celebrating to the luck and fortune of the last 8 weeks.

“Come and join us.” Michelle calls them, patting the spare chair beside her. “We want to know about your day.”
Madge fills them in about the day. Katniss has pulled her cardigan on to rid off the cool night air and hide her tattoos, she wasn’t yet brave enough to show them off and she didn’t want to ruin a great day with yelling and words of disappointment and defiance.

“Oh, Annie and Finnick had their little boy.” Prim tells them all. “We went and met him. He is adorable.”

“What’d they name him?” Rosie asks.

“Ziggy Logan. He’s going to be the next best surfer in the bay.” Madge claims laughing. “And Katniss is his godmother.”

“You are?” James asks his daughter, slightly confused.

“Yeah, Annie and Finn thought I’d be the best person to guide Ziggy through life.”

“They only just met you.” Rosie claims.

“And they still wanted me to be his godmother.” Katniss tells them.

“You’re a little young to be a godmother. You have no experience and you’re a little immature to be given that responsibility.” Her mother says.

“I think she’d be a perfect godmother.” Michelle says smiling. “They made a good decision hun.”

She smiles at her aunt, and smiles back at her grateful for her having her back.

“Got any pictures of him?” She asks.

Katniss reaches for her phone and goes to her gallery, finding a shot of the newborn.

“Here. He looks so much like his mother.”

The phone is passed around, Michelle and Paul gushing over the newborn. Katniss’ parents don’t say a word.

“He’s a real beauty. I guess that means you’ll be visiting more?” Paul asks.

Before Katniss can even open her mouth her mother interrupts.

“She won’t have time. She’ll be too busy studying. They made a stupid decision, considering you won’t be here.”

“Rosie, she can come and visit during her breaks. We’ll be more than happy to look after her.” Paul tells his sister. “She’s more than welcome here.”

“She’ll be too busy doing summer classes and working.” James tells his in-laws.

“I’m going to bed.” Katniss tells them all, feeling the emotions starting to get too much.

“Pack your things Katniss, we want to be out of here early tomorrow.” Her father tells her.

She walks away, not saying another word as her lip trembles and her eyes prickle with tears. Her chest and stomach hurt from the built up emotions and words just shared and she takes the stairs two at a time, slamming the door shut behind her.

Prim tries to comfort her, the best she can but there’s only one person she wants right now.
She keeps a close eye on the clock as she packs her suitcase, laying out her clothes for tomorrow and her pyjamas. She slips in one of Peeta’s button ups he had given her and all the gifts she had received. Prim lies back on the bed, engrossed in her phone and Katniss sneaks off for a shower. She washes her hair with coconut shampoo and conditioner and lathers her body in a fruity body wash. She packs up most of her toiletries, brushing her teeth and half drying her hair.

It’d be dry by the time she met Peeta.

The little celebration was winding up downstairs and Paul headed up to bed. He caught Katniss on his way to bed.

“Katniss,” he starts with a sigh. “I think your friends made a great choice naming you as a godmother. And even if you’re not five minutes from him, you’ll still be a big part of his life. As will Peeta.”

“How’d you guess?”

“I saw one of your other pictures.” He smiles. “He’s a good boy. He’s perfect for you dear.”

“Thank you.” She smiles at her uncle and turns to leave.

“How’d you”

“Katniss.” He says, clearing his throat. “We made sure Thomas got to do everything he wished for before he passed away. We made sure he got that eternal happiness and it made us feel better to see the happiness and light. He had his life taken away too quickly but he got to do what he wanted. I don’t want you to feel like you haven’t accomplished anything in your life when your time comes. I don’t want you to die with any regrets and at least feel as if you’ve accomplished mostly everything. Live your life the way you want to Katniss and not how other’s dictate it.”

She smiles and her uncle notices her wrists.

“It means something to you?” He asks.

She nods. “I have to Google this when I’m back home to find out.” She tells him, running her fingers over the coordinates.

28.6431 °S
153.6150 °E

“Peeta got the same coordinates, I have a feeling it’s to do with here.” Her uncle smiles and notices the other wrist. “And this is cause the ocean is part of me. I’ll always follow the ocean. And Peeta has a song called it. It was the first song I heard him sing.”

“It’s beautiful.” He tells her, smiling sincerely at his niece. “Night Katniss.”

“Night.”

She sneaks out of the window before midnight and finds Peeta leaning against his van. A little lantern is on inside the van and he pulls her into the van, closing them in. His lips kiss hers softly and she drinks him in.

“You smell intoxicating.” He whispers against her lips. His stereo plays music from his iPod and he lays her down on his bed, following her onto the softness of his mattress. The sheets have been pushed aside to make room for their warm bodies.

She also just notices the change of music as he begins to kiss her deeply, running his hands over her curves.
For you, there'll be no more crying.
For you, the sun will be shining.
And I feel that when I'm with you,
It's alright, I know it's right.

He pulls away from her for a second and stares into her eyes.

“I love you so much.”

To you, I'll give the world.
To you, I'll never be cold.
'Cause I feel that when I'm with you,
It's alright, I know it's right.

“And I really feel like Fleetwood Mac is helping me express my love for you.” He whispers to her.

And the songbirds are singing, like they know the score.
And I love you, I love you, I love you, like never before.

They strip their clothes slowly, taking their time. They didn’t rush and just wanted to remember this moment, to make this moment count before they were separated. She wanted to remember everything about him, the feel of him and the sound of his voice.

She touches his freckles, moles and scars. She kisses them delicately, the same way he replicates. He traces his tongue over the curves of her body and presses delicate kisses to sensitive places. He runs his fingers and lips over her outlines.

He sends a trail of goose bumps over her skin and shows her how much he loves her.

He marks her thigh with heavy kisses, ones that will bruise, and when he thrusts into her, his fingers dig into her hips, leaving her with a reminder of their time together.

And when they fall apart, he holds her to his chest and his heart carries her into that feeling of sleepiness.

“I’m staying.” She mummers. “I’m telling them in the morning that I’m staying with you.” She tells him sleepily.

It’s the same kind of sleepiness they had experienced from full days at the beach. Warm skin. Wet hair. Salt and sand and coconut-scented shampoo. Soft music and bed sheet tides pulling them into mermaid dreams.

“And I really feel like Fleetwood Mac is helping me express my love for you.” He whispers to her.

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And the songbirds are singing, like they know the score.
And I love you, I love you, I love you, like never before.
his wide eyes.

She knows he’s been awake for a while now, probably woken up from the many thoughts inside of his head. And the fact that she is leaving him in a few short hours.

She kisses his lips, greedily drinking in the taste of him as his fingers tease the space between her thighs. She keens into his body and demands to feel more of him. She craves more of him and knows she wants to feel him inside of her, to get her through their absence.

He slips inside of her unsheathed, the two of their lips still connected and they remain still while they relish in the feeling. They don’t move for a while and Peeta hooks Katniss leg over his thigh as he slowly slips out before driving back in.

It’s slow, sensual and fulfilling.

They are silent and know how to move their bodies without the need of words. Early morning light leaks in through the slightly parted curtains and a chorus of birds sing in the tree above the van.

“I’m close.” He whispers into her neck as he sucks the skin of her neck, the chain of her necklace cooling her burning body and he trails his hand down in between them.

“Me too.” She replies.

They come together, crying into the silence of the van and remain connected.

“I love you.”

A loud knocking sounds from behind them on the back window and they tear their gaze away from each other to look behind them. Their moment of love disrupted.

Her stomach drops and she feels sick.

“Katniss get dressed and out here right now!” Her father demands from outside the van.

“Fuck.” Peeta curses and slips out of Katniss.

Katniss is too shocked to move.

“Now!” Her father sounds again, prompting her to move.

She sits up in bed, feeling the sticky warmth of Peeta in between her thighs and feels the tears well in her eyes.

“I’m so sorry.” He apologises, kissing her shoulder.

She’s too upset to say anything.

The two of them dress quickly, Katniss pulling on her clothes and Peeta finding his clothes. She knows she shouldn’t leave her father waiting any longer and prepares for what she’ll say to her father when she faces him.

Peeta opens up the van door for her and she goes to step out onto the grass, when a hand grabs her wrist, yanking her out of the van before she even steps foot on the steady ground.

“You’re hurting me.” She tells her father as he tightens his grip.
She tries to fight, pushing her heels into the footpath but her father’s strength dominates her. She turns to Peeta who is stunned and she opens her mouth to speak to him.

“She tries to fight, pushing her heels into the footpath but her father’s strength dominates her. She turns to Peeta who is stunned and she opens her mouth to speak to him.

“Peet…”

“Drive away before I call the cops!” Her father yells at Peeta as he turns to take Katniss away from her lover. “Now boy.”

She has a goodbye on her lips as her father takes her down the pathway. She notices Peeta’s saddened look and stares at him as she is pulled around the corner to the house. The two lovers are torn apart without a word or kiss goodbye.

Chapter End Notes

The end is near.

Our poor lovers can't seem to catch a break.

I'll have an update later this week for you all.

Let me know what you think.
The two-hour drive to the Gold Coast was tense. Her eyes were sore from crying, her chest aching. She rode with her Aunt and Uncle, her parents not wanting to even look at her while they travelled back up the coast.

Her uncle kept looking at her in the rear-view mirror and she pretended she didn’t notice as they drove away from Byron Bay indefinitely.

Her parents had banned her from ever coming back here again and to say it didn’t sting was an understatement. It was like a tonne of bricks had fallen on her. It was a type of hurt that was unexplainable

They had departed Byron Bay as quickly as they could. Her mother and father wanting to put the town behind them that somehow destroyed their daughter’s reputation and aspirations to do bigger things than follow around a homeless busker like a lovesick child, surfing and doing drugs along the way. Her mother’s accusations hurt the most and left her cheeks damp with tears.

*Her father had slammed the front door closed behind them and pulled her to the living room, calling upstairs to her mother.*

“Rosie!” He calls with anger rooted deep in his voice. Her father was never an angry man. He tried his best to remain calm and kind but Katniss knew that she had destroyed that demeanour. “Rosie, get down here!”

She was sat on the couch and felt her body begin to tremble with fear.

*Her mother hastily ran down the steps, tying her robe at her waist. “What’s happened?”*

“She was with the boy. I caught them how no father would ever want to catch his daughter.”

She felt ashamed and dirty as she looked at her parents. Their faces covered in complete disgust and anger.

“What the hell were you thinking?” Her father demanded.

“You promised us you’d never see that boy again. You lied to us. Betrayed our trust!” Her mother states angrily. “You have been reckless and have rebelled against us. You’re reckless Katniss!” She was beginning to go red in the face. “He could have ruined everything you were striving for. You’re aspirations and goals. You could be amazing. But instead you start to piss it all away for a homeless hippie. We’ve raised you better than that. What were you thinking?”

“Have you been seeing him behind our backs?” Her father demanded, squeezing her shoulders.

She cowered away from his hold and cries out. “I’m not telling you.”

“Katniss how often have you been seeing him?” Her mother demands as her eyes zero in on the love bites on her neck and the exposed skin of her inner thigh. “Katniss!”

“All the time.” She replied quietly.
“Please tell me you were at least protected? The last thing we need is an unplanned baby or a STD. He’s homeless, he probably can’t afford condoms and who knows how many backpackers he’s been with.”

It hurt. The words and insults hit her deep inside her belly and she was left in tears. She didn’t speak a word to them, as she was too angry and upset.

“Answer your mother.” Her father demanded through gritted teeth. He was red with anger and shame.

“He’s not like that.” She tried to tell them.

“Were you protected?”

“I’m on the pill Mom.”

“So you weren’t?”

“We were. Okay. We used condoms all the time. I’m not that reckless!” She screamed back.

The rest of the family were awoken with the argument that followed and she watched them from the top of the stairs, not daring to intervene as Katniss was left humiliated and in tears as she tried to tell them the truth and listened to her parents reduce Peeta from the boy she loved to something that was lower than trash.

They had left well before 9 o’clock and her mother confiscated her phone and laptop. She was banned from communicating with him because they knew all too well how easy it would be for him to come and rescue her before their plane ride.

She watched the world go by and found herself during the car ride. Her aunt offered her phone but Katniss declined the offer. She was too ashamed to talk to Peeta right now.

No words could help Katniss in this moment. Her aunt, uncle, sister and cousin tried their best to console her but she didn’t want them.

River laid his head on her lap as they drove north and she patted him the entire way.

He seemed to be the only one who understood her pain.

She hid herself away until the next morning when she was roused awake to head to the airport. Paul would be driving them and he packed their luggage into the back of his car as they farewelled Michelle, Madge and Sam.

Michelle holds her longer and whispers in her ear. “Don’t let them win.”

Katniss nods against her aunt’s neck and pulls away, her arm still holding her.

“You’re always welcome back here.” She tells her niece and kissed her forehead.

She hugs Madge tightly, thanking her for making the trip happen.

“Well, we did have some fun and caused a lot of mischief.”

Katniss smiles at her cousin and lets her wipe the dampness from underneath her eyes. “I’ll see you soon.”

She nods and moves to Sam. He engulfs her in his arms, squeezing her tightly.
“That was from Peeta. He said he’s so sorry and he’ll miss you. And to remember, always.” Sam whispers in her ear. “You’ll be together soon Katniss.”

He lets her go after another embrace. “It was great meeting you Miss America. And until next time, I better brush up on my surf skills.”

She sits behind her uncle and on the window side, leaving Prim as a buffer and listens to music on her IPod. She finds a playlist she hadn’t created.

The Going Home Playlist.

Peeta. He had created this for her.

She smiles to herself and opens up the playlist, scanning the hundreds of songs and finding the first media item to be a video. She clicks on the video and Peeta appears on the screen.

“If you’re watching this it means you’re on your way home. I don’t even have the words to describe how much these last 8 weeks have meant to be. I’ll forever remember our time together and I’m counting down the days until we’re back together again. I love you with all my heart. And please be strong while we’re apart. It’s going to be tough, I know it is but remember what you had here. That’s as good as any reason to smile. I wish it wasn’t goodbye but I know it’s only temporary. I hope it’s only temporary. Don’t back out on me now Katniss.” He wipes his eye.

“And Katniss, remember where it all began.” He touches his wrist and she’s confused for a second before she looks at her own and sees the coordinates. “I’ll tell you what it means now. It’s where we first met. It was a Friday, I was busking on the corner of Lawson Street and you came riding by as I sang Follow the Ocean. Those coordinates take you straight to Lawson Street, where it all began.”

She feels tears fall down her cheeks and she quietly sobs.

“You’re my land and sea Katniss. Please follow your heart and remember I’ll be here for you. I love you.”

The playlist shuffles to, ‘Big Jet Plane’, and the tears fall down her cheeks harder.

She was jetlagged for nearly two weeks after they returned. She hardly slept and was barely functioning. Her parents left her to wallow in her grief and loneliness and she didn’t make a move out of her bedroom. They had returned back to work the week after they arrived back home and Prim was back at school, catching up on the months of schoolwork she had missed out on.

Her mother handed back her devices the day after they returned and Katniss just stared at them, not making a single move to check her phone.

During her bout of insomnia she plugs her phone and laptop in. Her laptop receives her iMessages before her phone powers on and she scrolls through them all.

Peeta had left her a number of them the morning they left Byron Bay and leading up until just a few hours ago.

I know you’re home. Please just tell me you’re Okay? I hated not saying goodbye to you.

I keep thinking this is a dream. Please tell me this is a very long dream and when I wake you’ll be back beside me?

I spoke to Prim. She said you guys are home safe, you’re parents are being hard on you though?
If you want me to fly over there, then I will. I’ll drop everything in a heartbeat to be back beside you. I’ll go wherever you will go, darling.

She ponders on what she’ll say to him and mulls it over for almost an hour.

I’m okay. I’m a little upset and still not talking to my parents. I wish this was all a dream and I very much wish I was with you. No don’t give up all your hard work, you have your album to focus on. I’ll be right. I’ll try and figure out something soon. I love you so much.

But it became too hard to talk to him as the days went on. All she could hear were her parent’s hurtful insults of Peeta. All she could see was the look of hurt on his face when they were torn apart. The look haunted her dreams and it would continue to haunt them.

He stopped communicating with her too once she showed her lack of interest. He was busy focusing on his album, getting that produced and ready for release in January. He was also touring the East Coast, headed down south for more gigs and making more connections.

They just accepted it became easier to not speak to one another because of how painful it was.

As the days went on, she began staying as far away from the house as she could. She accepted to start college in January and was busy preparing for the next stage of her life. The stage she didn’t want to cross into. Worst of all, her parents told her she had no option but to major in biology.

And the minute after she confirmed her acceptance, she felt the walls come tumbling down and had trouble breathing.

She ran from the house and to her grandparent’s place that was just a couple of blocks away and collapsed in their hallway, hyperventilating and crying.

Her grandparents comforted her; her Nan embracing her while her Pop rubbed her back.

“What’s the matter sweetheart?” Her Nan asked.

More tears fell down her cheeks as she felt her dreams were being crushed and imagined Peeta becoming a distant memory, becoming just a teenaged vacation fling as the years went on. And she could see herself listening to her parents and agreeing that they were right, that Peeta was nothing but a busker who had no ambition.

And it made her feel sick to her stomach.

Her Nan settled her in the spare bedroom upstairs with a cup of peppermint tea and Tim Tams. Her Nan pushed her bangs away from her tear-streaked face and climbed in beside her.

Michelle had informed her them of what had happened, preparing them for their arrival. Michelle felt they needed to know what had happened but none of the Everdeen’s knew they had been informed until Pop had expressed his disgust in his daughter and son-in-law for their behaviour as he picked them up from the airport.

And they were still pissed and bitter about their treatment of their granddaughter.

Katniss was expecting a huge lecture from her grandparents but they showed her they were on her side. They reminded her she was 18 years of age and old enough to make her own decision regarding her life.

“What’s wrong?” Her Nan asked her.
Katniss told her everything. Expressing her fears and doubts over her relationship with Peeta and her dreams to be back with him, considering she had just accepted her college offer. She wouldn’t be back with him until June next year when the quarter of college finished.

Her Nan was supportive and offered advice like she has been known to do. She reassured Katniss that they’ll find their way back together sooner rather than later.

“You can unofficially stay here if you’d like.”

Fall fell into Winter and she tried to keep herself busy. She kept in touch with Annie and Finnick, receiving updates on her growing godson who was adorably perfect and cute. She sent him a Christmas gift filled with lots of goodies.

She sent a present to Zeke, Colbie, Cruz, Winter and Indi and kept in contact with everyone else besides Peeta. They didn’t mention him and she never asked.

As winter break arrived she caught up with her friends, having not seen them since they all left for college. They met for coffee one afternoon and she told them of her trip but was interrupted with their own drama and stories. Katniss was soon left out of the conversation as her friends talked of college and boys.

And she felt lonelier than ever before. She felt displaced and alone and felt as if no one understood her.

And her once best friend had the right to tell her that she had changed.

She cried on the drive to her grandparents as she truly believed them.

“That’s what college will do to you and by the looks of it, it has already hit those girls.” Her Pop tells her as they go for a late evening walk. She had been crying all afternoon. “It’s called growing up. You’re forced to deal with them all day, every day and be friendly and when a little bit of time or space happens, things shift.” He explains. “And you don’t want to go to college sweetheart. You want to follow your heart.”

“I can’t follow my heart.”

“I’ll buy you a plane ticket for Christmas.” He offers, just like the rest of her family.

“It’ll be cancelled before I even step foot in the airport.”

“Be bold and brave. Don’t worry about what they think. Besides, I’ll be sure to help you get there.”

She smiles at her Pop, she was glad she at least had someone on her side.

Christmas Day was it’s usual occasion. Hospital visits increased with the holiday season and her Mom and Dad were called before breakfast to help out. Madge and Sam had flown over for Christmas to spend with them all and Katniss was grateful to have her cousin with her.

They retreated out to the beach after Christmas dinner with full bellies. Sam stayed inside to offer assistance in cleaning up, having totally won over Nan and Pop. While Prim was Skyping with Jai.

They watched the stars with Rocky, their Nan and Pop’s old Labrador and listened to the waves crash onto the shore.
“I lost my necklace.” She tells Madge.

“The dog tag one?”

“Yes. Is it at your house at all?”

“I don’t know. I’ll have to ask Mom if she’s seen it.” She tells her. “When was the last time you had it?”

“When I was with Peeta. I recall having it on then and I swear I had it on when we drove back to the GC.”

“I haven’t seen anything but it doesn’t mean it won’t show up.”

The Everdeen girls were remaining at Nan and Pop’s for the night. Not wanting to spend the night away from the family and wanting to relive their tradition. The kids always remained at Nan and Pop Undersee’s on Christmas night. Mostly due to the fact that their parents were always on-call. They kept the tradition going and Nan and Pop spoilt them every year during the holiday sleepover.

They were taken out to see the Christmas lights and always ended the evening with hot chocolate and either a movie or story. As they got older it became a movie but a story from Pop always ensured entertainment.

And Pop took them out Christmas light looking and they came back to the house with hot chocolate waiting for them and Christmas cookies. They sat on the back porch, looking out at the ocean and listening to their grandparents tell stories, mostly to embarrass Madge in front of Sam.

They told stories of Thomas, reminiscing on their grandson. There wasn’t a dry eye after the stories and Katniss felt that ache inside of her. She missed her young cousin and realised how much she missed Peeta.

Sam pulled her aside before they headed up to bed and handed her a package.

“What’s this?”

“It’s from Peeta.”

Her heart plummets into her stomach and she takes the package before retreating into her room. Prim has disappeared for a shower.

She tore open the package and found a note inside.

*Where it all began.*

*P*

She sets the note down and finds her necklace. She gratefully picks it up and presses it to her chest as the tears well in her eyes. She lets it go and finds a new addition had been added. A new tag joined the chain and she ran her finger over the inscription.

*Land & Sea.*

She turned the tag over and found the same coordinates on her wrist.

She got out of bed, clutching the necklace in her hand and on knocked on the bedroom door of Madge and Sam’s room.
“Come in.”

“Has Peeta finished his album?” She asks and Sam nods his head. “What’s it called?”

Sam exhales and offers her a smile. “Land and sea.”

She feels her knees go weak and inhales a deep breath as she feels the tears prickle her eyes.

“Are you ok?” Madge asks, ready to embrace her cousin.

She nods, giving them a smile as a lone tear falls down her cheek. “Where it all began.”

She left the couple to themselves and put her pyjamas on, Peeta’s shirt massive on her tiny frame. It still smelt slightly of him and she held the necklace in her hand and fell asleep with a smile on her face and Peeta on her mind.

Madge and Sam left them a few days later, heading across the country to New York for New Years Eve. They offered to take Prim and Katniss but they let the couple go on their own. Katniss spent as much time with her sister during winter break.

They watched the latest Christmas releases, had late night talks and Prim offered advice as Katniss picked out things for college.

They went for early morning surfs together and went exploring together until Prim was back at school.

Katniss began filling her days with song writing and sorting out the things she’d take to college. She wrote a long list and ensured everything was ready for her departure.

She also spent her days getting lost, singing too loudly and watching the sunset on the hood of her Audi. She returned at dinnertime having gotten distracted and counted the stars from the back porch. She daydreamt and imagined. She wrote some more and played her guitar. She listened to Peeta’s playlist at night time as she stared at the ceiling or watched the waves from her bay window.

She did more covers and made use of her free time before she was thrust into college life.

She still went out of her way to not interact with her parents despite her departure date fast approaching. Her parents were hardly home and that suited her just fine.

Pop brought her boxes so she could begin to pack her things.

But Peeta had taught her a lesson on what she needed and didn’t need. He got by with a few pairs of jeans, shirts, a box of CD’s, guitar and surfboards and Katniss was going to try and replicate this.

A quarter of her room would be following to Stanford while the rest remained behind. She placed an envelope of photos on top of the box and then moved the box off of her bed.

She was leaving in two days for college and she was starting to feel the butterflies filling her stomach.

Her IPad sounded with an incoming video call and she accepted, falling onto the mattress of her bed beside Buttercup, the scraggily cat that Katniss hated and felt was only pitying her, as he knew she’d be leaving soon.
She talked to Madge for close to an hour. She had just returned back to Australia a few days ago and had just accepted her university offer to start at the end of February. She’d be joining Sam at his university. She would be undertaking a bachelor in journalism and minoring in digital arts and design and Sam would be transitioning into a teaching course of secondary school, to later become an English teacher after partaking in a bachelor of creative writing.

Michelle and Paul had been all for Madge undertaking a different career path than medicine. She just couldn’t handle day to day of patients and saving people and wanted a career that was a little more laid back.

Katniss just wished she were allowed that freedom of deciding her own career path.

“You should have never gotten on that plane.” Madge told her just before they ended the conversation.

A soft knock sounds on her door and it opens, revealing her father.

“I’ve been called in.” He tells her. “How’s the packing going? I was going to see if you needed a hand?”

“I’m finished.”

“Oh, okay, well I’ll see you in the morning.” He tells her. She could sense the awkwardness between them and wondered where it all went wrong.

He closes the door behind him and leaves her to wallow in the fresh batch of emotions that overcome her body. She was home alone and suddenly didn’t like the loneliness.

Buttercup moved closer to her body, cuddling against her and staring at her, softly purring as she cried her eyes out. He kept a watch on her and when she woke much later on, he was perched there still keeping an eye on her.

She realised her phone had woken her up and she searched for it on her bedside table. She sat up in bed slowly. The sun was quickly shooting up into the morning sky, lighting her room.

Madge had posted on her Facebook wall. She unlocked her phone, opening up the post. It was a link to a blog page. She rubbed her eyes, fighting to keep them open as it loaded the blog page.

*Peeta Mellark Official*

Her stomach knots in anticipation. She hadn’t realised how much she missed him. She pushed him to the back of her mind as she prepared for her next stage of her life. She had allowed herself to let her parent’s words influence her. Believing that Peeta was no good for her. And she felt mad at herself for believing that.

He was the best thing that had ever happened to her.

Her parents just didn’t see what Peeta really did for her. What he taught her, how he inspired her and helped her grow and learn for herself. How he taught her perspective and the really important things in life.

They just couldn’t understand this.

A post had just been made on his account and she’s curious to see what it’s all about.

*Land & Sea*
I’ve learnt a lot about perspective in the last couple of years. I’ve learnt how to be independent, how to live alone and realised what I needed to get through my day-to-day life. I’ve become a better surfer, musician, person, friend, brother and son in my time of self-discovery. I thought I was good at all of these things. I thought I was well on the path of self-discovery almost two years into my journey; I had been spending all this time in my van and living out of home as an 18 year old. I had no fixed address, five surfboards, my guitar, a box of CD’s, some clothes and the opportunity to wake wherever I chose. And almost two years into this journey, I realised how much more I had to learn about the world when I met you. You taught me about the big wide world and myself. We were both lost souls in this big wide world, thrust together at a time where we really needed someone else. We chased the sun and the waves. We sang too loudly and loved too much. We got lost on the coast and lost in each other. We taught each other how to be better people. I swear I wasn’t expecting this.

In two months I’ve become a whole different person because of you, my love.

And it all began on the corner of Lawson Street.

You’re my land and sea. And I am yours.

We are the sand, music, the sun, the sky, the moon, the trees and summer. Sunburnt lips and morning stars. The start of spring and the death of the winter. The sea, the waves, the blue of the ocean, surfing, the marine life and everything else we love about the sea. You are what home is. Where my heart lies.

We went through a long two months of emotions. We cried together, laughed together, danced together, sang together, shared secrets and made memories to last a lifetime. We came together and loved each other. We made music. We made love. We learnt and grew together. We were separated too soon and I’m sorry it had to happen, despite all the promises we made in the dark of the night.

And it all came crashing down. I never said goodbye because I imagined you’d never leave me. But we were torn apart that Wednesday morning and you were halfway home before I truly realised you weren’t coming back to me.

We went our separate ways and didn’t communicate with each other. It became too hard. You enrolled in college. I spent those months finishing my album off.

We were separated and forbidden to not see or speak to each other, my life was distracting and your parents want you to become something you don’t want to be. They want you to follow their footsteps, becoming a successful and respected when that would tear you apart. All you want to do is follow the sun, sing a high note and catch the highest waves, living life to your fullest.

I’m sorry for your dreams burning to the ground.

I miss you terribly and these months alone haven’t been so great. I liked my time alone but spending my time alone became spending time with you.

I know you’re not one for public affection but I wanted people to know the story behind Land & Sea. To know our story and how much you mean to me. And why I’m dedicating this album, my first album to you. My one and only.

This is the true story behind land and sea.

Land and sea, land and home.
You are my home. My land. My sea.

By the time you see this I’ll be at the tail end of my 16-hour plane ride.

I’ll see you soon.

Peeta

She didn’t register the tears that were falling down her cheeks until she had reread the post.

She had to be sure this was true.

She called Madge and waited.

“Is it true?” She asks her cousin the minute the video call connects.

Her cousin has a huge grin on her face and Katniss can hear a gathering in the background, they’re at a party most likely celebrating Haymitch’s fiftieth birthday. The night is dark and she realises its getting late.

“Is that Katniss?” She hears someone ask and her cousin nods and hands her phone off to the person. “Katniss!”

It’s Finnick.

“Hi.”

“You all right sweetheart?” She nods and gives him a smile. “He’s due to fly in at 8. Go get him.”

She realises she’s got an hour until his flight lands. Madge is quickly handed back.

“You okay?”

Katniss nods. “I am. What is Mom and Dad going to say?”

“I think it’s time to start living your life the way you want to live it. They need to let you go and now is as good as any time.”

She smiles at her cousin.

She jumps into her Audi and fiddles with her music. Her phone buzzes with a text from Prim.

You’re not going without me.

She detours to Rue’s house; Prim running down to the car with Rue trailing behind.

“He’s coming home.” Prim says, squeezing her sister’s hand.

Katniss smiles at her sister and drives towards the airport. Her heart is beating wildly inside her chest and her stomach is filled with butterflies.

She finds a park and the three girls run towards the airport, avoiding people as they were beginning to leave the airport with their trolleys of bags and toddlers throwing tantrums from the long flights.

She finds the flight board and searches it for Peeta’s possible flight.
“Gold Coast to LAX. Brisbane to LAX. Sydney to LAX. Where are you?” She mumbles to herself reading the board.

“Where was he flying from?” Prim asks.

“I assume the Gold Coast or Brisbane.”

“There. Brisbane to LAX. It’s just landed.” Rue tells them, coming back to them having asked the desk attendant. “They’re just leaving the plane now.”

Katniss takes off in the direction of the gate he’ll be entering. The same gate her family had arrived through ten weeks earlier.

She turns to look at Prim and Rue.

“Go, we’ll catch up to you.” Prim tells her, urging her to move.

She arrives at the arrivals gate just as the passengers are departing the flight. She tries to search through the crowd for Peeta, for his unruly curls and bright blue eyes.

He’s the last person to depart customs, thanking the attendants at the door. And when she sees him, she realises she’s the happiest person in the entire world.

She’s running for him and he barely has time to drop his backpack on the ground to capture her in his arms. She wraps her legs around his waist, clinging to him tightly.

“Katniss.” He exhales into her neck and buries his nose into the crook of her neck.

She feels moisture on her neck and when she dares to move away, she sees tears falling down his cheeks. She wipes his tears away and kisses him deeply.

He wipes the tears that have fallen from her eyes and drops her to the ground, embracing her for a long while.

“I’m home.” He whispers into her ear and she tightens her hold on him.

“I’m home.” She echoes and kisses his neck.

They’re a sobbing mess by the time they pull apart. A few of the attendants have watched their reunion with glazed eyes, touching their chests.

“Come on.” She tells him, taking his hand.

Peeta embraces Prim tightly and hugs Rue, introducing himself to her.

They walk hand in hand to baggage claim and his bag is the last item on the conveyor belt. He plucks the small bag off the belt and hoists it over her shoulder. He kisses Katniss’ cheek and Prim and Rue lead them out to the car.

She drives them back to the house and into the garage. Both her parent’s cars are in the garage and they sit in the car long after Katniss has turned off the engine, staring at the wall in front of them.

“What are you going to do Katniss?” Prim asks.

Katniss looks at Peeta. He smiles at her and she smiles back at him before turning back to her sister and friend.
“I’m moving to Australia.”

Prim and Rue beam, cheering and she catches Peeta’s look. It’s the most beautiful thing she has seen in her entire life. His eyes fill with tears and pure happiness and joy covers his face.

Prim and Rue go ahead and Katniss realises they are all still in their pyjamas. No wonder they were getting strange looks from people at the airport.

She takes Peeta’s hand, not wanting to let him go as they walk into this one together.

Her parents are in the kitchen having breakfast. Newspaper and IPad’s in hand.

“Girls, what are you doing here?” Her father asks, setting down his newspaper.

“Katniss picked us up.” Prim tells her father and sits down nervously on one of the stools.

She squeezes Peeta’s hand and they make themselves known to her parents, appearing from behind the wall.

She hears her mother gasp. “What is going on Katniss?”

She smiles at Peeta and then turns to look at her parents. She inhales a deep breath and smiles at them.

They lay together on the spare bed at her grandparents. The afternoon sun lights the room and a light breeze blows in from the ocean.

Her parents had told them to leave and she was seeking refuge at her grandparents until Wednesday when their flight left for Australia. She had no return flight planned and contacted Stanford telling them she wouldn’t be attending there.

Her grandparents accepted Peeta with open arms and were friendly to him. Her grandfather had bought them their flights back to Australia and would drive them to the airport come Wednesday morning.

“Thank you for coming for me.” She whispers to him in the late afternoon. “Because I would have been on the next flight to Australia if you didn’t come.”

Their bodies are bare and a single bed sheet covers their bodies. He wasn’t jetlagged, just tired from their reunion coupling.

Her grandparents had left them alone for the afternoon, letting them reacquaint themselves and make up for their time apart. They had actively volunteered to get out for the day, going and enjoying their own time together and exploring Santa Monica like they used to when they were younger.

She traces her finger over his tattoo, one he had had coloured during the last ten weeks and he trails his finger over her newest tattoo on her back. A design Peeta had drawn up for her and one of his lyrics. A compass with tree branches outlining the compass with flowers, a bird ready to take off in flight and an anchor down the bottom, leading to the lyric;

_Do you love the ocean? Could you love the ocean with me?_

He still wore his necklace with the land & sea tag and told her about his album and the last ten weeks of his life.
She filled him in on her time apart and cries in his chest when she recalled the separation and the rift between her friends.

He reassured her everything would be fine and they kissed, with no desire to do anything else.

Tuesday night she secured the last of her things in her suitcase. Her parents were on-call and Peeta and her were spending the night with Prim, Katniss giving her sister instructions on what she wants done with the things she’ll want shipped over. Her Aunt and Uncle were very happy to store most of her things.

They had helped her applying for a visa lasting over 12 months.

She would stay with Peeta, travelling with him in his van and testing their relationship in the confines of the small space.

Prim saw them off the next morning, hugging them goodbye as she ran for the school bus. Her grandfather packed the trunk of his Mercedes SUV with their gear. Her mother and father were standoffish and unwilling to accept her departure.

She hugged them goodbye despite the differences, inhaling their familiar scents and remembering their warmth and Peeta shook their hands as they walked down to the car. Her grandparents drove them and Katniss didn’t feel one bit of guilt leaving her family for her own adventure.

Her grandparents followed them right to the gate, hugging them goodbye tightly.

“It was lovely meeting you Peeta.” Her Nan tells Peeta.

“You too.”

Her Pop shakes his hand and smiles at the couple.

“Have fun you two and remember to strap yourselves in, it’s going to be a long ride.”

She feels her stomach fill with warmth. He had accepted Peeta would be there until the final sunset, much like her parents.

So, after when the Captain’s voice sounds on the intercom, alerting the passengers of their incoming arrival to Brisbane he turns to her and asks, “Are you ready, real or not real?”

“Real. Very real.”

Chapter End Notes

The end is nigh. Look out for the epilogue coming soon.
Days In The Sun

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

5 years later
A cream-coloured clapboard cottage in Byron Bay

She can hear the sound of a guitar playing and she smiles to herself. It seeps through the open windows of her bedroom and she listens for a long while as she wakes up from her afternoon nap. She looks around the bedroom and four and a half years of memories overwhelm her. She feels that warmth spread through her body just thinking about them all. The wood of the house has been further imbedded with rich and beautiful memories and moments shared.

She spent her first night as a married woman in this room. Her husband and her further explored life as a married couple in the comfort of their haven and made it their own. They spent stormy nights wrapped in the comfort of each other’s arms. Wrote songs together and spent lazy Sundays in here. They like to say they conceived their children in here but there’s the possibility that they were conceived somewhere by the sea.

Their children were born in this room and they’ve watched their young children growing up from this room. Their daughter and son first met in this room two years ago and a bond was forged between the two siblings from that morning meeting.

And in just a few weeks they’ll be meeting their new sibling who kicks and rumbles inside of her stomach.

She stretches the kinks from her body and sits up, rubbing her belly and smiles.

She loves being pregnant. She loves being a mother. She loves her family. She loves watching them grow into their personalities and into people.

She loves how they’ve defined her and made her into the person she is today. They’ve brought out her best self and Peeta tells her that she shines so brightly.

They are both proud people and are very proud of their journey. They are proud of how they’ve come here, to this point in their life.

She stands up on the wooden floors and rubs the swell of her belly that kicks and moves to the sound of its father playing and singing outside. Their turtle, the nickname their children gave their unborn sibling, responds to its daddy more than it’s brother and sister did in-utero. Daddy’s voice seems to calm it down on restless nights and put the turtle to rest. Whereas, her voice seemed to calm Willow and Kai when they were restless in-utero.

Turtle kicks about more and she rubs her belly, right where turtle is kicking to calm the baby down. The kicking stops as she walks, the gentle movements of her walking calming turtle down.

Peeta had spent the day in town with the kids, taking them to the markets and then to Finnick and Annie’s, where they played with Ziggy and Zaria Odair, running around the front yard butt-naked under the sprinkler. The sprinkler reminded Peeta of his childhood days, running naked under the sprinkler with his brothers and cousins on sunny afternoons as their parents sat on the front porch with drinks in hand and smiles on their faces as they watched their children happily play.

Peeta had sent her a video of them running around and she felt pure happiness at the sound of her
children’s laughter. They were truly their happiest under the sun.

They were also their happiest in the water. They had had a hard time keeping their children from the ocean.

She steps out of the bedroom and follows the sound of the guitar. She wished she hadn’t missed the sunny day with her family but Peeta suggested she have the day to herself as he took the kids and let her rest as the impending birth was just around the corner.

Paintings rest on the table of their dining room, ones they had painted with Ziggy and Zaria as well as the goodies they bought at the markets today. A dozen muffins from the Muffin Man sit on the table and she fights the urge to spoil her dinner with a muffin. She looks up at the wall, a painting Peeta had given her as her 21st birthday gift hangs on the biggest wall in their living room. He had painted it himself and it depicts the corner of Lawson Street where they first met over 5 years ago. She had cried when she unwrapped it and asked for him to place it in the living room so guests knew how it all began.

And it was the first thing she saw when she came home. It was a good welcome home, especially after those long trips away, travelling up and down the coast playing gigs or visiting family or when they returned home from the States, visiting her family. They had just returned from Sydney a few weeks ago where they had visited Prim and Jai, Prim who is based there for University and Jai who is working as a popular photographer.

It was good to come home here to Byron Bay.

They still travelled, playing gigs and showing their children their favourite places and beaches but they still liked to come home. They had found their perspective and place in this big world, no longer feeling like lost souls who chased the sun and stumbled through life.

She passes the walls that are covered in paintings and drawings and filled with lots of laughter and happiness. She can feel the laughter and happiness as she walks to the front screen and smiles because she’s so glad she’s found home.

She can hear Willow and Kai singing along with Peeta and she waits by the screen door.

“Days in the sun, nights on the street, singing to my mother, singing to the seas, singing to my father, singing to the trees, singing to the things that help us breathe days in the sun, are always, are always, are always the best with you”

Their happiness seeps out into the afternoon sun as they sing together.

She rubs her belly as he tunes his guitar and she hears the familiar tune of her favourite song.

Simple Things.

She quietly exits out the screen door and onto the porch. Peeta, now 25 sits on the edge of the porch with his back facing her. His unruly curls are even more unruly while he plays for their raven-haired girl and blond-haired son who lay on the grass watching the clouds and listen to their father in just their underwear.

“Do you love the ocean and could you love the ocean with me, Cause I’ll be yours, cause I’ll be yours These are the simple things, and I want you These are the simple things, my love, my love.”
And she just watches them. Her beautiful family singing all together in the afternoon light.

Some days she has to pinch herself to remind herself of this perfect life and the fact that her husband and her created these beautiful children.

She catches her daughter staring up at her with a beaming smile. Her almost two year old giggles from beside his sister with his big, cheeky smile.

“Mummy!”

Peeta turns around to look up at her and she comes and joins him, sitting on the edge of the wooden porch and kissing his lips. He smiles his classic smile and his eyes shine in the beautiful afternoon light.

And all she can think about is first meeting him, when his smile was wide and his eyes shone like the stars. How his songs put her on a journey, making her feel all these emotions and how they inspired her.

And she knew, even on that street corner that this would have happened. That he’d give her his heart under the night sky and he would eventually become her everything.

He was the sand, music, the sun, the sky, the moon, the trees and summer. Sunburnt lips and the morning stars. The start of spring and the death of the winter. He’s the sea, the waves, the blue of the ocean, the surf, the marine life and everything else she loves about the sea. He’s what home would be. He’s where her heart would lie.

Now he was her husband, partner, lover, work partner, adviser, life coach, inspiration, best friend and the father of her children. The guy who breathed life into her and gave her this beautiful life. She’s accomplished her biggest wish, one she was certain she’d never fulfill when she first met but he was the reason she has fulfilled her wish.

And her wish was to fall asleep beside her husband, with the ocean sounding in through their windows and listening to their two children breathing evening as they dreamt of the ocean in the walls of the little cottage by the sea. The cottage that filled her dreams and gave her hope for this life.

He places his hands on her belly and rubs it softly as their children chase each other on the soft grass of their front yard. They can just see the ocean through the trees and the trail they walk down to the beach every morning and night to look at the sun and the moon.

“Tell me something.” He whispers.

She smiles at him and places her hand over his hand.

“She smiles at him and places her hand over his hand.

“I still spend my days chasing the sun and dreaming of the ocean but you and the kids are always right there.” She begins. “I no longer runaway from love and am surrounded with unconditional love every second of everyday. I walk along the sand and see all the people I’ve inspired with my songs. I still sing too loudly for you and my children who love to hear me sing. And I race the moon home so I can be home with my family. I no longer get sidetracked by the coast as I have my loves waiting for me. And I leave home of the morning and don’t return until dinnertime because we, as a family have discovered something new.” She says. “And it’s now not just about land and sea, it’s also about you, Willow, Kai and Turtle.”

He smiles at her, kissing her deeply. She had never been one for public intimacy or affection but he truly turned that around as he continually showed his love for her every chance he got.
And now, five years later, she was no longer starved of attention and craved it from those who were bad for her. She no longer needed quick-fix hook ups and attention by boys who gave it to her. She no longer found the urge to sneak out of home, to be reckless and wild. She no longer needed the thrills of being with a boy in the back seat of his car, tugging at his clothes. She no longer needed a secret arrangement with boys who meant nothing to her. She no longer was stone cold and closed off. She no longer held her life to herself and never opened up.

But with Peeta, she was her true self. She never starved of attention and craved it from those who were bad for her. She received love and attention from her husband. She had a lifetime of sex and attention from the man who absolutely adores her and the man she absolutely adores. She received those thrills and highs from challenging surfs and achieving her songwriting goals. She channeled those needs into her craft and life. She now got to tug at Peeta’s clothes in the privacy of their bedroom as they craved that intimacy. She and Peeta no longer had to have a secret arrangement and they meant the world to each other. She wasn’t stone cold and closed off. She was open, loving and honest and never held a thing to herself.

And she still gets to lose herself to him. They still share secrets in the dark of night. They still have intimacy, affection and post-sex pillow talks. They share their hearts to each other and their music. They share their fears and dreams. She has the comfort of his arms, the feel of his fingers on her skin and the taste of his lips. And she has his voice to sing her songs as he holds on to her.

Her land and sea has consumed her, made her fall apart and has put her back together so many times. He gives her warmth and they share the space between their sheets as they sing out cries of pleasure and live their life as adults. They make music and still share parts of themselves to each other.

And most of all, she still feels her heart beating every time she’s with him.

He squeezes her hip and she turns to him, looking into his eyes and smiling.

He begins singing into the afternoon and she feels her heart surge in her chest.

She looks out at her children, feels her baby stirring inside of her belly and her husband’s constant warmth and his ocean scent.

She loves and continues to be loved by her lands and her seas.

Chapter End Notes

This is the end. I can’t believe I have finished my first multi-chapter story. It's been a pleasure sharing this with you all and I'm sad to see it end.

They finally have found their true purpose and place in life and it is so satisfying to see them at this stage of their life with such hope and a bright future.

I had written out a different chapter for this last one but it was pushing 7000 words and was still nowhere near finished and was being rushed. I just wanted a nice simple ending for you all and this one has satisfied me the most, giving it the best send off.

The intended last chapter has lots of goodies in it so they might become outtakes for you all if you are interested. I'd like to give you guys a snapshot into Katniss and Peeta's life as they find their place in the world.
Thank you all for reading and the positivity, I've appreciated it a lot. And from the bottom of my heart I love you all for giving this a chance.

Come and find my on Tumblr - Herainab

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