Katniss Everdeen doesn't believe in destiny. She's been working her entire life to get to where she is and to give her family what she can. Peeta Mellark, on the other hand, is just the new boy with an odd accent, addictive eyes, and an entire country at his disposal. And while Katniss is certain that destiny is a fallacy, Peeta is convinced that he's going to change her mind.

There’s a spot in the hayloft where the light from the loose rafters spills into the solitary building. The hay feels still feels warm from the day, and she’s gotten used to the feeling of straw pressed up against her back. When she lies there, staring up at the ceiling, she can just begin to make out the outline of a beautiful night sky. This is Katniss Everdeen’s favorite place in the universe.

It’s not much, but it’s quiet, and it makes her feel small. She needs that sometimes. Needs to feel small. Needs to remember that the entire world is not resting on her shoulders, and that the reason she can do things is not because she matters or because of destiny or because of fate. Things come to people with hard work, and that is exactly what Katniss intends to contribute to herself and her family. Hard work.

She’s going to make something of herself so that Prim never feels the kind of pressure to be the same person that Katniss is. She doesn’t want her little sister to have to work herself to the bone during high school just because she needs a full scholarship. And Katniss certainly doesn’t want Prim to feel like she can’t do what she loves, because there’s no reason that her little sister should
lead an unhappy life.

Maybe it’s not practical or lucrative to become a doctor, but Katniss knows that she will eventually be receiving more money than she would in an average profession. And that’s what she’s going to do with her life. She’s smart enough. She’s passionate about helping people like her own family, debilitated by the loss that disease brings. If her junior year of college had taught her anything, it’s that she’s not squeamish when it comes to dissecting things. Katniss is going to do what she wants. It’s just going to come with the hardest work that she’s ever had to do.

“Are you up here, Katniss?”

It’s a voice so sweet that it can almost never be raised, and even when Prim is calling out to her sister, she sounds impossibly tiny. Katniss turns over on her stomach and peers down at her little sister, allowing a small smile to grace her expression when she sees the shirt sticking out of Prim’s skirt in the back.

“Hi there, little duck,” she says warmly. “What are you doing out here?”

“You came out to milk several billion years ago,” Prim informs her, giggling slightly. “I was just hoping that you would come inside so that we could spend our last night together.”

Her stomach rolls slightly at the thought of going inside and returning to the place with a silent mother and a befuddled little sister and an armchair that is always empty in spite of the fact that the man who used to occupy it every night has been dead for six years. Still, Katniss forces herself to give Prim a wider and far faker smile as she straightens up and heads to the ladder that will descend her back to a more earthly frame of mind.

As she steps onto the hay that lines the ground and looks into the wide, hopeful eyes of her little sister, she already feels far too big.

(OOO)

“So how was your break?”

The question is small, but sometimes Katniss wonders why Madge always asks it. She never answers more than an obligatory “good” before hunching her shoulders and continuing to unpack, forcing Madge to fill up the awkward silence. Still, maybe that’s just what makes them such excellent roommates. Madge understands when Katniss doesn’t want to answer things and Katniss allows Madge to vent. It’s a beautiful partnership, when one really takes the time to consider it.

“Good,” Katniss hums, placing one of Madge’s favorite throw pillows in a precise position on the couch.

“That’s good,” Madge says lightly, giving Katniss a look and knocking the pillow over a few centimeters. Katniss just rolls her eyes. “What?”

“Fine,” replies Katniss, reaching a hand back to glance at her braid. There are a few hairs sticking out of it, so she immediately undoes her elastic and reaches back to redo the end. Madge just watches, her mouth slightly open. “What?”

“You always get more... um, controlling during break, but I forget every semester.”

For the first time, Katniss looks a little ashamed.

“When I’m back there, it’s like…”
She stops talking, but Madge understands and gives her a curt nod.

“No. It’s fine. I totally get it.”

Katniss flashes her a grateful smile and one that is certainly genuine. She’s extremely lucky that Madge had been in her freshman Intro to Psych class because Katniss has strong reason to believe that nobody else would be able to put up with her so easily.

“Have you decided which grad schools you’re applying to?” Katniss inquires, hoping to change the subject. Madge plops down on the couch and grabs the remote to the expensive docking station that her father had gotten her as an end-of-semester gift. She presses the play button and taps her fingers along to the music as she nods.

“I’ve narrowed it down to four and a safety school,” she says. “You?”

Katniss swallows, thinking about the price of application fees.

“I’ve got to decide on three,” she admits. “At least being here means that I can go back to work.”

“Speaking of District Twelve,” Madge says, brightening, “Johanna and Annie said that they were going to meet us there around… now. Do you want to go to lunch?”

Nodding, Katniss heads into her room to grab her purse. She’s always starving, and their apartment isn’t that far from her job, where she can easily sneak free fries for herself and her friends by sweet talking her coworkers.

The bar restaurant is crowded by the time they get there, but their friends have already grabbed a table. It really does feel like the beginning of the semester, and when Katniss thinks about, she can’t believe this is her last first semester at Capital University. It feels like just yesterday that she was a shy freshman, genuinely afraid of her roommate and scared of walking anywhere lest she step on the toes of an upperclassman. She’s never felt like she belongs here, especially with all of the money that the students have. That isn’t Katniss. She doesn’t quite fit in.

Her friends don’t make her feel like that, though, and that’s why she loves them. They make her laugh and they make her feel included and they don’t make her feel shitty because she has to try so fucking hard. They get it.

“Hey, Everdeen!” barks out a voice, and Katniss turns around to see her boss walking towards her with the delightful swagger that only he can possess.

“Yes, Haymitch?” she says, voice slightly patronizing. He notices, but doesn’t comment. They’re at the place in their relationship where they’re both aware of the fact that she’s smarter than him.

“Darius crapped out on his shift tonight. Says that his plane was delayed, but I’m not an idiot. He’s going on a date. Anyways, can you take his shift?”

She glances back at her friends, who are all encouragingly shaking their heads at her. But then Katniss thinks about the Application Fees, and before she can talk herself out of it, she nods her assent.

“Sure. When does it start?”

“About ten minutes.” Haymitch says, throwing her a sarcastic grin as he saunters away.

“I have to go get my work clothes,” Katniss tells her friends, rising. Johanna throws a peanut at her, which Katniss dodges expertly. “Be right back!”
She exits the building and begins walking as quickly as she can towards her apartment, not bothering with a cab. It’s such a quick walk that it would be a colossal waste of money. Still, a glance at her watch tells her that she’s definitely going to be late. The pedestrian light has a few more seconds on it, so Katniss makes the decision to attempt a sprint across the street. As she does so, a car almost slams into her. She lets out a screech and turns to holler at the driver of the car, but he seems nearly as shocked as she is. His eyes are wide underneath a mop of curly blond hair. Realizing that she doesn’t have time to deal with the emotional issues of this obviously incompetent driver, Katniss knocks her fist against the hood of this expensive car before taking off towards her apartment.

She’s forgotten about him by the time she’s back at work fifteen minutes later, clad in her black shirt and skirt and her obligatory braid. She’s been braiding her hair back since she was a little girl on the farm, but she’s always regretted how much of a thin, spindly thing it is as opposed to the thickness that accompanies Prim’s hair. Still, she doesn’t think that she’d be able to work without it anymore. The familiarity of its weight on her back. The way she flips it over her shoulder when she studies. The sameness of it.

Katniss loves it when things stay the same.

It’s a slow night, at least. Most of the students are here with their parents, which means that they’re all going to much nicer restaurants than the dingy, cheap District Twelve. With that in mind, Katniss gets to spend most of her evening reading over application requirements and feeling that familiar tug in her stomach when she reads the Johns Hopkins logo. It’s so pretty, and perfect, and she wants it more than she’s ever wanted anything in her life. But it’s far away from Prim, and she can’t leave Prim with their empty, desolate mom and… and that doesn’t mean that she’s not going to apply. That doesn’t mean that she’s not going to try. If she doesn’t go somewhere far away for med school, she will stay here forever, and that won’t do her sister any good. She doesn’t want to leave Prim, but Katniss wants to give her any opportunity that she can. If that means going far away to the medical school that she knows she can thrive at, Katniss is not going to stop herself.

Probably.

“Hey.”

The voice, accompanied by a British accent, is low and shy, causing Katniss to quirk her eyebrows before looking up. This person sounds way too unsure of himself to actually be legal- if he asks for alcohol, she’s certainly not going to be serving him. Upon seeing him, however, she recognizes him immediately.

“Oh. It’s you.”

The man cocks his head to the side, frowning deeply.

“I’m sorry. Do I know you?”

Katniss’ expression turns from her normal scowl to her angry scowl as she realizes that this boy has absolutely no recollection of her.

“You nearly killed me this morning,” she reminds him, eyes narrowing judgmentally. His own sapphire eyes widen with surprise.

“You’re the girl from the crosswalk?”

“That would be me,” nods Katniss, bracing her hands on the counter behind the bar.
“I’m so sorry!” the man says immediately, his puppy dog eyes practically leaking apology. “I was overwhelmed and I had no idea where I was and I swear… I wasn’t trying to kill you. I just wasn’t looking where I was going.”

Her stiff posture only relaxes slightly at his words. Shaking her head, Katniss gestures to the bar.

“What can I get for you?”

“Whatever beer you have on tap. Thanks.”

“I’m going to need to see your identification,” Katniss tells him.

“Seriously?” he says, starting to laugh. At the extremely sober look on her face, his chuckles die. “Oh. Okay. Yeah.” The man digs into his pocket and brings out a leather wallet. It looks brand new and disgustingly expensive. Looking at it, Katniss knows without a doubt that he’s got to be over twenty-one. Actually, she’s starting to doubt that he’s even a college student.

Regardless, she takes the I.D. from him and glares down at it. Peeta Mellark’s smiling face stares right back at her, cocky in a way that she hasn’t seen him before. His shoulders are squared, his white teeth on prevalent display. And he’s twenty two, just a few months older than she is.

“Are you a senior?” she inquires, reaching for a glass. It’s a big campus, but she’s never seen him before, and usually the people that come to District Twelve are frequenters of the bar. It’s not exactly the most stately of buildings. It takes dedication to want to eat there.

“Yes,” he nods.

“Doing a semester abroad?”

He accepts his I.D. and beer and hands her the money.

“I’m finishing out my schooling here, actually,” he says, and she wonders whether his voice sounds stiff because of the accent or because of the manner in which he expresses himself. “My parents thought it would be good for me to experience different places in the world.”

“Besides England, you mean?”


“You’re not from there?” Katniss questions, confused.

“No.” Peeta shakes his head. “My dad is, though, and he and my mum sent me to a boarding school there.”

She’s about to ask where he’s actually from, but realizes that she’s never this talkative with the customers, and she’s not about to start now. Katniss isn’t sure what has compelled her to continue talking to him, but now that she’s conscious of it, she isn’t about to start doing it again.

“That’s nice,” she says, reaching for a glass. “Have a good evening.”

His brows constrict at the sudden turn of her countenance, and he nods slowly.

“Yes. Alright. Bye, then.”

“Bye.”
She’s just looking down when the sound of a body hitting the counter causes her to jerk her head up. Her eyes come to rest on her best friend, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

“Who was he? He was cute.”

“His name was Peeta,” shrugs Katniss. “He’s an exchange student from England.”

“Never mind that,” Madge says, face still alight with amusement. “Check out the ass on that boy.”

“He’s kind of stupidly dressed,” Johanna notes, snapping her fingers in the direction of Katniss. Katniss gives her a look. “What?”

“Ask nicely.”

Johanna rolls her eyes.

“Fine. Will you please aid me in my endeavor to get totally and completely pissed tonight?”

With a curt nod, Katniss wordlessly hands Jo her scotch and soda.

“He is dressing rather oddly,” Annie notes, her lips finding the straw of her Shirley Temple. “What kind of guy goes to a college bar wearing tan slacks and a blue button down?”

“It brings out his eyes and perks up his ass,” Madge shrugs. “All the power to him.”

“Maybe they dress like this all the time in England,” Annie suggests. “Maybe you should go find out, Katniss.”

“Why?” she asks, filling somebody’s drink and giving them a small smile as she hands him his drink. As a result, she’s rewarded with a tip.

“He seemed to like you,” Annie points out.

“Maybe he wants to bone ya,” Jo laughs.

“Maybe you can take him up to the stacks!” says Madge dreamily. “Gosh, I haven’t been up there since-”

“The last day of school... last semester,” Johanna reminds her.

“It’s my favorite place in the world,” Madge jokes.

“Don’t sell yourself short,” Annie says genuinely. “There’s more to you than the stacks.”

“I hope not,” Madge says sincerely, but Katniss knows her and knows that there’s more to Madge than Madge likes letting on. The thing about people is that they are almost always deeper than they want to seem, and Madge has a particularly keen sense of what she’s allowed to show people and what she isn’t. Her father is a politician, after all. He’s taught her to never reveal her feelings.

Katniss gets that. She’s about to use deflection right now, and she trusts that Madge is going to let her do so. That’s the kind of bond that they have.

“I’m not taking Peeta up to the stacks,” she says, “and I’m also not going to keep my job if the three of you keep hanging around me during work.”

“Yeah,” says Johanna derisively. “Because Haymitch cares so much.”
Katniss doesn’t say anything after that, but she does watch the man at his table. He sits by himself, observing the world around him like it’s something brand new and exciting. She’s never seen anybody look at the bar like this; like it’s a challenge that needs to be deeply considered before he can tackle it. For some reason, she desires to help him.

But she’s not going to. She can’t. Katniss Everdeen doesn’t help anybody except for herself and her sister, occasionally going out of her way to assist a friend. That’s the way it’s always been. On the off chance that she lets somebody in, she will give them everything that she can. But it’s a horrifically vulnerable position to be in, loving people like Katniss loves them.

For that reason, very few people are able to make their way in, and she certainly never plans to let a guy in. Especially not an attractive guy with curly blond hair and eyes that look like sparkling gem stones. A guy who downs beers all night so that he can keep coming back to buy more from Katniss and who seems to be giving her twenty dollar tips every single time he comes to the bar.

She resolves to forget about Peeta Mellark by the time classes start.

(OOO)

Katniss’ braid is still wet when she gets to class. As a joke, Johanna had set her phone’s alarm ten minutes later, meaning that her entire morning schedule had gotten messed up. Luckily, she manages to arrive before class begins, so it’s with relief that she settles onto one of the stools at the front of the room and begins methodically arranging her pens.

“I don’t think they can get any straighter than that,” comes a voice, and even though she’s heard it only a few times before, Katniss immediately places it.

“You’re a chem major.”

“Political science, actually,” Peeta says. “But I have one more science requirement and this one fit into my schedule and previous schooling, so-”

“That’s nice,” Katniss says, cutting him off. She looks down at her paper, not wanting to see his awkward flush as he walks away from her.

He doesn’t. He sits down on the stool next to her and flashes her a wide smile, a broader one than first presented to her on his driver’s license. Katniss doesn’t say anything, knowing that he’ll be moved as soon the professor sorts them into lab partners. In any case, she knows that she can’t be lab partners with him. There’s something about him that’s far too intriguing, and intriguing doesn’t work for her. Not at all.

Not now.

“First order of business,” Professor Beetee says, striding into the room and beginning class right away. Katniss has been told to never be offended when he doesn’t make eye contact, so she isn’t surprised when he doesn’t look at any of the students, instead choosing to pay attention to his immaculately neat shoes. “Look at the student sitting next to you at your lab table. This person will be your lab partner for the remainder of the semester. Please take these next ten minutes as an opportunity to go over the lab supply list and divide who buys which supplies.”

Katniss doesn’t have to glance at Peeta to see the happy look on his face. She does anyways, as she’s a glutton for punishment.

“Looks like you’re stuck with me,” Peeta says happily, passing her a copy of the syllabus that Professor Beetee has handed him.
“Wonderful,” Katniss replies drily. She would ask for a change, but she knows that Professor Beetee isn’t that kind of professor. He might transcend above other professors when it comes to academics, knowledge, and passion, but he’s not the most brilliant when it comes to student interaction.

Katniss likes him.

“So you’re gonna have to help me through this,” Peeta says conversationally. Katniss’ pen pauses in her division of the supply list. “I’m not the most knowledgeable science student to ever walk these hallowed halls.”

“I’m sure you’re fine,” says Katniss stiffly.

“No, really,” Peeta says, somehow effusive. “I’m terrible. This is going to be a series of long nights tutoring me and entire class periods trying to get me to understand concepts and me following you desperately to your job demanding that you bestow upon me the gift of your wisdoms and comprehension. I mean, seriously.”

“Stop,” Katniss says, clenching her fists in frustration. “This is my future. Not only do I need this class to graduate, I need to get an A in it so that I can get into a good med school. I’m not going to be spending long nights, nor am I going to be spending any time, tutoring you. You are not allowed to find me at work or drop slack in this class because I’m a hard worker. Carry your own weight and come end of this semester, you will never have to see me again.”

He looks thoroughly chastised as he says,

“Well, what if I want to see you again?”

Katniss chooses to ignore this.

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End Notes

Hey, everybody! I’ve been wanting to write Everlark for ages, and the other day my mother and I were having a “The Prince & Me” marathon. When I watched it, it hit me how amazing it would be as an Everlark story. So here this is. My first multi-chapter fic since Sleepless. Are you as scared as I am? I hope not. Obviously I’m going to be changing things in order to make the characters more IC and the plot more applicable to the series. Anyways, please let me what you think and feel free to nudge me to get me to keep writing. If you want to poke me or ask me questions, you can find me as rongasm on tumblr. Have a great day! ~writergirl8

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