

Chapter 13

Once the sound finally registers, I have to tell my hand to stop.

Slowly, I peel it off of the horn and see my handprint, distinct and powerful at first, then slowly fading away as the ghost of my last actions. My first night in the capitol enters my mind when I stepped off my chariot. I left those same marks on the bar I used to steady myself, like I was holding on for dear life.

I sit there, just staring at the now empty shell of a human being. My mind struggles to grasp the fact that a kid, not much older than me, just lost his life... and *I* took it.

I can only imagine what's now going on in the Capitol. The betting must be getting heated as those who sponsored the compass shout in victory, whereas those who bet on Minos are cursing my name.

They're not the only ones, I bet.

Surely, the powers that sent this lapdog of the Capitol after me are none too happy either.

My spirit slowly returns to my body, forever carrying the knowledge that Minos will never be able to do the same. I shouldn't feel this way. If I hadn't done this, he would have done much worse to me. Didn't he say as much? Yet, the thought still feels like an anchor has been tied directly to my chest, but I'm still in the Games and I'm going to have to keep pushing forward.

As my heart begins to settle and I return to the world around me, a sudden pain flares back into existence. My arm feels like it'd been dipped in the lava. It hasn't been torn off, but it hangs limply to my side. I try to see if I can wiggle my fingers, but the pain keeps me from doing anything.

Something in my shoulder just... feels out of place. The only thing I can think to do is stand up and try to swing my arm back to try get that something to

go back where it belongs. I hold my breath and twist my body upwards from ground to sky.

Vaguely, I register it feels as though that something almost felt right again but slipped and I let out a huge cry as I'm sent into a whole new realm of pain.

I try to take deep breaths to regain sanity, but I keep gasping harsh and jagged. I can't help it. I feel tears starting to cut through the grime on my face.

I have to do it again but harder this time.

My mind whimpers at the thought. With the trembling, stupid, fingers of my right hand, I work my belt off, fold it in half, and place a folded section between my teeth.

I bite down hard and give a few grunts, trying to prepare myself. Finally, I give another yank of my body upwards, but still no go, and scream into my clenched teeth. I gather my courage trying not to allow my mind to think.

As hard as I can, I swing my arm upwards and away from my body once more and, I swear, I hear this suction-pop noise, loud as a firecracker in my ear as that something finally makes its way home. I plop down on the ground, continuing to breath heavily, and slowly the belt slips from my mouth as my jaw relaxes.

The tears keep flowing, this time in relief as the sharp, jagged pain is replaced with a dull, throbbing one. I collect myself, as my breathing slows, and I make my way back to my feet. It's time to move on.

I'm just about to clear out so the hovercraft can come collect the body, when I remember to check him for his supplies, but he doesn't have anything. He must have left his cache of food somewhere. I'm getting ready to call it hopeless, when another golden something catches my eye.

It's his nose ring... it's... flashing as if there are little lights inside the metal. I want to take it out for closer inspection, but when I try to remove it, I find I

can't.

What the hell, it's not like he can feel it, I think; and then give a big yank.

The metal that runs through his nose let's go and tears his skin, but the ring is still attached to his body.

Two tiny strands of the thinnest wire I've ever seen are attached to either side of his nose ring and run into his nostrils.

At school, I heard rumors of people getting cybernetic enhancers. To my knowledge they were invented to give an edge to tributes, but for obvious reasons, the use of one during the Games is strictly forbidden.

I thought it was just a schoolboy fantasy. I mean, who wouldn't want to get almost superhuman abilities without really putting in the work. It would certainly explain a lot of things. For instance, not only how big and muscly he was, but how fast he was despite it. It would also explain my initial thoughts of him not being all there.

Going down that route is said to have setbacks, not only the immense coin it takes to actually get one and implant it, but I hear it actually starts messing with your mind since it has to be hooked directly into your nervous system.

Maybe he wasn't lying when he said he could smell me.

That would certainly explain why he didn't know exactly where I was back at the pomegranate tree. The natural odors could have distorted my smell. I wonder how he was able to get this little detail past the Gamemakers, or were they in on it?

With my body the worse for wear, and my mind racing, I try to find where I left my spool. I've only gone a few turns before I look back and see the hovercraft materialize, and the long claw's descent to remove Minos from the Games.

The sun is now high in the sky, lending more light to the maze, but not

nearly enough to make it any less creepy. I use my compass to try and make it back to the site of his camp. I don't find the clearing, but I do manage to locate a portion of my thread. I check my compass again to make a guess of which way to follow it until... Success! I make it back to the clearing.

I check his tent once again and give a shout of joy when I see he has a sleeping bag lying on the floor... wait... not just any sleeping bag... *my* sleeping bag! Yes, I see the tears at the mouth where he must've broken free. That bugger must've been using it just to spite me. He probably had his choice of any bag in the cornucopia but chose to stick with the one I had to sacrifice order to keep my life.

No matter, it's back with its rightful owner now.

Then I look up at the side of the tent and am taken aback by what I see. There, painted on the canvass of the tent, in what can only be blood, is a portrait of a young woman smiling back. His sister perhaps? Maybe even a girlfriend he was trying to get back to?

My head and heart begin to ache. A thought of Brie enters my mind and I give a thought to all I would do... all I have done just in order to see that smile she reserves specially for me again. Is it possible Minos was just doing the same?

Then there's the fact that he painted it in blood... it begs the question of what or who... Still, he had to have painted it himself. Although I've never seen its living equivalent, this portrayal looks real and inspired. My nemesis, as it turns out, had an artistic flame to him... one that I'd snuffed out.

I refuse to let this get to me, but I don't think it will ever leave me either.

Other than the painting, the sleeping bag was the only thing in here. I roll it up and re-place it in my pack. I exit the tent and give a thought to taking it with me, but I decide against it, thinking of the judging eyes of the girlfriend to the tribute I killed watching me as I slept (if I could manage such a feat). Even if I

devoted the time to wash it off, I don't think it could ever truly be removed.

Instead, I decide to close the flap behind me and try to make it look like someone lives here if I ever need a decoy.

With Minos' death, how many of us left are there?

I need to think of a way to find out. Maybe if I eavesdrop on a fellow tribute... but first I'd have to *find* another tribute. One problem at a time, for now I resume my original plan and try to find the edge.

I follow my thread along a little way and spot the spool right where Minos barreled in and broke my sword. I pick it up and travel the passageway until I reach the corner of the next intersection and I'm rewarded with Minos' oversized fanny pack. In it, I find his stores of food, water, and matches. I add them to mine and continue moving.

I go on pulling my spool of thread through the twists and turns of the maze for what seems like hours, my remaining cache of thread getting considerably thinner, until I finally reach an intersection with the longest hall I've seen yet.

I choose to go right and am walking for a good amount of time until I see that it comes to a right angle leading back inward towards the maze. I work my way back to the previous intersection, the thread coiling and catching onto itself as I backtrack. I think about following down the passage in the opposite direction, but figure I've finally reached the back of the maze.

What now, Haymitch? I think.

I didn't come all this way just to be stopped here. I come close to the retaining wall of the maze, and sensing my presence, the snakelike plants start to rouse and hiss. I know I can't cut them down, but what if I burn them? I place the spool of thread on the ground, and rummage through my pack for some matches.

I light one. Just as I'm about to hold it to the hedge, one of the tendrils

strikes out at me and I jerk my hand in a reflexive motion, dropping the match in the process.

I light another, and am just starting to approach the hedge again, when I hear another hissing sound... but different. This is something new and coming from behind me.

I spin around, my hand reflexively pulling out my knife.

Nothing is there...

The hissing continues, but... it sounds like it's moving away. I look down at my feet and see that there are two scorched trails in the grass, one heading back into the maze and one heading down the hallway I'd just double backed from. I follow that one with my eyes to see sparks off in the distance... now making their way towards me.

The thread is burning up!

Suddenly the sparks turn to small explosions as the burning thin wire reaches sections of the thread that have tangled on itself. With horror, and lightning speed, it becomes clear that the bigger the clump, the larger the explosion, and then I remember the spool is sitting on the floor right next to my feet.

Without a second to spare, I chuck the spool down the hallway leading back into the maze and hastily beat it in another direction. I don't have long to run before the spool catches and an explosion goes off behind me.

It didn't seem too bad, but it would've definitely been enough to kill anyone in the direct vicinity. I mentally curse myself for not figuring out what the wire was for earlier. The havoc I could have wreaked by using that spool to its full potential...

Oh well, it's gone now.

I walk down the passage I threw the spool to inspect the damage. A brief

glimmer of hope rises when I see the now charred stumps in the deep, black depressions that were once living mutts. They can't seem to grow back. My heart drops when I remember that all of the thread is gone, and I have to find a new way to burn through.

What can I grab? I've walked a good portion of this maze and haven't found anything of use to me. I'm going to have to turn around and go back outside the maze in order to try and find something to get past the hedges. If there was one spool of thread, mightn't there be others? It's a long shot even before you factor in the explosion of the cornucopia and it's supplies, but what else is there to do?

With the thought of the long trek back and then having to find something that can solve this problem, my body screams. I'm just so tired. But what can I do? The thought of sleeping in this place gives me the creeps, but no one can stay awake forever.

I decide to go back to the clearing and try to get some shut eye.

It takes less time going back being able to follow the scorch marks, but when I get there, the color of the sky overhead has turned to a bright orange.

I stand there for a moment in a daze. My drooping eyelids staring at what once was the tent of my fellow tribute, the one that *I* killed.

I'm so exhausted I'm actually considering it. Do I really dare try to sleep under the gruesome gaze of the girl on the wall? What if someone happens upon it while I sleep? The explosion from the spool was loud enough to advertise my whereabouts to anyone in ear shot. Wouldn't it be like putting up a sign saying "come kill me" if someone decide to come looking?

Yes, that *would* be what it was... I was already thinking of using it as a trap, why not use it as a decoy to let me know if anyone comes by? Suddenly, an idea pops into my head that I can't shake, so I decide to go with it.

I grab the tarp out of my pack and lay it out flat on the ground right next to the side of the tent. It's about eight feet by eight feet.

I lift up one side of the tent and slide the side of the tarp under it. Then grab the largest bowl of my mess kit, fold the tarp halfway up next to the tent and dig a me-sized hole, positioning it so the portion where I lay my head would be right next to the side of the tarp to allow some air flow.

The work is long, but at least this has been a very moist arena and the ground is soft. I only make it big enough to lie on my back and even then, it's only about a foot deep. I know that it's not going to hide me completely, but I'm just so tired, and with only one good arm to dig with, it's all I can manage.

I lay the tarp down flat to see the results of my handiwork. The tarp, for the most part, lies flat with just a small indentation where the hole is that will be filled with my body. It'll definitely distort my shape and hide most of me. My real hope if someone does decide to pay me a visit, is that they'll be too consumed with the thought of someone being inside the tent, that they won't pay any attention to where I'm hidden... I just hope that those stupid squirrels don't decide to drop by.

I move the tarp up and line the hole with my re-acquired sleeping bag. I lie my pack on the back side of the tent, hiding it from view, but close by and accessible if I need to make a quick getaway.

I'm just starting to settle myself down in my bag and pull the tarp over my head, when I hear the anthem play.

I look around frantically for the seal to appear in the sky over head, but there is only so much sky to check before I realize that the hedges are so tall that they're probably restricting my view. No matter, I know of at least one face taking its last look around tonight. I might be missing out on others, but I've already lost track so what more harm could that do?

I lie myself back down and position the tarp as best I can. I keep my arms on the outside of the bag, one still throbbing in pain, one keeping an iron grip on my knife in case it's needed. I give one last thought about not knowing how many tributes are left and resign myself to just living by Brie's last words as the darkness starts to envelope me... "Stay alive!"