

Sixty seconds. Sixty seconds to take in the ring of tributes all equidistant from the Cornucopia, a giant golden horn shaped like a cone with a curved tail, the mouth of which is at least twenty feet high, spilling over with the things that will give us life here in the arena. That's how long we're required to stand on our metal circles before the sound of a gong releases us. Step off before the minute is up, and land mines blow your legs off. Strewn around the Cornucopia are other supplies, their value decreasing the farther they are from the horn. Behind the tributes across from me, I can see nothing, indicating either a steep downward slope or even a cliff. Food, containers of water, weapons, medicine, garments, fire starters. Not daring to flee since my general location has just been broadcast to any killer who cares. I know it's a girl now, I can tell by the pleading, the agonized scream that follows. To my left and back, sparse piney woods. And this one probably doesn't have much in the way of weapons while I've got this excellent knife. I'm beginning to think we—meaning the person whose death I'm now devising and I—we might actually have gone unnoticed. The fire starter must have dozed off. They're on her before she can escape. "Shouldn't we have heard a cannon by now?" An argument breaks out until one tribute silences the others. Certainly it could be of some use in a downpour. If I had the guts to go in and fight for it against the other twenty-three tributes. Which I have been instructed not to do. We're on a flat, open stretch of ground. A plain of hard-packed dirt. This is where Haymitch would want me to go. Immediately. "Good to see you," I whisper. Strapped in a tree. But then you grit your teeth and stick it out until dawn! I lie smoldering in my bag for the next couple of hours, really thinking that if I can get out of this tree, I won't have the least problem taking out my new neighbor. My instinct has been to flee, not fight. But obviously this person's a hazard. The sky is still dark, but I can feel the first signs of dawn approaching. Then I hear it. Several pairs of feet breaking into a run. Then there's laughter and congratulations from several voices. "Better clear out so they can get the body before it starts stinking." "Unless she isn't dead." "Then where's the cannon?" "We're wasting time! I'll go finish her and let's move on!" The voice belongs to Peeta. For instance, only a few steps from my feet lies a three-foot square of plastic. But there in the mouth, I can see a tent pack that would protect from almost any sort of weather. To my right lies a lake. I hear his instructions in my head. And here I am a stone's throw from the biggest idiot in the Games. I mean, I know it's cold out here and not everybody has a sleeping bag. Stupid people are dangerous. "I'd say yes. Nothing to prevent them from going in immediately." "She's dead. I stuck her myself." "Someone should go back. Make sure the job's done." "Yeah, we don't want to have to track her down twice." "I said she's dead!" I almost fall out of the tree.