your skin and bones

by tents

Summary

"i never understood / what made your lips on my neck / such an intimate affair / until your teeth grazed my pulse / and i realized / you could tear open my throat / and make me bleed out in your arms / but instead / you chose to kiss" -nellsays (Tumblr).

Rating for drug abuse, profanity, & eventual sexual situations. Drabble collection in chronological order. FEMSLASH. Full story is under the same title on fanfiction.net

Notes

Begins in Mockingjay around where Katniss offers to share a compartment with Johanna. Roughly follows Suzanne Collins's storyline, and then I go off on my own tangent. Peeta doesn't recover from the Capitol's torture. This story doesn't really follow a set storyline. It's more like a series of drabbles in chronological order. Updates are not constant.

Characters belong to Suzanne Collins. I do not The Hunger Games. Some parts may reflect Collins's writing. The title has the lyrics from Coldplay's song "Yellow". Rated M for profanity and drug abuse. Originally published in Nov 2013 on fanfiction.net by sinuk (me)
“'Still a little sore?' With an expert hand, she quickly detaches the morphling drip from my arm and plugs it into a socket taped into the crook of her own. 'They started cutting back my supply a few days ago. Afraid I'm going to turn into one of those freaks from Six. I've had to borrow from you when the coast was clear. Didn't think you'd mind.'

Mind? How can I mind when she was almost tortured to death by Snow after the Quarter Quell? I have no right to mind, and she knows it.'"

~Suzanne Collins, Mockingjay, p. 219

I never thought the day would come, but Johanna Mason and I are now sharing a compartment in District Thirteen.

"She can't. She's unstable," they tell me.

"I can manage her."

To be honest, I just didn't want to see her drown in morphling. Every time I visited her she always seemed to be teetering on the edge. There was no telling when she would fall.

As much as I hate to admit it, I don't want Johanna dead. She wasn't just an asset to our revolution. She's a living, breathing person, and everyone including herself seems to forget that. I tell myself this is because I owe her for what she did back in the arena and the Capitol for me, but I know there's probably much more to that.

Eventually they give in.

She never thanks me for taking her in, but I don't mind. I don't think I could've thanked her if the situation had been reversed either.

"When she opens the drawer that holds my few possessions, she shuts it quickly. 'Sorry.'

I think of how there's nothing in Johanna's drawer but her government-issued clothes. That she doesn't have one thing in the world to call her own. 'It's okay. You can look at my stuff if you want.'"

~Suzanne Collins, Mockingjay, p. 238
I wake early in the morning for training drills and find her still in bed, which is unusual because normally she's the one who wakes me up to train in the first place.

Her eyebrows are furrowed and she murmurs something incoherent before sitting up abruptly. I see her eyes dart around the room briefly, focusing on me for a second before her fingers loosen their grip on the bed sheets and she lies back down.

"You talk in your sleep." I allow her to regain her bearings for a moment before collecting her training clothes off the floor and tossing it to her. "Come on, Mason," I say. "We're victors, remember?" I leave to wait outside before she could say anything.

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It's pouring out as we stand at the edge of the hidden entrance to Thirteen, and I hear the sound of Soldier York's whistle faintly in the distance. Johanna goes pale and appears to have ceased breathing.

"You okay?" I ask. She shakes me off.

I thought maybe last week it was just the idea of stomping around in the cold for eight hours that troubled her but now I'm not so sure. She strides into the rain, and we are soaked within minutes as we start out on our run. My ribs are mostly healed up now and I'm confident that I can make the five mile run. But after the first mile I turn back and see Johanna some distance away on her knees in the mud, hands gripping her abdomen.

I rub her back as she vomits what little contents of her stomach into the mud until the retches stop.

"Fuck, I can't do this anymore," I hear her say through the drumming of the rain as she sits up, wiping her mouth with her arm.

The rainwater stings my eyes but it doesn't conceal the defeated look on her face. "You're a Victor, of course you can. Just not today." She's shaking like a leaf but I don't know if it's from the rain or run or both. I pull her up and she holds onto my shoulder as I lead us over to a tree.

"Fucking rain," I hear her mutter.

The thick tree branches attenuate the heavy downpour and Johanna collapses against the base of the trunk, her breathing shallow. Her cheeks are slightly red from the cold but other than that her skin is so pale it's almost transparent. I study her expression as the rain picks at my eyes before untangling my government issued poncho from around my waist and placing it around Johanna's shoulders.

"What the fuck are you doing?"

"What do you think?" I say, adjusting the hood so it shields her face.

She scowls but leans her head back on the tree as if she were going to sleep.
"Is everything okay, Mason?" I ask tentatively after a few moments of silence, shifting on the tree root I was sitting on.

"Yeah. Everything's great, Everdeen," she says thickly, her bottom lip slightly quivering. "Fucking fantastic."

I clench my jaw and stare at the mud on our feet and shoes. "Let's go back," I say. "We'll run some other time. And Soldier York won't be happy if we catch a cold."

"Fuck Soldier York," I hear Johanna mumble as I pull her up.

My clothes are streaked dark brown with mud but Johanna looks even worse. She tries not to lean onto me for leverage while we trek towards the living facility.

I ignore Soldier York's orders as we pass by her on our way back, and she eventually stalks off in frustration.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hello everyone! I'm sinuk from fanfiction.net under a different alias and I thank you for taking the time to read this

Here's a little background on why I wrote this: I've always been intrigued by Johanna and Katniss while reading the books, especially their attitudes and behavior towards one another. It was their changing attitudes and the gradual progression from forced acquittance to friendship in Mockingjay that captivated me. Or maybe I'm just drawn to people or characters who are trying so hard to hold it together. They're like the 'what if' pairing for me. Like Katniss would be the future and/or the constant thing in Johanna's life after all that's happened. I don't know if that made any sense, but I began writing this. This was also originally published on fanfiction.net by sinuk (me) in Nov 2013 but I decided to upload here too.

This has been a work-in-progress since probably August or September of 2012, but I lost track of when I actually began writing it. I switched computers and copied files over and the dates are all messed up. I apologize in advance for some parts that seem a little over the top, speaking in the case of cheesiness or just a poorly written and unorganized piece. I write to express. I write when all my other forms of repose do not work. I write in a way so when I reread my work another time, I can recall exactly how I felt when I wrote it. Even if I want to forget that feeling.

On that happy note, I hope you Joniss shippers enjoy this! I thought long and hard about whether I wanted to upload this or not, but really I have nothing to lose. Katniss and Johanna have grown to become some of my favorite characters of all time. Thought I'd upload in honor of Catching Fire being released.

Again, there isn't a set storyline. Just me drabbling my heart out. Because I've already got a few chapters written out, I will update soon.

P.S. There is a lot of poetry and works and lyrics and quotes that are placed throughout this story that I sympathized with. They were sporadically added throughout the piece and are indicated by the blockquotes. Some may relate to the chapter, some don't. Either way, I read it and I thought it would suit Johanna and
Katniss. All of them have sources.

And feedback is always appreciated! :)
I follow behind her as we walk through the corridor. She strides past our compartment and I raise an eyebrow.

“Jo—” I start, meeting her stride but she places a hand on my arm to silence me. We round corners and go down multiple hallways before she stops at a door labeled for authorized personnel only. She knocks on the door and a devious smile grows on her face when there is no answer.

“Watch my back,” she says, and before I can argue she slips into the room. I wait beside the door uneasily, not wanting to become an accomplice in whatever her schemes are. I listen to her shift through the bins in the room. It smells faintly of fresh cloth and ammonia and after a peek inside I realize that it’s a medical closet. Johanna emerges with something clasped in her hand and shuts the door behind her.

“Come on,” she says, leading me in the direction from where we came.

She peels off her clothes when we get into the compartment and plumps down on her bed. Holding out her hand to me, I see that there are two ampoule syringes of morphling in her hand, similar the ones soldiers were given in battle to numb the pain of a wound so they could continue fighting.

“ Took me forever to find that closet ever since they cut me off,” she says, removing the protective casing from one of the syringes with her teeth. “I couldn’t find my way back to my room the first time I went in and they had to send two nurses to go looking for me,” she adds, smiling at the memory. “I only took two so they wouldn’t notice a dent in the supply. Want one?”

I do. But under the circumstances of being the all-powerful and protected Mockingjay I think twice about it. I don’t want to bond with Johanna over drugs.

“Suit yourself,” she tells me simply when I shake my head.
I turn away as she plunges the needle into her skin. She sighs in relief and lies back on her mattress.

“How did you even find that place?” I ask.

“I was out of it,” she replies. “In one of my dazes. Lucid enough to realize where I was once I found it though.” She turns over on her mattress, her back away from me. Rounding up my clothes, I head to the showers.

I manage to sneak my lunch back to the compartment on the way back. Johanna had put on her second pair of clothes and is now wrapped up in sheets. When she hears me set my tray down on the end table she turns towards me.

“Want some?” I ask as she sits up sluggishly.

“Yeah, I’ll try.”

She gets about halfway through the stew I brought her before it comes back up. I almost didn’t reach the wastebasket in time for her.

“It is miraculous that you didn’t get too sick from today,” I say absently. “Apart from your upset stomach.”

“Hah. Lucky me.”

We spend the remainder of our day doing mindless things, like talking about the revolution and reviewing our military terms. I tie knots to pass the time. Johanna mentions how Finnick tried to get her to do that too, but it only worked to a certain extent.

I manage to get some water in her and she has since then fallen asleep. Sometimes I hear Johanna mumble in her sleep but she doesn’t wake up. I envy her.

I didn’t notice until now but there’s a circular scar smaller than the palm of my hand just at the juncture of the back of Johanna’s neck. I remember wondering if that was there before or if it was the Capitol’s work before I drift asleep.

Later that night, she returns from the bathroom with wet rags and spends a considerable amount of time cleaning the remaining mud off her skin.

“Johanna?” Her first name feels strange on my tongue because we have grown so accustomed to calling each other by our last names. It’s late and I know it’s futile to just call out into the darkness after she took a hit from her morphling supply, but I do it anyway.

After no reply I roll over onto my back and try to sleep when her voice rings through the silence.

“What?”

“You okay?” I blurt. I wasn’t expecting an answer.
“Just dandy,” she slurs, her speech affected by the morphling. “So, are all our conversations just going to consist of you asking if I’m okay? Because I’m fine.”

“I—sorry,” I mumble. “Couldn’t sleep.”

“I know the feeling,” she says drolly.

“I just wanted to know I’m not alone in here.”

“Hm. Well, I would like be alone in here,” she begins, “but due to your insomnia I’ve been unable to sneak away from you long enough to find an efficacious murder weapon to bludgeon you with,” she finishes, rolling over on her side so her back is towards me. “So I’m not going anywhere.” I detect a touch of sincerity behind her voice but she had said everything so bluntly I can’t be sure.
drizzle

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: drug use, profanity, PTSD
Some parts of this chapter mimic Suzanne Collins’s writing
I do not own the characters

“At the hospital room door, I watch Johanna for a moment, realize that most of her ferocity is in her abrasive attitude. Stripped of that, as she is now, there’s only a slight young woman, her wide-set eyes fighting to stay awake against the power of the drugs. Terrified of what sleep will bring.”
~Suzanne Collins, Mockingjay, p. 254

The rain has been letting up lately, although it doesn’t do much to help lift our moods.

Johanna shoots the last of her morphling before we head out on our run, seeming much more driven than our last attempt. She starts shooting more and more, even on days when we don’t run. But it seems like the morphling is the only thing getting her through training.

It’s the twelfth consecutive day that she’s been using. The plastic cap is held between her lips, the needle pressed to her skin.

“Should you still be doing that? The rain’s stopped. The officials might notice a dip in the supply.”
She gives me a pointed look and scowls when I don’t pull away.

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I see her dancing with Finnick at the wedding. They move in one fluid motion, weaving around each other in an intricate fashion that couldn’t have been choreographed in the few moments they’ve been on the dance floor together. I’m glad she’s enjoying herself. She catches me smiling at the two of them and motions me over.

We dance. Finnick and I dance. We form a circle around Prim and dance. It is an array of hand holding and swaying and twirling between the four of us. Finnick’s eyes shine, Prim’s smile lights up the entire room, and Johanna’s laughter is contagious. There’s laugh lines on her face I didn’t know were there before. I even dance with Peeta. Johanna and Finnick teach me the custom dances of 7 and 4 respectively and they are shown the traditional dances of 12 by Prim and I. Annie’s eyes beam as she watches the four of us, and soon she joins in. I don’t remember the last
time I’ve been this happy.

*Rise from your cold hospital bed  
I’ll tell you, you’re not dying  
Everyone knows you’re going to live  
So you might as well start trying*

~Regina Spektor, “Firewood”

When I find out that Johanna’s back in the hospital, I don’t take it well.


“It was while she was on the Block. They try to ferret out a soldier’s potential weaknesses,” says Haymitch. “So they flooded the streets.”

This doesn’t help. Johanna can swim. “So?”

It takes a moment before it clicks in my mind. But Haymitch beats me to it.

“That’s how they tortured her in the Capitol. Soaked her and then used electric shocks. In the Block she had some kind of flashback. Panicked, didn’t know where she was. She’s back under sedation.”

Finnick is on his way towards the hospital immediately but I hole up in the compartment.

Why hadn’t I read the signs before? Her treatment towards the rain as if it was acid. Collapsing. How she always wiped herself down with a cloth instead of showering. The circular scar. Her erratic breathing in the presence of water. I had contributed to her misery with the morphling withdrawal.

After a few hours I pull myself together and head out to the woods with one of the white cotton bandages from 12. Square. Sturdy. Just the thing.

I find a pine tree and strip fragrant needles from the boughs. I make a neat pile in the bandage and gather up the sides to tie them together. On the way to her hospital room, I spot a medical closet.

She’s asleep when I come in. I set the bundle of pine needles on the nightstand and take a seat beside her. A bag of morphling is connected to her arm. Her eyebrows are slightly knotted but she looks calm.

“You lied,” I say quietly. “You said you were alright, you said you were fine.” That’s why she stole the morphling. It dulled the edge. The pain wasn’t as bad.

As surprised as I am to admit it, I’m worried about her. She looks so vulnerable and fragile here in her hospital bed. I know the full truth. Her and Peeta alone in their separate cells in the darkness —“partners in torture.” Peeta was gone. Not physically, at least. But I don’t want to lose her, too.

She stirs and I look up. Her eyes briefly open to meet mine and they are wide-set with fear as she suddenly sits up. But the flames die away when she realizes who I am. I see through the chink in
her armor and there is a broken soul lying in front of me, her spirit and vigor long gone, replaced by armor that is only a front to protect herself from her own vulnerability. Sounds like someone I know.

“Fuck, I fell asleep again,” she mumbles, rubbing the nape of her neck. Her sudden movements when she woke jerked the morphling drip from her arm and she reattaches herself.

I pick up the bundle of pine boughs and hand it to her.

Johanna recoils away from me. “What is that?” she asks. I see the sweat glistening on her forehead.

“I made it for you. Something to put in your drawer when you come back.” I place it in her hands, my touch lingering a moment too long. “Smell it.”

She lifts the bundle to her nose and takes a tentative sniff. “Smells like home.” Tears flood her eyes.

“That’s what I was hoping. You being from Seven and all,” I say. “Remember when we met? You were a tree. Well, briefly.”

She gives me a small smile. “Finnick came by today.”

I nod.

“You weren’t there.”

“I know,” I say. “I just... needed time to think,” I add slowly when she looks at me questionably.

“You needed time to think,” she repeats. “And would could our Mockingjay possibly need so much time to think about?”


She brushes it off. “Yeah, I’m sure there’s a lot about me to contemplate. Thanks for that.”

I bite my lip. But it was true. I was thinking about her and what had happened and how I had been so oblivious towards her. I was concerned about her, but given our friendship—or acquaintance she might call it—I’m not going to say that. It’ll complicate things. As if they weren’t already.

“I’m here now,” I say. “And I was worried.” She raises an eyebrow but waves it off. “Because the morphling and the rain and everything,” I continue and gesture at my head. “I get it.”

“And so does everyone else,” she says, her tone indifferent. “I’ll kill that motherfucker.” I assume she means Snow. I hope she means Snow, but her eyes are drooping from the morphling. She jerks herself back awake.

I examine the drip hanging near her bed. “You don’t have to steal anymore,” I remark.

“They’re going to make sure I get a safe dose every day,” she replies, frowning. I smile. There’s a moment of silence before the nurse walks in to check up on Johanna. I stand to leave.

“Go to sleep,” I say to her quietly, touching her hand. She frowns at the gesture but I slip one of her beloved morphling syringes in her hand.

Johanna gives me a look of gratitude, her fingers closing around the syringe as I move towards the door.
“Just this once.” She almost smiles at me. I keep the image of her face in my mind when I fall asleep that night. The nightmares aren’t as bad.

When we hold each other in the darkness, it doesn’t make the darkness go away. The bad things are still out there. The nightmares are still walking. When we hold each other we feel not safe, but better. [...] For just a moment or two the darkness doesn’t seem so bad.

~Neil Gaiman

She is released after two and a half weeks.

“Nothing like pretending that their procedures are working,” Johanna tells me as she collapses at the end of my bed. “But I still have to come back for regular checkups.”

“But what if you have another episode and they send you back?”

“Well, let’s just hope that doesn’t happen.”

My eyes flick away from hers when I see her place her clothes inside of the drawer, along with a familiar white bundle. I fight back the smile that aches to grow on my lips.

I don’t know what it is, but perhaps it’s Johanna’s presence in the same room as me that makes sleep come easily that night.

I wake from an unpleasant dream and see that Johanna is still asleep in the bed across from me. Her sleep is troubled but she doesn’t wake. I watch as her chest rises and falls, trying to mimic her movements to steady my erratic breathing.

I don’t know how many minutes pass before I hear her gasp awake and sit straight up in bed. She covers her face for a moment, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. Her breathing comes in rapid motions and I hear her hands fumbling on the nightstand beside her until she finds the last of her stash of morphling. Her hands are shaking when she injects, but I’m not sure if it was from her last hit or her nightmare. She exhales slowly, running her hands through her short hair before tossing the syringe on the floor.

It’s gone in the morning.

“But why bother? You’re too tough, right? Yeah, I know how easy it is to convince yourself you’re something that you’re not. You can do that on the outside, can just keep moving, keep yourself so busy that you don’t have to face who you really are. But you’re weak. I’m like you. I’m weak too. I can’t get through this without somebody to touch, without somebody to love. Is that because sex numbs the pain or is it because I’m some evil fuck monster? I don’t know. But I do know that I was somebody before I came in here. I was somebody with a life that I chose for myself. And now? Now it’s just about getting through the day without crying.”

~Orange is the New Black (2013-)
“Do you trust me?”

The water’s begun to go a little lukewarm in the tub. It’s filled a little over halfway up, and my hair is plastered to my face and she curls up against me in her underwear.

The events leading up to this situation weren’t the prettiest. She had been wiping herself down again, still slightly buzzed from her recent morphling intake and I had decided I wasn’t going to have another chance at asking her without talking myself out of it.

“She’s a little cuddly, Johanna.”

“What?” she had said, rubbing her cheeks with the rag.

“Do you need help?”

“What?”

“I mean—with the water thing. I could help you out. Like with the bathtub and all.”

She scrunches her eyebrows. “The fuck is this, Katniss? I’m not made of glass, I can handle it. Did someone put you up to this?”

“No,” I sighed exasperatedly and had slumped back onto my bed. “I—nevermind. Forget I even offered.” I heard her throw the rag on the floor and the springs in her bed creaked as she pulled her knees up to her chest.

“Sorry. It was instinct.” “Yeah. I caught that.”

She chewed on her lip. “Do you even have a nose?” she asked, lifting her elbow to smell her underarms. “I smell like Hawthorne after training.” I smiled at that. She added after a moment of silence, “Of all the things I thought would fuck me up, you know?”

“We could go in the washroom tomorrow. Late, if you want. Most of the nurses would be asleep by then, no one would see and check you back into the hospital,” I had said quietly.

She drew her lips into a thin line and met my eyes. “Just so we’re clear, I’m not gonna brush your fucking hair or share clothes or do any of that intimate girly shit with you because of this.” I grinned and the look she had given me after saying that actually made me feel like we were… well, friends.

Despite being almost friends, I never expected to crawl in with her. But she thrashed so violently when I tried helping her in I became soaked without even setting foot in the bath. “To hell with it,” I had muttered and began stripping down to my underwear.
She cradled herself against me as she tried to recompose herself and get accustomed to the water. My heart was beating in my throat at the close proximity and I had hoped that her tremors would gradually fade but so far, it wasn’t looking too good.

She doesn’t reply. “Johanna?”

She nods, clenching her jaw as I gently press a wet washcloth to her back. Laying a hand on her shoulder to steady her, I shift the cloth around her neck and shoulders and back to cleanse her pores. Her skin is slightly tinted yellow, and I stop after a moment and rub her arm soothingly as I did with Prim when she had nightmares. “Is it too much?” I ask when I see her hands shaking.

“No, keep going,” she says, biting her cheek as I continue to scrub her back, massaging the muscles as I went.

I try not to linger on each sporadically placed scar on her skin for too long. The entire time I talk to her, telling her stories of occurrences that happened in 12 before I was reaped. When I pour water over the back of her head, her breathing becomes so rapid it nears the point of hyperventilation.

She flinches, telling me to stop. Her voice is a tone I haven’t heard before. The sudden movement shifts the water, which only adds to her hysteria. Her hands grip the edge of the bath and I climb out quickly and pull her up. Once free of the water she collapses against the end of the bath on the cold cement, her breath shallow.

“She’s shivering uncontrollably and her eyes stare back at me blankly. I rub her face with the towel to dry off the moisture and whisper comforting words until she calms down.

_Sometimes people are beautiful. Not in looks. Not in what they say. Just in what they are._

~Markus Zusak

The overwhelming intimacy of that day makes sleep come easily enough, but soon everything is screaming in my dreams. My eyes snap open and a shiver runs up my spine as I sit up. My breath is short and my heart threatens to burst from within me. There’s a flash of light that quickly goes out as the compartment door shuts behind Johanna.

“You alright there?” she asks almost tentatively. In her hands is a syringe.

“Yeah,” I mutter, lying back down and pulling the covers to my chin. I shudder from the cold sweat that broke out in my sleep and realize my body is trembling from the adrenaline.

“This is so fucked up,” she says suddenly, tossing the syringe into the trash. “They’re filling the medical cabinets with empty syringes! What do they expect us to do? Cope?”

She catches me watching her and sighs. The shadows dance against the walls as I see her start towards me and stop, her face vague.

My throat swells when she climbs into bed beside me, lying down with one arm folded beneath her head.
“This is bullshit,” she mutters, her free hand playing with the sheets.

“You going to start numbing yourself with me now?”

“Ha ha,” she says, her voice thick with sarcasm. She shifts on her side to face me, rubbing the crook of her elbow. “You know, you’re lucky,” she says quietly after a few moments. “Having someone around when you wake up. I’m almost jealous.” She smiles sadly to herself.

“What did you say about all that intimate shit?” I ask innocently after a period of silence. A smile pulls at my lips.

She scoffs. “Shut up.”

I lie across from her for a while, listening to her steady breathing. The thought of sharing a compartment being her ploy to murder me flickers in my mind, but in one fleeting moment of comprehension I realize this was her trying to alleviate the effects of my nightmare. And I’m so touched by her actions that my body acts before my mind, and my need for human contact overpowers her attitude towards our friendship and I curl towards her. Her skin is slightly damp with sweat, and our faces are in such close proximity we’re almost sharing breaths. I sigh uneasily.

“When’s the last time you had a fix?” I ask.

“A while.”

Her hand eventually goes to the small of my back as she tries to steady it. The contact relieves the swelling in my throat and my body calms. It comforts me. It’s something I haven’t felt in so long, something I wasn’t sure I’d ever feel again. It’s different from Peeta’s. It’s hesitant and wavering, but I feel secure in her arms. Secure. The word replays in my head as I place my hand under her forearm.

“Don’t think,” I say. Don’t think about your withdrawal. Don’t think about the morphling. Don’t think about how close we’re lying together, or how our noses are nearly touching. Don’t think. I fall asleep wondering if I’m still talking to her.

And you are folded on the bed
Where I rest my head
There’s nothing I can see
Darkness becomes me
But I’m already there
I’m already there
Wherever there is you
I will be there too

~”Silhouettes” by Of Monsters and Men
I reach for Johanna and drape a towel around her shoulders as she climbs out of the bath before wrapping one around mine. She watches me with wide eyes.

I look at the dip between her collarbones and pristine skin and can’t help but smile.

“See something you like?” she asks smugly.

I roll my eyes. “How do you feel?” I ask her, unplugging the tub.

She hesitates, patting the moisture off her head. “Clean. But internally speaking: shit.” I see a shadow of a smile on her face out of the corner of my eye. She is still recovering from the last stages of her morphling withdrawal. I avert my eyes when she bends over to pat her legs dry, and when she stands up straight again our faces are unusually close. I see a drop of water run down the side of her nose, moving towards the corner of her mouth. The chill air begins to raise goose bumps on my skin.

“See you back at the compartment,” I mutter and slip out of the room before I do something stupid like try and kiss her.

We work with the water over the next few days. Johanna has improved to the point where I don’t have to sit in the tub with her anymore, but I remain in the room so she keeps a level head. I help her when her hands start shaking too much. She hasn’t been shooting since I’ve started helping her, at least not to my knowledge. But she’s getting better. She’s getting better.

19. As the pressure of a gas increases, its volume decreases. When you fold your body over mine in the dark and press down on my bones, I shrink countless times. For love, I grow smaller.

~writingsforwinter, Number 19 of “A 20-piece Memoir on Me & You”

“It’s just a meeting with Haymitch,” I say. “I’ll come back.” I want to mean it but my quavering voice tells me otherwise.

I stand in the doorway of the compartment. It’s the night before we launch the mission for the Capitol. Originally, my plan was just go to the dining hall and then the meeting with Haymitch so I could leave without any sappy farewells, but the dejected look on her face as she lay there makes
me second guess myself. She nods, muttering something remotely sarcastic.

“Hey,” I say quietly, sliding the compartment door shut. Her eyes are glued to the ceiling and I sit beside her on the bed. “Me dying won’t even matter that much to you anyway.”

She laughs. “Hell no, it won’t.” She sits up, glancing over at me and flashing one of her signature smirks, but this time it doesn’t quite reach her eyes. I watch her as she gets up and opens her drawer, looking for nothing in particular.

I suddenly forget all about my plan to leave as my hands finger the bedsheets. That slight falter in her bravado has me pondering how long she had been wearing it. The bravado that hid the void that’s swallowed her life.

They can’t hurt me. There’s no one left I love.

“Go,” she tells me blankly as I get up. “Go shoot Snow’s fucking brains out. Or better yet, drown him. Let him get a taste of his own medicine.” I hear the anger seeping into her voice and she looks away, clenching her jaw.

I watch her for a moment in the doorway. All I want to do in this moment is bring her back. I want to fill that void because she is looking completely hopeless right now. I want to tell her that there is life beyond just living. She’s gotten this far already. We’ve gotten this far. There’s no point in turning back.

She turns to me as if to retort something to make me leave but my body is surging towards hers and I kiss her. It happens so quickly that we are both stunned by what I’ve done for a horrifying few seconds. I stay connected to her for a moment—almost reveling in the tenderness of her lips—and prepare to pull away when her mouth moves against mine to let me in. Her hands pull my face close, my skin burning where her fingertips meet my cheek.

Our movements gradually grow hungry with desire and we stumble against the wall, the cold concrete cooling my hot skin. We part only so she could remove her clothing and I hear my breath hitch at the sight of her bare skin.

“Nothing you haven’t seen before,” she smiles into my mouth, her hands tugging at the waistband of my uniform.

We fall back onto one of the beds, and she strokes my face as her lips meet mine once more. Her body is pressed against mine, tongue teasing my bottom lip and I let her in. My hand goes to her neck, thumb brushing her ear as I pull her closer.

“Are you sure about this?” she asks suddenly, pulling away. “We don’t have to, you know.” I open my eyes and see hers scanning my face in the darkness. My heart is beating in my throat but I still manage a laugh through my erratic breathing.

“When have you ever asked me for my consent to anything, brainless?”

I hear her laugh in the darkness as she helps me remove the remainder of my clothing and my hands run fervently over her skin, this time with a different purpose. I feel the heat rising in my cheeks as I try to control my breathing as she begins placing kisses down my body, her lips grazing my pulse point and biting at my collarbone. Warmth radiates at each spot her lips touch. She carefully maps my abdomen with kisses and her hands run down my sides, sending a shiver that rattles my bones and my hands caress her head. Hers continue to move ardently over my skin, moving lower as each blissful moment passes.

“Don’t think, right?”
I nod, but I know I’m lying. Don’t think about how your bodies fit seamlessly against each other. Don’t think about her lips on yours, her breath on your neck, her hands on your skin. Don’t think about the heat increasing between your bodies, where your skin is touching, where it is not. Don’t think about the delicate contours of muscle on her back or the slight curve of her stomach, or the sight of her collarbones in the dim light. Don’t think. Just do.

“I didn’t know you had it in you,” she tells me afterward.

“Me either.”

I watch the steady rise and fall of her chest as she lies beside me, my fingers running along the lines of her back. I start to move from the bed when I hear her voice ring out in the silence.

“Don’t go,” she murmurs, her nimble fingers closing around my wrist.

“I’m not,” I whisper as I find a discarded shirt on the floor and pull it over my bare chest. From the unfamiliar aroma I can tell that it isn’t mine.

I return to her embrace and kiss her shoulder gingerly, adjusting the sheets over the both of us. My breathing is still a little troubled and she turns on her side, her eyes flickering between mine briefly before she kisses me, her cheeks warm. Our legs tangle beneath the sheets and we share a tender moment together, hands roaming to now familiar places and I don’t want to stop. Her lips part from mine but she doesn’t pull away. I feel her hand gingerly rubbing the back of my head and I brush my nose against hers and pull her closer, her eyelashes fluttering on my cheek. We shift to rest more comfortably against one another. I tuck my face into her neck.

“I haven’t got anyone but you,” I hear her say after a long silence, her hand stroking the nape of my neck. She curses and turns her head away, taking a deep breath. I stir to somewhat acknowledge what she said, but she continues to stroke the hairs on my neck as if nothing happened.

I almost could not handle the morning afterward.

“Stay,” she murmurs sleepily as she lay on her stomach, her hand closing around mine as I try to slip out of bed. “Don’t go. Please don’t go.”

“I can’t,” I say, running my thumb over her cheekbone. “I’ll come back. I promise.” I know it’s futile to tell her this. I shouldn’t have kissed her. I shouldn’t let her get her hopes up. But she has become one of the reasons why I’ll do anything to survive. I’ll fight for Prim. I’ll fight for her. She says something incoherent and it’s evident that she won’t let me go. I crawl back in beside her, kissing the spot between her eyes and then her nose and lips. (“They always say they’ll come back.”)

It takes everything inside of me to slip out of her arms after she falls back asleep. I don’t risk a kiss before I go. Because if I kiss her, she might wake up. And if she wakes up I’ll see her eyes. My father had always told me that the eyes are the window to the soul. And if I’ll see her eyes and I will never possess the willpower to leave. But I guess I was still partially following my plan after all. No sappy farewells, no last heartbreaking words. The entire journey to the Capitol I don’t change out of her shirt.
The saddest word in English: Stay.

~writingsforwinter, 6-word Story #49

I come back. I come back and now I live a life that I only saw in the depths of my worst nightmares. But I will confirm three things: One: I watched the mutts as they tore the life out of one of my dearest friends. Two: I watched as innocent children received silver parachutes that blew them to bits before my eyes. Three: I saw my little sister go with them, my name forever a ghost on her lips.

And all I remember is a terrible pain, a pain I've never felt before that licked up my arms and legs and back, barely brushing my chin before I blacked out. It was the color of the rebellion and I have never felt so betrayed.
Katniss Everdeen, the girl on fire. How painstakingly ironic.

I lied. There is no life beyond just living if you have nothing left to live for.

“‘Let me die. Let me follow the others,’ I beg whatever holds me here. There’s no response. ‘Trapped for days, years, centuries, maybe. Dead, but not allowed to die. Alive, but good as dead.’”

~Suzanne Collins, Mockingjay, p. 349

“Perhaps the greatest faculty our minds possess is the ability to cope with pain. Classic thinking teaches us of the four doors of the mind, which everyone moves through according to their need.

First is the door of sleep. Sleep offers us a retreat from the world and all its pain. Sleep marks passing time, giving us distance from the things that have hurt us. When a person is wounded they will often fall unconscious. Similarly, someone who hears traumatic news will often swoon or faint. This is the mind's way of protecting itself from pain by stepping through the first door.

Second is the door of forgetting. Some wounds are too deep to heal, or too deep to heal quickly. In addition, many memories are simply painful, and there is no healing to be done. The saying 'time heals all wounds' is false. Time heals most wounds. The rest are hidden behind this door.

Third is the door of madness. There are times when the mind is dealt such a blow it hides itself in insanity. While this may not seem beneficial, it is. There are times when reality is nothing but pain, and to escape that pain the mind must leave reality behind.

Last is the door of death. The final resort. Nothing can hurt us after we are dead, or so we have been told.”

~Patrick Rothfuss, The Name of the Wind, p. 135
I spend my days running. Not running like during training. Not running like I did during the Games. Not even physically running. I'm not sure what I'm running from, but I don't want to turn back to check.

Sometimes the air gets so cold in the vents that I am unable to hear my own thoughts, feel my own hands on my skin. I do not feel the cold metal biting into my skin as I slide the wristband that deems me mentally disoriented around and around, staring at the letters until my brain no longer recognizes the symbols printed on the band. My mind focuses on the jabbing pressure of the plastic band digging into my skin as I float in and out of consciousness.

Sometimes it takes hours to find me. I don't want them to find me, but I can't help but scream when I can no longer fight the demons in my head.

"'Haymitch.'

'Listen to that. The Mockingjay found her voice,' says Haymitch, laughing.

'I need your help,' I say.

Haymitch belches, filling the air with white liquor fumes. 'What is it, sweetheart? More boy trouble?' I don't know why, but this hurts me in a way Haymitch rarely can. It must show on my face, because even in his drunken state, he tries to take it back. 'Okay, not funny.' I'm already out the door. 'Not funny! Come back!' By the thud of his body hitting the floor, I assume he tried to follow me, but there's no point.

I zigzag through the mansion and disappear into a wardrobe full of silken things. I yank them from hangers until I have a pile and then burrow into it. In the lining of my pocket, I find a stray morphling tablet and swallow it dry, heading off my rising hysteria."

~Suzanne Collins, Mockingjay, p. 363

I hear shuffling from outside my burrow as I sit with my knees pulled to my chest. A hand lifts the
piece of silk shielding my face, and for a brief moment my mind doesn’t register the figure in front of me. The soft light accentuates the small features and lines of her pristine face, and in this moment I think it's too good to be true.

"Are you going to say hi or what?"

She gives me a one-sided smile, her eyes shining at the sight of mine. The sight of her momentarily petrifies me, and as I crawl out from beneath the sheets, she pulls me into her. Hot tears sting my eyes as I breath in her scent, the scent that faded from her shirt long ago, the scent I now considered home and we tumble to the floor. Her arms tighten around me and I feel as if a weight has been lifted off my shoulders when I bury my face into her neck.

My mind has been a cloud, slowly drifting away until her embrace rained down on me and I feel a heat that warms me to the core, a heat I feared I would never feel again. I close my eyes and absorb her presence, the feeling of her body against mine, her hands pressing into my shoulder blades. Her. No words could fathom the feeling that will express how much I had longed for her when I was away.

So I don't say anything. And we hold each other for a long time, and she whispers quietly to me, kissing my ear, my neck.

And in the midst of our embrace, between the mess of our arms and legs, I realize there are tears running down my face. The reality of Prim's death hits me like a train, and suddenly my body is wracking in uncontrollable sobs as she untangles our bodies to get a clear look at me. The event replays in my head as I melt into her lap, trying to regulate my breathing. Even the warmth from her body cannot stop the hysteria that is beginning to seep into my limbs. I don't feel her hands as they caress my face as I wrap my shaking arms around her middle to anchor myself from the impending storm, but the waves come crashing down.

I'm sobbing too violently to realize she is crying with me.

("Why did you leave?"
"I knew you'd be okay.")

We might be hollow, but we're brave.

~Lorde, “400 Lux”

From the red rawness of her eyes I see after some nights I realize I'm not the only one who's hurting.

Finnick.

The last trustworthy and dependable and constant person in her life. Gone.

(And then I realize she's staying strong for me.)

And some nights in bed when she thinks I'm asleep, she grieves. I tighten my hold on her when I hear her quiet sniffles in the dark beside me as she subtly tries to wipe the tears away.

Some nights we cling to each other in the darkness. Some nights there are only unsaid words and
damp pillowcases.

- 

It was one of the very few nights that she managed to sleep. She had never said it out loud, but I could see the concern in her drooping eyes when we spent another sleepless night together.

I listen to the rhythm of her heart against her chest as I lay tucked underneath her arm. When she cranes her head towards mine in her sleep, tucking my head underneath her chin, I am reminded of a moment Finnick and I shared during drills.

"You know how Johanna is. She's always held everyone at an arm's length," Finnick had said to me. "I've known for Jo a long time; she's a good person. One of the best people I know. Yeah, she's had a lot of one night stands and flings and has a certain attitude towards people, but with you she's different."

"She's different with you, too."

"But my different is different from your different," he said, flashing his teeth at me in a grin.

"Nothing's going on between us," I had told him almost uncertainly.

"Love is weird, Katniss," Finnick said after a moment. "With everyone else, you'd think there was nothing past her abrasive attitude. Believe me, she's got a heart behind all those layers of sarcasm and menacing looks." I smiled. "The feelings are there, she just chooses not to use them.” He gestured around us. "With everyone."

I had contemplated this for a moment before turning back towards him. "What about you?"

He chuckled lightly. "Me?” he asked, a finger pointed at his chest. “It’s complicated. We have each other's backs.” I had thought back to the arena when they found each other on the beach. The looks they gave each other that I had never thought twice about until now. His expression when Haymitch told us she was back in the hospital. I watched as Finnick had removed the magazine from his gun and methodically tossed it up and down in the air. "Everyone else is just a distraction. But when I see her with you…”

Our conversation ended when he was called away by a drill instructor. He had turned back and grinned at me as he left, and I never got to hear what he meant to say. And now I never will.

- 

The gaping hole in my chest leaves me in a state of dysphoria, even around her. She's worried. She tells me that it's not my fault and that everything will be okay, but I can't hear her. I watch her face when she offers me food but I can’t bring myself to eat it. When we're in bed, I feign sleep and she stays awake for hours on her end, shifting around on her side. A feeling of guilt strikes me each time I see the dark circles underneath her eyes in the morning, and at times I find myself unconsciously rubbing at her cheeks with my hands in hopes that they will fade.
Despite my aimless wandering throughout Snow’s mansion, I always found myself back in the same room. Or perhaps I wasn’t lucid enough to realize that they were different rooms, but none of that had mattered to me. Each room featured a wide window that spanned the entire wall, and every day I pulled the curtains back to reveal the expanse of the Capitol. I had initially tried to ignore the aftermath of the revolution but found my efforts futile each time I caught myself violently wiping my eyes. Instead I occupied my time by staring out the window up at the glow of the sky. The iridescence of the clouds mollified the ringing white noise in my ears and the ache in my chest enough to keep my mind at bay.

I don’t know how she finds me, but at some point in the day she comes in and joins me. I had been so busy polishing the windowpane with the end of my shirt that I didn’t hear her come in today.

"Eat," she says, seating herself beside me. "Please." I stop polishing the glass long enough to notice a loaf of bread in her hands before turning back towards the window.

If she was disappointed with the lack of response, she didn’t show it. Instead she pulls her knees up to her chest and gingerly places a kiss on my shoulder. Together we sit in silence, watching as the sun made its way across the sky, casting varying shadows on the loaf of bread before us as it went. Eventually I find her head on my shoulder.

Even after the sun had set the bread remained untouched.

Kiss her till her pain has been pushed away.

~Unknown

I wake one night and my hand automatically goes towards the end table, fumbling around inside one of the drawers. When my fingers close around a morphling tablet, I swallow it dry before falling back into the pillows. My stomach drops when I turn back towards her and find her wide eyes watching me.

"Go to sleep," I say. "I don't want you losing sleep because of me."

Her hand caresses my neck and I lean into her touch.

"You're not going to go through this alone," she says firmly. "I know what it's like. I'm not going to watch you go through this by yourself. I'm not going to do that."

I watch her collarbones as they shift with the movement of her hand.

"Does it get better?" I ask after a moment of silence, my eyes momentarily meeting hers.

"No," she replies, cupping my face in the process. I fear that she can feel the heat in my cheeks radiating into the palm of her hand, but her expression remains indifferent. "It only gets bearable. But it doesn't get better."
Her hand falls to the nape of my neck and I open my eyes when she shifts in bed. In the distance, my eyes catch a white bundle sitting beside a set of clothes on top of my drawer, just out of reach. I feel a sudden hot ache behind my eyes, my cheeks burning, and barely have time to register what it is in my haze before she speaks again.

"I was alone for a long time after my Games," she begins, her voice quiet. "The loneliness, it eats away at you. I don't want you to go through what I went through alone. I'm not letting you do that." Her fingers brush the hairs back on my head and the raw sincerity of her voice brings me to tears.

*People say I love you all the time—when they say, 'take an umbrella, it's raining,' or 'hurry back,' or even 'watch out, you'll break your neck.' There are hundreds of ways of wording it—you just have to listen for it, my dear.*

~John Patrick, *The Curious Savage*

She pulls me against her in the water. I watch her hands, shimmering as they travel over the grafts in my skin, bursts of warmth spreading wherever she touched. Her hands run up to my shoulders, pulling me even closer. I feel gentle kisses being placed on the spot behind my ear, trailing down my spinal cord as her soft voice tells me it's all right.

I draw circles on her knees, unsure of who she’s trying to reassure. At this point I can't tell if my face is wet from my tears or the water.

Maybe both.

There were nights where our brief kisses grew heated and escalated quickly—to the point where her hands fumbled with the hem of my shirt as she ached to get closer. But she never objected when I pulled away. I could still see the devastated look on her face when I told her to stop one night. It was the first time we had tried to have sex since the night I left, but the scars and discolor sent me into a fit of anguish; and the images of the parachutes replayed in my head like some twisted tracker jacker hallucination. Only it was real, and before I could register any thoughts my breath was short and I felt her hands on my face, trying to calm me down. She planted kisses down my ear to my jaw to my neck, her hands caressing my face in such a manner I couldn’t imagine what was going through her head in that moment. Through the hot tears stinging my eyes I could feel the heat of the fire, hear the faint call of my name. Johanna climbed off of me and held me against her chest until I regained control of myself. It felt like hours before I could manage that. In that moment I didn’t think the pain would ever stop.

She told me she was sorry, and the fact that I couldn’t compose myself enough to tell her it wasn’t her fault only spurred more tears.

Another night she offered to find me a shot of morphling, but after a long internal struggle I turned it down. I feared she would leave before I could make up my mind, but she had sat in silence beside me, massaging my hands as I tried to formulate the thoughts swirling around in my head.
into coherent sentences. I couldn't do that to Prim. She knew I was strong; she would want me to pull through this.

But I realized I was lying to myself because whenever there was a morphling tablet within my reach I couldn't help myself.

Why do you speak in words, when there are a thousand ways to communicate?
Speak to me with your eyes. Speak to me with your lips. Speak to me with your knees. Cave into me. Crash into me. Quiet does not mean empty, but so very full, so full that words would never be enough. Speak to me without words.

~Amanda Helm, "Shyness"

At times I catch her biting her cheek out of the corner of my eye when I pull the tablets out. She would suddenly display a great interest in her hands, drumming her fingers against whatever surface she could find. But she didn't cave. I recount the pills every few hours just to make sure they were all there but each time the numbers remains the same.

The next morning, I stand in the bathroom. My hand trembles as I open my palm, counting all the pills out one by one like they were bits of candy. It's easy. I find my life to be as pale as the pills in my hand, as lifeless, as colorless, as fragile. When I hold one up towards the light I see her face. I no longer see the pill held between my fingertips but feel as if her gentle hands were on mine, her hushed voice whispering in my ear, see her brown eyes as bright as a new morning.

When I blink I find that the pill had fallen into the toilet in front of me. That fleeting glimpse of her moments before is enough for me to make my decision. I turn my hand so my palm is parallel with the floor, watching as the pills plop into the toilet, settling at the bottom peacefully. I pull the handle and they are wisped away, leaving me with only my reflection in the water.

The next time she offers me food, I eat. And I'll never forget the look she gave me when she saw me take that first bite.

You spent too long running
But there's nothing coming
Turn around and run into me

~Benjamin Francis, "Stole You Away"
Sometimes I would wake in the middle of the night or early in the morning and feel her hand toying with my hair. Or outlining the edge of my face with a gentle finger, or rubbing my back underneath my shirt with her palm reading each rift in my skin. And I would stir just to see what she would do, and she would wait until she thought I was asleep and I would feel her plant a kiss on my face and pull me closer. And I let her hold me. I reveled in her touch and the soothing sensation it brought, and the feel of her hands over my skin, massaging as they went along—almost as if she could rub the scars away. And on some nights I would touch her too. We didn’t talk. It was just these moments of silence with her that were so endearing. They were gentle notions—caressing her cheek and neck, running my thumbs over her curves, my hands through her hair, over the smooth expanse of her belly. Sometimes they weren’t, and we would touch and kiss and lose ourselves in each other, even if it was just for a moment. I could get lost in her for days and days and days.

And one night she tells me she loves me. It’s barely a whisper, and when I hear the gravel in her voice I nearly drown in a floodgate of emotions. My body reacts before I can conceive proper words and she holds my head between her gentle hands and our lips meet. Her hands leave trails of fire as they run over my bare skin and I can taste the saltiness of our tears as we kiss. And she keeps telling me she loves me, she loves me, she loves me so much it hurts. I can’t even bring myself to say it back to her without the dead screaming in my ears.

And it gets so hard to breathe that when her lips part from mine for air, I break like a porcelain doll right there in her arms, pulling away. My body is wracking uncontrollably as I struggle for oxygen and I wonder briefly if my little sister had ripped out my lungs along with my heart when she succumbed to the fire.

(“I never thought I would be able to say these three words again but we’re safe now and I love you. I want you to know that, okay? I love you.”)

Stay strong. You never know who you’re inspiring.

~Unknown
We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are.

~Anaïs Nin

“And she needs a release. And she needs closeness, even if she doesn’t trust intimacy. She has to find comfort in people that will be safe for her.”

~David Fincher on the character Lisbeth Salander, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) director commentary

I used to wander President Snow’s mansion. I could wander and hide in a closet in the farthest corner of the damn place and it would take hours for authorities to find me.

But it didn’t take long for her. It never took long for her—an hour at the most. Not that I kept track.

I don’t know how she does it. Initially, I thought it was my growing paranoia from my withdrawal, and I began watching my back in the hallways. Of course, there wouldn’t be anyone. But she always found me.

We are sitting on a bed in a room furnished after the color fuchsia on the third level of the mansion. Our feet meet halfway between our bodies and she is hunched over a book in her lap. I watch as she turns the page.

Her eyes are distant, almost glazed over, as she reads and I wonder how far she wanders when she has a book open. I become fixated on her fingers as they hold the pages, her index finger tracing the corner of the page. Her fingernails are clean, cut short. I mentally kick myself for not noticing sooner, despite how many times she has held my hand.

I know I’m not the only one with issues in this room. I know she’s got her own demons and addictions and I want to be there for her like she is for me. I want to get better for her. I want to be able to tell her.

“What?” she says quietly, looking up. “You were saying something,” she adds at my confused expression, her hand hovering over a page.

I don’t say anything. I can’t say anything. Instead I feel the mattress depress as she moves closer to me, her hands drying the dampness on my cheeks. She pulls my face into her shoulder and as I close my eyes, I hear her close the book. She rubs my ear and runs her fingers through my hair until I regain control of my breathing. In this moment I don’t think it’s possible to feel any more pathetic than I do right now. I still feel her hand in my hair, gently massaging my scalp while her other hand draws circles on the back of my hand.

“Jo?” I say. She hums a quiet response and buries her face in my hair and kisses my head.
I sit up so our faces are level and press my lips to hers. I linger for a moment and she melts into the kiss, running her hand down the side of my face. I pull away, my face still held in the palm of her hand.

“Johanna, I…” My voice catches in my throat as her eyes flick up to meet mine. I bite my lip, keeping my eyes focused on the delicate curve of her collarbones.

“I know,” I hear her say, her mouth curling into a gentle smile. I feel the warmth from her body leave me and I retract my lips between my teeth, feeling the heat in my cheeks dissipating. For so long, I’ve had words fed to me. Everything was scripted, pre-written, all thought out. My ability to use words to sway the most adamant audiences on national television, to give voices to the darkness, to incite the fight in people, fails me during this quiet moment of intimacy. In this moment when I want to say something I actually want to say, I can’t. I can’t even say it.

“I know,” she says again, holding up the book, leaning in close. “You want me to read to you.” She smiles fully now, and a laugh escapes my choked throat.

“Yes,” I say, hastily wiping at my eyes. “Yes, please read to me.”

I end up lying with my head in her lap as she reads aloud in an animated voice. Her free hand is at the nape of my neck, her fingertips just grazing the edge of my shirt. I realize I’m not even listening to the words. My mind is focused on the flow of her voice, letting it spread throughout my body. I could almost see her smiling as she read, and when she pauses to begin the next chapter, I interrupt her.

“You stayed,” I say, surprised at the clarity of my voice. I can’t think of anything else so I sit up to face her, unsure of what to do next. “I—”

She hushes me with a peck to my lips. “I’m reading here, Everdeen.” She laughs at my feigned somber expression and pulls me so close I could count every fleck of color in her chestnut eyes. I find that my cheek aligns perfectly with the palm of her hand. “It’s okay. I’m not going anywhere.” She kisses me again and I tug her closer when she parts as the book clutters to the floor.

…but mostly I hate the way I don’t hate you. Not even close, not even a little bit, not even at all.

~10 Things I Hate About You (1999)

“I want to go back to 12.”

“I thought you’d never fucking ask,” she replies, a smirk pulling at her lips. “Snow’s tapestries were beginning to make my retinas burn.”

“You didn’t have to stay here,” I say, scrunching my eyebrows.

“I’ve got nowhere else to go,” she replies nonchalantly.

She lies beside me in silence, and then turns so her eyes meet mine and her hand goes to caress my neck, her thumb flicking my earlobe.
“Are you sure you want to go back?” she asks simply. “I haven’t been back home—to 7 since I was reaped.”

“I’ll be okay,” I say quietly. “You’ll be there.” I see the glint of light in her eyes when they focus on me. “I mean—if you want to be,” I stutter. “I mean I want you to be there.”

Her face softens. “You’re an idiot,” she says, kissing me before I have any time to think. I break away, grinning sheepishly and hear her laugh. “I want to,” she whispers, stroking my cheek. “Of course I want to, brainless.” Her eyes gaze into mine warmly.

“You’re all I have, too, you know,” I say after a pause.

Her hands stop moving in my hair for a moment as she absorbs my words. She places a kiss on the top of my head and responds with a murmured “I know.”

Let someone love you just the way you are—as flawed as you might be, as unattractive as you sometimes feel, and as unaccomplished as you think you are. To believe that you must hide all the parts of you that are broken, out of fear that someone else is incapable of loving what is less than perfect, is to believe that sunlight is incapable of entering a broken window and illuminating a dark room.

~Marc Hack

I hear the faint humming of the train as we travel at lightning speed across the country. Our luggage is by the door of our compartment, neatly packed into two backpacks.

She’s awake, lying on her side as I lie on my chest on the bed. Her hand is running down the length of my bare back along my spinal cord in a soothing motion. I close my eyes at the contact.

“I don’t want to lose you,” she whispers, her voice almost drowned out by the humming of the train. Her hand briefly massages my trapezius muscles before they return to my back. Shifting to face her, I link our fingers together and bring my face close to hers to press a kiss onto her forehead.

She tilts her chin up, her lips slightly parted and I close the gap in a kiss, cupping her cheek in the process as we melt into one another. We stop as quickly as we start, sharing breaths for a moment before fitting our bodies together in an embrace. There are no nightmares tonight.

Finding you was like coming home.

~writingsforwinter, 6-Word Story #81
skin

Chapter Summary

“I love you.”
“Yeah, I know.”
“Don’t forget it though.”

~Skins (TV Series 2007)

“We’re not there yet, are we?” she asks as the train pulls to a stop.

“No,” I say, picking up my backpack. She does the same without question.

The train doors slide open to reveal a barren forest with remains of factories and buildings scattered throughout. Burned black from the rebellion. Burned down because of me. Her breath hitches as soon the sight settles and her eyes glint in the pale light. I hear the thud of her backpack on the floor when it slips from her hand. She stumbles off the threshold, standing in astonishment on the platform.

I am just about to call out to her when I hear my name coming from a group of people about to board. They appear friendly enough, and I greet them with a polite smile. They speak exuberantly, talking about the rebellion and how much they admire my bravery. But when I look at the black forest behind their heads I can’t help but feel a little skeptical.

The train signals their departure, and when I look back to where Johanna was standing she’s gone.

-xxxxxx-

I find her in a cemetery at sunset. The flames hadn’t reached this part of the forest and the mixture of green from the abundance of trees and vegetation swaying in the breeze creates a surreal image around her still form. I notice there are handpicked flowers in front of three graves, including the one she is kneeled before.

Her back is to me and I could faintly hear her cries in front of the headstone, barely murmuring the names of her deceased family as she repeatedly hits the gravestone over and over again with balled fists.

I approach her, the dead leaves crunching audibly beneath my boots. She doesn’t acknowledge me until I lower myself besides her, pulling her bruised knuckles away. Her tears soak into my shirt as she wraps herself around me.

I bite down on my lip to tune out her brittle voice as she apologizes into my neck over and over again, trying to keep from breaking down myself. She pulls back, and as I massage her hands back open I find the bundle of pine needles I had given her clutched between her fingers.
We don’t stay for very long after that.

“I love you.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Don’t forget it though.”

~Skins (TV Series 2007)

Her hand never leaves mine the entire walk back to the train.

“I’m sorry I brought us here,” I say as the compartment door shuts.

“Don’t be. I needed that,” she says softly, wincing as I clean her hands. They’ve stopped bleeding by now, and her eyes stay glued to the movement of my hands as they wrap the gauze around her knuckles. “When I learned they were dead I never came back. Not to my house, at least. I mostly stayed with Blight in 7.

“You and Peeta were lucky. President Snow had plans to keep us in line. All of us,” she adds after a moment, taking a deep breath. “No one told us what we were doing wrong. No one told us what happened if we did do something wrong. No one told Haymitch or Finnick or Enobaria or anyone. Why should they tell me?

“I stayed with Finnick, too. He was the only one who didn’t see me as a monster,” she sighs after a long silence.

“You’re not a monster,” I say immediately, tying off the last knot.

She doesn’t seem to hear me. “It only took one night,” she says, her voice tremulous as her hands begin picking at the bandages. “One night and everything I ever cared about was ripped from me. Gone.

“It is better if you die. Being a victor isn’t worth it. It’s better if you die in the Games.”

She releases my hand and rubs the spot on the crook of her elbow in a familiar pattern.

“Where’s all the fucking alcohol?” she says shakily to no one in particular. Flipping through all the cabinets in the compartment, she finds a stocked shelf and emerges with a bottle of whiskey, looking uneasy before uncapping it and taking a long drag.

In the end, it’s her who pulls the bottle away from me that night.

Love isn’t about

fucking each other

at any opportunity.
It also isn’t about
how many months
or years
that you’ve been together.

To me,
love is about
being able to see light
inside of the person
who knows nothing
but darkness.

~mostlyfiction

“We were in the library when you told me you loved me for the first time. […] And you looked at me expecting nothing at all because you knew expectation just led to heartbreak. You said those three goddamn words like you couldn’t hold them in any longer, so I did the only thing I could and kissed you with all the words I could not say.”

~Marianna Paige

She gasps awake in bed beside me. Her sudden movements rouse me from my dreamless sleep, but she doesn’t seem to notice.

After listening to her erratic breathing for a few moments, I sit up and trace my finger down the length of her back. My lips meet her bare shoulder briefly, and my hand runs down her arm and settles around her middle. I hear her let out an uneasy breath but she makes no notion to acknowledge my presence.

“Hey. Could you look at me, please?” I say gently, placing a kiss on her neck as my thumb runs across her ribs. “Please?”

She turns so we face each other, but when our eyes meet hers go straight through me, as if I wasn’t even there. I find her hand and press my lips against her palm. Our eyes meet and I lean forward to press a kiss on her forehead, then her nose, and eventually her lips.

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” I whisper when we part, my voice drowned out by the hum of the train. I run my fingers through her hair and this seems to calm the storm because her eyes close at the gesture. “I’m here. You’re all right. You’re okay.” She nods in response, curling towards me and I pull her into an embrace as the heat from our bodies fuse.

“I love you,” I say into her hair. She pulls back to brush the strands hair back from my face, her eyes never leaving mine and I kiss her with such an intensity she plummets back to earth.
It is a risk to love.

What if it doesn’t work out?

Ah, but what if it does.

~Peter McWilliams
I think that [Her], to me, is more about our relationship to each other, and our need for intimacy and connection, and the difficulties within ourselves that make that challenging—and the limitations within ourselves that prevent intimacy or connection; when that is the thing we need, maybe the most. I think that those are timeless things. That kind of loneliness and longing and need for connection, and what connection means and what intimacy means to us.

~Spike Jonze, interview about the relationships in Her (2013) on Rotten Tomatoes

We arrive to my house in the Victor’s Village. It’s relatively unscathed from when I was last here. Weeds sprouted around the staircase leading up to the house and I find myself reaching for them, the sharp edges of the leaves grazing my fingertips. When I cross the threshold into the house, the pull in my chest that had initially presented itself when we stepped off the train becomes unbearable as the scent settles in.

It wasn’t the smell of Snow’s white roses. I had grown so accustomed to the smell of soot and ammonia and the Capitol’s pungent mixture of vinyl and perfume that my own house was unfamiliar to me. The smell of home—or what home used to be and what it used to mean to me. Certainly not a vacant house with unoccupied rooms filled with now meaningless objects.

I feel my body sink into the couch cushions. Even in the darkness behind my eyelids I feel like a caged animal trapped in the mess of my own thoughts. No matter the amount oxygen I intake I cannot seem to fill the seemingly nonexistent void in my chest. My hands clutch my knees to my chest as my eyes sting with tears. But none come. I scrub my hands at the tear ducts in my eyes to no avail, and I find that the only solution is to clamp them shut until spots of color begin to appear. Her voice materializes beside my good ear but I am adrift, with no sense of direction and no promise of return. I rest my face in my hands and hear her voice once more. It is just above a whisper, and she places her nose in my hair and my face feels warm when she speaks again.

“Hey. Come back.”

Her hand grazes the side of my face and when my breathing seems somewhat regulated, I find that there is nothing threatening to devour me into eternal darkness. There are only her battered arms, draped around my torso and preventing me from floating farther away. She smells of petrichor and wood smoke, of fresh air and dry leaves. Her voice sends ripples through my skull, and I notice the ache in my chest has reduced to a faint buzz.

“It’s okay.” A finger strokes my face. She moves to hold my head in her hands, turning my face so when I open my eyes all I can see are her tired ones. “It’s okay,” she whispers again, her hands brushing back the strands of hair that had fallen in my face. I close my eyes once more as her forehead falls on mine.

I wake up with her head in my lap, the light catching her eyes as she looks up at me. Her hair is no longer the soft down it was in 13, not quite the length it was when I first saw her. But it’s long
enough for me to run my fingers through it, and she closes her eyes at the gesture.

“Do you like it? The house?” I ask her after a few moments. Her eyelids open about halfway, and when she speaks her voice is on the edge of sleep.

“Mhm,” she says, her hand reaching up to gently caress my face. “It’s not empty,” she adds before her hand falls to her side as she drifts asleep.

1. I like to think that the moon was always jealous of the way

   I look at you like the sun. How your laugh turns me into a pillar of salt,

   how your voice repositions the needle of my vocal cords

   until my syllables match your own.

~writingsforwinter, “i’m trying to save you but it’s difficult”

“So, this was you and Gale’s make-out spot?”

“No, this is where we met to hunt.”

“Oh, right,” she says, going to sit beside me on the rock. “Hunting.”

I feel a smile growing on my face as I carve the bark away from the branch in my hands. She rests her head on a knee and watches me as I work the remainder of the bark off and smooth the shaft down with the edge of the blade. I tie a length of twine to each end of the branch, pulling it taut so it thrums in my hand after I secure it. Her hand reaches out and flicks the bowstring.

“Who taught you how to do this?” she asks quietly.

“My father. Before he died in the mines.” I pull on the string a few times, feeling the wood strain against it. It holds.

She yawns beside me, stretching back onto the rock. I set the bow down, reaching towards her to pull her up. “Come on.”

“What’s going on?” she asks as I lead her in the direction of the town.

“I’m going to show you around 12.”

The process of rebuilding 12 had begun shortly after the war ended. Volunteer workers helped restore old buildings and erect new ones for medicine and housing. The Justice Building was already halfway done, and as we pass by a schoolhouse still in the process of being framed, Johanna reaches over to pick up a pair of bright yellow construction gloves.

“Why the hell not?”
Volunteer builders give us approving nods as we enter the construction site, and a man with a curled mustache assigns us to a project.

At the end of the day, we stumble back to the house with our hands blistered and our bodies covered in sawdust, and Johanna is in such a good mood I am able to convince her to accompany me to the bath.

[...]

The moment when you both turned to one another

at the same time, faces closer than air and water,

and how your bones fit together

like a house finally turning into a home.

~writingsforwinter, “after the first time you sleep with him”

I am see-through, soap sliver you’re so thin

As I begin rubbing lathers up your state worsens on my skin

And gold, fatless finger to lip, one two three four hush

And pulse to pulse, now shush

She makes the sound the sea makes to calm me down

She makes the sound the sea makes

I am tired now

~“Dissolve Me” by Alt-J

“Are you sure about this?”

She pulls her lip between her teeth and nods.

“Okay.” Before I go to press a button I turn back towards her. “I still don’t know how to work these.”

She cracks a smile. “I don’t think anyone knows.”

A jet of water shoots out of the showerhead when I press a button and in my peripheral vision I
see her flinch in the slightest of motions.

“We don’t have to do this.”

“I’m fine.”

After a few more tests, the water reduces from a pressurized stream to a steady flow and I stick my hand in to test the temperature.

“I’ll go first,” I say when I see her shifting on her feet on the white marble floor. I hold my hands out for her and her skin feels like down on my fingertips. “Go slow.”

“I think I know how to get into a shower, Katniss,” she tells me, her eyes watching the water as it hits her feet. I rub her elbow.

“It’ll be okay. I’m right here. You’ll be okay.” The shower drowns out my voice but she nods, her nose brushing against mine. I gently ease us towards the shower, my body shielding hers from the full force of the water. Her lip quivers as I massage the soap into her hair.

“Hey, hey,” I say just over the sound of the water as my hands toy with the hairs on the nape of her neck. “You’re going to be fine, okay? Just trust me.”

Her eyes snap open when my hands, lathered with soap and water, go to touch her cheek. She nearly pushes me away but I cling to her clenched fists, massaging them back open. I quietly shush her as I rub the soap into the nape of her neck. Eventually she falls towards me, her body folding against mine as the water pools around our feet.

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*I do not use the word home lightly.*

*So when I sigh it into the crook of your neck,*

*Believe that your spine is a timber frame,*

*Your kiss a welcome mat,*

*And your enveloping arms my front door*

~sekaoj
Chapter Summary

It’s 40 degrees outside and
I need the warmth of a burning
body next to me to remind me
how it feel to have my hand
on someone’s chest,
to remember my heart
is not the only one beating
life into every breath.

~mynameiselly

*And I know the world keeps spinning*

*And I know I’m out of time*

*I know the world keeps spinning*

*But I’ll take my time with you*

~”Out of Time” by Running Young

I wake with a start. My heart is pounding in my throat and my limbs feel dead, an unnatural chill settling in my bones. My hands go to rub the remnants of my nightmare from my eyes but the result is futile. Each breath comes uneasily, as if my lungs are no longer accepting oxygen. The gooseflesh on my skin won’t seem to fade. I feel the heat in my cheeks along with the threat of tears but I know none will come. My eyes shut, and when I feel sleep pulling me once more, a hand closes around my throat and I jerk back awake so violently I am sure I woke her up.

I claw at my throat and find nothing but air. The room is empty aside from her still form beside me. I focus on the curve of her shoulder, where the glow of dawn draws a silver line where the light meets her skin, highlighting the stray hairs on her head. But I find no comfort in the rising sun as it drives the darkness away, and the thought sends a shiver up my spine. I cover my face with my hands to block out the light. Have I been driven mad from the entities embedded in my head? Have I gone over the edge?

But something else pulls me out of my thoughts. It is not her touch or the warmth of her body or even her quiet breaths in the stillness of the morning. The mattress shifts as she turns towards me and I crack an eye open. She’s looking elsewhere but her voice reaches out to meet me all the same. It extends to the corners of the room, bouncing back to our bed, her pitch fluctuating as she sings to the melody of a song I do not recognize. Her voice is hesitant, almost shy, but it has a ring to it that captivates me. She catches me watching her and the corners of her mouth curve into a smile. She sings until my chest no longer feels hollow, until my eyes burn from not blinking, until the song ends and her face turns beet red.
She gives me a small smile, her hand reaching out to touch my cheek. Her lips brush over my nose and she pulls me against her, telling me to go back to sleep. My mind is too wired for sleep to come but she sings to me until I feel a jab in my shoulder, telling me to go get her a glass of water if I want to continue to hear “the fluidity that is her voice”.

My mom taught me one thing: You don’t always have to tell people you love them. You just have to give them no reason to doubt it.

~irishjulienne, saying I love you is not a habit

Think about the way society operates. The real problem is that adults build a world without understanding why they’re playing the game in the first place. Business. Politics. These are desperately important things that need to function and be taken seriously in order for society to function, but every damn day we forget that the reason we do them is because we actually crave the simplest things in life: fun. Peace of mind. Love. Togetherness.

~Film Crit Hulk, “Film Crit Hulk Smash: THE REAL AWESOMENESS OF THE LEGO MOVIE”

But she wore herself down
till she was
almost invisible
and if you blinked
you had to go and find her all over again.

~runiqu

“How did he die? Finnick?” she asks, her hand brushing a strand of hair behind my ear.

My hands tighten around the mug of milk and honey she made me. “I couldn’t save him,” I say a moment later.

She sits up in the couch. “You couldn’t save him?” Her voice is level.

“He died right in front of me. And I couldn’t save him.” I bite my lip, my mind rushing to avoid the inevitable. But she’s entitled to know. Perhaps I will never understand what was between Johanna and Finnick, but the only thing I’m sure of is that they were friends. If anyone deserved to know the circumstances of his demise, it’s her.

I watch the emotions play across her face as I retell the story. The furrow of her brow, the flicker in her eyes. When I mention the mutts, the hand she has running through my hair falters so slightly
I almost miss it.

“It’s my fault,” I hear myself saying, my face going hot.

“It’s not your fault.”

“People died down there! Because of me!” I clamp my mouth shut at the volume of my voice as her eyes scan my face. She removes her hand from my hair and I study her expression for a moment before dropping my gaze to the mug of milk. “People I didn’t even notice were gone until it was too late. It was my fault, my idea to go underground. I put us all into even more danger—”

“You would all be dead if you hadn’t gone underground,” she says, her voice steady. “You wouldn’t be here with me. Right now.” I swallow the lump in my throat and push the image of her reaction to the Capitol broadcast announcing the death of my squad out of my mind. “There was nothing else you could have done,” she adds quietly, her voice briefly pulling me out of my thoughts before I sink back in.

Nothing I could have done, I echo. Nothing I could have done when District 8 was bombed, when 12 was incinerated, when the Nut collapsed in 2, when my squad was being slaughtered by the mutts, when the pods went off in the Capitol, when people were being killed and maimed because of me. I was the Mockingjay, the symbol of hope and incitation for the rebellion, yet the people around me had been dropping like flies. I think of the barricade in front of Snow’s mansion, and my hands, initially engulfed in the warmth from the mug, are reduced to pins and needles.

“Everyone knew exactly what they were fighting for,” I hear her say as I flex my fingers to reduce the prickling sensation in my hands. “They knew the risks, they knew the consequences, and they were willing to take the chance. They didn’t die in vain. Finnick sure as hell didn’t. And neither did your sister.” Her hand touches my jaw, fingers slightly trembling, but my head stays locked in place. “Don’t think of all the lives lost, Katniss,” she says quietly after a moment. “Think of all the lives you saved.”

I watch the milk swirl in its creamy opalescence as her words sink in. The images of fire and violence and death I see reflected on the surface dissolve into those of trees and flowers and dawn. I think of the smell of the forest after a storm and the shimmering surface of the lake in the early hours of the morning. The electric fences torn down, the flogging posts removed. I see a world with no more tributes, no more arenas, no more Games. I see a life where living in constant fear is replaced by a life of tranquility, harmony, and recovery.

All the lives you saved. All the people who are no longer surviving, but living. Because they fought alongside me. With me. Their Mockingjay.

“I never thought of it that way,” I say quietly.

Her laugh fills my ears as her fingertips playfully pinch my nose as she stands up. “Of course you didn’t,” she says, grinning. “I have my uses, you know.” She is silent for a moment. I stare at the hem of her shirt and feel her hand gently grip the hair on the back of my head as she leans down to place a kiss on my forehead, just below my hairline. My eyes open just as she takes the mug from my hands and disappears into the kitchen to reheat it.

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I think I need a sunrise
I’m tired of the sunset
~”Boston” by Augustana

There’s bears in the wood and they’re out to get me
And I’m safe from harm if I stay in the chalet
And hold me tight and I’ll sink in
I’m absorbed in your thinking

~“Hand-Made” by alt-J
“What’s this one?” I ask, running a fingertip over a raised scar on the side of her arm.

“Brutus.” Her eyes briefly flicker back and forth between mine. “Lucky his spear got my arm and not my spleen or anything.” I smile. “I got his leg before Chaff came in. Then Peeta.”

There is a lapse of silence. She touches the scar left from my spleen surgery, her eyes distant. My thumb traces a leaf-shaped spot on her jaw.

“Capitol. Their clubs did most of the talking.”

I feel her eyes on me as my fingertips travel to the back of her neck. Her breathing goes still when I touch the circular scar on the nape of her neck. If I hadn’t seen it back in District 13 when we first stayed together I never would have known it was there.

She draws her lips between her teeth. The air in the room becomes so still I almost certain I am the only one breathing. I fear I had stumbled into the wrong territory as the silence drags on, but when she speaks, her voice is level.

“That’s where I was hooked up to the circuit after being soaked with water. There’s two more on my sides and ankles.”

“I didn’t want to ask.”

“You didn’t have to.” Her hand trembles as she draws circles on my arm, indicating that there was nothing more to be said about the subject. “What’s this one?” she asks quietly, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“Our cat.” My cat. “Buttercup. We didn’t really like each other.”

“Why not?” Her voice is soft.
“I tried to drown him in a bucket.”

She snorts and her eyes stray to my collarbone.

I cover the spot almost self-consciously. “Shrapnel. They were probably picking bits of metal out of me for days.”

She pushes my hand out of the way and rubs my collarbone as if there was still debris caught in my skin, her eyebrows furrowed. “How come that’s all you’ve got?”

“These are recent. I was remade after I won my Games. They fixed everything that came before.”

“I forgot they did that,” she tells me quietly, her hands massaging up my arms. She reaches the lump of a scar on my arm where her knife pierced my skin like a sheet of paper. “Guess they missed a few.”

I smile. “Some psychopath attacked me in the forest.”

She raises her eyebrows. “A psychopath, huh?”

The words are out before I can stop them. “She saved my life.”

She seems startled by my sudden display of sincerity, but her mouth curls as she pulls her bottom lip between her teeth. “Well, someone had to do it.” Her eyes dart away from mine as she reaches up to brush a few strands of hair out of my face. “You saved mine.”

There is a lapse of silence as her words hang in the air. I watch her twist the bed sheets around her fingers for a moment before I decide to speak.

“Don’t be going soft on me.” I pull her hands away so our fingertips align.

Our eyes meet, and I see the shadow of a smile pulling at her lips despite her dark eyes. “I could say the same to you.”

-xxxxxx-

Dawn creeps in from the windows as I stir from dreamless sleep. I blink placidly a few times at the glowing window before turning towards her. Her back faces me, and the sheets cascade around her body, still aside from the steady and gentle breaths that indicate sleep.

In my languid haze, I snuggle closer, breathing in her scent as I gingerly press a kiss onto the exposed bit of skin on the nape of her neck. I don’t feel her body tense suddenly as I pull back from the kiss, as I squint my eyes to somewhat wash the drowsiness away, as my eyes focus in on a faint circular scar just beneath the spot my lips had touched moments before.

I have a split second before I realize what I’ve done. I hear a sharp intake of breath, feel the bed depress and see a hand flying through the air as she whips around to face me. I pull in half a breath before her fingers close around my throat.

The back of my skull hits the headrest from the sheer force of her hand grasping my throat. For one
fleeting moment, my instinct tells me to grab the nearest object and bash it into her skull. The next moment, I blink and see Johanna as she cowers over me, her face so close I could only see her eyes as they burn into mine.

I try to ignore the pain blossoming beneath my jaw, the spots in my eyes. My hands grasp at her arm, touching skin, once like velvet beneath my fingertips, now a chilling cold. Fear washes over me and I choke her name out from between my lips—the lips that were pressed against her skin only seconds before. A new, dull pain behind my eyes struck me before I realize there are tears threatening to spill. It is silent aside from my almost pathetic attempts to breathe beneath her.

Her glistening eyes are almost indistinguishable between the spots in my vision, and there is a moment of undeniable clarity in her eyes. It’s almost as if a fog lifted, a thunderstorm ended. Her demeanor shatters as the pressure on my neck lifts. Not even thirty seconds had passed since her hand closed around mine but I am gasping for breath, the air rushing into my lungs like water bursting from a dam as my head hits the pillow once more.

I don’t hear her over the buzz ringing in my ears, and I lift my head up. She’s backed up to the very edge of the bed, her hands clenched into fists and her face hidden behind a fringe of hair. The silence that falls between us is what makes my chest ache with an almost unbearable pain.

The sheets rustle as I pull myself over towards her, the pain in my head slowly ebbing away.

“I almost killed you,” I hear her say. Her knuckles are white, and her hands are shaking slightly. “I could have killed you, Katniss, I—”

Her voice cuts off when I take her hands into my own. They feel familiar now, warm between my palms. As I massage her hands apart, watching as the blood is suffused back into her fingers, a few tears escape from her eyes and fall into her lap.

“It’s okay,” I tell her quietly, resting my head against hers so my lips are beside her ear. “It’s okay.” Warmth radiates from between our hands as she trembles against me, our heads wrapped around each other as I continue to whisper in her ear to calm her down.

And you know

For you I’d bleed myself dry

She remains distant after the incident, farther than I’ve ever seen her. I find myself reaching for her to hold her hand, bury my fingertips in her hair. Anything to bring her back.

One thing I’ve noticed is that she doesn’t shy away from my touch. But she shows no sign of reciprocation. I only see the dip in her eyebrows, her superficial expressions, the empty look in her eyes. There are many moments where I cannot help but drop a kiss on her forehead, or between her eyes, or on her shoulder. Out of affection. Compassion. The purity of my soul that only she seems to bring out. Just to let her know that I am still here with her.

When we are sitting idly beside each other, I wonder about how patient she was with me after I returned from my mission. About how the silence never seemed to drag when she was with me, how she would hold my hand so that I wouldn’t forget I was alone.
Once, during these few days, I think I imagine her leaning forward to accept a kiss on the forehead. Only once.

The bed is empty when I wake in the middle of the night. There is the faint sound of rain drumming against the house, and I sit up and glance around the room. The lump in my throat dissipates when I see her sitting in front of the window, her eyes staring fixatedly at the droplets running down the glass.

“Johanna?” I pull my arms out from beneath the pillow. “Come back to bed.”

The sound of rain replaces the silence once more and I feel the mattress sink as she sits on the edge of the bed.

“Katniss?”

I open my eyes and her back is to me, her head hung low. When she doesn’t speak again, I crawl towards her until I’m seated the edge of the bed beside her, the cool floorboards beneath my feet. I turn towards her and try to count the freckles that dot the skin on her shoulders in the darkness.

“Katniss, I’m sorry.” Her voice is brittle, and I find her hand amongst the sheets. She grips my palm between her fingers. “I’m sorry.”

I lean into her so that my cheek rests on her shoulder and briefly release her hand, moving them so our fingertips touch.

“You have nothing to be sorry for.”

“Don’t,” she says as the words leave my mouth, her voice strained.

I lift my head off of her shoulder and briefly study the silhouette of her face. My fingers interlock with hers.

“You’ve had plenty of chances to kill me,” I say quietly. “Why stop there?”

She is silent. Releasing her hand, I turn so that I am facing her and try to rub some warmth back into her arms, pulling her onto the bed and turning her body to face me in the process.

“You could’ve died,” she says quietly once our bodies are settled.

I stop rubbing her arms and reach up to nudge her chin up to look at me.

“It’s going to take a lot more from you to kill me,” I say, brushing a few strands of hair out of her face. “Come here.”

She looks up at me again, watching as I pull her wrist towards me. Her hand leaves mine and brushes over the bruises on my neck. “Could you accept my apology first?”

I guide her hand away. “I forgive you, Johanna.”

There is a moment of stillness and she falls towards me. She entwines herself around my body, her face fitting in the crook my neck as my arms settle around the bend in her back. I breathe her in and lose track of how long we stay wrapped around each other. The rain grows heavier as the night wears on, and her grip on me loosens as she murmurs something into my neck, and I turn my head to press a kiss behind her ear. I pull our bodies back down toward the bed and they fit
together like a lock and key.

*And you know*

*You know I love you so*

~“Yellow” by Coldplay

Chapter End Notes

that's all i've got for now. stay tuned...
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or both. do whatever you want. hope you're all well. stay safe. take care of yourselves.

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