An unlikely friendship between Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark is formed when Gale Hawthorne is selected as a tribute for the 74th Annual Hunger Games. This time watching the games from an outside perspective, Katniss roots for Gale while witnessing Cato and Clove's formidable relationship that could likely prevent Gale from returning home.

Cato/Clove and Peeta/Katniss
A sigh of relief escapes my mouth as the breath I was holding in for the past minute is released. Prim and I are both safe for another year. I turn to catch Prim's gaze that is seeking me out and notice the anxiety that had shown on her face all month seems to have vanished. Our mother gives a slight smile directed at Prim that is as good of a response as I could have asked for from her.

As the unlucky 14-year-old girl from the seam walked forward to the stage, I search out Gale who gives me one of his ever-steady nods before he takes a deep breath, still waiting to hear the name of the male tribute be called.

I focus my attention back to the stage where Hilt Collis is standing, visibly shaking and holding back tears next to Effie Trinket. I feel sorry for Hilt. She lives a few houses over and is the youngest of five siblings. She has an older sister in my year at school but I know she won't volunteer. No one ever volunteers in District 12, even to save a sibling. Who would when going into the Hunger Games as a tribute from an outlying district means near-certain death?

Effie turns her attention to the male reaping ball and I find myself repeating not Gale, not Gale, anyone but Gale over and over in my head.

But with 42 entries floating around in the glass ball the odds proved to not be in his favor. His name rung out over the crowd, mispronounced by Effie Trinket's harsh Capitol accent, and before I can even comprehend what just happened, Gale has put on a brave, determined look as he steps forward and walks with large, solid steps to the stage.

All I can think is how each step he takes is one step closer to his death, one step closer to his siblings starving, one step away from helping me keep my mother and Prim fed. I feel disgusted at myself for thinking such a selfish thought but it's true; with Gale gone I will be single-handedly responsible for feeding not only my own family but trying to help Hazel out as well.

From the stage, Gales eyes meet mine though his resolute look does not waiver even for a second. I consider for a moment that he could make it out alive. He is already playing the game. Gale would never want to seem scared or weak and being selected as a tribute for the Hunger Games is no exception.

Effie Trinket looks pleased to see a strong man and not a starving child selected for once, though it is likely because she hopes to get more media coverage this year, not that she actually thinks he could have a chance at winning.

Gale reaches out to shake Hilt's hand at Effie's instruction and firmly wraps his hand around the now-crying girl's fingers giving a stiff shake. And just like that, the ceremony is over and Gale is escorted by two peacekeepers off the stage and towards the entrance of the Justice Building.

The town square turns to chaos as family members seek each other out to celebrate another year their children were spared. I quickly lose sight of Prim's blonde head and try to push my way back to where my mother and the Hawthorne's were standing.

By some miracle I manage to catch a glimpse of Prim's shirt and reach out for her. Pulling her towards me I lead us to our mother who pulls Prim in close for a hug. She reaches a hand out to tuck a loose hair behind my ear, but I am too preoccupied with trying to spot Hazel to respond in any way.

I see her holding a distraught Posy, who while too young to understand what just happened, is
likely frightened by the huge crowd of people. Vick and Rory stand to Hazel's left and are also crying. I quickly walk over to them and put an arm around Vick to try to comfort him, not that it will really do much good.

"Katniss," Hazel exhales as she sees me standing there with Vick, "Thank you for coming over."

"It will be alright Mrs. Hawthorne." I respond, more for my benefit than anything else. "Gale's strong and smart."

She gives a faint nod and I can see it is taking everything she has to hold it together in front of her other children.

"We should head over to the Justice Building to see him off." I state.

"Do you think you could hold Posy when I go in?" Hazel asks with a level of desperation. "I don't want her to see me all upset."

"Of course." I reply.

"Would it be alright if I go to say goodbye as well."

"Sure Prim." Hazel smiles down at her, still as kind as ever even when facing the possibility of her oldest son's death, "I'm sure Gale would be happy to have you pay him a visit."

The six of us as, well as my mother who I'm sure is just coming because Prim asked her to, solemnly make our way towards the entryway to our District's grandest building.

A peacekeeper standing guard out front asks which tribute we are here to see then escorts us down a hallway where a large door is positioned at the end. Hazel hands Posy over to me, who has somewhat calmed down now that we are inside and away from all the noise, and goes through the door to see Gale first.

I wait on a bench outside with Posy on my lap and Prim just beside me while Hazel says goodbye to Gale. No one says anything as we wait for Hazel to return.

I begin to think about what I should say to Gale when I see him for what could likely be the last time. I internally scold myself for already thinking the worst and know I must seem positive when it's my turn to speak with him.

Hazel emerges from the room with tears streaming down her face, which she hastily tries to wipe away. Posy, Vick and Rory enter the room next. I let Prim go after them and realize I still don't know what exactly I will say to him. Time passes all to quickly and before I know it, it is my turn to walk through the door and say goodbye.

Gale is stood by the door waiting for me when I enter. He pulls me into a tight hug immediately and I find I don't ever want to let go.

"Katniss." He whispers desperately, "Katniss, my family. Posy, Vick, Rory. I don't know what will happen to them without me."

"Gale, don't worry about that. You know I will take care of them. I'll go hunting everyday and even skip school if I have to." I assure him even though I have had doubts about the wellbeing of his family myself. Sure, they will be able to hold out over the duration of the games, but if Gale never returns, I don't really want to think too deeply about what the outcome may be.
"Gale, you can do this. You have to do this for your family." I insist. "You are the best hunter I know. You have tried to teach me snares for years and I have never been able to replicate some of them. You have a good chance."

"Of course I will try, Katniss. I want to return to my family and you." He asserts.

I am glad that he hasn't already given up. He could never make it out alive if he let go of any hope. Sensing our time could be running short due to the amount of visitors he had, I feel the urge to draw him in close again.

"Be careful." I plead, not trying to sound as desperate as I came off, "You can do this."

Gale rubs my back, not wanting to let go just yet. The door is forcefully yanked open, announcing our time is indeed up.

"I'll take care of them Gale, I promise." I shout, as I am pulled none too gently from the room.

"Katniss, I…" Gale's voice is shut out by the slamming of the door and I feel a pang of guilt as I realize I will never know what he last wanted to say to me if he does not return from the Games.

For the first time in a long time, I allow myself to cry.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

An unlikely friendship between Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark is formed when Gale Hawthorne is selected as a tribute for the 74th Annual Hunger Games. This time watching the games from an outside perspective, Katniss roots for Gale while witnessing Cato and Clove's formidable relationship that could likely prevent Gale from returning home. Cato/Clove and Peeta/Katniss

Before I know what's happening, my legs are carrying me off to the direction of the district's boundary fence. I slip under it with ease, the power off as usual, and find myself running up to the hill where just earlier today I had enjoyed the bread and goat cheese with Gale.

I allow myself to sit down in the soft grass and feel sorry for myself only for a few minutes before realizing that it's not going to do me any good. Wiping the tears from my eyes, I decide to channel my feelings towards Gale's departure into determined motivation to hunt and make sure I keep my end of the deal.

He has to fight 23 other children and make it out alive. I just need to go hunting more often and make better trades.

I know if the roles were reversed Gale would work twice as hard to get enough food for Prim and my mother, so I will be sure to do the same for him. I head over to the tree where my quiver and arrows are stored and keep my eyes peeled for squirrels.

It's easier than it should be to forget about the situation and focus on the task at hand. By nightfall I have six birds and two squirrels. As it's reaping day and the place is still crawling with peacekeepers I decide to keep the food for the Hawthornes and myself.

Rory opens the door when I knock at Gale's house and eagerly takes the one squirrel and four birds. I'm glad Hazel didn't open the door since she would have made sure I took most of the food home to Prim.

I can see the TV on in the background showing Claudius Templesmith and Caesar Flickerman arguing over who is more excited to see the recap of the reapings and catch a glimpse of the tributes again. Knowing the mandatory viewing hours will start in a few minutes I quickly say my goodbyes and trudge down the road to my house.

Prim is still visibly upset by the day's events. Gale had been somewhat of a big brother to her and she is taking it hard. While I usually pray that the power is shut off so I can get away with not watching the games, this year I know I will be watching every moment I can.

I give Prim a kiss on top of her head and a comforting pat on the arm before sitting down behind her and pulling her into my lap to see the competition Gale will be facing in the arena. I remind myself that the first two districts will be his biggest competition and not to get too worried since most districts will not have such formidable tributes. The Capitol seal appears on the screen, signaling mandatory viewing has begun.

After a quick introduction, the camera pans over District 1 and the spotless buildings of the
wealthiest district come into view. I find myself leaning closer to the screen, not wanting to miss out on any small detail I can learn about the other tributes.

While the outlying districts' reapings all share the same pattern of calling the name out of an unlucky kid, the career districts do things their own way.

In District 1 they don't even bother with glass balls to pull the names out of as it is instead a mad dash to the escort, whoever is the fastest gets selected as tribute. The untrained children stand in the back and rush forward just for the thrill of it all, since the older trained kids are positioned in the front, hoping for their shot at glory.

This year is no different and as soon as the male escort for the district raises his arm into the air the mass of male bodies rushes forward. A tall, toned brunette boy makes it up first and is met with a substantial cheer from the crowd. He seems to be liked in his district and must be one of the formally trained students.

He announces his name- Marvel- to the crowd and looks like the usual normal, arrogant tribute from District 1. He doesn't seem all that intimidating and I can't help but think that Gale has a couple of inches on him and probably 20 pounds.

Claudius comments that District 1 is off to a strong start. Of course they are. I feel annoyed at how no one in the Capitol will admit to their knowledge of the training in the career districts.

Next up the girls make their mad dash to be selected as tribute and the winner of that race goes to what seems to me the most beautiful girl I have ever seen. Her long, blonde, wavy hair doesn't look a bit out of place in spite of the sprint she had completed to be up onstage.

The crowd erupts into an even larger cheer for her, along with jeering from the male population of the district. I wonder what her specialty is since good looks alone won't get one very far in the games.

This is the furthest thing from the announcers' minds as they gush over how gorgeous she is and how excited she must be to show her looks off to all of Panem. The girl looks like she is used to it and even enjoying the attention as she tells the escort her name in a sultry voice and gives a small wave to the crowd.

The camera zooms in on her to fully capture her beauty, showing her bright green eyes and full curves. Even though there are still 22 more tributes to be selected, there is no doubt in my mind that she will get every single sponsor that selects based on looks.

With District 1 complete, the scene changes to the dusty brick main square of District 2. Although District 2 is a favorite of the Capitol, it is nowhere as nice as District 1. Seeing as they provide masonry and peacekeepers, there really is no need for it to be spotless.

The reaping balls are completely full and nearly overflowing in District 2. There is always someone who volunteers so those living in poverty have no fear to take out tesserae.

This year is no exception as a frighteningly huge man barrels forward to volunteer as soon as a name is called from the male reaping ball. The crowd erupts, cheering much louder than they did in District 1. It is clear that he is well known, likely for his violence, and that the district expects a winner this year.

Caesar comments that he is so excited for the action to start already just with seeing the selection of the first three tributes.

I find myself scared for Gale, this man- for at 18 like all volunteers from District 2 are and built up
with more muscle than I have ever seen could never be called a child—looks like he enjoys nothing more than killing. I don't think a fight would be fair between him and Gale even if he had nothing on him and Gale had his choice of weapon. I can only hope that someone takes him out before Gale has to deal with him.

The district escort has some trouble getting the crowd to settle down their cheering for the man who's name I now know to be Cato. She turns next to the other reaping ball and calls out the name—Clove Jacia. For the first time in my memory no one jumps forward to volunteer.

The camera pans over the girl's section, not quite sure where to focus the camera since this has never before happened in District 2. Caesar confirms my train of thought by stating that District 2 has had two volunteers every year for the past 15 hunger games.

I am just starting to feel relieved that there will be one less career tribute for Gale to have to face off against when the selected tribute steps forward. Although she looks a bit taken aback to be called, I can tell immediately that she has been trained.

She is striking with her dark brown hair and dark eyes but unlike Glimmer from District 1, I can see beyond her beauty. The look in her eyes tells me that she is vicious and likely feared seeing as the girls around her give her ample space to make her way up to the stage.

The crowd cheers almost as loud as it did for her district partner, which has to say something about her since she certainly lacks the huge stature Cato has. Even the usually oblivious commentators take notice and say she looks like one to watch out for in the arena. A fierce look in her eyes, she steps up to the stage and looks out over the crowd with a sickening grin.

Something about her is unsettling to me and I focus my attention back to Cato who hasn't taken his eyes off of her. Though he still looks every bit as threatening as he did when he volunteered, he looks a bit troubled over the selection of his partner. I tell myself to remember this since the unusual selection of the District 2 female tribute could come into play later.

When the pair is told to shake hands, I notice that Clove doesn't even look up at him and that the usual sneering at each other that is the norm for District 2 doesn't occur. I get the feeling that they knew each other before the games and that her selection wasn't welcome to him.

I feel sorry for the tributes that have to compete against District 2, for the girl to me seemed even scarier than the giant male. With a sinking feeling, I remember that Gale will be one of those unlucky tributes. After years of watching the games without really knowing anyone selected it is easy to distance myself from the terrors. This year however, that won't be the case.

District 3 selects a terrified scrawny, young boy and a crying girl as usual. District 4 has two volunteers but they don't seem to be as threatening as the first two districts or as interesting.

The female selected from District 5 walks up to the stage with purpose, reminding me of Gale. While she obviously is untrained and likely terrified, she hasn't given up hope and seems to refuse to look scared. That worries me.

Her partner is the usual cowering boy from District 5 and the next five districts all produce more of the same. District 10 has a boy who has to walk up to the stage with a cane. I feel a bit more relaxed knowing that Gale won't only be facing the highly skilled tributes and that of the outlying districts he is the strongest.

That is, I thought he was the strongest and largest until the male from District 11 was reaped. The dark skinned boy is massive, almost as large as Cato and doesn't look all that friendly.
His district partner however is the youngest one selected this year and Prim lets out a small gasp upon seeing her. She looks smaller than Prim and I immediately feel horrified and disgusted at the thought of her having to compete. What chance does she stand against the careers? Or even an armed tribute from another district. To her credit she doesn't cry when she takes her place onstage next to the huge boy named Thresh. I can't help but admire her bravery.

I prepare myself to see the District 12 reaping and watch as Hilt's name is pulled and ready myself to again see Gale walk up those dreaded steps. He looks every bit himself when I see him onstage, not changed by the camera at all. I feel a tinge of pride when I watch him take his place on stage, because if I was a citizen in the Capitol I would think only how strong and courageous he looks.

He has certainly fooled Claudius who comments on how refreshing it is to see someone from an outlying district not seem afraid of going into the games. Caesar agrees and says not to count out District 12. I let out a sigh of relief I didn't know I was holding. Getting the support of the Capitol citizens is the first step and Gale has not been counted out yet.

I watch him closely and see his eyes flit over the crowd and know the exact moment when he made eye contact with me. I see his eyes focus on the section of the crowd where I was standing for a moment before having to shake Hilt's hand. It makes me feel sad and yearn for him to be back in District 12 with me, hunting out beyond the fence where we can be ourselves.

The program abruptly ends with a reminder to watch tomorrow's required viewing when the tribute parade will be shown.

I think over all the tributes and admit to myself that it could be worse. The career districts as well as the male from 11 all look like ones to watch out for, especially the pair from 2, I would have to watch them closely, something seemed off besides there not being a female volunteer. I only count those seven as major competition for Gale and again find myself hoping that he can manage a way to win.
A/N: Thanks to everyone who has reviewed so far, especially the constructive criticism, I am a bit rusty and agree that I need to work on my dialogue as well as showing not telling.

The following dawn, miners set off from the Seam to mine coal and people in town opened their stores, continuing business as usual. I held Prim’s hand tightly as we walked through the streets to school. It could almost be a normal day. The rest of the District was back to their normal routine, as if Hilt and Gale hadn’t been taken away to near certain death.

My first class of the day was history, and I quickly became more focused on the pattern the wood made on my desk than the lesson on the destruction of District 13. I wondered what Gale was doing right now. Was he still on the train? Was he already in the Capitol? Has he given up hope?

“Are you okay?” I must have really zoned out as I am startled and pulled out of my thoughts, seeing that the classroom is now empty. Had class really ended without me noticing? I look up to see the voice belongs to Peeta Mellark, the baker’s youngest son.

“I didn’t want you to sit here through lunch without realizing class was over.” He explains, as if to justify talking to me.

I never have talked to Peeta Mellark before, kids from the town don’t often associate with seam kids, and I tend to keep my distance from most people at school aside from Madge, though even she is more of an acquaintance than a friend.

Slightly embarrassed that Peeta thought I was too out of it to eventually realize it was lunch time, I mutter a thank you before hurriedly placing my notebook into my school satchel. While I was hoping to make a quick exit, it seemed like Peeta had other plans.

“I’m sorry about your friend.” He offers warmly.

I can only nod in response. I turn to leave, but am again stopped by Peeta’s voice.

“If you want, you can sit with me at lunch.”

I am slightly taken aback at this offer. Did Peeta feel sorry for me? Gale was the one in the games. I was fine and didn’t need him to pity me. Did his friends from town put him up to this? His face looked hopeful however, and I couldn’t see anything in his features that would suggest malintent. I tried to be polite as I rejected his offer, telling him Madge was probably sitting alone wondering where I was. Instead of picking up that I wasn’t too enthused about the prospect of spending lunch talking to him, Peeta seemed unfazed and said he was more than willing to join me and Madge.

As I was unable to think of an excuse, that was how Peeta Mellark ended up walking through the hallways by my side in an uncomfortable silence. I was thankful we were late to lunch so there weren’t many students in the hall to judgingly watch us walking together towards the table Madge and I usually shared.
Madge’s face lit up in recognition as she saw Peeta and I walking towards her. Almost immediately upon reaching the table Peeta and Madge began conversing with ease. It hadn’t crossed my mind that they may know each other.

Madge never spent time with anyone besides me at school, although being from the town it was likely that her family was friends with Peeta’s family. They converse like old friends and I again am left to wonder why she spends her time sitting alone with me instead of laughing and talking with the kids from town.

Peeta and Madge make sure to include me in their conversation, but it is obvious they have more to add than I do. We spend the lunch break talking about class, somehow managing to avoid talking about the Hunger Games. Peeta jokes that he thought he was the only one who was afraid of our awful English teacher with no patience and stale breath, causing me to laugh because I thought the same thing. By the end of lunch, I’ve nearly forgotten that I didn’t have anything to eat. It occurs to me that having Peeta join us for lunch isn’t as bad as I assumed it would be.

The next day I’m surprised to see Peeta again sat at the table with Madge, but I’m happy that Madge finally has someone to talk to at school. Peeta laughs at something she said as I sit down beside her, causing me to wonder if Peeta fancies Madge. It would make sense. Madge was the Mayor’s daughter and very pretty with her blonde wavy hair, fair skin, and red lips. I can’t really come up with another explanation for his sudden appearance at our table.

They are talking about tonight’s opening ceremony that will be broadcasted live across Panem tonight. After Madge groans that she hopes District 12 won’t be coal miners again this year, Peeta’s tone becomes serious,

“My mom said she thinks District 12 may finally have a winner this year. “

This surprises me. Gale and I were always careful not to trade at the Mellark’s when Peeta’s mom was there. I guess she may have been happy to turn her other cheek when it came to getting fresh meat so long as she didn’t have to be the one paying for the illegal goods.

“She thinks Gale has a good chance. “

I was hoping we would continue to avoid discussing the games as we had yesterday, but I should have known better than to think I could continue ignoring them.

My mom hadn’t spoken another word about the games since the replay of the reapings, likely for Prim’s benefit. I was secretly dreadling having to watch the required viewing tonight as we would be going over to the Hawthornes. I had so far kept up my end of the deal with Gale, giving half the game I caught to his family, but have been avoiding any further interactions with Hazel or his siblings.

“He’ll have a better chance if he isn’t dressed as a coal miner though.” Madge points out, in an attempt to lighten the mood.

“You can both come watch the ceremony tonight at my house.” Madge continues, extending an invitation to Peeta and I. I think I’m going to try to get out of watching at the Hawthorne’s and instead go to the town square for the public viewing. I don’t think I can handle seeing Hazel’s reaction to Gale being paraded around the Capitol before having to fight for his life. Peeta however accepts the invitation, further confirming my suspicions that he is interested in Madge.

Back at home after school, I manage to wiggle my way out of going to the Hawthorne’s for the required viewing by assuring my mother that I will go to the town square as to not risk being punished for not watching the games. As much as I don’t want to have to see this year’s hunger
games, I do want to see Gale on TV, if for no other reason than to know he is still alive.

I leave the Seam just before dusk to ensure I make it to the town square on time. The sunset to my left is vivid and colorful with streaks of pink and orange lighting up the sky. It seems unfair that the sky treats us to such a spectacular show while 24 children miles away in the Capitol prepare to fight in the arena. I am walking through the nice part of town where the sewing shop and carpenter’s workshop is when I hear my name called out.

Madge is briskly stepping down from her porch calling to me again as I turn towards the sound of my name.

“Katniss, hey, do you want to come inside and watch the ceremony with Peeta and I? It’d probably be better than watching it alone.” I had planned to see if there was anyone from the Hob at the public viewing I could stand next to during the broadcast, but with the temperature dropping as the sun sank further down and with the town square still being a mile walk from here, I decided to take Madge up on her offer.

Madge smiles when I agree to join her and grabs my hand pulling me towards her house.

I have been on the porch of Madge’s home plenty of times to trade, but have never been inside. In fact, thinking back, I haven’t been inside anyone’s house from the town.

She opens the door to reveal Peeta leaning against a few expensive-looking pillows on one of two sofas in her living room. There is a piano pushed against the wall and a large grandfather clock next to the staircase. I wonder what it would have been like to grow up in a house as nice as this. Madge leads me to the other sofa and sits down next to me, tossing me a blanket which appears to just be for decoration on the back of the couch. I imagine the sweaters for Prim this fabric could be used for if it was ours, yet here it was being used to brighten up the room and offer additional comfort while lounging around. I almost want to turn and leave, but stop myself when Peeta says he’s glad that I could join them.

Peeta and Madge trade stories about their mutual friends while Caesar Flickerman and Claudius Templesmith begin their commentary leading up to the opening ceremony. I feel very out of place and try not to get any dirt from my shoes onto anything around me. I am very nervous to see Gale onscreen. I know how important it is to make a good first impression for the sponsors. I silently pray that Gale won’t scowl during his chariot ride.

I tune into Madge and Peeta’s conversation, trying to focus on something else and soon am wrapped up in listening to them talk about which District is likely to have the worst costumes.

Spending time with Madge and Peeta is easier than I imagined. Peeta makes sure to include me in the discussion and the time passes much faster than I expected. Before we know it the mandatory viewing notice flashes on the screen and District 1’s chariot comes into view.

I lean forward and start picking at the skin around my nails, anxious to see who the sponsors take a liking to as well as to see Gale. As expected District 1 and 2 earn loud cheers from the crowd with the Capitol citizens calling out their names. The careers are always a crowd favorite and this is especially true this year with the stunning beauty of the girl from District 1 as well as the duo from 2 who unexpectedly are holding hands. The camera zooms in on the second chariot to show the tributes from 2 raise their interlocked hands into the air and the crowd erupts with cheers at their display of unity as well as their presumed skill. They seem to promise that together they will not let the games be boring.

“I’d be afraid of them. I don’t like that girl. “ Madge says referring the girl from 2, who Caesar tells us is named Clove. Peeta shoots her a look and Madge turns back to the screen. It was likely
for my benefit since I had already caused the quick of my ring finger to bleed due to my nerves.

On TV the Capitol citizens politely claps for District 3 before again rising to their feet to cheer for District 4. Peeta comments that District 6 has the worst costume so far which is true since I can’t even tell what the tributes are supposed to be. It just looks like a big explosion of tires and tools.

Soon the District 11 horses are zoomed-in on and I prepare myself to see Gale on screen. The tiny girl from 11 holds onto the chariot tightly as if afraid she could blow away in the wind, which I don’t think would be impossible. Next to the hulking boy from her district, it is clear to see how little of a chance she has in the games, not unlike all other 12 and 13-year-olds.

Two black horses are shown on screen and I know this is the moment that I will see Gale.

Madge shrieks pointing at the screen a second before I realize what I am seeing. Gale and Hilt are literally on fire. I jump up off of the sofa, but once on my feet am not sure what I had hoped to accomplish by doing so. I am as unable to do anything to help Gale, as I will be during the games-if he even makes it to them alive.

“Look, they’re fine.” Peeta assures us. I lean towards the TV and see that Gale and Hilt do appear to be unharmed. In fact, Hilt is waving at the crowd with a small smile on her lips. I release a breath I was unaware I was holding before sitting back down, embarrassed by my reaction.

Gale looks strong and even better, alive and well on screen. His face is set in a look of strength and determination as he looks around at the audience, giving the occasional wave. I wonder what it took to get him to just do that. I was so worried that he wouldn’t even look at the Capitol citizens which could cause him to lose out on sponsors. He hasn’t given up.

“The crowd loves them.” Madge says softly, as if in disbelief that the Capitol could ever have such a strong response to District 12.

But it’s not hard to believe. The Capitol loves excitement and beauty, and standing strong surrounded by flames and blowing embers, Gale is everything the Capitol loves.

A/N: Thanks for waiting for this chapter; I have had a crazy semester doing all sorts of research! I would love to hear your thoughts- positive, negative, comments, questions, requests, or anything else!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!