Not You

by italktoomuch

Summary

A year by year fic of the Reapings leading up to the fateful one that started The Hunger Games as we know it, beginning from the 69th Hunger Games, alternating between Katniss and Peeta’s perspectives. For the prompt School Days.

Not You…

PEETA, age 11, 69th Hunger Games:

I never thought I’d start worrying about her dying too; at least not this year. But I do. Her collarbones poke out, ridging even from under her shirt that is much too large, although I am sure it was just fine before the winter. She shivers alone at lunch, clasping bony fingers tightly around themselves, her shoulders hunched, a scowl etched on to her face, her eyes both sad and hollow, but determined.

A boy and a girl, from the Seam, only a year older than us are reaped that year.

Yet it is still Katniss whose life I fear.

On the night I see her, her eyes are not determined, the fire rather diminishing with the rain permeating her skin and into the bones desperately visible just underneath.

Not her.

The bread burns, I feel a flicker of hope burning inside me for her, while my mother’s palm does the same to my cheek. I don’t care.
She doesn’t shiver the next day.

For a moment, I think she sees me staring and the butterflies ignite in my belly and I wonder what we will say, if anything.

But instead, her eyes flit away and find a dandelion; and for the first time in months, I see the corners of her lips twitch just the slightest way up, and something reignites behind her eyes. And I know this year, she is safe.

KATNISS, age 12, 70th Hunger Games:

It’s my first year. I don’t sleep the night before, neither does Prim. My mother cries. And when I have to separate from them into the throng of those of us unfortunate enough to have names in the two bowls set high on the stage, Prim cries for me too. I’m numb, my muscles tense and my eyes wide. I don’t trust anyone. And all I can hear is Prim, wailing as our mother fails to calm her even when I’m long out of earshot. I can’t leave them; they won’t make it if I go.

Prim doesn’t even know how to hunt.

I make a note to do teach her if I can get through today with my name remaining buried beneath everyone else’s.

The crowd thickens and engulfs me into it, and then forces me into a line of other girls my age, some I vaguely recognise from school. What are we queuing for?

They take our blood and press it on to the page, so quickly that I don’t have the time to wonder what it does as it seeps into the paper, why they want it, what they want to know. We’re walking again, filing into slots. I’ve never seen so many people in the one place before, never had so many people fill a space so huge with only silence and dread. I swallow thickly and examine the crowd in an attempt to work out their strategy for penning us like this. I see Madge and we lock eyes for a second, but we find we cannot do more to acknowledge the other. I blink and turn away, distracting myself as I continue to decipher the layout. The girls go in on one side, the boys on the other. And the youngest are at the front which means Gale should be – Oh, no Gale.

I find him in the middle of his section, standing tall over everyone else, even at fourteen. He nods and I nod back, my lips pressed together tightly and my stomach churning. I can’t look at him any longer either.

My palms grow clammy and my chest shakes, but now I keep my head up, eyes forward and my gaze trained on the stage. Just get it over with….

I want to throw up as I realise I feel relief when I don’t recognise the two older Merchant Tributes that stand on the stage. At least the Tesserae was worth it, at least it wasn’t me.

At least it wasn’t him.

PEETA, age 13, 71st Hunger Games:

They make us watch as they die. Both of them, in a second bloodbath at the Cornucopia, something that only happens in some Games when two alliances face off for the territory, food and weapons. We’re in school, Miss Tracey is supposed to be taking math, when the Anthem plays and the screen lowers from the ceiling.

I didn’t know them, not well. I don’t think they even knew each other much; one Seam, one Merchant. But I know they’re classroom is two down from ours. I knew before today, but you would have no doubts now, the cries and sobs are so distraught that they could only be from one
They show us the whole thing, from the start to the end, with only three Careers left and the
ground red beneath them.

I look to Katniss. Did she know her? The Seam girl?

Her grey eyes are steely and unwavering, staring straight through the screen, her jaw clenched and
her face blank. I hope she didn’t know her.

KATNISS, age 14, 72nd Hunger Games:

They don’t stand a chance. Two twelve year olds from the Seam, it’s… it’s…..

Gale’s fire and fury from his rants in the woods are rubbing off on me, but I know it would do no
good to yell about the injustices of The Games, of being ruled by the Capitol. And I’m no good
with words.

But they’re only a little over a year older than Prim.

My nails dig into my palms as I watch them tremble on stage, Effie Trinket as bright and as
excitable as ever, and Haymitch Abernathy the reliable drunk, joke. It was only last year that it
dawned on me that he would have won the Games once. I don’t know how he did, and I won’t
try to find out; I refuse to watch any more than I have to, any more than I am obliged and forced
to.

I look up from my shoes and find that the crowd is starting to disperse, the volume of its silence
still something I am not used to interpreting or understanding. I am not the only one still stuck to
my spot. Adjacent to me, in the boys section of my age he stands too. His fists are clenched like
mine and his face is a mix of sadness and anger. He shakes his head, kicks his toe into the ground
and turns.

When he looks up to find me staring, his blue eyes making their way right into mine, I freeze,
having been caught. He knows better than to smile, not right now, and not after what I’m sure we
were both thinking: we just watched two kids get escorted to their graves, we know, everyone
knows it, and they know it too.

Instead, he blinks and bows his blond head, his face solemn but kind, shoves his hands in his
pockets and walks away.

PEETA, age 15, 73rd Hunger Games

Halfway through. Fifteen. Rye and Arden made it so can I. Get this over with and it’s only three
more years. Three more years of watching Effie Trinket smile and congratulate our Tributes.
Three more years of school corridors growing eerily quiet at this time of year, of lessons
interrupted, of classmates no longer here, of their friends crying for weeks. Three more years and
my Father will sleep easier again and my Mother’s shouts of how useless I am will not increase
the closer The Reaping gets.

Effie Trinket steps up to the mic, as she has every other year. “As usual, ladies first.”

A deeper silence falls over the already noiseless crowd. Her heels clack on the flooring and her
hand dives into the pile of names.

I wonder how many have hers on them. I know she always signs up for Tesserae; I see her drag it
passed the bakery every year. Only three more years of that too, I think.
Effie clears her throat. “Sabina Evans.”

I don’t know her, I think. I let out a breath and immediately hate myself for feeling this way, just as I have done every year. Because every time they call out the girl, I find myself actually relieved. Because it is not her, because Katniss Everdeen is not walking up the steps to that stage. And every year, I get so caught up in thinking this that I don’t ever hear who the boy is, and only know it is not me when I see him climb to the stage too.

And hopefully, I only have three more years of that too.

KATNISS, age 16, 74th Hunger Games:

“Peeta Mellark.”

Oh, no, I think. Not him. Because I recognize this name, although I have never spoken directly to its owner. Peeta Mellark. I can see his struggle to remain emotionless, but his blue eyes show the alarm I’ve seen so often in prey. Yet he climbs steadily onto the stage and takes his place. Why him? I think. Then I try to convince myself it doesn’t matter. Peeta Mellark and I are not friends. Not even neighbours. We don’t speak. Our only real interaction happened years ago. He’s probably forgotten it. But I haven’t and I know I never will…

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