you are terrifying / and strange and beautiful / something not everyone knows how to love.

Written for jada_jasmine for the Make A Wish: multi-fandom fulfillment wish ficathon. Set during Mockingjay

She repeats the things she knows are true, a litany of facts to anchor her: My name is Katniss Everdeen. I am seventeen. My sister's name is Prim. I took her place in the Hunger Games. She recites these things over and over in her mind. When the noise in her head is too loud, too full with Jabberjay screams and the buzz of Tracker Jackers, Katniss repeats them out loud.

Finnick recalls a similar list that Annie used to recite. All the things that she remembered to be true.

My name is Annie Cresta. And later, I love Finnick Odair.

The doctors wanted Annie to remember that she had survived the Hunger Games, that she had won. Annie remembered the Games. She remembered that she had won. Annie also remembered that Oran had lost his head in the process.

It took less than a month for Annie to stop reciting her list. Her voice dwindled out into nothing, her eyes gone blank and staring. Locked in her own personal nightmare, she would end up nowhere Finnick wanted to be, nowhere that he could even get to.

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Beneath 13, Finnick and Katniss sit in near dark. Katniss sits wedged in the cradle of Finnick's open thighs, her back to his front. Finnick's arms curl around her shoulders, and his heart beats an unsteady tattoo against her spine. His big, long-fingered hands move easily over hers as he guides her through the intricate twist of bight, loop, and elbow. The callouses on his thumbs remind her of Gale, and that makes her think of home. It also makes her incredibly lonely and sad. And because she cannot think of one without the other, she pictures Peeta's wild eyes and his blood on white tile; her hands tremble.

Finnick squeezes Katniss's fingers gently, a reassuring pressure until the shaking stops.

"It's a trick," Finnick says. "You just have to know where the parts fit."

Katniss shakes off the memories: Gale in the meadow, Peeta on the train and in her bed. Gale in the beating of her heart and Peeta like breathing. My name is Katniss Everdeen, she reminds herself. I am seventeen.

She snorts. "Parts? It's just a piece of rope, Finnick."

Katniss doesn't hear him laugh, but she can feel the vibrations along her back. With his head tucked alongside hers, his smile is a gentle tightening against her cheek. "Like you're just a little girl who once was on fire?" Finnick finishes tying the knot, waits as Katniss slides her fingers over the contours and tries to map out the pattern.

"Maybe." She bites off the word. Feels the knot that Finnick has made and feels just as tangled on the inside.

There are seven years and nine Hunger Games between them, PTSD, and a catalog of missing things: friends, hope, heart, Annie Cresta and Peeta Mellark. Katniss has a plus one in her column: District 12 burned to the ground on her behalf. Coal dusted cottages reduced to ash over her father's grave.

"All this," he says. "We're huddling in the dark, bombs crashing over our heads for a girl who couldn't decide which boy to marry?"

He pulls the knot apart and it's a rope again. A simple, singular thing.

"Fuck you, Finnick," Katniss says. There's no anger in her voice. No heat. She's always a joke in the end. Too awkward, good for killing things and nothing much else.

But Finnick, always full of secrets and things to say. Finnick with his clever fingers and his love for Annie Cresta like an open wound. Katniss only ever makes a mess, an incidental revolution, knots by accident. See, this is why no one lets you make the plans. Between the two of them there is also Mags.

Katniss owes him, but she doesn't say it.

Finnick drops his hands into Katniss's lap, the rope forgotten. He crosses his legs beneath hers so that he's her very own personal chair, and drops his chin into the curve of her throat. Katniss is surrounded, enveloped, and it's the safest she's felt in a long while. Not since the Victory Tour when Peeta held her while she slept.

"Hey," he says against her hair. "I'm sorry. Just ... I'm sorry. It's the waiting and being cooped up." He squeezes Katniss tighter. "I hate this," he whispers.

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Finnick sits in the dark with his lap full of Katniss Everdeen. Not crying, not this time. Almost, but not quite. Not that he would care if he were. Katniss has seen the cracks, she's seen how he can fall apart. But here she is anyway, cuddled in his arms and letting him show her how to tie rope into knots.

There's something about Katniss that reminds Finnick of Annie. More than just her dark hair and the elegance of her wrist bones. The way she flinches at memories, maybe. Or maybe it's the way he has to ease close when she's not paying attention. She startles easily; but then all the Victors do.

Unlike Annie, Katniss is likely to lash out and break his nose. With Johanna it's always the threat of a knife in the ribcage.

"Katniss," Finnick begins, then pauses. All the things between them. Not words, exactly, just things: Mags, the Jabberjays in the forest, Peeta, Annie, and the knowledge of how love can be a weapon.

Katniss tilts her head back, rests on Finnick's shoulder and stares up into the blackness.

"How fucked up is this?" she whispers.

"I..." he begins again. Katniss relaxes back. Strokes her hand over his and turns her face towards his. They are so close.

It's important that this is the story they share. Tributes, then Victors, now refugees.

Finnick closes the distance between them, his lips pressed to hers and his hands beneath her shirt are a question: how do we survive this?

Finnick can tie knots in his sleep. It's what he does. He also understands how to care for wounded things. Mags taught him that, and then Annie. Now there is Katniss. Bright and sharp. Not as brilliant as Johanna with her glinting edges and daggered smile, but just as lethal. Maybe more, because with Katniss Finnick doesn't worry that she'll draw blood because she knows no other way. Katniss doesn't really have it in her. Not yet. But he's seen her pushing and pulling: Peeta and then Gale, even Haymitch, hangs onto the idea of her, and she has no idea how easy it could be to break them all. When it happens, and it will, she will break them by accident.

Katniss pulls away first. Finnick holds her wrists gently in the loose circle of his hands.

"Finnick?"

In the dim light Finnick can see the worry in her eyes. He wants her to understand, but he will not say out loud, all the ways that he loves Annie. All the ways that it has to do with how much Annie needs him, how fragile she is, and how he never has to worry that she will leave or hurt him first. At least not on purpose. But then, maybe, that is another way that Katniss reminds Finnick of Annie. The day that Annie broke him, it was an accident. Finnick had never seen that one coming, but here he is now, tying knots in ropes to keep from losing his mind.

"It's alright, Katniss," he says. He wants her to know, but will not say it out loud. It should be part of her litany of things that are obviously true. *My name is Katniss Everdeen. I am seventeen. My sister's name is Prim. I took her place in the Hunger Games. Finnick Odair loves Annie Cresta.*

Because Finnick does loves Annie, and this has nothing to do with her, but also everything.

Finnick leans in again, slides his tongue along the seam of Katniss's closed lips; a question. She pauses. A breath. A thought. The tentative parting of her mouth is an answer. A yes, for right now.
End Notes

Summary prompt from Warsan Shire’s ‘For Women Who Are Difficult to Love.’

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