Things We Lost in the Fire

by writeshite

Summary

After the war, they go their separate ways. There's nothing left for her with them anymore. Katniss and Peeta have each-other, Haymitch doesn't seem to make a fuss whether she stays or goes. After everything, this is what it comes down to. The kids get their little house in twelve, Haymitch skulks off back to his drink, and she returns to the Capitol...So now what? Now, she tries to get her life back together. Complete with all the hurdles that entails.
Chapter 1

The apartment swells with dark. Silence sleeps like a lion in every room. And the old escort sleeps beside the one that resides at the foot of her bed. Her eyes look heavy even when closed, even in shadow, you can tell it's no trick of the light. Those eyes begin to shift, begin to dart to and fro without seeing. Faces creep into her dreams; all anger and hate, splintered teeth and dried blood. She sees their young faces across the room that isn't there, on the other side of the cell she has not seen the inside of in months. They stagger ever closer to her, cornering her like a wounded creature. Their spits and groans not quite managing to overpower the screams of those around her. There's only two faces missing from the oncoming crowd that draws her blood out from her and into the floor, and their voices are crying to her from beyond the glass. Effie --- Effie! Please! And she can do nothing. Say nothing. She can hardly even breath. Her tributes move ever closer to her, their faces contorting and, melting. Melting into masks of white, visors of black. Their crumpled backs straighten as their skin morphs into uniform. Hands extend beyond fingers into coshes that make her bones ache before they've even touched her. They keep coming. They won't stop. They never will, will they? Violent, shaking hands try to shove them away from her but the hands just keep coming. Thick, leathery fingers wrap around her ankle and she's dragged across the bitter concrete 'til the mass of peacekeepers bear down on her.

She wakes with a wretched scream when they start beating her.

Darkness. Silence. It swallows her whole. Swallows her cry, her shaking, the tears that brim in her eyes. She can't see a thing. She doesn't like that.

Her spine twitches and senses things that are not there as she climbs out of the bed too carefully, half anticipating a hand to shoot out from under the bed. The woman disappoints herself in actually looking. The light is flicked on with some haste and then she can soothe herself with the sight of everything that is her bedroom. No cell. No horrors. No guards. No pain...The last one isn't exactly true. But she's too awake now, to addled with fear that won't entirely be quashed. Some time away from her bed may do her good.

The rest of her lavish apartment stands in pitch, as well as the world outside it. A few lamps here and there suffice, and she's glad it's not yet morning. The view outside her grand windows is not what it once was. Not the glittering city she left, not the city she loved. Oh, she still loved it, her Capitol, but war changes a place just as it changes the eyes that look upon it. And it was not the home she left. She didn't want the daylight reminding her. But it would come regardless.

It's almost ritual the way she moves; soft steps to the kitchen, three little pills, blue, purple, pink, (blue stops the nightmares, purple calms you down, pink makes you sleep), all lined up in a pretty little row beside the sink. Plucking them off the counter one by one and knocking them back. Dry. She's used to it by now. The way she follows the same path to the couch each night and plants herself there, looking out on the shadow of her Capitol. Lights like a blanket of fallen stars, glittering supernovas, shimmering galaxies, all beaming up into the vacant night sky. It doesn't show the damaged buildings across town. The washed out pastel streets. The empty buildings all boarded up and fenced off. It just shows the lights. And she curls up on the couch, staring out of her window across the view, remembering old times, old parties, old friends, all dead and buried with the war, until the pink pill kicks in and she slowly drifts off into a blue, nightmareless sleep.
The daylight is unforgiving. It bears down on her through her huge windows, with no shadow of relent. And she's forced to look at it. It's the small things; if you looked at it as a whole you probably wouldn't even notice. Now she can see the boarded windows, the red tape and fences, the buildings that still stand, pristine, as if looking down on their condemned brothers for fear that they'll be next in line. Men filter in to one such condemned site, clad in their hard hats and safety gear. She'd rather not be around to hear the demolition go off when she's so close to the thing. Effie heaves herself up from the couch with a heavy sigh and makes her feet find the floor. It was taking too long to fix everything. It had been almost three years since it all came to an end. Since they all got to go back 'home'. Home. Ha. This wasn't home. It was no prison either, sure, but it wasn't home. Not anymore.

Her feet take her to the kitchen without thinking, switching on the coffee machine and setting her tablets down beside it. Though she waits, eyes lingering on the little foil slip on the counter. It's going to be a long morning. She pops one out of the packet, it's just one, she thinks, just a little one. The coffee begins to gurgle and spit as she knocks back the little green pill (green ones pick you up). She watches the news as she waits for it to kick in. Something is happening in District 8, she's not sure what but it looks positive. There's various shots of President Paylor looking encouraging and making a variety of assurances. She never actually uses the word promise, though. Smart. They skirt around the 'renovation' of the 'Old Capitol', that 'with new power comes new prospects, new places, and better living for all'. She smiles at that, partly because they show the planned housing rather than the towers they're imploding, but mostly because it really sounds good. People left homeless after the war will be able to live their lives again. It really does remind her there is good in the world. And that's how she knows the pill has kicked in.

She watches the remainder of the news. There's a clip of Katniss and Peeta walking through the new streets of 12, smiling holding hands, and she almost cries she smiles so hard. It's been so long. The media check in with their Mockingjay, they never stopped really. Every few months or so. But they seem to be weaning the public off of them now. It's the first time she's seen their faces in about six months. She entertains the idea of going back for a moment, but then has to plainly remind herself that they are as good as married now, they have each-other, they don't need her hovering around them like an old woman. They're adults, they can look after themselves. Her feet hardly seem to touch the floor as she slips through the room, sipping her sweet coffee as she heads back into her bedroom. The light in there seems dim now compared to the glaring daylight, and she feels hemmed inside that room. It doesn't sit well with her. Without putting her cup down she opens her wardrobe and takes an armful of clothes out, closing the door once again with a tap of her foot, she closes the door to her bedroom as well as she leaves. Better. It might have only been a moment but coming back into the open area of her apartment she feels as if she can breathe again. With a deep breath and a sweet smile the haul of luxurious fabrics are deposited onto a couch. Lips purse as she eyes each individual piece, one arm crossed over her chest, still sipping her coffee. She's enjoying this. Trying on each colour, each silk, each frill and floral, matching the heels and trotting up and down the place. She almost forgets everything else. No, she does, she does forget everything. After an hour or so of frivolous decision making her costumes are returned to their rightful place, with only a slim fitting, pearly, pale purple dress, with a great shimmering silver fur jacket and towering mauve heels almost entirely made of small crystal flowers to match. Her best powdered wig sits within its pretty box on the couch beside the ensemble and she beams bright enough to light the city in place of the sun. All that's left is make-up.

Her mother taught her never to don an outfit without first applying make-up. She can recall once as a young girl not listening to her and ending up with white powder all over a pretty pink dress. She's more careful now. Her pristine bathroom shimmers and shines, she showers and dries her hair, donning her plush dressing gown and gathering her boxes of powders and shade, creams and
liquids. Her bedroom seems friendlier now, but she still leaves the door open into the rest of the apartment. A huge, decadent mirror is the focus of her ornate dressing table, and as she sits she begins to hate the light: Bright but soft, filling the room, gracing all it touches, and catching her face at just the right angle so she can see every nick, every cut, every fine scar left there. Small, thin touches stay white against her skin; only narrow streams, but to her they feel like swelling rivers. The darkened circles under her eyes like plains of dead earth. Her thin bones like dying branches. She is a forest. Harboring dead fruits and never blooming. Her body is a broken landscape that continues to destroy itself. And in spite of this she feels happy. Almost elated. But it's not her, it's the pill. Making her body feel as if it's dancing on a star. Making her feel as if she is roses; all petal and no thorn. But there is a nest inside her heart, woven and dark, crawling and dancing to its own harrowing tune, cockroaches and centipedes scuttling out and over her. But they're pierced by thorns, left to writhe on their spikes under the cover of pale rose blooms. She feels sick. But she can't stop looking. Can't find a reason as to why (or why not) she lets her dressing gown slip from her shoulders, unveiling the rest of her, revealing the other swelling rivers and dying branches and plains of dead earth and red sands and salt flats and dying blossoms.

She comes out of the room in a haste. One more (or two, can she remember?) green pills down her throat and a face painted white, with bruised lips and eyes like purple butterfly wings. Silver baubles hang from her ears and hair is scraped back and pinned down. Her dressing gown pulled right up to her neck and tied too tight around her. It takes her some time to wriggle into the dress and make sure she looks immaculate, but she does. She stands before the mirror in the hall admiring her finished look. Now is when she feels herself. Now is when she feels she is able to live again. Live life as it once was. But of course life can never be as it once was. And her comfort is a poor imitation, made up of fancy clothes and pretty pills.

One of her neighbours passes her on the stairs; chattering away with their husband before they see her. "Good morning!" she trills as she pauses on the step. "Morning, Miss Effie" the man smiles. He's a nice young thing. Always smiling and ready with a pleasant greeting or two. "Please, Tristan, just Effie will do perfectly. And how are you lovely pair this morning?" "We're just fine, thank you. And yourself?" it's the wife that speaks now, her arm looped lovingly in his and smiling at Effie. "Oh, I'm feeling just wonderful. Apart from this little back pain, but I'm just about to attend to that now" "Oh, well we won't keep you!" the woman nods to her and leads the husband off up the stairs past her. "You have a nice day now!" Effie calls back to them as she continues down. She can hear the pair of them chattering again, but quieter. And then Tristan's irritated tone rips through the hushed noises "Why? She didn't do anything" "We don't know that do we?!" his wife hisses. And instantly Effie knows. People usually have a little more subtlety about them, a little more consideration and manners. People still don't trust her here. She's heard everything; 'spy', 'traitor', 'pariah', 'she could have given our names to the rebels', 'who knows what she's capable of!', 'I bet she was with them all along', 'she's been laughing at us this whole time', 'i don't know why they didn't just sentence her with the rest of them'. She continues down the steps and tries not to let it gnaw at her for the rest of her day.

The Doctors surgery is cool, and she's glad of her fur. The incident on the stairs has been pushed to the back of her mind as she sits awkwardly in the chair. It isn't long before the lady behind the desk calls her name, pointing her over to the room at the end with a sullen glance. She wonders if she knows who she is, and swears she feels her eyes on her as she enters the room, whether they are there or not. Dr. Aurelius stands to shake her hand with a smile. It's good to see a familiar face. Every once in a while she decides she should 'keep tabs on her health' and pops in for a visit. She tells herself this
in earnest, but if you looked at her calendar you would find it hard to find anything of terrible interest. "Lovely to see you again, Dr." she genuinely did look pleased to see him, and him her. They find their seats more or less at the same time, Effie leaning uncomfortably in her chair.

"So, what can i do for you today Miss. Trinket"

"Oh, you know me. Effie is just fine."

"Aha, alright then. How can I help you today, Effie?"

"Same old, same old I'm afraid"

"Your back troubling you again?"

"Dreadfully"

"Still?"

"Unfortunately, yes. I just can't seem to get rid of it"

"I see. Would you mind if I took a look?"

She shakes her head brightly, slipping off her jacket and getting to her feet in a most awkward manner. His hands are almost frighteningly cold, she never understood why Doctors always seemed to have cold hands. She knows where he will press and poke and prod, his palm gently pressing under her left shoulder blade is her cue to feign a wince. "There?"

"Mhm" she half groans. A cruel finger presses into the middle of her back and she almost screams. "It's still in the same spots. Have you been doing your exercises?"

"Everyday"

"And how are you sleeping?"

"To tell you the truth not very well. Regrettably I'm barely getting a few hours sleep most nights"

"Right. Honestly, Effie, I'm a little worried about it. It's been the same for over two years now."

"Yes?" For a moment anxiety spikes through her gut like barbed wire twisted against a palm. She hardly realises she's leaning forward.

"I know we've spoken about this once before, but I'm worried we've not been looking closely enough, my concern is it could be deeper than just tissue damage. Maybe a fracture or a rupture or a sign of something else amiss"

She really has no concern for any fractures or ruptures or anything amiss. There's nothing to be amiss. Though she can't ignore the niggling doubt that she's dug herself a hole she won't be able to climb out of.

"Have you been experiencing any other symptoms? Any other pain? Anything at all you might call unusual."

"No, nothing"

"Nothing at all?"

"I can't recall anything else not working as it should" she says it with a light chuckle but her eyes don't smile.

"Alright. Well, keep tabs on it, ok? You should come in again in a couple of months, I'll make you an appointment"

"Is..Is that it?"

"Yes, I think so. Unless there's anything else?"

"Um, well, yes, I was..I was wondering if i could get some more pain medication? Just to manage with for the time being."

"Oh, yes, well, i don't see why not"

"I do apologise I rather think you may have to show me how to use it again, I think I've forgotten!" she laughs again. She isn't haphazard about this. She knows (or thinks she knows) how to keep a veil over it.

"Haha, of course" He takes the key to his cupboard and unlocks it with a metallic clang. The little white box is set down on the desk, she watches him return to his seat rather than watching it. She pretends to pay attention as he takes out the small syringe, the vials, the paper instructions she read back to front the first time she was given it because she was so scared of killing herself with the damned stuff. He sets it all up, talking the whole way through, tapping the needle and squeezing it just enough so that a little liquid drops onto the surface of the desk. She hates seeing it go to waste. And every time she thinks it she catches herself, has to remind herself it's just a security blanket.
She doesn't need it. Not like that. Not like Johanna Mason or the Morphlings from 6. She's not like them. She has some self-control.

"Ok? You got it?" his sweet, mannerly smile looks back at her as he hands her a fresh box.

"Yes, I think so. Thank you again, Dr" she gives his hand a firm shake and turns to the door.

"I think your back would be all to happy if you refrained from those shoes for a little while" the man chuckles as he stands with his hands in his pockets looking her up and down.

"We'll never know, will we Doctor?" they both laugh as they bid their farewells, and to her credit, Effie maintains her skewed walk the whole way home.

Her back really does feel peculiar once she gets back home. All that ridiculous hobbling. But, if she's going to lie she's going to do it right. He's such a sweet man, it hardly seems right to lie to him so persistently. She stows the little box in the back of the cupboard behind all the rest of her pills and potions. She hides it. She doesn't need to take it, it's just comforting to know it's there. Comforting to know she can use it if she needs to. And only if she really needs to. It repeats over and over in the back of her mind: I am not Johanna Mason. I am not one of the Morphlings. I am not like them

The post has been delivered whilst she was on her little outing, but she's of no mind to look at the dreary bills and informers now. Another cup of coffee in her hand she settles demurely onto the couch before the screen curved against the wall, it's banners and posters fluttering about the news channel like chased birds. It's mostly small Capitol business, some more views of what's going on in District 8. They appear to be rebuilding something. It certainly does look positive. There's more shots of Katniss and Peeta, mostly the ones from earlier, and she finds herself smiling sadly again. This time she watches further though, and there it is. Memorial Day. Three years since the war ended. It crept up on her without her even really knowing. But it made sense. A shot of the justice building being rigged with a banner of gold. She can just make out the mockingjay pin on the reporters lapel. The penny drops. She quickly moves from the couch and to the kitchen counter, rifling through the letters to find it. It doesn't take long, hidden between dull flyers and a residents survey is the ivory card; embossed with the presidential seal and silken in her hand. She tears the delicate golden tab holding it closed and throws it open to read:

On this day three years gone, our forces triumphed over President Snow's violent oppression of the Districts.

As an affiliate of our forces, and of our Mockingjay, we would like to invite you to attend our Memorial Day gathering, located in the Justice Building of old District 12.

She leans over the counter, reading and re-reading it. She'd rather not go. She'd rather not be there surrounded by all those somber faces and words, rather not be strangled by the past. And she's sure she's not the only one. But she's part of their team. Team Mockingjay. She wants to see them, it's been so long, too long. It wouldn't be hovering. It wouldn't be getting in the way. Just show up, perhaps stay for dinner, and then home again in the morning. It would practically be nothing. If nothing else, it's an excuse to see them again without feeling like she's barging in. They'll all know her there. Know who she is. Whose to say they'd even want her there? Or that the invite was sent out merely as a courtesy? I didn't think she'd actually come, she can hear them saying. Muttering about what happened, where she was during the war. And slowly that morphling begins to look inviting...

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