

The Hunger Games - Mockingjay

1 The Circle's full of people milling around, wailing, or just sitting and letting the snow pile up around
2 them. I fit right in. I begin to weave my way across to the mansion, tripping over abandoned
3 treasures and snow-frosted limbs. About halfway there, I become aware of the concrete barricade.
4 It's about a metre and a half high and extends in a large rectangle in front of the mansion. You would
5 think it would be empty, but it's packed with refugees. Maybe this is the group that's been chosen to
6 be sheltered at the mansion? But as I draw closer, I notice something else. Everyone inside the
7 barricade is a child. Toddlers to teenagers. Scared and frostbitten. Huddled in groups or rocking
8 numbly on the ground. They aren't being led into the mansion. They're penned in, guarded on all
9 sides by Peacekeepers. I know immediately it's not for their protection. If the Capitol wanted to
10 safeguard them, they'd be down in a bunker somewhere. This is for Snow's protection. The children
11 form his human shield.

12 There's a commotion and the crowd surges to the left. I'm caught up by larger bodies, borne
13 sideways, carried off course. I hear shouts of "The rebels! The rebels!" and know they must've
14 broken through. The momentum slams me into a flagpole and I cling to it. Using the rope that hangs
15 from the top, I pull myself up out of the crush of bodies. Yes, I can see the rebel army pouring into
16 the Circle, driving the refugees back on to the avenues. I scan the area for the pods that will surely
17 be detonating. But that doesn't happen. This is what happens:
18 A hovercraft marked with the Capitol's seal materializes directly over the barricaded children. Scores
19 of silver parachutes rain down on them. Even in this chaos, the children know what silver parachutes
20 contain. Food. Medicine. Gifts. They eagerly scoop them up, frozen fingers struggling with the
21 strings. The hovercraft vanishes, five seconds pass, and then about twenty parachutes
22 simultaneously explode.

23 A wail rises from the cloud. The snow's red and littered with undersized body parts. Many of the
24 children die immediately, but others lie in agony on the ground. Some stagger around mutely,
25 staring at the remaining parachutes in their hands, as if they still might have something precious
26 inside. I can tell the Peacekeepers didn't know this was coming by the way they are yanking away
27 the barricades, making a path to the children. Another flock of white uniforms sweeps into the
28 opening. But these aren't Peacekeepers. They're medics. Rebel medics. I'd know the uniforms
29 anywhere. They swarm in among the children, wielding medical kits.

30 First I get a glimpse of the blonde plait down her back. Then, as she yanks off her coat to cover a
31 wailing child, I notice the duck tail formed by her untucked shirt. I have the same reaction I did the
32 day Effie Trinket called her name at the reaping. At least, I must go limp, because I find myself at the
33 base of the flagpole, unable to account for the last few seconds. Then I am pushing through the
34 crowd, just as I did before. Trying to shout her name above the roar. I'm almost there, almost to the
35 barricade, when I think she hears me. Because for just a moment, she catches sight of me, her lips
36 form my name.

37 And that's when the rest of the parachutes go off.