Grounding

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Summary

Peeta and Katniss both aren't the same after the reign of Snow. Post Mockingjay Peeta and Katniss try to adjust to "normal" life.
Nighttime (Prologue)

Chapter Summary

In which Peeta and Katniss' mental statuses are briefly explained before I get my stuff together and actually write this.

Emotional dependency wasn’t something that they meant to happen during the Hunger Games, but put two people from the same town in a highly traumatic situation and dependency just happened. Now, Katniss and Peeta lived together, trying to piece back together what was left of their lives.

Almost every night, if she could sleep, Katniss would dream. On good nights, she would dream of only colors and vague shapes. Abstract memories of her life in District 12, sometimes good memories. Sometimes she dreamt of her first time in the Capitol, and how it amazed her with its colorful people and endless resources. Most nights, she vividly dreamt of her time in the Arena and the Second Rebellion. Fire eating her house, drowning, supposed gifts becoming cluster bombs falling on Capitol children, water flooding her lungs as she drowned, vultures, poison gas coming up from the ground to choke her and Peeta, Prim... night after night she would wake up in a cold sweat, heart pounding. Sometimes she would find herself restrained and panic, screaming until Peeta, equally rattled, ran into the room to unwrap her from her bedsheet. Sometimes when there were thunderstorms, Katniss would instinctively take cover under a desk or hide in a closet. Her ear was still damaged from her first Hunger Games, and if Peeta accidentally snuck up on her left, she would catch herself ready to throw an elbow.

Peeta wasn't much better off. Reality and imagination blurred together. He constantly doubted if what was happening was real or if he was dreaming. His mind always raced, wondering if Katniss was safe, wondering if the sound of bees wasn't the sound of bees at all, wondering if he would slip away again and come back to find that he killed Katniss. All he wanted to do was leave the Games whole, alive or dead, he just wanted to be in one piece. Now he was missing his left leg, replaced by a plastic and metal prosthesis, and it itched. His leg would itch and ache and nothing could be done to relieve it. He had to wait it out. Usually it flared up whenever the weather changed, and he would joke that he was like an old man now. He felt like an old man. He could usually sleep, something he was thankful for, without too many nightmares. When Katniss called out in the night for him, he would either pull on his prosthesis and run, or he would quickly grab the crutches next to his bed and fly into her room. When he did have nightmares, it was about the Capitol, injecting poison into his veins and into his mind, pinpricks pushing fire into his brain. Rough hands restraining him, the flash of a blade, the screams of human and metal and bone.

It was all hard to think about, let alone discuss, and they kept their experiences to themselves. Both knew they should talk about it, but neither wanted to be the one to address the giant, blood-stained elephant in the room, so they ignored it as best as they could.

It was exhausting.
One morning, Katniss was trying her hand at baking muffins from scratch. *Flour, sugar, baking powder, milk.* Simple enough. She always teased Peeta for it being easy, but she realized it was pretty damn hard and there was no guessing. It was nothing like cooking. She accidentally started the mixing machine on too high a setting and let out a small yell as flour billowed up and stuck to her loose t-shirt.

"Dammit," she muttered, wiping weakly at the disaster.

"Katniss?" a groggy Peeta came up from behind her, "Are you-- baking? Real or not real?"

Katniss snorted and turned to him, "Well, I was *attempting* to bake, but, obviously that's not what is happening here. So real."

Peeta wore black sweatpants and a plain shirt. "I could teach you, you know," he offered, opening his arms for a hug. Katniss hesitantly looked at her flour covered self, but Peeta just smiled softly as she walked into his arms. "Good morning," he said into her hair, breathing in gently. Her hair smelled like cinnamon, possibly from her mixer disaster.

"Good morning, Peeta," she mumbled, fingers tracing shapes on his back. "How's the leg?"

Outside it was sunny, but big puffy clouds were moving in slowly. She understood weather affected him like it did her scars. It was one of the things they both shared.

"I'm at a one," Peeta said, "A little achey."

"Good." Turning her head to kiss his neck, she asked, "You wanna help me make these muffins?"

Peeta pulled away to go wash his hands, "Do you want me to get you an apron?"

Mornings and afternoons were easier for the both of them. Katniss typically could keep herself busy if she needed to ignore her feelings and flashbacks. Finnick had taught her how to tie knots to cope when she felt overwhelmed, and so she would practice knot tying on a variety of ropes that Annie had given her as a gift from Finnick. If even the thought of Finnick was too much, she would run. Katniss would write a short note to Peeta and take off for an hour or three; sometimes she would hunt while out, sometimes she would just do a perimeter run to calm her nerves. She would come back all sweaty and drained, but cleansed nonetheless.

Peeta coped by baking and painting. Baking was sometimes harder because his prosthesis would itch if flour or some other dry ingredient made its way to the padding for his hip because he had a habit of wiping his hands off on his pants or shirt, or sometimes he would hook his thumb onto the
top part of the prosthesis, like a pocket. Or if his pain was too much, he had to bake on crutches, mostly because Katniss worried, and crutches and baking really didn't mix. Painting was most relaxing for him and required almost zero physical effort. Living as a Victor, he had practically unlimited paint and supplies, so he didn't have to stress if he would like his painting or have to paint over it when he needed more canvases.

If either felt they were dissociating and couldn't distract themselves enough, catching themselves staring off into space a little too much, the two would lay on the rug in the living room, a surprisingly plush woven rug, and just be next to each other. Hearing each other's breathing, feeling the shared heat, sometimes holding hands. The tactile presence of each other helped ground them. Katniss was most verbal during these sessions, talking about the old times with her family, remembering the better days. Peeta liked to listen. Secretly he felt that it was like his penance for trying to kill Katniss and for killing who knows how many before getting back to her. Sometimes, Peeta felt off and had to talk. Katniss would open the conversation gently, and Peeta would lay there, watching the fan above them spin, telling her about how he felt recently. On occasion he would try to put into words his loyalty and respect for Katniss, working himself up enough to drive him to a panic attack. Katniss would gently weigh him down, putting her arms around him or her head on his chest, applying just enough pressure to keep him grounded, murmuring soothing affirmations and stroking his hair until his breathing evened out again. Peeta felt it was oversharing and burdensome when he panicked in front of Katniss, but she was glad he felt he could trust her with something so intimate, so vulnerable.

Daylight kept most of the bad away.

Chapter End Notes

I like to call this projecting something that recently happened to me into writing. Prepare for some actual dialogue and like smut maybe in the next chapter. Finals and other stuff is coming up, but I will finish this.
Relapse

Chapter Summary

Some more background-y information and a Mockingjay recap is given. We meet Haymitch and his geese, and Katniss has a PTSD flashback and a panic attack.

Chapter Notes

This chapter features the start of the mature-ish content. Also, Haymitch arrives and brings the canon-typical alcohol abuse. Be warned.

It had been a few months since the two had moved out back to District 12's Victor's Village, which had been spared from the bombings by the Capitol. It wasn't of Katniss' own accord originally; after her trial, Commander Paylor and the rest of the jury decided to send her on temporary exile to 12, so she could heal and the new government could try to reestablish order. Peeta arrived a while later with primroses to plant in the front of Katniss' house in memory of Prim, but the two ended up living together out of habit. Few original residents of the Seam remained, including Greasy Sae who took care of Katniss before Peeta moved in. She ensured Katniss was eating, coming in and cooking for her. Greasy Sae was like Katniss’ new mother in 12, because her own mother refused to move back to 12. Katniss couldn't blame her.

Haymitch lived across from them, tending to his geese and his alcohol. He rarely left the house, but a few times a month, Katniss and Peeta would bring actual, non-alcohol-based food and drinks to his house. The walk up to his house featured various whiskey bottles and liquor boxes, and from the porch one could smell the alcohol. When they felt up to it, and when Haymitch was out with the geese, the two would sometimes try to clean up around his house. Typically they focused on the kitchen, which is where they usually were whenever they came over. Broken glass, torn papers, trash, alcohol, and the occasional unnamed substance littered his house. God knows what they would find upstairs where his room presumably was, so they stuck with the main floor. Haymitch never mentioned when he came back inside and found the kitchen cleaned and the floor swept, but he never complained, so it became almost a monthly habit.

Katniss was constantly on the lookout for more Capitol vehicles, planes, trucks, anything that could transport bombs or assassins. She wasn't so worried about her life, but the lives of people who survived the bombings, and Peeta. Peeta insisted that there were no trucks coming to take him away, and Paylor wouldn't send assassins after them all the way to 12. Paylor liked Katniss, Peeta reasoned. She wasn't convinced. Secretly she liked her house because it was a ranch with a basement; it was a harder target.

When she couldn't sleep, Katniss would sneak out of the house and keep watch. It was habit. Tonight was one of those nights. Slipping on her hunting boots, the quietest shoes she owned, and pulling a jacket on, she crept out of the house, holding her breath as she padded past Peeta's room. On the way out of the door, she grabbed her knife, bow, and quiver, just in case. She softly closed the door, holding the handle down until the door was in place, then slowly letting the handle raise.
The air outside was cold and still. The autumn leaves fell whenever a wind blew through, making Katniss whip her head around in the direction of the noise. When she sat at the door, she sat with her left ear to the house, which presumably wouldn't make any important noises, leaving her good ear to the world to listen. The soft fluffing of goose wings and sleepy honking were usually the only noises she heard this late at night; sometimes however, when light streamed from across the street, Haymitch would suddenly yell and throw bottles in his kitchen and send her heart rate skyrocketing, pushing her up against the siding of her house with her knife at her chest for protection.

Tonight, Haymitch was particularly active. All of the Victors held secrets that they couldn't always keep tamped down. Something heavy dragged across his bedroom upstairs, and Katniss could see his silhouette through the thin curtains he had put up, hunched over something. Katniss tried to listen to what wasn't Haymitch, tried to focus on her other surroundings. The geese were quiet, and few leaves fell. She thought she heard something moving towards her on gravel just as Haymitch shoved whatever he was dragging down his stairs with a drunken yell, making loud crashing noises that startled the geese and terrified Katniss. She backed up into the doorway, pressing herself small between the frame and the rest of the house. She had left her bow just out of arm's reach in her hurry and swore. She held her knife in a death grip, turning her head to listen for any surprise noises. Haymitch's silhouette disappeared as he went downstairs. Katniss let out a choked whimper as the gravel-crunching came closer, and the wind whispered her name. Leaves fell, Haymitch's door opened, letting more light pour out into the street, and Katniss saw something glowing to her right, from the forested side of the village. Katniss pushed up harder against the door, not opening it in case whatever was outside slid inside to get to Peeta and the book they had created together in memory of those they had lost. Finnick was in that book, and so was Prim and Cinna and Rue, and Katniss would not let anything come back to kill their memories too.

The wind picked up and on it the low grumble of something blew to her. Katniss. The leaves rattled. Katniss. Something slammed shut. Gravel crunched. Katniss. Rain began to fall, cold and clean, but as it touched her face, Katniss was overwhelmed with fresh memories of Finnick, the mutts, and the sewers. The footsteps were coming closer, something large was coming. She slid down against the door, head dropped and eyes unfocused as the vividness of Finnick's death flashed over her. Sewer water splashed up to her face as the mutts, slimy and pale, attacked Finnick below her, and she started shaking. She saw, in slow motion, the largest mutt in the group shove its way towards Finnick. Finnick looked up, locking eyes with her, exhausted and terrified, and his face transformed into Peeta's. Peeta's bright blue eyes stared as the monster went in for the killing bite to his throat, and she screamed. She fumbled for her knife and muted in the distance, something like a door slammed. More noises came from behind her, and she tore her eyes from Peeta/Finnick's body to face her attacker behind her. Large arms came up from the sewer, and suddenly she realized Haymitch was yelling at her.

"Katniss! Katniss snap out of it!" he repeated from behind her, arms crossed around her chest, restraining her. Katniss was standing. She looked to her hands, free from Haymitch's grip- she held her knife with white knuckles, brandishing it at... Peeta, who looked disheveled and defensive. His prosthetic wasn't even on quite right.

"Oh..." Katniss said simply. She let go of the knife, letting it harmlessly fall in front of her, hands shaking.

"I'm gonna let you go now, okay?" Haymitch said slowly, stinking of wet shoes and alcohol. Katniss didn't realize how much she was actually dependent on the support, and fell to her hands and knees, wheezing.

Above her, Haymitch told Peeta to make sure she got to bed all right and to calm her down.
"In case she doesn't relax on her own, I brought some of this." A liquid sloshing noise passed above to Peeta, who hummed his thanks. Katniss whined and put her forehead to the wet concrete, trying not to throw up. The wind still murmured Katniss with the leaves. Adjusting his leg a little, Peeta squatted down to her level.

"Katniss?" he asked softly. "Katniss, I need to get you inside, okay? It's raining and I don't want you to get sick." To Haymitch, he said, "Could you please move her bow inside? And thank you..."

"Do you need anything else?"

"No. Haymitch, I'm sorry."

"It's fine, kid. I was already up." Haymitch's footsteps retreated, slightly unsteady.

"Katniss," Peeta repeated, "I'm going to help you up and we're going to go inside. Okay?"

Katniss took in a shuddering breath and whispered, "Okay," as she got to her knees. She was drenched in a mixture of sweat and rain and she was cold.

Peeta helped her up and threw her arm around his neck to help her get inside. Closing the door, he carefully stripped her of her jacket, which was soaked, and her boots and socks, announcing what he was doing before he did it so not to scare Katniss any more than she already was. Katniss' breathing still was unsteady and parts of her feet and hands began to tingle from her lack of oxygen and the cold. Her fingernails were turning shades of purple and blue.

"I need to get you into something dry, okay?"

Katniss shakily gave him a thumbs up. She finger-spelled "b-a-t-h". She was so cold.

"Okay, you can get in the bath and I'll bring you something. I need you to try to breathe, though. Can you do that for me?"

Katniss didn't have the strength to turn the handle for the water for the bathtub, and so waited on the toilet wrapped in a blanket for Peeta to come check on her. She tried to breathe in and out evenly, but she kept holding her breath on the exhale, trying to hold in noisy whimpers and sobs.

Peeta knocked on the doorframe and entered. He put down a bath robe and a new pair of pjs, button down flannels, and started the water for Katniss. It killed him to see her like this. He talked softly to Katniss, trying to get her to breathe.

"I'm real, okay? Come on Katniss, breathe with me. Ready? Inhale," he inhaled for a count of three, "and exhale," he exhaled for a count of six. He had actually learned the technique from Annie when he was recovering after the death of Coin and Snow. She was always good at yoga and meditation, and taught him some ways to ground himself if he was ever alone and panicking.

Once the bathtub was sufficiently full and the room steamed up, he helped Katniss undress and get into the tub. She shook as the water expelled the cold from her. Inhale and exhale she thought, shivering.

Peeta leaned over the tub and placed a kiss on her forehead. "Is this better?"

She nodded, not trusting her voice. Talking would lead to more crying.

"I'm not leaving," he promised, "I'm going to make tea and get the bed ready." His was easier to get in, so he piled on multiple blankets and started the tea.
Once Katniss was warmed up and redressed, he ushered her into his bedroom so she could sleep if she wanted, and so he could keep a close eye on her. They both climbed into bed, with Peeta on Katniss' right. He slipped off his prosthesis, keeping it close by just in case.

"How-- how long was I out?" Katniss asked from underneath several fleece blankets.

"Haymitch made it sound like only a couple of minutes," Peeta answered carefully, "Where'd you go?"

"Literally or --?"

"Both."

"I went outside to keep watch, and..." she trailed off.

Peeta turned on his side to look at her. "And...?"

Katniss cleared her throat, "And, um, Haymitch was throwing stuff in his house, and I heard noises and I thought the wind was mutts and I was so sure something was coming to get us, so I panicked and--" she took a deep breath, trying to stem the flow of her words.

Peeta threaded his fingers through her still-damp hair, braiding little pieces together absentmindedly. Katniss shuddered. "It's okay," he soothed, "You can tell me."

"I relapsed," Katniss admitted, "Remember the-- the sewers?" Her voice broke and Peeta stopped braiding and moved to hold her hand. He remembered the sewers.

"I.. I watched Finnick die again."

"Oh, Katniss..."

"No, but.. it wasn't Finnick. He looked at me and then suddenly he was you. And then the mutts--" tears began to well up in her eyes and she pulled her hand out of Peeta's and turned on her side to face the wall. Her back shook as she tried to hold in her sobs.

Peeta sighed and rubbed her back, making soft sounds to calm her. He traced shapes and letters, writing recipes in large letters on her back with his hand for a few minutes, getting her to steady her breathing.

"Katniss, listen to me. What happened to Finnick wasn't your fault, okay? It was horrible and unfair but it wasn't your fault."

"I'm scared, Peeta," Katniss choking out. His eyebrows furrowed and he scootched closer to Katniss, slipping one arm under her pillow and draping the other across her waist. She closed her eyes and let out a sigh, visibly relaxing. "I'm just scared that someone will come and take this all away again."

"I'm here with you. Real or not real?"

"Real."

"What matters right now is that I'm here," he stroked his hand down her leg, nails dragging slightly, "and you're here and we're both safe. We're both here and real. Focus on what's now."

"Okay. I'll try."
His lips met her neck and she pushed back against him slightly. With this encouragement, Peeta went to work, gently sucking on her tense muscles, leaving small darkening marks on her neck.

"You don't have to do this," Katniss felt like she was being too needy. She was in Peeta's bed, and it was the middle of the night and she had caused enough drama.

"But I want to," Peeta smiled against her back. She turned to him so she could meet his eyes and pulled him in for a kiss. It was deep and needy, making Peeta move his hand from her thigh to her hair, cradling her head. Katniss pulled on his shirt, needing to be closer, to have skin on skin contact to keep her grounded. He took it off without much ceremony and shook out his blond hair. She grinned, and he moved to start unbuttoning her flannel.

"You won't be cold, will you?" Peeta was always worried about her comfort.

"As long as you're here, I won't be cold."

He smiled and peppered kisses along her jawline. She moaned and carded her rough fingers through his hair.

"This is real?"

"This is real," Peeta confirmed, and kissed her again.

Chapter End Notes

I am Bad at writing any sort of romancey/porny stuff. I'm so sorry. Next chapter is expected to be the porn chapter, but we shall see. Thanks for reading!
Scars

Chapter Summary

Peeta struggles with body image and Katniss strives to help.

Chapter Notes

Be warned, this is literally probably the dirtiest thing I've ever written in my entire writing life. Hopefully you aren't disappointed. Really, this is just the porn-y chapter, which is why I feel like the angst is a little fake. I don't know. Hopefully you'll like it. Also, if you can't tell, body worship is my Number One Favorite Kink. Also, I am all about consent.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been a few days since Katniss’ episode out in the rain. She hadn't gotten sick, luckily, and Peeta was able to stop worrying about her. However, as the week went on, in the evenings he would lock himself in his room and Katniss could hear muffled sobbing when she went by to go to bed. She was worried about him.

Katniss’ episode had reawakened something in Peeta that he had managed to keep in the very back of his mind. He was scared he would go back to the way he was when Finnick was killed. Rebel doctors claimed he was fine and the trackerjacker poison was out of his system, and his likelihood of relapse was next to zero. But statistics sometimes lied, like it did during the Games. He was afraid for Katniss, and doubting and suicidal thoughts made their way back to the front of his mind, settling in for the long haul. How could Katniss ever love someone who was more than prepared to kill her? How could she love someone like himself when there were people like Gale, beefy, stable, and whole. He hated himself for letting himself lose his leg. In reality, it wasn't his fault. There was nothing he could do. God damn Cato for stabbing him, and God damn himself for not seeing it coming. God damn his wound for getting infected. Damn it all.

He was broken, mentally and physically. It was almost impossible for him to hide, too. Flesh-toned prosthetics were only really for show, and he, like Katniss, was still worried about potential attacks. So, he kept his metal and plastic leg. His only goal in the Games was to stay himself and keep Katniss alive. He barely achieved his last goal, and he didn't even really complete it himself. Not only did he lose his leg, but later he lost his mother, father, and his siblings. He lost the bakery where he had first met Katniss at. He had almost nothing. If Katniss ever left him, he would be alone and he would be like Haymitch. At least Haymitch still had all of his body parts, as far as he knew. He was ugly, a freak, and Katniss could have picked anybody she wanted, and they would have thrown themselves at her feet. She could have had anybody, but instead she picked the cripple, the town boy.

He would sit in his room on the floor in front of the full-body mirror, take off his leg, and glare at the scarred stump that the Games had left him with. Sometimes he would take off his shirt, too, and stare at the scars on his chest, throwing him into a panic attack as he remembered broken pieces of when he was hijacked. He was disgusting.
One night, Peeta excused himself from the table and went to his room. Katniss followed closely, almost silent. She was determined to help him get through whatever he was dealing with. He always was there for her, but she never felt like she was there for him. Once at his door, Katniss cleared her throat, making him jump.

"What's wrong?" she asked bluntly.

Peeta gawked. "Nothing's wrong. Why did you sneak up on me?"

She moved in closer, "Something's wrong, Peeta. Let me help you."

He opened his door with a sigh and let her in. He sat down on his bed, in front of the mirror, with his arms crossed. She sat next to him, quiet. She waited. Peeta's breathing shifted and she looked over at him; he was staring at himself in the mirror, and hot tears welled in his eyes. He noticed, and turned to face her.

"Fine, do you want to know what's wrong? I'm what's wrong."

"You're not--"

"I'm missing a fucking leg, Katniss. I tried to kill you, at least twice, and yet you're still with me. I don't have any family left, I don't have anything, and you could have anyone you wanted, Katniss. You could have had Gale, for God's sake." He took in a rattling breath, I'm broken, Katniss. I'm broken and repulsive. I couldn't protect you if we... if we were attacked again. I couldn't do it." A hot tear escaped from his eye and rolled down his cheek.

"Peeta, I chose you. You're not repulsive. You're beautiful and you're talented and I'm deaf in one ear, Peeta. If you're repulsive, then so am I. We can both be repulsive together."

Peeta laughed, a short bark, letting out another tear. "You're not repulsive," he began.

"Neither are you." She held his hand, firmly squeezing. "You're real, and this is real, and that's fine with me, Peeta. You're perfect to me." She kissed his cheek, tasting salt. He sniffed, and she pulled back. "You know what? I'm going to prove it to you. I'm going to prove that you're perfect." She stood up. Peeta sat on the bed, staring at his lap. Katniss stood with her back turned to him. Peeta let his eyes wander, casually glancing at her butt, but quickly returned to his lap as she turned around.

"What aren't you okay with me doing?" Katniss asked.

"What?" Peeta was confused.

"What would you rather not have me do? Sexually or otherwise," she clarified.

Peeta's brows furrowed. In all honesty, she could throw him into the sun and he would be happy. "Do whatever."

"Okay then. Can I tell you what to do?"

"Fine."

"What's your word?"

"Cucumber." It was random enough, and plus he hated cucumbers. Something about their texture just made him want to throw up. "I don't know how you're going to somehow change my--"
"Promise me that if you're slipping or you're uncomfortable you'll use it," she interrupted.

"I will. Wait-- what's yours?"

"Haymitch."

He chuckled in spite of himself, wiping off a stray tear. "That's a pretty good one."

"Thanks, it's the biggest turn off I can think of," Katniss grinned. "Lay down."

"'kay." He leaned back, laying down on the bed. He crossed his arms over his chest defensively. His left leg ached, and he had to remind himself it was all in his head. His plastic and metal leg lay underneath his sweatpants, probably cold to the touch. He flexed his toes in anticipation of something, but he wasn't sure what.

"I'm going to make you feel so good, understand?"

"Okay." He still wasn't convinced that this would change anything.

Katniss climbed on top of him, grinned, and started with his neck. Little pinpricks marked where the Capitol had been, like red freckles, and she kissed each one she saw. He closed his eyes with a shiver as she reached his collarbone, pinking as she nipped softly at the bone. "You're beautiful," she declared, and moved to the end of the bed again. "Pants."

Peeta shimmied out of his sweats, feeling a little cold and very awkward as Katniss eyed his prosthesis and his other leg.

"How do I take this off?"

He sat up to do it himself, but she gently pushed him back down to his elbows. "Talk me through it, Peeta." She placed loud kisses on the metal shin, meeting his eyes mischievously.

"Um, it's not very exciting. There's a, ah, a button on the inner thigh. Press that down until you hear the air come out. Then just slide it off."

"You're still okay with me doing this, right?"

"Yes."

There was a hissing sound as the vacuum was broken. Katniss eased the prosthesis off, setting it upright on the ground. Peeta's stump had a silicone covering over it, and Katniss looked at Peeta. His eyes were averted and he stared out of the doorway to the hall.

"Peeta, look at me."

Peeta's pupils were small and face was pained as he met her eyes.

"Are we okay with going through with this?" she asked, putting her hands to her sides.

He cleared his throat, "No, it's fine. I just... just don't get grossed out."

Katniss pushed herself up and kissed Peeta deeply. "I won't get grossed out. You're beautiful and perfect, remember that." She returned to the edge. "What next?"

"Roll the sock down. It's, ah, high up." He held his breath as she snaked her hands up his boxer leg and rolled the silicone sleeve down and off his leg.
"Peeta..." she whispered, taking it in. She had never really looked at his leg since the accident. It was pale, but then again, so was the rest of his body. The scars were neat, old stitch marks still visible as a salmon pink across his thigh. Across his quadriiceps was the largest scar, maybe a quarter of an inch thick, where the Capitol doctors had taken his leg. The scar puffed out slightly towards his inner thigh, and was flat across his quad, showing old muscle and fat in the way the scars lay.

"I'm like a zombie," Peeta said bitterly.

"You're beautiful and you're mine and I'm proud of you, Peeta," she said. She brushed her fingers across his upper thigh, eliciting a quiet moan from Peeta. "Can you feel that?"

"Y-yes."

She drew her fingers closer towards the scar, massaging his leg gently. Kissing up his inner thigh, she checked in. "What's your word?"

He took in a breath. "Cucumber."

"Tell me if this is too much," she warned, and ran her tongue across the stitch scars above the biggest scar. Peeta instinctively jerked back with a sharp inhalation, then immediately apologized. It was just new to him, he said. She returned to kissing his inner thigh, a safe spot, causing his hips to buck up into the air. "You're beautiful," she breathed, and moved carefully back to the scars. She kissed around the scars and slid a hand up his shirt, fingers dancing across his stomach. Once he was comfortably moaning, Katniss moved to the big scar and brushed her lips against its length, exhaling warm air. "Beautiful," she repeated, eyelashes fluttering across his skin.

"Katniss, please.." Peeta dropped back down to the bed off of his elbows. His boxers were getting uncomfortable and he hadn't even taken off his shirt yet. Katniss was still fully clothed.

She moved to his other leg, pressing kisses to the soft spot underneath his ankle and his knee, whispering words of adoration. "Everything about you is beautiful," Katniss murmured, "You're so beautiful." He pushed his hips into the mattress as Katniss reached the edge of his boxers, trying to control himself.

"Peeta, you're okay, you're fine. Let me take care of you. Do you want to move?"

"No, keep going." Secretly, he loved the feeling of Katniss taking care of him. She was gentle but just firm enough to keep him in the moment. "I'm unworthy. What did I do to deserve you?" he wondered aloud.

"Take off your shirt and I'll show you," Katniss said. He sat up, pulled off his t-shirt quickly, and lay back down. His collarbone was still pink from her kisses, and as he got more and more turned on, his chest flushed. He had a few cuts from the Games, and his upper arms and chest showed pale squares and pinpricks from where Snow and his doctors had him hooked up to trackerjacker poison. Straddling him, she leaned over and placed a kiss on one square, "You're brave." She moved to where his collarbones met, and sucked, causing him to gasp and jerk his hips up towards her. "You're gorgeous, even if you're a little impatient sometimes," she reprimanded with a wink. A set of four small, shiny, pale scars placed in a square were over his heart. "You're kind and you're trusting," she said, kissing each dot. He groaned as she flattened her tongue and dragged up back towards his throat from the middle of his chest. "And you're cute, too." He opened his mouth to protest, but she put a finger to his lips and said, "All of you is cute. Every inch."

Peeta blushed and reached for the hem of her shirt. "Please." She smiled and slowly lifted it, the soft fabric noiseless as she tossed it to the ground. Peeta took in her scars, too. New burn scars
across her side from the bombs, old cuts from when she hunted with Gale on her forearms, stitch holes visible on her chest.

"See, we're both scarred," Katniss explained, lifting his hands to the scars on her arms. He brushed over them lightly and pulled Katniss back down to his chest. He buried his face in the crook of her neck on her right side so she could hear him murmur, "Thank you for this" before he ran his hands up her sides, flitting over old scars and kissed the shell of her ear. Katniss groaned and almost fell on top of him. "This is good?" he asked as his hands reached her bra band.

"This is fantastic and it's real," she said, breathing erratic.

He freed her breasts and she kissed him, slipping her tongue into his mouth. She whined into him as his hands made it up to the nape of her neck, undoing her braid. She lowered her hips a bit to give each other a bit of friction, a teasing release. Peeta whimpered and tightened his grip on her hair, making her moan in return.

"You're so hot when you do that," Peeta confessed, pupils blown wide.

Katniss smiled down at him, "So are you."

That night, no nightmares came. Peeta finally felt at ease with himself and was more in love with Katniss than ever, and Katniss felt she had finally done something to repay him for his patience and compassion.

Chapter End Notes

I would like to give a shout out to AmputeeOT on YouTube for her super informative amputee-related videos.
Also, tfw your drunken mentor is your safeword.

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