

Haymitch Abernathy: The Price of Defiance

Inspired by *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins

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I stare out the window trying to get a glimpse of something familiar, even though I know it's pointless. The Capitol stretches on for miles, and the sun seems cruel as if to say, *Move on*. I could have died in the Games countless times. The pain would have been easy compared to this gaping hole inside of me. It's funny now, how just as I realize that I've made it out of a torture-filled arena, I look at things as if I've lost the Games. Like I'm dead. I wonder if the other victors ever feel that way.

Esmerelda, my escort, is fussing about my room, telling me to hurry up. Apparently I have to go to a room with another horrendous outfit and a stylist trying to make me back into a "decent-looking person." You'd think that *decent-looking* meant *crazy* in the Capitol. I barely hear the schedule being read to me. All I can think about is the Games. Hearing my name at the reaping. How my girlfriend, Rose, looked at me, her heart already broken. My brother and mother shocked into incoherence as I marched up the steps. I knew better than to listen for a volunteer. No one wanted to go in the place of Haymitch Abernathy, especially in a Quarter Quell.

I remember my fight with the careers. How I killed two, and Maysilee helped. How we were allies until the last five. How I heard a scream after she left that could have shattered glass. I remember kneeling down and staying with her, and her death. It was horrible.

At the end of the Games, I barely felt the pain that the girl from District One inflicted on me. When the ax came back, it killed her. Quick and easy. And it was over. I felt no relief, no happiness. The Games would never leave. For years to come I would wake up, screaming in horror as I watched Maysilee die.

Esmerelda is calling me to dinner. And I prepare myself for another night of useless questions and answers. I know I can go home after this. See my mother and brother and Rose. It seems like I'm at the station immediately. I have no sense of time. I go to my new home. It feels wrong. I've killed people, but people love me for it. It's sick, and I want to forget. But for my family and Rose, I must stay above the waters that threaten to drown me.

Not a week later, the district is called to the square. There is a call for me to come early and alone. I hug Rose and my family, and I leave. I am handed a script, and told to tell a camera that the force field incident was an accident. My survival,

luck. When the camera turns off, President Snow comes out. He frowns at me, then dismisses me. The crowds come, and my mother, my brother, and Rose are called to the stage. There is a speech to honor them because they know the Victor of the Quarter Quell. It makes me sick. Then the crowds leave, but my family and Rose stay. President Snow calls me back up, and takes us inside the Justice building.

Peacekeepers grab my family and Rose. I scream, and they're taken to a room that is locked before I can get in. I hear muffled noises. An intake of breath, and a muffled question. My mother screams that she loves me, my brother yells that he understands, and Rose yells, "Don't forget me!" Only then do I realize what is happening. And before I can even try to do something, I hear three gunshots. I feel like I have been ripped apart. I run and I can't stop. I go to the Hob, where an old man stops me.

"Take this," he says. It's a bottle. I press a coin into his hand and I take it. The alcohol felt heavy in my hand. I don't remember the rest of that day, or many of the days to come. But I remember one thing. Rose. And twenty-four years later, I meet someone who reminds me of her. She's named after a flower, too. That's when I try to remember. When I try to move on. Katniss Everdeen saves my life. And, in return, I will try to save hers.