the brave ones

by thenightskysighs

Summary

"It took many days of fighting the urge to crawl under the warm blankets and fall into
depression; many days of plowing through the woods and falling apart; many days of
picking up the small pieces of sharp glass that were called Katniss."

It wasn’t a moment of giving in, or persistence that lead her to agree, really. She didn’t decide to
become a mother just because she hated that look on her husband’s face when children ran up to
greet the town baker. (And ask for cookies, which he gave with a grin, of course.) It wasn’t her
mother’s wishful tone when she spoke about Annie’s son. How Annie was so grateful Finnick
gave her the chance to bear his child, even if they couldn’t watch him grow together. Or even
Haymitch’s plea to “give the boy something to do besides take care of me”.

It was the silence.

Silence that rung in her ears. The gut wrenching silence that brought so many thoughts; so many
pictures of could-of-been’s and should-of-been’s that left her heart aching and her mind racing.

Returning home from hours of hunting was difficult; coming home to a warm house, bursting with
the life they had somehow pieced together with skin grafts and parchment paper. Paintings above
the mantel of the meadow in the spring, Peeta’s jacket on the kitchen chair—Katniss would sigh
and hang it up on the hook by the door, where he always forgot to put it—her bow forgotten by
the fireplace where she crouched to warm her hands.
It was missing something. It had been missing something for years, and it took Katniss a long time to pinpoint it.

The first time Peeta brought it up, she began to tremble; hot tears rolled down her face and Peeta sighed, not exhausted or upset; sadly. Because he knew her fear, he just chose to ignore the same fear of his own.

The kitchen chair scraped the floor as he came to her side and cupped her face in his hands, her jaw shaking in his palms as she cried for him; for the fact she knew he wanted nothing more than to be a father and he deserved nothing less than having that wish granted. But she also cried for herself; because she wished she could give that gift to him. She wished she wasn’t so afraid.

“Peeta,” She strangled the sob in her throat and spoke with more forcefulness than she intended. “I can’t.” She heard his exhale (it sounded exhausted, so exhausted) and watched his nod. But she also saw his understanding but that still didn’t make her feel any better as they both finished their dinner and he walked outside. Words that could have been said to reassure and mend fell to the floor like forbidden wishes and no one made the effort to fold them back up.

She didn’t really know until now how, I just need some air could hurt so much.

Peeta didn’t push. He poured out his thoughts on a white canvas and watched it bleed through. Watched them become reality.

It wasn’t reality though. It was some form of idea that could be reality, but was too sacred to be tainted.

Katniss could feel it crawling over the cracks and crevices. The small glances from her husband, the ache in her chest. The silence ringing in the empty house when she waited for the front of cold air to come through the door and settle into the warmth of his arms. The birds singing in the trees; the lake when the sun rose.

The missing pieces that she was too afraid to admit she was actually wanting.
Their lives had fallen into this normal routine of bakers’ hours and snare lines and geese finding their way into the garden. Katniss threatening to *shoot an arrow right through the pest’s eye* but Peeta would laugh, and Katniss would realize how ridiculous it all seemed, and join in. Minutes later they were still laughing, Katniss doubled over at the sight of Haymitch staggering through the yard, talking to his geese like they had to be disciplined.

She regained her senses when she felt his gaze, at first she thought he was having an episode. *Of course we can’t even laugh without having something terrible happen,* she thought. But when she met his eyes they were warm. And blue. She noticed the small parentheses curling around his lips, the wrinkles he was getting from knitting his brow together.

*Are we really getting old? Wasn’t it just yesterday we were building this mess we call our lives?* The questions swam through her mind and she didn’t notice she had uttered them until his mouth started moving in conversation. He laughed before he answered, “Everyone grows old. But, we’re not *that* old.” They were barely shy of 30. She almost corrected him, she could see herself setting her jaw, *I feel old.* She would say, then walk off and let him soak in her words.

Instead, she nodded because she wasn’t that girl who ran away anymore. She refused to be.

“It’s nice to see you laugh again.” His smile was tight, and his eyes so old. She kissed him, to somehow pour words she couldn’t say into him. They had been married for years and kissed each other a thousand times, but it always felt new.

His fingers splayed across her back and she pressed her cheek on his chest. “Katniss, don’t think I’m not as afraid as you are. Everyone’s afraid. Not being afraid is what’s dangerous.” She wrapped her arms tighter around his ribcage because she knew what was coming. “Just,” He sounded so hesitant as he spoke, so pained that Katniss grimaced. “think about it.”

“You know I love you.” She said; because that was something she could give him without being afraid. And even then it frightened her; how much she had grown to love him.

“And you know I love you.” He returned.

They were all each other had left, and they both knew that.

When he kissed her goodnight and he draped his arm over her waist, she turned her head slightly and wondered if they would have his curls.
She didn’t want them overnight.

It took many days of fighting the urge to crawl under the warm blankets and fall into depression; many days of plowing through the woods and falling apart; many days of picking up the small pieces of sharp glass that were called Katniss.

And none of those days were any easier on Peeta. He still fought as much as she did. Dealing with the silence, the nagging, and the darkness in his mind. He fought so hard; so astonishingly hard to keep the darkness at bay. But they won, forcing so many lies down his throat.

She found him in the furthest corner of the room. His head lay limp in his bloody hands and she approached him as she would a wounded animal. “Peeta…” She breathed his name softly and watched his eyes meet hers.

They were so tired.

“Peeta,” She crouched in front of him, he unfolded his arms and legs and she crawled into his lap.

They both tried to remember how to breathe.

“I—” She faltered, cursed herself; cursed her cowardice. Want to try. The words sat on her tongue like lead, Peeta casting a glance her way as he waited for her to finish her sentence.

But she couldn’t.

She wasn’t ready.
“I’m going hunting.” She didn’t wait for his reply.

She simply blinked and it felt like time had went missing. The silence grew louder. Which is strange, because how can silence be so loud?

She woke up that morning, greeted by sunlight and warm breeze through the open window, and blue eyes.

“You’re not going to the bakery today?” She inquired. He smiled softly, “I thought it would be nice to have a day off.”

She found his fingers and folded them into hers; resting her forehead on his collarbone and breathing in his distinctive smell.

It was rare; these moments of pure peace and tranquility. Usually Peeta was running off to the bakery because everyone needed bread, and pastries and cakes. It was a nice change from the dull streets of 12. Even with the help he had hired, he was still needed. The role of the town baker fell on his shoulders and he knew his father would be proud of the life he made for himself after the war; a prosperous bakery and a beautiful wife. That didn’t make Peeta miss his father any less, though.

“Breakfast?” Peeta asked with a smirk.

White dust fell like snow over the counters, fingerprints painting impressions on the granite.

“This is your thing, not mine.” Peeta chuckled as Katniss poured excessive amounts of flour into a bowl that blew the dust into the air and sprinkled the floor and her features, but she enjoyed acting like she knew what she was doing. It was one of the better days when she could take joy in being stupid and playing with flour. “I’m not even going to attempt pancakes,” She pushed the bowl toward him and he took it gladly, “Thank God, I don’t have to watch you burn them.” She laughed and Peeta smiled because he loved watching the joy change her features. How the light from the window hit her face so perfectly; how she squinted her eyes; how the dimples that adorned her cheeks grew.
“You’re staring.” She called out and shook him from his thoughts. “Sorry,” He said sheepishly, then cocked an eyebrow, “You have flour on your...” He paused as her fingers went searching for flour on her cheek, “Well, entire face.” She let out a groan that turned into laughter as Peeta set her on the counter and dabbed the dust off her features.

She remembered one time, a few years back, when they were first beginning to start over. Katniss still drifted from reality and Peeta, many times lost sense of his surroundings and the images overcame him. They danced around each other; not quite knowing what to say or how to say it. It was a tedious game of glances at breakfast and bumping into each other’s hands as they did the dishes. They were strangers; strangers that knew so much about each other and knew nothing all at the same time.

She remembered his polite excuse that he needed to go home (the term used so loosely) and it was when she watched his figure walk away in the brisk night that she didn’t want him to. That if she really wanted to start over and move on, she wanted to do it with him.

“Now you’re staring,” Peeta retorted, wearing a mask of mock sarcasm.

“I want to.” The words hung in the air like an unopened gift and Peeta tried to hold on to his sanity. “You mean...” He trailed off, and she tangled her fingers with his. “Yes.” She smiled.

There were no fireworks or shouts of joy like she had expected; just an eerie peace that sat in the room as Peeta kissed her brow.

She knew they had each other, and that’s all that mattered.

She never stopped being afraid of the whole thing. There was a constant fear that something would go wrong, that she would do something stupid and screw it up. When she pushed back the bottle of monthly pills to the farthest corner of the cabinet, her hands trembled and she tasted bile finding its way into her mouth. It was a constant nagging in the pit of her stomach, worse than the silence that rang throughout that huge house. She was terrified of bringing innocence into the world and watching their child get such a rude awakening.
Her nightmares were more violent than they had been in years, so violent Peeta almost took two steps back as he held her shaking form in his arms. “Katniss…” He breathed her name and she took a deep breath of her own. “Maybe we shouldn’t… do this—” He cut himself off when she shook her head and a fire he hadn’t seen in years blazed in her gray eyes. “No, we’re not giving up now.”

She wasn’t made to give up, it wasn’t in her blood. And as she lay, listening to the breathing of her husband, she realized she was protecting a child that had not even been conceived yet.

It scared her, when she found out. It made her skin feel like fire and she held on with everything she had left to not run away. But when she told him, and he smiled, and kissed her, and kissed her, the torment of the fear fizzled out for a moment. Because she knew their lives had changed forever. There would be bad days and nightmares, tears and heartache but the happiness Katniss felt and Peeta shared, was worth a thousand sleepless nights and countless bad days.

She and her mother cried. “Katniss, I’m so happy for you.” She whispered breathlessly, and Katniss nodded even though her mother couldn’t see her. It had been so long since she had good news to share and they were actually crying over life and not death. “Come visit soon?” Katniss shouldn’t have asked, she knew. But she wanted her mother for the first time in years. She wanted to feel her hand stroke her hair and see her wise blue eyes. Because they had lost so much and it wasn’t right to create walls.

“Maybe so.” She took it as a good enough answer.

Haymitch came in fairly sober, his words somewhat slurring and the occasional trip. “What’s for breakfast?” He made a clumsy attempt at sitting down at the table. Katniss set a plate before and smiled brightly, “Good morning, Haymitch.” He made a face. “Katniss, in a good mood?” He laughed bitterly and stabbed his fork in the pile of yellow eggs, and punched the air with it. Peeta laughed then received a scowl. “What are you, pregnant?” Peeta paused and Katniss cleared her throat. Haymitch laughed heartily and gave Peeta a clap on the shoulder when he gave a slight nod after sharing a glance with Katniss.
“It’s about time,” Haymitch retorted, “Just don’t ask me to babysit your kid, alright?” Katniss laughed, and the tension fell from the room.

Haymitch walked home with a smile and a bottle of whiskey wasn’t the first thing on his mind.

She was born in late summer, after hours of labor. “She’s as stubborn as me,” Katniss laughed to hold back tears as her daughter was handed to her. Wailing and learning to breathe, she had her mother’s hair and her father’s eyes.

The fear that had tormented both Katniss and Peeta for months, left like it never existed. Peeta kneeled beside his wife and they watched as their own flesh and blood learned to breathe in oxygen and become acquainted with her new world.

They brought life into the world instead of focusing on the blood on their hands, and realized that this is why they fought; for the good things that outweigh the bad. For small feet in the morning and stories before bedtime. The tears that came with scraped knees and the smiles after lullabies. For laughter in the middle of the night after a day of being parents. To pass down an ageless story of courage and sacrifice. To tell the story of the brave ones no longer here to tell it themselves.

There would be bad days and good days, and in-between days but they were happy in this moment and that was enough to last a lifetime.

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