

## Chapter 15

After a few hours, Maysilee wakes. It takes her a few minutes to wipe the sleep from her eyes and shake off that sluggish sinking feeling when your body has its first adequate sleep in days. Although we both know that this alliance can only be temporary, we're already feeling the benefits that come with it.

Fighting off a yawn, she says, "Anything interesting happen while I was out?"

"Nah, I think the gamemakers are satisfied with four deaths in the past two days. They have to give everyone time to place their bets. And since we're down to the final eight, they're going to start airing specials about those of us left."

"Don't look a gift horse in the mouth, right?" She answers with a laugh.

I have no idea what that means, but obviously she does and she's the one with the love of horses, so I give her a small smile in return.

"So, what's for breakfast?" She asks.

I can't help but pause at the domestic spin she keeps putting on our situation. It's like she is trying to bring a little bit of home in here with us. Is she just trying to make herself feel better, or is this a tactic to make it more difficult for me to see her as an opponent when the time comes?

"Why don't we put our supplies together and see what we've got?" I say.

"Great idea."

She pulls her backpack around. It's much smaller than mine, and I can't help but feel a bit sorry about it.

She pulls out the bowl, a fair amount of dried beef, a water bladder she must have gotten from another tribute, a good amount of paracord, and her blow gun. In turn I slowly empty out my pack and add to her pile. I add my dried beef to the pile in her bowl, cache of matches, the soup cans, anti-venom kit, compass,

and something rather heavy at the bottom that I almost completely forgot was there, my binoculars.

"Woah," she says, "those look interesting!"

"Yeah, they're obviously Capitol made, and I haven't really had a chance to explore any of the extra features, but I have a suspicion they have a night-vision setting."

"What do you mean you haven't had time to try that out? That'd come in handy *loads* of times!"

She picks them up and starts fiddling around.

"Well, like I said, I've been kinda preoccupied... besides they're binoculars, it's not as if I can just walk around the forest all night wearing them."

There are all sorts of buttons and knobs on them. Finally, she pushes one on the side.

"There, I think I found it."

Even though the sun's out, it is still dark enough in the hut to test it.

"Well give it here, let me see!"

It only takes a second to see that she has indeed found it. Everything in the hut is either a dark or bright shade of green. I think I'm going to have to try and find a way to use this...

"Which button is it you pressed again, so I know?"

She points to the one at the top of the right side. I press it again, expecting everything in the scopes to resume their natural colors. Instead, everything turns to a soft, cool, blue.

I almost think I've broken them. I move around until they land on something on the floor with a light-yellow tinge to it. I take them away and look with my own eyes. They were looking at the sleeping bag, empty on the floor. I put them back up to double check. Sure enough, the same blob of yellow lays in front of me.

This is all being observed by Maysilee and she knows somethings up.

"What, what is it?"

I swing my head and the binoculars toward the sound and am almost blinded by the sudden bright reds, oranges, and yellows that can only be Maysilee.

I slam my eyes shut at the unexpected flash of color and bring the binoculars down away from my face.

"What?!" She repeats slightly agitated.

"I'm not sure exactly, but I think I might have the beginnings of a plan..."

"A little farther!" I say to her as she makes her way further from the hut. I can tell that she's frustrated with me because I haven't let her in on my thinking yet. I have a pretty good idea my hunch is right, but I don't want to say anything yet incase I'm wrong.

She goes over to where we set up the tarp to collect the rain and asks, "How's this?"

"That should be fine."

Standing just outside our door, I bring the binoculars to my eyes. The world is once more plunged into shades of cool blue. I find the zoom and reel it back as far as possible. I don't have to scan the woods long before my eyes land on the fiery-red form of Maysilee.

I zoom in on her a bit and find that, even though her color is distorted, I can easily make out distinct features on her, the contours of her face, the outline of her clothes, etc.

"Okay," I say to her, "now go behind a tree."

She does and completely vanishes, but before doing so, she places a hand on its trunk, and when it comes away, a distinct print is left behind. A deep orange at first, but rapidly turns bright yellow and eventually fades away.

"Now go behind the tarp."

She does, and instead of disappearing completely, an obscure outline of her bright orange is visible.

"Okay, I think that's enough to be going on with."

She looks at me irked and mutters through slightly gritted teeth.

"Okay, so are you gonna let me in on what's up?"

"I think we've been presented with a 'game-changer.'"

"What does that mean?"

"These seem to detect body heat, even in trace amounts."

"Really? Let me see!"

I hand them over and make my way to where she was standing.

"Woah!" She says.

"I know, right?! This will be a great way to find the remaining tributes.

Only thing left after that is to form a plan on how to take them out of the game."

"Yeah, I guess so..." She says less than enthusiastically.

I understand how she feels. Having to kill those who are actively pursuing you is one thing, actually hunting *them* down is another.

I shrug and say, "Well, since the original only has one remaining member, I'd say that we're the career pack now, time we start acting like it."

"So, what do you want to do?"

"First thing's first, we have to find where tributes are hiding. In order to do that, I say we look around for a high tree, or a pile of rocks somewhere."

"Let's try to stay close to the hut, okay? It took a lot to build, I'd like to get some more use out of it."

Well, that takes some of the old places I've been off the table, but I don't want to abandon it either.

"Okay." I say, "Let's just go walking for a bit and see what we find."

So we walk, making a big circle to not stray too far from camp. As we go along, occasionally we pause and look through the binoculars to see if anything pops up along the way.

Every once in a while, we see a tree trunk showing bright red. We take particular care not to go near these because we agree it's probably a squirrel nest.

Finally, we hit pay dirt when we find a towering cherry tree. The problem was that it becomes dangerously thin the closer you get to the top, and the closet branch to the ground was at least ten feet in the air.

"Just like the one I found at the edge of the meadow. Maybe it's a sign that it should be me to go up, after all, I am the lightest."

I do feel some apprehension at the thought, but quickly push it away. She's right.

She takes off her pack and hands it out for me to take. I switch it with the binoculars. She slips the strap around her neck, I boost her up on my shoulders, and she starts climbing.

The higher she gets, the more the tree sways in the wind; now becoming top heavy. My stomach starts to churn with each movement. When she reaches the highest point she can get to, she wraps her arm around the slender trunk and raises the binoculars to her eyes. She scans for a bit, but by the way she stops and stairs in one direction, it is clear she's spotted something.

I quickly lift my compass and hold it towards the direction she is looking. I make a note of two points east of north and hope for more information later. She's keeping very silent, which is smart or else your voice gets carried on the wind, but it makes me wonder if she spotted anything close.

She resumes her scanning until I see her pause again. She does this at

least twice more and I make a note of which direction she was looking, and she starts down. Once she reaches the lowest branch, I place my shoulders underneath her feet and help lower her.

It's an awkward process that ends up with me hugging her very tightly, feeling every contour of her body (unbidden the image of her in her skin-tight coal miner's outfit pops into my head) until she is safely back on the ground and we're embracing each other. She looks up at me as I release her, and I can't help but notice how red her face has become. Was it from the effort, or something else?

In a cracked voice, I say, "What..." clear my throat. "What'd you see? I counted at least four long pauses."

Her eyes are still keeping away from mine as she says, "Yeah, there were quite a bit of orange spots all around, but I think I spotted about five tributes. Two, not too far, off that way," indicating the first direction she paused. "I think they're probably working together, the last were on their own, to the best of my knowledge anyway. The one in that direction," She indicates directly behind me, "is sitting atop an enormous pile of rocks. I'm pretty sure it's Chanel."

It's good to hear that the last career tribute is accounted for, but it still made me nervous to have one tribute, whoever it might be, unaccounted for.

"You sure about this?" I ask.

"Not completely, it's hard to distinguish exactly what's going on at the forest floor through the trees, but I'm fairly certain about Chanel, and the two off that way."

"Well then, feel like living dangerously?"

"I feel like that's the only way we *have* to live, but what did you have in mind?"

"I'm thinking we go after the pair first."

"Why?" She asks with a scoff. "Wouldn't it be easier to go after one of the singles?"

"On the surface, I'd say yes, but they might feel a little more secure about their being two of them. Maybe enough to get sloppy..." "Go on." She says now interested.

"We just have to make them feel the risk is worth the reward. To a hungry eye, no one looks too closely at the platter, even if it's a silver one, just the meal presented on it." I scratch my chin a moment and think. Then an idea strikes me, and I ask, "May I see the paracord?"

"I don't think I'm gonna like this plan..."

I give a throated chuckle and say, "Oh, trust me, if either of us has the right to not like this plan, it's me."

"Why's that?"

"Because I'm the bait."