DREAMS COME TRUE

by icbiwf

Summary

A World Cup-inspired Everlark drabble that grew into a short one-shot.

Peeta Mellark was not a soccer fan. He had never played soccer as a kid, or in school. His large, stocky frame lent itself more toward power sports like wrestling and football. He had never actually watched an entire soccer game before, not even after they got the sports package and had two whole channels devoted to the European leagues.

Which left Katniss nothing but mystified at his sudden devotion to the World Cup.

"You can just feel how important this is to the players," he tried to explain to her after he'd spent two hours watching a scoreless game. "Their whole lives have been building up to this, ever since they were little kids they've been dreaming of winning this tournament, and now here they are, and if they can score in the next ten minutes then their dream lives on." The excitement that had been lighting up his features dimmed a bit as his face scrunched up in thought. "At least I think there's another ten minutes. They don't count down to zero like other sports, but I'm pretty sure the game ends at ninety minutes. Well, ninety minutes plus a few, because they don't stop the clock when play stops and they sort of try to make up for that at the end..." He let his voice trail off when he saw the look on Katniss's face.

"You see?" she said. "You don't even understand the rules to this thing."

"I know the basics!" he said defensively. Katniss dipped her head to hide her smile at his childish tone. "But I'm serious. This is like if the Olympics only had one sport. These players have had one dream in their lives, and now they're trying to make their dreams come true. It's compelling, even if I still don't understand how the offsides rule works."
Katniss bit her lip, feeling guilt twist in her gut at the discussion of life-long dreams. She knew what Peeta's dreams had been. He'd always been a talented artist, from the time they were kids in school. If he had studied at an art school, or if he had moved to a larger city to immerse himself in the art scene there, he could have been something really special. With his good looks, natural charm, and work ethic, he could have gone anywhere and done anything. But he had forgone college altogether, instead staying behind in their backwoods coal town to take over his father's bakery, and his biggest artistic accomplishment was when a picture of Delly Cartwright's wedding cake ran in the local paper.

Katniss knew it was because of her. She'd never had a hope of being able to afford college, not when she couldn't afford groceries half the time, and even if she'd had the money she never would have left Prim alone with their mother. She wasn't going anywhere, and he'd stayed with her, and the truth was that she sometimes hated herself for holding him back when he could have done so much better for himself without her.

She didn't often let her thoughts spiral like this, because deep down she knew that Peeta was happy with their life, and she was too. She knew that if Peeta really had any big regrets then she'd know about them. He was too open with her to hide anything important, and she had become an expert in reading him over the years. But despite knowing all of this, sometimes she couldn't help but mourn for all the opportunities he'd passed up for her.

"Haven't you ever had a dream, Katniss?" Peeta asked, oblivious to the mental turmoil he was causing.

"I was just trying to survive. Any dreams I had were about Prim, getting her through school. Getting her a decent meal."

Peeta smiled softly. "That's what makes you such an amazing person: You're selfless, you always put other people's dreams ahead of your own."

He obviously meant that as a compliment, but with the direction her thoughts had taken she didn't see it that way. She wasn't selfless, just the opposite. She had let Peeta throw his future away because she was too weak and too selfish to let him go.

"Did you have a dream growing up?" she forced herself to ask.

"Oh, yeah," he said, smiling at the memory. "I was always a dreamer, it was the one thing my mother was right about. I'd spend hours sketching and painting, daydreaming about what my future would be like."

Peeta's words were like a spear in her gut, confirming all of her worst fears. She could just picture it, little Peeta as the boy he was in school, sitting up in his room with his watercolors, dreaming about being a professional artist. She didn't have much of a chance to beat herself up, though, because Peeta was still talking.

"Do you want to see what I looked like when my dream came true?" he said.

Her confusion must have been evident on her face, because Peeta chuckled lightly as he rose from the couch and disappeared into their bedroom. When he returned a moment later and handed her a large white photo album, Katniss's confusion only deepened.

"Peeta, this is our wedding photo." From the cover of the album, their much younger selves stared out at her. The picture showed how tight money had been for them at the time, when Prim was about to go away to college and Peeta's father had only signed over ownership of the bakery a few months before. Katniss wore a simple knee-length white dress she'd found in a second-hand store,
while Peeta wore a rented tuxedo that was slightly too long on him and too tight across his shoulders. She’d been embarrassed by how drab the dress was, but Peeta had insisted that it complemented her well and that anything more elaborate would have looked silly on her anyway. Peeta had hated the tux because it didn’t fit him in exactly the same ways as Rye's hand-me-downs had never fit him growing up, but Katniss had liked how it emphasized his broad shoulders and narrow waist. She still did.

They had almost forgone wedding photos at all, deeming them an unnecessary expense, but at the time Peeta’s friend Delly had been just beginning to turn her photography hobby into a career, and had volunteered to do the wedding photos herself in exchange for using copies of them in her portfolio. The photo on the cover of the album had been taken shortly after the ceremony. Katniss was holding her bouquet of wildflowers and dandelions that Prim had gathered that morning, with more of the flowers woven into the elaborate wrap-around braid her mother had styled her hair into. Peeta was holding both of her hands, his hair left at her request in an unruly mess of curls rather than the slicked-back style he generally used for formal occasions. They were supposed to be looking into the camera, but in the moment the photo was taken they were both caught sneaking glances at each other. And they were both grinning like they had just recently discovered the concept of happiness, which wasn't as far off the mark as she would have liked.

Katniss looked up at Peeta as he sat next to her, not understanding what he was trying to say. "Why are you showing me our wedding photo?"

"Cause that's the day my dream came true," he explained. He reached over and began flipping through the book. "Here, it's a few pages in," he said. The memories of that day came back to her as he flipped past the photos: Their families in a hundred different groupings. The decorations in the VFW hall that her Uncle Haymitch had arranged for them to use for the day. Peeta talking with the justice before the ceremony. Her walking down the aisle alone, having refused to let anyone who wasn’t her father fill the role of “giving her away.”

"Here!" Peeta said, pointing her to a particular photo. This one was different from the others, it wasn't as carefully posed as Delly's other work and the image was slightly crooked. It showed Peeta, standing next to his brother, with the tops of people's heads blocking the lower part of his body.

"I had your friend Finnick take that picture," Peeta explained. "I knew Delly would be focused on you, but I wanted to capture this. That's what I looked like the moment they opened the doors and you walked into the hall. It's the first time I saw you in your wedding dress, the first moment when I saw you walking down the aisle towards me. That's the moment when all my dreams came true."

Katniss was too overcome to speak, but she reached out and clutched Peeta's hand tightly in her own as she studied his younger self in the photo. His mouth was hanging open, and the corners were just starting to pull up into a smile. His eyes were wide, as wide and as blue as she’d ever seen them. Rye had one hand on his shoulder, and was looking at his brother with concern.

"I remember when Rye grabbed my shoulder there," Peeta said, as if he could read her thoughts. "He was afraid I was about to fall over, and if he hadn't grabbed me I might have. It's like I forgot how to stand for a moment. I felt his hand and it helped me remember that this wasn't just another idle daydream, that this time it was finally real."

"I guess I had quite an effect on you," Katniss said, trying to lighten the mood so she didn't do something stupid like cry.

"You still do," Peeta said. "Sometimes I think you have no idea what kind of effect you have on me."
"I have some idea," she said, feeling like she'd been insulted somehow. "I just find it hard to believe sometimes."

"You never give yourself enough consideration," he said. "See? Selfless."

Katniss scoffed at his overestimation of her once again. "So anyway," Peeta said, "I know what it's like when your dreams come true. If you look at me in that picture and compare it with that Brazilian player who scored the goal in overtime yesterday, I think you'll see the same kind of excitement."

"I don't think they call it overtime in soccer," Katniss teased, "and that Brazilian guy jumped almost his entire body height into the air and then wound up in a pile with ten other sweaty men."

"Hey, you don't know what happened at my bachelor party!" Peeta said in mock offense, drawing a real laugh from her. "But you're right, that's closer to what I did when you said yes."

Katniss couldn't keep the smile off her face at that, and as the soccer game ended with 127 minutes on the clock and no goals scored, she stared at the picture of Peeta at their wedding, and a plan formed in her mind. "Hey, can you give me your phone?"

"Sure," he said, his face displaying his lack of understanding even as he passed her the phone. "Calling someone?"

"I want to take your picture," she said as she set up the camera app. "I think it's time we added to this collection of Peeta-when-his-dreams-come-true. Smile for me?"

He gave her one of his trademark megawatt Peeta smiles, the kind of smile that she never would have dreamed could be genuine before she got to know him. The kind of smile that left her simultaneously thankful and disbelieving that he was a part of her life at all.

"There's something I've been meaning to tell you the last couple of days," she said.

"Yeah?" he said absently, trying to hold his smiling pose.

"Yeah." She took a deep breath, and steadied the camera.

"I'm pregnant."

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