Goner

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Goner

by itsAsecrett

Summary

After a falling out with the most feared assassins in the known world, Arya Stark finally decides to go home. Of course why would it be that simple? Arya never seems to reach the places she sets out for, not without at least a few complications anyway.

In the North Jon Snow deals with the responsibilities of his new title, and reconciling with all the things he's lost. Sadly for him, he's never been very good at letting go, and I'm afraid death didn't make it any easier for him.

Finally, serving his new Queen faithfully, we have Tyrion Lannister. Just trying to hold things together, and answering his burning question about a disappearing girl and the iron coin she left weighing in his pocket.

*This is mostly a Jon and Arya POV fic, with some Tyrion, and small Aegon and Samwell chapters. Maybe some more if I change me mind. There shall be smut, but in the future kindstranger. This is what they call a slowburn I believe.
Chapter Notes

aye, this is the first chapter...I wrote it about a year ago and briefly edited it, so lets hope it's not all terrible:) Mostly set up for the future ahead, and thanks for reading...if you make it that far anyway, it would be just my luck if you did, kindstranger.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Arya

It would be just my luck to die here. The ship was swaying relentlessly in the storm, as the rain seemed to crash on the deck above like a waterfall. Arya might have been nervous, if she cared enough to be. After everything that happened recently and over the years, she could only find the idea of dying at sea slightly ironic, if not tragic. After finally making the decision to go back to Westeros, to go home. Calling it a decision would be generous though, after the path she'd carved for herself, she'd been left with few choices. In fact, stealing away on this damned ship might have been her only choice, if you could even call that a choice. But there was no going back, and no use looking back, only forward.

The other men, some women and children, were terrified the boat would sink and be lost at sea, never to be seen or heard of again. A small boy of only around nine was crying, while his mother quietly tried to comfort him at the edge of the gloomy room, somewhere she could hear another baby crying too. It was a large room, but you wouldn’t know it if you didn’t look hard enough, because below deck it was a cluttered mess. There were barrels small and large everywhere, full of foods or wines for trade. In the middle of the room and on some parts of the walls; cots stuck out crookedly, with many different kinds of people sleeping on them. Not a single bed was left to spare.

She herself didn’t have a cot to sleep on, the captain had offered her his cabin after she had handed him her infamous iron coin, and said the words “Valar Morghulis” but she declined, her goal was to stay as undetected as possible. She smiled slightly remembering that night a few days past.

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. Even in darkness the man’s expression was clearly frightened by the coin, he had denied her passage at first practically growling at her, “Tis no room on tis boat! Not even for no scrawny girl, now gets out of here! I have tisngs’ tis need attending to” he’d told her.

Once she had said the words and shown him the coin though...he started singing a different tune. He wasn’t a Braavosi that was for sure, and she guessed he was from Pentos by his accent. But even so, many traders from many cities and cultures knew the coin’s meaning.

He had told Arya his name as well, after she had declined the cabin, “Valdor Dallaeron, that’s my name” Before going below deck she told him not to tell anyone she was there, or she might forget his name. His expression was enough for her to believe he would stay silent, but she did notice a red haired girl giving her a strange look; she had clearly over heard the conversation. But it wasn’t Arya’s false face she was looking at; it was her hand.

Arya had been able to hide her injury from the clueless captain but her right hand had been bleeding
profusely since that afternoon, and the blood dripped down, soaking her sleeve in crimson. Arya had just kept walking, and headed below deck hoping the ginger would leave her be and keep her mouth shut.

Later that evening it proved to be too much to hope for though. Arya had noticed the girl constantly glancing at her from the other side of the room, after the ship had set sail. Whispering in the ear of some familiar man who looked as though he could be the same age as Jon Snow would be by now, but he looked nothing like him. In the dark she could still see he was very fat with a round face, dark hair, and his eyes always seemed to keep landing on her.

Finally the man walked over, but the red haired girl stayed with who Arya assumed was their child. It wasn’t until he got closer she realized she knew him. It was the boy from the Nights Watch, Samwell Tarly. She recalled saving him one evening and then giving him the last of her clams when she had been Cat of the Canals. Gods that felt like a life time ago. And in a way it was. He wasn’t dressed in black this time, and Arya knew he wouldn’t recognize the face she wore.

“Ah…I don’t mean to bother you or anything…” he started.

“Then don’t” she was irritated by the pain in her hand and didn’t feel like risking getting to know anyone.

Sam cleared his throat “I’m Samwell…I’m on my way back from Oldtown, my friend Gilly” he waved a hand behind him, “she told me you had a…ah injury on your arm…” he paused for a moment looking like he regretted his decision to talk to her entirely. She silently told herself to be more polite.

“I’ve learned more than a few things in healing…I could take a look, if you like.” Arya was reluctant to let him help her at first, but common sense won out. She had wrapped her hand several times in different cloths that day, but the blood always soaked through.

She nodded silently, shifted her body on the barrel she was sitting on toward Sam, and rolled up her sleeve. The beige cloth she had used to cover the wound earlier wasn’t beige at all now, and when she opened the palm of her hand she could feel the blood trickling downward, tickling the sides of her hand despite the constant burning from the wound.

Arya gritted her teeth as she unravelled the blood soaked cloth, revealing the knife wound that had went right through her hand. She had endured plenty of painful cuts and bruises, not to mention emotional pain, but the cut still burned like wildfire all the same. Sam pulled out a cloth of his own, a white one, he knelt down and pressed it on both sides of her hand gently, she drew in a sharp breath of pain. “Sorry” he muttered not looking up.

It hurt again when he pulled the red stained cloth away, “oh, it goes right through…I’m going to need to stitch it” before she could say anything, he had jumped up and walked faster than she expected he could, back to the ginger and his baby, wandering back over a moment later with a leather bag.

He opened her palm again “This is going to hurt” he looked up at her with apologetic eyes. “I’m going to have to wash it and sew the skin together…I don’t have any milk of the poppy either” he said while picking up a container of fresh water.

“Just do it” she said allowing herself to bite her lip, something she hadn’t done in a long time.

Sam started washing her hand with the water and a new cloth but paused for a second.

“Wait, I forgot” he smiled and almost laughed “I didn’t get your name”
She took a second to think, she couldn’t use Cat again and she wondered sadly if she’d ever get the chance to use her real name again, and for no reason Arya could name her mind went to her father. She could picture his long solemn face and greys eyes, so kind and real, but for only a second before he faded away. “Lyanna” she said softly.

“That’s a pretty name” he replied, smiling again while he finished washing the wound, “How’d you manage to cut your hand so deep Lyanna? And why didn’t you get someone to look at it before?” he sounded more confused than nosy.

When someone’s trying to murder you, you don’t stick around. But she thought of a simpler excuse instead of the truth. “It was stupid, truly” she sighed “A man accused me of stealing his money, I didn’t, but he didn’t believe me. I never realized how bad it was, and didn’t want to miss the ship.” She figured she was convincing enough, Sam seemed to believe her story. He muttered something about how terrible people could be and then he continued to ask her more questions, while he sewed her hand. She suspected he was trying to distract her from the pain, but coming up with a back story was more troublesome when someone was sticking you with a needle over and over again. “Why are you going to Westeros?” He’d ask, “Are you travelling alone? Where’s your family? Are you from Braavos? You speak the common tongue well.”

Arya had told him some truths and some lies, told him her parents had sailed away to get medicine for her sick older brother, but their ship had never came back and her brother had died anyway. She told him she was originally from Westeros and wanted to go back because it had been years since she’d seen her home.

She’d become quite good at lying, she thought when she was done telling “her story”. The Kindly Man might have been able to tell when she was lying, but it was starting to seem that everyone else was blind to her lies, as she’d once been to the world. It used to be a strange feeling, as she got better at seeing the truth. After spending so much time with professional liars, it was like everyone else were shouting their own emotions at her the rest of the time, with their faces and their eyes, instead of words.

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Three days had passed since meeting Sam and the ginger whose name was Gilly. They were sitting together, and she noticed the baby that was crying, was Gilly’s baby boy Little Sam. Arya had learned Samwell Tarly wasn’t the father but he was going to be. According to Sam he was on his way back to The Wall, and was going to bring Gilly to his home at Hornhill. Sam insisted he wouldn’t risk bringing Gilly back to The Wall, not with The Others on their way.

That in itself had been a shocking revelation, The Others. It made her worry about her last surviving brother Jon Snow, who last she heard; was Lord Commander of The Nights Watch. She was so proud of him, but so worried it made her stomach twist in unforgiving knots. She hadn’t even heard any news of him in over a year, but if she could make it to Westeros, somehow make her way to The Wall...she'd be home again.

Old Nan used to tell her, Bran and Rickion stories about the Others and about the Long Night. It was hard to remember the details, it truly felt like another life, it was another life, you’re Lyanna now...for now. As much as she pretended to be someone else, to be anyone else, she felt a punch in her gut when she thought of Bran, which led her to think of Rickion. Her poor little brothers who had been killed before they had a chance to live. Arya heard once that it had been Theon Greyjoy himself who’d done it, who killed them and burned them along with Winterfell. She thought that was mad at first, and didn’t want to believe it, but once she’d heard he’d betrayed Robb too, and from so many different people...she couldn’t deny it any longer. If I ever see that traitor again, I’ll slit his throat.
The ship jolted from the storm and Arya's head hit the wall behind her, the sound of barrels falling and rolling on the floor beside her. A few people let out screams of shock and cried out in pain as they were thrown from their beds, she only cursed and rubbed her hand over the tender new bump. Arya got up and walked toward a window and looked outside, it was black as pitch, but in the darkness a single flame glowed in the distance, seeming to rock back and forth on the waves; like a mother would her baby. It was another ship, she wondered where it was going and if they were managing any better in the storm than they were. She decided it didn’t matter then, and started walking over to an edge of the room where she could lay down without worrying about a barrel of wine falling on her face while she slept.

She passed by Sam and Gilly, giving them a courtesy smile then settling down with a rag someone had generously named a blanket. There was no use in getting close to him, being his friend. Any friend she’d made had left or, more often than not, died. She closed her eyes and her hand instinctively went to Needle, it felt a little queer to have the sword by her side again, but it felt right.

When she fell asleep she saw the grey eyes of the boy who’d given it to her, his sweet smile. But the sweetness ended quickly to be replaced by a nightmare, where dead men made of ice butchered the living.

But not for long, because after she was engulfed into a different world, full of strong scents of deer and other wolves, a forest that was far from the salt sea. She had four legs instead of two and felt more powerful than she ever did when she was awake. She lifted her head to try and figure out where the deer was, but something in the air made her pause. Most of her cousins wandered off following the deer scent but she found herself drawn by a different kind of prey.

After tracking silently in the dark woods lit by a half-moon, the glimmer of a fire dancing in-between trees caught her eye. When she reached the edge of the woods she could see four men sitting by fire, no...three men, and a very large women. Unlike most of her cousins she enjoyed the taste of men and did not fear them, but even if her cousins were afraid, they’d follow her to their graves if she told them to. After all she was their alpha, their Queen.

“After everything I’ve taught you and you still can’t skin a rabbit Pod?” the women was teasing the smallest of the men.

“I’m sorry mi’lady” the boy sounded ashamed, clearly missing the jape.

“And did my brother never teach you what a joke is?” another man laughed, when she looked at him her eyes were drawn to the glimmering of his hand, his golden hand. She felt a low growl rise in the back of her throat, and a forgotten grudge crawling through her fur.

All of them stiffened and looked in her direction. “Wolves” the large women whispered grabbing the hilt of her shinning sword pommel.

“We have a fire they should leave us be” the Kingslayer insisted, she revelled in his nervous tone.

“They should” the women agreed.

She padded into the clearing then, not taking her eyes off of the man with the golden hand. The four bodies stood up around their fire and drew their swords.

“It’s hu-huge” Pod sputtered frightful, she could smell the fear rolling off him in waves, each one closer to panic. But she just glared at the golden haired man with his golden hand, growling, willing him to know who she was, and wishing she could tell him it wasn’t just the direwolf who was going to enjoy tearing his throat out.
“It’s a direwolf boy, but it’s only one” the women informed him.

“I don’t think only is an apt term” the Kingslayer said sarcastically, but even with his light tone she could smell his fear, and with another growl she took a few steps forward, eyeing the Kingslayer.

“I think it wants you Jaime” Pod whispered raising his sword defensively.

“Don’t be ridiculous” the women hissed.

“No, he’s right” the other man whispered in the dark, sending prickles up her spine, it was familiar. Not to the wolf but to the girl inside her head, she cast her golden glaze to the other man. He was tall with a broad chest, his shaggy hair was as dark as pitch and his eyes glowed an unmistakable deep blue in the moonlight. But she knew the scent of him somehow, even if the direwolf wasn't the one who'd shared his bed once, fleeing for her life beside him in some unknown woods. Gendry. Arya wouldn’t have thought it possible for a direwolf to feel anxiety, but her paws froze in the icy grass. She stopped growling and just stared at the blue eyed boy, a turmoil of feral instincts at war with the girl inside her head, yet appearing eerily calm to the humans. She’d been so distracted that she hardly noticed her cousins come sneaking out of the shadows, ready to attack her prey.

“What’s it doing?” Pod whispered while Gendry held her gaze, he looked confused but she thought she could see awe in those blue depths. One of her cousins took Pod’s question as an invitation, leaping at the party while and other wolves followed his lead. All six wolves who’d followed her leaped at the group with snarling and snapping jaws. She didn’t move at first but as soon it registered in the girl's mind what was happening she let out loud commanding howl, leaping at the light grey wolf that had lunged at Gendry, grabbing her by the leg and tossing her like the young girl inside her head might have once thrown a doll.

The other wolves had backed off with another growl that was directed towards them, while the wolf she’d thrown limped into the forest whining. Gendry lay on the ground and she could smell his blood. He’d been bitten on the arm. The others must have been injured too because she could smell the salty tang of their blood, but she didn’t care for them. Sniffing at the boy, trying to apologize without being able to speak, wishing she could tell him she was the girl he once knew...but that was wrong. That girl had died with her mother, and had a few dozen smaller funerals after that. All that was left of the girl he'd known was a dark silhouette, with a long memory.

He gave her a strange look cocking his head to the side “I’m okay” he whispered, she took a step back then, remembering herself. The Kingslayer had inched closer to study her, she didn’t fear him but the very presence of the man who’d once attacked her father caused the direwolf to feel the resentment all over again. She let out a threatening growl towards the golden haired man and one last glare, a promise for the next time she saw him, turning she stalked off into the shadows of the woods with her cousins. Next time Kingslayer, thought the girl inside her head.

Arya woke to Sam’s round face hovering above her, “Are you okay?” he asked. She pushed herself up off the floor, making the wooden floor whine in response. “Why wouldn’t I be?” she grumbled, rubbing sleep from her eyes, trying to recover from the reality of her dream. She glanced out a window to see it wasn’t even dawn yet, but the worse of the storm was over, besides the light pitter pattering of rain drops above their heads.

“You were making queer noises…well actually you were growling…” he looked like he wanted to say more. She had been growling, growling at Jamie Lannister? And Gendry? The dream came rushing back. Gods.
“So what? It was just a dream, it happens all the time” she retorted, but regretted it the moment the words left her lips, for Sam instantly looked even more intrigued. “What is it?” she asked slightly annoyed this time, wanting to have a minuet to think on her dream. *What’s his deal?*

“What animal do you dream of? A dog?” Sam suggested. *A dog*, she saw Sandor in her mind’s eye for moment, covered in blood and begging to die.

“Not a dog…A wolf” *a direwolf truly.*

Sam backed away a little as she got up and sat down on a barrel that hadn’t tipped during the storm. “You know how I mentioned I was friends with the Lord Commander at The Wall? His names Jon.” Sam waved his hands as he spoke.

Arya’s heart stopped for an instant, her dream completely forgotten. *Why does he want to talk to me about Jon? What about him?* she asked working on not giving away her sudden anxiety. *Calm as still water.*

“He’d growl in his sleep too!” Sam said excitedly, “He had a pet wolf, not just a wolf, but a direwolf, and he’d have wolf dreams” Arya just stared at him. “Like the ones you were having last night!”

“What’s your point Sam?” She knew his point, Jon was a Warg like she was. If she hadn’t learned how to control her face she would of smiled, maybe even laughed. They used to have so much in common, her and Jon, and it figured they would have this too...but Arya had changed so much over the years. She wasn't the little girl who’d follow him around and beg to hold his sword, the girl who'd finish his thoughts, and cry in his arms over cruel nicknames. She found herself uncertain about how much they'd still share, their dark eyes if nothing else.

“He’s a Warg! I think you are too!” she made her self laugh, she hadn’t truly laughed in a while. “I’m serious, you said you’re from Westeros right? They say people who share blood with the first men are more likely to be skinchangers and wargs. Jon has Stark blood and they’re said to have one of the purest bloodlines descended from the First Men!”

“Wargs and Skinchangers? They’re just stories Sam...” even when she didn't need to, she caught herself lying to people. Old habits die hard, especially ones drilled into her for years by religious fanatics.

“So were dragons once, and whitewalkers, and trust me they’re real” *A warg then,* Arya had known for a while what she could do, and it took her a while longer to put a name to it. Like she'd known what she was, but had refused to admit it.

“You read too many books Sam” was all she could think to say to dissuade him.

Sam smiled “That’s true enough, and that’s why you should believe me, did you ever meet a wolf? I read once you have to have some sort of bond with the animal.”

Arya’s mind was a jumble of emotions, and her thoughts went to Nymeria and her wolf dreams. She was thrown back to the night she’d been on the run with Gendry and Hot Pie, they were being followed by Lord Bolton's men. When Arya had dreamed that night, she’d dreamed she was a wolf who’d hunted them down. *Did I...?* A sheet of ice crawled up her spine. *I tore them apart...or did Nymeria?*

“Lyanna?” Sam’s voice sounded slightly farther away as her palms started sweating. She couldn’t say why, but she was thinking of Old Nan’s stories again. She’d tell them that skinchangers were
evil creatures who were more beast than man. *Maybe she was right*, she thought bitterly, the amount of blood on her hands...it wouldn’t be a stretch that someone might see her as something evil, a demon or monster...*but not Jon, Jon could never be evil.*

“Lya-“ Sam was cut off by a scream above them, a girls scream. In an instant the men and women who were asleep, were awake, their eyes wide in confusion as to what was going on. When the sounds of steal clashing began, men and boys alike started tearing open bags and ruffling through their things to find a weapon. The sight reminded her of the deserted village by the God’s Eye, the night Yoren had been killed, along with two dozen boys.

Arya jumped up as well drawing Needle in her left hand. “What do you expect to do with that?” Sam yelled, he looked terrified.

Arya ignored his question. “Get Gilly and the baby somewhere safe, and find a bloody weapon!” she shouted. She was aware Needle was very small, but other than the four knifes Arya always had hidden on her person and the dragon bone dagger at her hip, it was all she had time to grab before fleeing Braavos. Besides, if it was small that meant she could move faster in the room shrunken by people and storage.

Before anyone had a chance to run upstairs men in dark armour came crashing through the only exit, they had long swords and spears drawn and most were covered in someone's blood already. Everything happened so fast, Sam was running towards Gilly, other men ran into the fray but they didn’t have any armour and most weren’t skilled or trained in the arts of fighting, they were just traders. The strange soldiers seemed to cut right through them, only a few putting up any sort of challenge.

Arya had an advantage, the soldiers weren’t interested in the women and children who were screaming and trying to find a place to hide, so they never saw her coming. She ran forward and saw a man with a black-grey beard being pushed back by one of the soldiers, she took Needle and drove the small sword through the back of the soldier’s thigh. He fell to his knees with a cry and the bearded man slashed his own sword across the soldier’s neck, silencing him. The man gave her a quick gracious nod and went back to the fight, and Arya took his lead. Staying low she managed to cut down three other men by striking their legs first, which didn’t have any armour on them. Once they’d fall she’d slid Needle across or through their throats to finish them off. One soldier had caught on to what she’d been doing soon after, and had turned to face her.

He had an ugly face, she could tell even through his black helm, painted in cold rage and sweat. He lunged forward with a blood stained sword but Arya was faster, easily dodging his blow. She knew Needle wouldn’t be any help fending off his long sword so she had to move fast to dodge his blows, he swung his sword once, twice, and missed her; but it was getting harder to avoid him. Below deck had already been cluttered with junk, but now it was swarming with people too and stank of blood and sweat.

Arya had run out of space, the man brought his sword up and swung for her face. She ducked down and when he lodged his sword into the wooden pillar beside her, she sprang up and stabbed Needle through his neck. He choked on his own blood when she pulled the sword back, and the eyes that were once burning with rage glittered with fear as he fell on the floor. His hands rose to his throat, trying hopelessly to stop the bleeding, *had her mother once done the same?*

She turned from the dying man and her dark thoughts, catching the sight of three more soldiers. One was swinging his sword at Sam while the other two were creeping up behind him and toward Gilly. Jumping over a barrel she threw one of her knives into the back of one’s head. Reaching the other before he had a chance to see his friend fall to the floor. He didn’t have dark armor on like most of
the men, so she only had to slid Needle through his copper skin from behind; she knew where the heart was.

As he fell, Arya heard Gilly let out a startled gasp while Little Sam was wailing like the world was ending. \textit{Not today}. The other solider knocked Sam to the floor with pommel of his sword but before he had a chance to bring it back around, Arya was on him. She jumped on another barrel to gain some height and stabbed her sword right through his eye, he fell back screaming in pain and clutching his face. Sam sat up looking bewildered when he saw it had been Arya who’d saved him, his mouth shaped in a little O. With Little Sam’s crying she almost didn’t hear the steps behind her, she was half turned around when something crashed into the side of her head, sounds of clashing steal mended together, her body becoming weightless as she fell, the world blurring and darkening before her...\textit{It would be just my luck to die here.}

\textbf{Chapter End Notes}

So like the copycat I am, the title of this work is based on a song, as will be this chapter and all the ones to follow.

Goner - Twenty One Pilots

Dead and Gone - Siren Gene
Lost It To Trying

Chapter Notes

It's edited so ima post it \((• ◡ •) /

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sam

After one of the soldiers knocked Lyanna over the head with the back of his hammer most of the fighting was over. Many men laid dead on the wooden deck, and the rest yielded knowing the battle was lost. He’d thought Lyanna was dead too at first, but the men who’d taken them prisoner locked her up in chains as well, along with sixteen other men. Sam still couldn’t believe how skilled Lyanna was with her little sword, he was beyond impressed. He was grateful too, she’d helped him and he wanted to thank her. Most of him was shamed though, saved by a little girl.

He could picture the men of the Nights Watch laughing and taunting him, “You’re lucky there was a little girl to help you Ser Piggy, or someone would be having bacon for dinner!” they’d say. The worst part was Gilly saw the whole thing, he wanted to be strong for her and brave too; but Sam was always afraid.

He knew he had to go back to the Wall, no matter how much he didn’t want to, he’d said the oath, and he said another oath when he went to the Citadel in Oldtown. The bright side was he’d see Jon again, Jon had been one of his truest friends and he missed him. That was only if he made it back to The Wall though.

The men who’d locked them up hadn’t said anything about letting them go, but when Sam asked, their guard did tell him they weren’t going to hurt the women or children and that they put them in another cabin. He was grateful for that. He asked why Lyanna was locked in here with them and the guard had only laughed, saying he was told she was as dangerous as the rest of the men, if not more so.

They’d only been locked up for what Sam felt was about two hours, when someone had finally come to feed them. At least that’s what Sam hoped they were coming to do, but it wasn’t. Instead the two men who came in wanted everyone to be searched for weapons and started ordering people to stand up one at a time. The man who had dark copper skin would stand with an arakh in hand, ready for if a prisoner tried anything. The other would pat down their clothes and ordered people to take off their shoes. The men had only found two knives so far, off of two different men; one of whom told them where his knife was first. Lyanna was still knocked out, laying down chained by her wrists at the back of the cabin, so she was the last to be searched.

Sam was starting to get worried about her, he’d read up on many cases where people who had suffered a head injury had fallen asleep as Lyanna did, only to die a few hours later. If she was dead then the two men didn’t notice, they’d just started to search her anyway and to Sam’s surprise they found a knife hidden up her left sleeve. Once they had found the second knife the men gave each other a puzzled look, and when they’d found the third the darker skinned man with black hair smiled, laughed and said,

“I’m starting to think Daegor wasn’t crazy when he said to lock her up with the men” he jested in a
“Apparently she stabbed one of those Unsullied right in the eye” the other replied with a smirk, then continued to check her pockets; which were empty other than a single coin. The man held the coin up to his face, then stood up and took a step back.

“Seven Hells, look at this” he handed the coin to the dark skinned man.

“What? It’s only iron, we have a ton of iron” he bit the coin to be sure.

“Don’t Dothraki know anything of other cultures?” the man didn’t wait for an answer. “It belongs to the Faceless Men of Braavos”

“Those bloody expensive assassins? This is a little girl for fucks sake.”

Sam couldn’t believe the Dothraki’s blond companion, and didn’t think the Dothraki did either. A Faceless Assassin? Sam had learned a bit about them when he was in Oldtown, but he’d heard about them long before that; they were the most notorious and successful killers in the known world. If you had enough to pay them, then whoever you wanted killed was as good as dead. Sam looked at Lyanna again, she seemed almost peaceful with her eyes closed despite the chains around her wrists. He thought she could only be three and ten, barely a woman. How could a child become an assassin? He’d been impressed before by her skill, now part of him feared the unconscious girl. Another part of him pitied her.

“Aye, she might be a little girl. Or she might be a young boy wearing a girl’s face. Come, there might be a way we can find out” The blond man led the way out of the room with the Dothraki right behind. The two men didn’t come back for about another hour, all the while Sam couldn’t seem to collect his thoughts. Lyanna was some kind of hired killer? She hadn’t been the warmest but he’d met plenty people far worse, and over the days he thought her warming up to him and Gilly. He’d even caught her playing with Little Sam once.

Meanwhile the men who’d captured them consisted of Dothraki and Unsullied? Sam knew Unsullied were trained killers from the city Astapor in Essos, while the Dothraki were nomadic horse lords who Sam had thought feared ever crossing the Narrow Sea. Yet here they both were on a ship heading for Westeros, and he couldn’t for the life of him figure out why.

But once they did come back they weren’t alone. The Dothraki man from earlier just stood by the door, again with an arakh at hand. The blond man walked over and pushed Lyanna up right, and next to him knelt a beautiful women who wore all red, she even had dark red hair. The blond man handed the coin from earlier to the red women, and asked,

“What do think? Is this her real face?”

“It might be. Unlike all other illusions in the world that can conceal a person’s identity, a Faceless Man’s false face, is as true as their own.” She spoke wistfully, while she ran a slender finger slowly down Lyanna’s cheek.

“How can you tell then?” The Dothraki asked from the other side of the room, he looked mildly interested leaning against the wall with one foot up while twisting his rounded blade in his hand.

“Through the Lord of Lights will” she said the answer as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. She then took a small knife from the blond man, and ran it lightly across Lyanna’s forehead, just enough for the cut to bleed. As she did this she spoke in a language Sam didn’t know, and to his astonishment it actually worked. Lyanna’s face changed. Her skin was a tone lighter, and her face...
was longer and prettier, she also looked years older than Sam had thought she was. There was a purple bruise kissing the left side of her face and she still had dark hair. But everything else was different, yet familiar at the same time. Sam could feel his jaw fall open, and could see his dumbfounded expression mirrored on the prisoners around him, as the red women held a lifeless limp face in her hands.

“And here you have her true face, curious though, it is a girl.” She said cocking her head to one side smirking. “That’s very uncommon from what I know of the people who serve in the House of Black and White.” Her voice was as smooth as summer silk.

“And how much do you know of this…organization?” the Dothraki asked suspiciously, he too looked discouraged by what he’d just witnessed.

“Not a lot, no one does.” she said simply, standing up she started to walk out of the room, her red dress sweeping across the floor, and a limp face still her in hand. “Come, we shall tell the Queen at once.”

While they were talking Sam couldn’t stop staring at the girl, I know her, he thought. At first he was thinking he was seeing things, but after the red women and her men left Sam had plenty of time to look at “Lyanna’s” face.

Cat, that’s what she’d told Sam to call her when he’d met her the first time he’d come to Braavos, she’d been younger then but just as fierce. He could remember the way she’d fearlessly pulled a knife on two men twice her size, who’d wanted to steal Sam’s cloak. She’d been selling clams and oysters, her hair was a short greasy mess then, and she had stank of fish. But she’d saved me, how could such a kind heart be a cold killer?

Sam had so many questions to ask her, had she been with the Faceless Men when he first met her? How’d she change her face? How had a young girl managed to join the most well-known group of assassins in all of Westeros and Essos combined? And why was she really going to Westeros? To assassinate someone? He figured everything she told him must have been a lie, considering Cat and Lyanna had told him different stories about who they were, which one was true? Were either of them true? But when Lyanna or Cat finally opened her eyes that night, Sam couldn’t think of how to ask her any of his questions.

Arya

When she woke her head was pounding the same way Gendry might have once hammered a sword on an anvil. She didn’t like it when things reminded her of Gendry, and she didn’t like to admit she missed him, he’d left her like everyone else had in this world. One way or the other. She was confused for a moment, not knowing where she was or how she got there. The room was dark other than the dim light glowing from a single candle that hung in a cage of its own, and the room smelled of sweat, straw, and the faint tang of blood. Arya could make out the dark shapes of other people chained to the walls by their wrists.

Arya pushed herself off the floor, her chains clanking against each other at the slightest movement. Not, no, no, not again! She started tugging and pulling on her chains in frustration, causing them to jingle loudly, but it was to no avail. She was furious that she’d become another person’s prisoner, after being taken by the Lannisters, Boltons, The Brotherhood, and even the Hound. If there were any gods they clearly didn’t care about her, not in the slightest. She went to feel her left arm to find one of her knives missing, she then instantly went to check her boots.
“They took all your knives” someone muttered in a miserable harsh voice, Arya looked up to see the black-grey bearded man from earlier, he had a fresh cut on his cheek and Sam was sitting up next to him, both chained, same as her.

“Who took them? Who took the ship?” she asked and looked to Sam because he was the only person she’d bothered to talk to these the past few days. Perhaps it was because she’d met him before, or because he was a brother of the Nights Watch and knew Jon. When Sam looked at her, there was something strange in his expression that told her instantly something was off. When she glanced around at the other people in the room, all men, some were staring at her with similar strange expressions.

“We don’t know girl” said the bearded man, “some hired Unsullied and their dark skinned companions with the braids” out of all the men in the room, he seemed to have little to no interest in Arya. As for the rest, most would steal glances at her, others wouldn’t even look at her, and it wasn’t until some skinny boy covered in dirt and dried blood started talking to her did she understand what was going on.

“My names Zayne Sterventon” his voice was quivered like still water would after you’d throw a pebble in it. “Zayne Sterventon” he said it more slowly the second time. She realized that she’d seen people look at her this way before, when she’d first set sail for Braavos. Half the people on the _Titian’s Daughter_ had been scared of her because of that stupid coin. _They know, how do they know?_ Her hand went to her pocket; which was now empty. Then another man with dirty shaggy black hair turned to her,

“I’m Darr-” she cut him off.

“I don’t care who you are, I’m no Faceless-man. It was just a stupid coin.” but for once it was clear she didn’t convince anyone with her lie.

“H-How’d you do it? Change your face like that?” Sam had finally found his tongue. Arya’s hand went to her check, it felt the same, but it always would. She figured her disguise was gone, but how? Someone on the boat must know a thing or two about magic.

She rested the back of her head against the wall and closed her eyes with a sinking feeling in her chest, all the while cursing herself for bringing that damned iron coin. _What now?_ People would hear of the little girl that was a “Faceless-Assassin” who’d gotten herself captured, without a doubt it would be a story to tell. And how long until that story sailed its self back to Braavos? And how long until The Kindly Man sent someone after her? Would he even send someone? Arya didn’t know the answers.

Without her consent, memories of her final day in Braavos filled her mind. It had been a sunny day, which was extremely rare there, when she’d been given another name. She knew what she had to do, what she had done so many times before. All in the name of the Many-Faced God...but when she saw her target things changed. The man she’d been sent to kill had been no man at all, but a boy, a young boy with a freckled face, wide smile, and dark hair. He’d been some rich man’s son, and Arya suspected that was the only reason someone wanted him dead.

The things she used to tell herself to justify her actions didn’t seem quite so relevant anymore, not when it was a child’s face she was looking at. She’d convinced herself that it didn’t matter who she killed in the name of the May-Faced God, whoever she killed would be dead anyway. If she didn’t kill them then another faceless man would, all she was doing was learning what she needed to learn. _It was just a means to an end_. But the boy was someone’s son, and that someone was important. Arya knew that was why whoever wanted him dead, had wanted him dead. It felt like a stab in the heart. Bran and Rickion had been the sons of someone important too, and they’d been murdered for
it. How could she do the same to this innocent child? She couldn’t, she wouldn’t, but she did more than just that.

Arya had warned the young boy’s father, it had taken a lot of pleading for him to even believe her. The iron coin she once had was enough to sway him though. She told them to change their names, dye their hair, anything, and leave without looking back. She hoped it was enough, and that by the mercy of the Old Gods no one would find them. Arya would never know if anyone did because they set sail that afternoon. She knew the consequences of what she’d done, she’d betrayed the Faceless Men and there was no changing it.

Arya had went back to the House of Black and White later that day, no one would know what she had done yet, at least she had hoped they wouldn’t. When she got there the temple was as quiet as ever, only one man sat in front of the weirwood face praying silently. She’d made her way down to the cellars where they kept the belongings of all the people who’d died there. She donned a grey tunic and a black cloak with a hood, she then took a few knives to hide up her sleeves and in her boots, and at the last moment she decided to take a dagger as well. It had belonged to a frail old man who’d come to the House of Black and White seeking the gift. He’d told her it belonged to his son who’d died on The Wall. It was the strangest blade she’d ever seen, shiny and black, forged from dragon bone.

In hindsight it was probably smarter to steal some money as well but she didn’t bother, the iron coin would get her where she wanted to go, and it almost did. She’d pushed through the white wooden door at the front of the temple and counted her steps as she walked down them for the last time. Bending over she started digging her nails in the stone steps to loosen one of the bricks, it was harder than she remembered. Finally it gave way and she reached down and pulled out the slender blade. Needle. She couldn’t help but pause a moment to look at the sword, it was dusty but still just as beautiful. Her mind went to the boy who’d given it to her, but only for a second...for someone was behind her.

She spun around with Needle in her hand, and there stood one of her brothers, another acolyte.

“So, a girl is Arya of House Stark again?” he asked her nonchalantly.

“I always was.” she kept her face calm but she felt a pit in her stomach.

“Many of us won't be surprised, but another face must be added to the hall. You know that.” he said it in such a calm way you wouldn’t think he was threatening to kill her, but she knew exactly what he meant. If not the boy’s face, then hers. “You understand I’m sure” he gave her a smirk.

“Just keep walking, no one has to die” she reasoned.

He shook his head sadly, “You know it doesn't work that way” he lunged for her and Arya stepped aside before countering. The boy was fast and dodged her strike, he tried to grab her after but she ducked away. There she stood facing him again warily, Needle pointed at him, the boy didn’t seem angry or malicious; he didn’t look like he felt anything at all. He tried to stab her once more, but she knocked the blow away. They danced back and fourth until she managed to cut his blade out of his hand, drawing blood. But he didn’t flinch and before she’d known it, his other hand was a fist knocking her in the face. She hit ground hard and heard the ringing of Needle meeting the stones, she was on her back and the boy had landed on her, hands reaching for her neck. Thinking fast she reached for one of the rocks closest to her, she’d planned to smash his face in with it but he’d somehow pulled the dragons tooth dagger from her belt, driving it right through her hand.

A scream burst from her lungs. He held her to the ground by her throat with an iron grip, and she knew he picked up Needle with his spare hand, *he’s going to finish me off with my own sword.* Arya
couldn’t say how she managed to do what she did next, she only remembered the blinding pain and rage that had consumed her. When he raised the slim blade she reached over and ripped the dagger out of her own palm, and in one smooth motion slashed it across the boy's throat.

Needle fell from his hand causing another soft ringing to fill the air, along with the sound of the boy choking on his own blood. It felt like someone had splashed her with warm water and she had to close her eyes; it was the boy’s life blood spilling all over her. She’d given him a shove and he fell to her side and lay on the stones. He jerked once, twice, his body going limp. His green eyes had betrayed him in his last moment of life, he’d looked horrified.

She remembered standing back up then and wiping the blood off her face with a shaky hand, then wiping the dagger on her already blood stained shirt, before putting it away. She’d reached down and picked up Needle from beside the dead boy and placed it in her belt where it belonged, all the while holding her bleeding right hand tight to her chest, her body left trembling from the adrenaline. Arya stood there a moment longer than she probably should have, just starring at the boy she’d killed while her blood dripped on the stones. She remembered thinking how he’d lived his life as no one, but by the look in his eyes...he’d died as someone. No one wouldn’t fear death.

“Valar Morghulis” she whispered, and felt a shiver run down her spine. She’d felt someones eyes watching her in that moment, she looked back at the House of Black and White towering above her and back at the one ebony door and the other with the weirwood face carved in it. No one was around but when she looked at the weirwood face she thought she could feel it’s gaze, whilst the breeze picked up her hair and whispered softly in her ear. That’s when she left, pulling her black hood over her head, cloak swaying in the wind. Not once looking back at the boy she killed, or the shadowy temple that had been her home for years.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, kindstranger 🌸___🌸

Lost It To Trying - Son Lux
Waves

Chapter Notes

There will be some Jon and Tyrion soon, I promiseee •●•?
and thanks for the comments kindstrangers, they're really motivating <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Arya

Arya sat in the dusty, gloomy room not saying a word. She’d just been listening to the men talk, while the subjects varied. One man said their captures didn’t plan on hurting women or children, another said they were going to let them all go once they got to land. At that very moment, the prisoners were discussing who’d stolen the ship. They mentioned Dothraki and Unsullied warriors and a Red Women mentioning a Queen, and none of them seemed to know what the hell was going on. Arya did. She’d heard all the stories of the Dragon Queen, Daenerys Targaryen, Stormborn, Breaker of Chains, and all the other bloody titles. Who’d freed the slaves of Slaver’s Bay, and freed the enslaved Unsullied soldiers, causing them to fight for her instead. By the sounds of it she had all of the Dothraki at her disposal now too, along with three dragons, if the stories were true. Arya wondered what the hell she had to gain from raiding a small trading ship.

Sam kept looking back at her, she hadn’t answered his question before, and since she figured out he and the rest of the men had learned her secret she hadn’t spoken a single word. That had been about three hours ago by her guess, and from the small window above Sam’s head she knew it was the middle of the night, meaning she’d slept all day. She could tell a part of Sam feared her now, which bothered her more than she cared to admit, but she could see the curiosity in his eyes too. He stole another glace at her and finally she turned to face him.

“Just say it, whatever your question is” she didn’t bother trying to hide how tired she was.

“I have a lot more than one question” he smiled but it died quickly, like he forgot to be afraid or nervous, or maybe he didn’t fear her as much as she originally thought. She looked back at him expectantly, waiting to hear what his first question would be. Expecting him to wonder how many people she'd killed, if she was hired to kill someone now; really anything revolving the Faceless Men. But instead he asked,

“Do you remember me?” he sat up straighter when he spoke. “We met some years ago, you said to call yo-”

“Cat” she finished for him, “I remember” she smiled softly “you were looking for one of your brothers from the Nights Watch.” He seemed pleasantly surprised she remembered, but Arya had a long memory if anything. The North Remembers, she reflected.

“He was supposed to come with us to Old Town” Sam told her a little bitter, his face flashing a bit of anger. “He’s probably in some whorehouse right now”

“He’s dead” she informed him.

“Dead? How do you know?” he actually sounded concerned, why she could not say. The man had
him thrown him in a canal after all.

“Don’t sound so sad, he abandoned you and was a deserter of the Nights Watch, those vows are for life. As far as I’m concerned he had it coming.” Thinking of Dareon made her stomach burn, she remembered his stupid songs about lady’s and lords. Sam still looked a little upset, and she wasn’t about to tell him she’d been the one to kill him. Before Sam could say anything else the man with the black-grey beard cut in.

“Don’t you faceless fools take no part in judging a man? I thought it was whoever had the deepest pockets did the judging.”

“I told you, I’m no faceless man.” she retorted.

“But you can change your face?” Sam sounded confused.

“But I can change my face” she agreed, and let out a sigh.

“So is your name Cat or Lyanna?” Sam posed another question, Arya smiled softly at that and gave him a look.

“What do you think?” she asked.

He smiled back accepting neither of them were her name, and she wasn’t going to tell him her true name anytime soon “Right, well which do you prefer?”

She thought about it a moment, “Cat I guess” it reminded her of her mother, plus she had enjoyed her time being Cat of the Canals, more than most of her lives.

He smiled again, an honest smile “Cat it is” he agreed and squinted his eyes at her, “you know you do like a little familiar.”

“Probly’ because we've met?”

Sam shook is head, “It's more than that...” he muttered.

That was when a man walked in with keys jingling in his hands. He had dark copper skin, black hair in a short braid, and dark almond shaped eyes. “Someone wants to meet you girl” he said in a thick accent that was clearly Dothraki. He crossed the room and knelt down to her level, grabbed her wrists and started trying different keys on her chains. She studied him while he did so, he was young and couldn’t be older than her. Why would they send a boy? She wondered, but she couldn’t complain, this would only make it easier.

Once the chains were off she didn’t move, and she did her best to look exhausted. The boy offered her his hand, and she took it while letting him take most of her weight, giving him the sweetest smile. Boys were almost too easy to fool. Once they were standing he started to lead her to the door but she placed a foot in front of his, tripping him and using her good hand she smacked his face to the floor. He was out cold.

“Hey unchain me!” one man told her, way too loudly for her liking.

“Will you shut up?” she hissed back and kicked the keys to the bearded man she’d talked to earlier, just a few inches out of reach. Hopefully by the time he got them and unchained some others she’d be gone. She made her way to the door when Sam called out to her,

“Where are you going?” he sounded distraught and guilt pricked her chest, she didn’t want to just
leave him. He’d been nothing but kind to her while she’d just lied to him.

“Sorry Sam. If the Old Gods are good and we both make it to where we’re going, we just might see each other again.” she gave him a true smile, grabbed the dagger off the Dothraki boys hip and left closing the door softly behind her, trying to forget Sam’s sad eyes. The room they’d kept them in was below deck at the end of a dark hallway, the only light coming from two candles hanging in cages on either side of the hall. She made her way in silence until she found a door slightly ajar, with no light shining through. For what felt like the first time her life, she got lucky; this was where they kept the stolen weapons.

Once she opened the door all the way, half a hundred blades reflected the light of the candle dancing behind her, some as clear as a mirror, and others only reflected a blurry flaming shape. She didn’t care for all the long swords, she had only one in mind, yet she found the dragon tooth dagger first. A black tooth in the midst a sea of steal. After a few moments she found Needle half buried under a pile of dull blades, she didn’t take any extra time other than grabbing a few more knives and leaving. Quick as a snake.

Once she made it up the stairs without anyone knowing and stealing a bag of oranges, she knew the hard part came next. She had no idea who or what was above deck or how many people there might be. Fear cuts deeper than swords. Arya pushed the door open, the creaking sound it made, making her want to curse. Surprisingly nothing happened and she stepped out onto the deck alone, welcomed by the cool salty breeze. It wasn’t too windy, the storm from the other night had disappeared and the sky was filled with a million winking stars. She kept to the shadows as she made her way around the deck, spying a guard who looked to be in the same dark armour as some of the men she’d fought. He stood there unmoving, the same way she’d been taught to do at the House of Black and White. One of the Unsullied.

She started heading back the way she came to avoid the guard, she couldn’t hear anything other than the waves splashing softly against the ship and she found herself walking beside the railing when she found what she was searching for. Three small boats tied to the side of the ship. Part of her thought what she was doing was stupid, what if she didn’t even make it to land? But she couldn’t risk being a captive by some dragon queen, not when all she had was her own face. Arya had heard rumours Daenerys had the Imp by her side as well. Even if the chances of him recognizing her seemed slim to none in her eyes, she refused to risk it.

Below deck she heard a man start yelling and she knew there was no use in trying to be quiet anymore, so instead of lowering the boat down slowly she took out the dragon bone dagger and cut the ropes. The boat landed in the water with a crash and as quickly as she could she put the blade away and threw her stolen bag down. That was when someone blew some kind of horn, which tore through the silent night air sharp as a knife.

“Hey!” Behind her on the left stood an Unsullied, his whole body covered in armor part from his head, with dark skin and dark eyes. “Don't move” he stalked toward her, spear pointed in her direction.

“I appreciate the hospitality, I do. But I've places to be, people to kill.” she smiled sweetly. “I'm sure you understand.” she offered, glancing her head to the right to see more men a few meters down the deck. Tall soldiers whose features stood out from the candle above their heads, but one smaller shape stood out significantly more. His mismatch eyes gleamed even in the distance between them, the Imp.

“I'm warning you” the Unsullied threatened.

“Your courtesy is admirable” she sighed, “You can tell your Queen I'm rooting for her if you wish”
her eyes wandered to the Imp's shadow growing closer. “I even promise to make a toast when she executes Cersei.”

“Don't-” his words were lost on his lips as her blade flashed from her hand, slicing a rope above their heads. The rope snapped back and the giant blue sail it was supporting shivered, the faded fabric crumpling and sinking toward them.

“Apologies” turning around and throwing her body over the railing, she jumped. Ice cold water burned up her nose and soaked her clothes. Bursting from the sea she climbed aboard her new boat, grabbing the oars and pulling them with all the strength she had. Men were shouting at each other, at her, but she didn't listen. Instead she started rowing herself away from the ship and into the darkness. No one came after her, and the ship wouldn't be going anywhere anytime soon; not without a proper sail.

She could hardly see a thing besides the ship she was rowing away from, candles glowing all around it's edges and shadows of men crawling about. As the darkness grew thicker the shadows became shapeless and the candles looked like little stars lost at sea. She didn’t mind the darkness though, it seemed an old friend than anything to be afraid of. Arya knew the most dangerous monsters could hide in the light just as easily as they could in the dark, after all she'd done it for years.

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The sun had risen and set three times since she’d made her escape, and Arya’s arms burned worse than the sunburn she’d gotten on the first day. When she wasn’t rowing they still ached, it even hurt when she was peeling an orange, and she was growing very tired of oranges. The hand that Sam had stitched itched constantly and she worried it was getting infected, but sadly she lacked supplies stranded in the middle of the sea.

After her escape she had to wait until the sun had risen to make sure she was rowing east, she wouldn’t have a chance of making it all the way across the Narrow Sea with just her small boat and a couple oars. The last place she wanted to go was back to Essos but she didn’t have much of a choice now. Once she got back she’d planned to find money and make her way onto another ship that was sailing west, maybe if she was lucky there would be a ship heading north to Eastwatch by the sea. But she knew that was wishful thinking. No one would be going that far north with winter practically here, and Arya Stark was rarely lucky.

She noticed from the corner of her eye that the sun was setting and removed her hood. It was just starting to kiss the edge of the horizon, shimmering orange and yellow flames forming on the sea. Arya was taking in the beautiful sunset when she heard it. A terrible screech shredding the air, goosebumps raced up her spine and a shiver crawled in her bones. Turning her head in the sound’s direction her mouth split open; a great shadow of what looked like a giant bat with a tail was flying its way towards her.

Arya had heard of dragons hatching in the East and seen the drawings of what a they looked like, heard the stories from many sailors swearing up and down they’d seen one. She’d even met the skulls of the old dragons under the Red Keep herself. But seeing a real one had her breath flying away with the beast. Its wings were twice as long as it’s body, but it was hard to say how big it was gliding so high above her. She could make out the scales it had for skin, shimmering from the fleeting sunlight. Midnight black and deep red scales shimmering and reflecting the sunset, the colours of House Targaryen. Fire and Blood.
It flew right over her as she craned her neck to keep from looking away, she watched it fly towards the sunset until it was no bigger than her finger, and the sun had sunk under the waves. She'd been so starstruck she'd hadn't even heard the waves crashing on the hull until the ship was on her. Arya blinked the awe from her eyes, turning her head to see a long ship gaining on her.

“Oi!” a man’s voice echoed off the waves, and Arya watched his little head stick out over the railing. Tossing her oars aside she waved with one hand. Moments later more heads were popping up over the side, men’s shouts echoing in the distance. The girl glanced back to where the dragon had disappeared, nothing but a darkening sky in it’s place. Arya closed her eyes and relived it's silhouette against the burning sun, tasting the wonder of it all on the tip of her tongue and letting the rare feeling of peace wash over her. If all else goes to hell, at least I saw a dragon. Sighing she let the tranquility slip away, turning back to her new reality and soon-to-be captors, and considering who a girl would be this time.

A rough hand pulled her over the top of the ledge and she was faced with a man of his mid thirties, brawny with ginger hair. “Thanks” she said breathless from her climb up the side of the boat, untangling her cloak and grimacing as she flexed her wounded hand. The climb up the rope had left it throbbing under the bandages.

“My pleasure” he smiled and held out a hand, “the names Rolly, but you can call me Duck.”

She raised an eyebrow, “Duck?” she repeated taking his hand in her left, the one that wasn't currently burning.

He grinned, “Aye, a nickname that stuck. We all have em don't we?”

“I suppose I've had a few” she agreed, “I'm Malia.”

Other sailors had swarmed around them, curious eyes sneaking out from around every side. Arya took them all in, scruffy faces some young and some old, and very few women. Almost all were armed and wore some type of yellow cloth. There were banners hung off the front of the ship, pure gold silk and cotton snapping in the breeze. The Golden Company, she realized. Sell-swords then.

“The hell's going on here?” a harsh voice rose over the heads, and the sea of men parted. An even older man with a red wolf-skin cloak appeared, an interesting choice of attire to go with his blue hair. Behind him was a woman of about the same age, dark hair and haunting violet eyes that drew Arya's attention. And beside her strode a handsome man who’s perfect jawline gave her pause, soft hair dyed blue blowing in the wind with dark eyes to match.

“A damsel in distress, Captain” Duck called, “Thought we should give her a hand.”

The Captain in the wolf skin stopped abruptly when he approached her, his brow crinkling above old blue eyes. He blinked when their eyes met, then again as if trying to get the sun out of his eyes. Arya's stomach twisted when she read him, recognition passing over his features. He can't know me, I've never seen him in my life.

“Who are you?” he barked, clearly a little taken aback by her.

“Malia” she told him, hiding her suspicion under innocent grey eyes.

“She was just floating in the sea” Duck explained, turning to point, “On that little boat.”

“What the hell are you doing out here?” the Captain barked.
Arya frowned, “It's nice to meet you too.”

The Captain glowered at her but Duck and the handsome boy smiled, “You must forgive my father” he spoke sweetly, taking a step toward her. “His name is Griff, and they call me Young Griff.” he said placing a hand to his heart, “and this is our ship, we call it The Shyer Maid.” he reached out a welcoming hand.

“Well it is nice to meet you” she said as she shook his hand, calloused fingers wrapping around her own.

“Aye” Young Griff grinned.

“Aye, now if you'd enlighten us with why you're so far from shore, alone?” the older Griff spoke up again.

Arya had already prepared the lie, “Pirates, maybe slavers. I didn't get a chance to ask. They raided the ship I was on” she looked to her little boat, “I was lucky enough to escape.”

“She smells like a fucking orange” Some dark haired man slurred from beside her.

She smiled without joy, “They're the only thing I've eaten in days” she admitted. Arya's heart skipped a beat and she flinched back when Young Griff's hand reached for hers.

“Sorry” he blushed, “I didn't mean...it's just your hand, it's bleeding.”

“Oh” she swallowed her nerves and cursed herself for a coward. Lifting her hand she could see fresh blood creeping out under the bandages, her skin pulsing painfully underneath. “Accident with a knife” she muttered.

“I can help with that” offered the women with the haunting violet eyes, she was at least twenty years her senior, but Arya could only imagine how beautiful the women must have been in her youth.

“You can call me Lemore”

“Lady Lemore” Duck corrected with a teasing grin.

“Hold on, we have no idea who she is.” Old Griff growled.

“Do you wish for us to throw her back into the sea?” Lady Lemore asked him like she were teaching a child to share.

“I don't like this” he growled with apprehension.

Lady Lemore smiled softly, “I know” a shared secret passing between their eyes as Lemore regarded Arya once more, seeming slightly baffled for half a beat. She glanced back to the Captain “You must admit, the Gods work in mysterious ways.”

Old Griff snorted and looked to Duck, “Keep an eye on her.”

“I can do that” Young Griff offered, then quickly added, “Duck is busy enough as it is, helping train the new recruits.”

Old Griff scowled with disapproval, “Fine.” his scowl made it's way to Lady Lemore whose lips curled up knowingly. His hard eyes found Arya's, “Do you have a full name, Malia?”

“Snow” she replied.
“Snow?” she didn't think anyone missed the scorn in his tone.

“Yes.” her voice was iron and her eyes steal, daring him to say something, anything against her brother's name. “Snow.” Arya wondered then if she would ever see Jon's grey eyes again.

“You're quite far from home.” is all he said. Aye, _but closer than I've been in years._

Chapter End Notes

Waves - Dean Lewis
Tyrion

The sun beamed down with hardly a cloud in the sky to conceal it while Tyrion was making his way back to Daenerys’s cabin. He’d spent that morning above deck playing Cyvasse with an elderly man who’d lived most of his life on this very ship. He’d told him his farther had named it the *Devils Kraken* when he was a boy, the elderly man’s father had taken much pride in his ship according him, but to Tyrion it wasn’t anything special; just a normal sized ship with red faded sails. The only thing that had concerned him this morning was beating the man at the bloody board game, which despite his best efforts he couldn’t seem to do. If he was being honest, he was trying to distract himself from his idiotic mistake from the night before.

Tyrion had been intrigued to say the least when Kinvara had shown them the lifeless face of a little girl. After he'd arranged for Daenerys to stay on this more modest ship in hopes of staying somewhat under the radar, he'd sent one of Dany’s men to fetch the girl so he could meet her. Of course why would a Dothraki do anything an Imp asked him to do? The man had sent some boy in his stead, a boy who the girl had left unconscious on the floor. Part of him was just thankful whoever the girl was she didn’t leave a trail of bodies behind her, for given the reputation of the Faceless men he had no doubt she could have.

He'd almost met her, sort of. All he saw was the silhouette of a small girl with dark hair that met her shoulders, but with the candle light in his eyes she was only a fading shadow. Later after the girls rather bold escape, he went below deck to speak to the other men the Dothraki and Unsullied had taken captive. First apologizing and having them all unchained, the whole raid had been mayhem. An old Khal of the Dothraki thinking himself some kind of general now, took it upon himself to make the order. The Unsullied had went along only because they’d thought it had been their Queen’s order. Now there were innocent men dead at the hands of his Queen's army, and they hadn’t even reached Westeros yet.

_The men were rubbing their sore wrists from the heavy metal chains, most looking none to happy to see him. And why would they? In their eyes this Imp had been at the head of an army that had just murdered their friends and brothers, for no discernible reason other than their own lack of discipline. “I'm here to ask you anything you know about the girl that was traveling with you” he started._

“She kept to herself” stated an older man, silver shining in his dark beard. “How much do you really think an assassin would give away to a ship of strangers?” he spat, eyes dripping with contempt.

“I don’t know, I wasn’t one of the strangers. Surly though she said a word or two?” Tyrion turned his mismatched eyes on the man. His stare was known to make people uncomfortable but this man was having none of it.

“You talked to her most” a skinny boy accused, turning his glare on to the largest man in the room. “you said you knew her before.”

“I-I didn't know her” the fat man stuttered.
“What’s your name?” Tyrion turned to him.

“Samwell, Samwell Tarly. But people call me Sam.” They were about eye level with the young man still sitting on the floor.

“Tarly?” he raised an eyebrow, “Son of Randall Tarly?”

“I’m a b-brother of the Nights Watch now” he corrected.

“A little far from the Wall don’t you think?” Tyrion eyed the boy, he’d seen Randall before and he couldn’t say the boy took much after his father.

Sam pulled a chain out from under his shirt, a maester’s chain. “The Lord commander of the Nights Watch sent me to the Citadel, to become a maester.”

“And what of maester Aemon?”

The man looked stricken, “He died.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, he was a honorable man.” Sam only nodded. “So this Faceless-Assassin, what do you know of her?”

“She wasn’t a faceless man” he argued, but looked unsure. “at least that's what she said...”

“Aye, and I'm not a dwarf. People say many things Samwell, but I trust what I see much more than what I hear. You'd be surprised how much a lifeless face can tell a man about a person.”

Sam just shook his head, “She was kind, not exactly warm, but kind. I don't think she was here to kill anyone.” he reasoned.

“Maybe you’re right” probably not. “I would still like to hear anything you might think significant, anything about who she really was?”

Sam looked pained, “she said to call her Cat, but it was clear it wasn't really her name. All she had was the coin, some weapons, and a deep cut on her hand.” He looked up at Tyrion. “You're here with Daenerys aren't you? The Dragon Queen? Does she really have dragons?”

Tyrion smiled at the wonder in the mans eyes, “she really does.”

Sam’s eyes were wide, “She shouldn't be sailing for KingsLanding, she should be sailing North” his words suddenly urgent. “The Others are marching on the Wall, My lord. If it falls there won't be anything to stop them, they, they'll kill us all.”

Some other man snorted at the boys words but Tyrion found himself unnerved by the fear in Sam’s eyes. “The Others you say?”

Sam nodded viciously. “I swear it on my mother's grave” the boy almost seemed to pale a little and his voice shook, “I've seen them. They're real, and they're coming for us all.”

Tyrion cleared his throat and shook the forbidden feeling from his bones. “Is there anything else about the girl? Anything she might of said to indicate where she was going?”

“I don’t know, she said...” Sam frowned, gears turning behind is eyes.

“What?” Tyrion pressed.
“She said if the Old Gods are good and we make to where we we’re going, we’d see each other again...I told her I was going to the Wall.” he finished.

“Thank you Samwell, the Queen will appreciate your help.”

“Will you tell her what I’ve told you? About the Others?”

“I’ll be sure to mention it” he replied.

Sam looked down and shook his head bitterly, “You don't believe me” he muttered.

“I.”

“Believe what you see” Sam finished for him, “Aye, and you will.”

The girls fading presence still left him uneasy, as did Samwell's words. He'd heard so many stories and examined so many books about the Faceless Men, yet he hardly knew more than the common sailor. An organization built on secrets and illusions, in a city that had been nothing but a story for nearly a hundred years. But a young assassin sailing for Westeros at the same time as his Queen? It struck him as odd, even stranger the girl had been caught. Temporarily, but still captured. Tyrion's thumb brushed over the iron coin he'd taken off the guards, as his thoughts tumbled lost and confused in his mind.

Daenerys sat with a cup of water beside her, and when she saw him arrive she told the cup bearer to leave them. When the boy had left Varys came in as well, wearing a yellow robe. Tyrion had already taken his seat beside Missandei, she was wearing a navy blue dress that exposed her stomach, while Grey Worm wore his usual armor with dark clothes underneath. Dany on the other hand wore a light violet dress that brought out her eyes, and a silver dragon necklace that had rubies for eyes and three tails.

“We’ve received a letter from Winterfell, I figured the Hand should read it too.” Daenerys glanced at him with tired eyes, she'd been up half the night dealing with the Dothraki's raid. Personally apologizing to the prisoners and disciplining the attackers.

“And what does Lord Bolton have to say to his future Queen?” He asked while poring himself a cup of red wine.

“Lord Bolton doesn’t hold Winterfell anymore, according to the letter the Starks have reclaimed it.” Dany said while playing with the parchment in her hands.

“The Starks?” Tyrion couldn't hide the shock in his voice, almost spilling the wine. But which Stark? Robb was dead, as was his youngest brothers, Jon was a sworn brother of the Nights Watch and a bastard. Arya Stark had been dead for years, but Sansa...she could be alive.

“Lady Sansa and her base born brother Jon Snow have taken the North and killed the Boltons. It’s not just that though, they’ve given us a lot to discuss” she said this while sliding the letter over to him and Varys. Tyrion’s mind was racing with questions, which seemed to double when he unrolled the paper, and his eyes went straight to the bottom of the page, where it read the names of Lady Sansa of Winterfell and Jon Snow, King in the north.

“King? How could he be king? He's Lord Commander of the Nights Watch, those vows are for life.”
Tyrion needed more wine for this.

“I don’t know” Dany exchanged a look with Missandei and Grey Worm but they would be no use on the topic either, but Varys spoke up.

“I’ve heard questionable rumors from the North, ones that might explain how. I thought them ridiculous and didn’t bother to discuss them.” Varys explained vaguely.

“Well?” Tyrion looked to bald man who had seated himself beside Grey Worm.

“If what they say is true then Lord Snow’s watch has ended, those vows are indeed for life and according to the whispers, Jon Snow gave his life.”

“Perhaps you could be more clear?” Missandei asked “dead men don’t take castles in my experience” her voice laced with sarcasm.

“The red priestess who claimed Lord Stannis as “The prince that was promised” apparently brought Commander Snow back to life after he’d been killed by his own men in a mutiny.” Varys sighed with disbelief.

“Brought him back to life? That can’t be possible.” Dany almost sounded annoyed.

“Says the women who’s walked through fire unscathed” Tyrion reminded her. For a second he thought Dany was upset with him, but then she seemed thoughtful.

“Do you believe it then?” Dany looked to him.

It was hard to say, Tyrion was still trying to collect his thoughts. Sansa Stark was now the Lady of Winterfell, he hadn’t even heard anything of her since Joffrey’s wedding when she’d been a young girl. Hell, a young girl who also could have murdered a king for all he knew. As for Jon Snow being resurrected that sounded mad, but Tyrion was struck by his amazement at how far the boy he’d met at Winterfell had come despite it all. From the bastard of Winterfell, to Lord Commander of the Nights Watch, to bloody King in the North. That’d make one hell of a song.

“Does it truly matter? By the sounds of it the whole of the North believes it, at least enough to put a crown on his head.” he muttered.

“Cersei the Queen and now another King in the North? At least my nephew had the sense not call himself a king” Dany was referring to prince Aegon he knew, Rhaegar Targaryen’s true born son and technically rightful heir to the Iron Throne. At the moment Aegon was sailing to Westeros as well, but on another ship with a different fleet. He had the Golden Company at his back and had a mission to take Dragonstone away from his sister’s forces in the name of Daenerys Targaryen. For some reason the young man still dyed his hair and used an alias. “I didn’t think I’d find another contender awaiting us in Westeros, especially not a Stark” she sighed.

“We don’t know that Jon Snow is a threat, it’s not like he has any claim to the Iron Throne.” Grey Worm consoled.

“His farther did help lead a bloody rebellion against my family, who’s to say this Jon Snow and his sister won’t do the same after I take the throne?”

That made Tyrion chuckle, “Those were under very different circumstances, Your Grace. Not to mention the crimes House Targaryen had committed to House Stark during that time.”

“Right” Dany waved a hand dismissively “I know they say my brother took the Stark girl, but I’ve
also heard just as many say she left with him."

“I’m don’t know, just that she ended up dead. But those aren’t exactly the crimes I was referring to.” Tyrion was reminded again how Daenerys had grown up only hearing her older brother’s recounts of history, and he had no doubt they’d be at the very least, slightly bias.

“No? Which then?” she challenged.

“The murder of Rickard Stark, Ned’s farther and Brandon Stark his older brother, killed by your father.”

“I heard they were traitors to the crown, same as Eddard Stark” she was sounding less certain.

“If asking for your sisters return after being kidnapped, or whatever the case, is considered betrayal, then yes, what a terrible traitor Brandon Stark was. And how dare Lord Rickard come to his son’s aid after being imprisoned?” Tyrion found himself annoyed by her lack of knowledge on the history of the other houses of Westeros, the houses she was supposed to rule. He couldn’t help his sarcasm. “As for Eddard Stark himself, you’d probably find yourself agreeing with the man if he still had his head, considering neither of you thought Joffrey should sit the throne.”

Dany didn’t reply right away but instead poured herself a glass of wine with a face hinting at her sorrow, then she looked back to Tyrion. “So you’re saying they were all more innocent people killed by my family?”

Varys cut in then and Tyrion took the opportunity to look at the beginning of the letter “Well I wouldn’t blame yourself for Lord Eddard’s death, besides even if he was a traitor what would be the significance? This is his son and daughter we’re discussing, if wejuged everyone on their parents I don’t think I’d be sitting at this table right now.”

“I suppose that’s true” she considered.

“I think you and Jon have more in common than you think” Tyrion said whilst putting the half read letter back on the table, grinning at the parallel he’d found.

Dany arched an eyebrow, “and how’s that?”

“Both your family’s were killed by Lannister’s, you escaped across the Narrow Sea and he went to The Wall. Yet you both returned to take your family’s seat, leading an army of known savages. Though I have no doubt the Wildlings and Dothraki have very different cultures” A hmmf was Danys only reply as she took a sip of her wine.

Missandei picked up the letter again and broke the silence “This is interesting”

“What is?” Grey Worm asked.

“Apparently Arya Stark was never married to Roose Bolton’s son Ramsey, it was some other girl.” she explained. This was something Tyrion already knew about, the girl had gone missing after her father’s arrest and was likely dead, pretending she was alive and married to Ramsey had given the Bolton’s a better claim to the North.

“Another one of Eddard Starks’s children? Any idea where she might be?” Dany looked to Varys.

“Dead probably, she was only a child when she disappeared” Tyrion answered instead and Dany gave him a sour look, but he shrugged in response.
“Maybe” Varys sounded indifferent. “and she didn’t just disappear, she escaped the Red Keep and possibly even Kings Landing itself, with the whole of the Gold Cloaks searching for her. None of my little birds even heard a whisper. She could be alive.”

Dany smiled at Varys “So she’s smart enough to evade even you? Master of Whispers” but Varys ignored the jape and continued.

“She still could be dead, and the letter asks for any information on the girl to be sent to Winterfell immediately. Her and the Stark boys Brandon and Rickion, who are still missing and apparently weren’t murdered by Theon Greyjoy.”

Tyrion found himself thinking of his visits at Winterfell, he tried to picture Arya’s face but it had been years since he saw her, and he’d only met her the once. He could however recall a small girl that had dark hair like her father and bastard brother, with a little grey direwolf pup following her everywhere. Bran was easier to picture because he’d met him more than once, he could recall the boys smile and bright blue eyes when Tyrion had given him the special saddle. Granting the boy the ability to ride a horse despite his broken spine. As for Rickion, he’d been little more than a babe when Tyrion had met him.

“You said this letter would give us a lot to discuss, what else is there?” he asked as Varys picked up the letter again. Tyrion watched his face while he read it, and saw him raise his eyebrows in a mixture of disbelief and what seemed like humour.

“Apparently an army of the dead lead by White Walkers” he placed the parchment down again.

“White Walkers? And undead people?” Missandei looked baffled, “This country sounds…strange”

A shiver raced up his back as Samwell’s words echoed in his head, “Aye, and you will.” the young man had promised. If someone had told Tyrion a few years ago that White Walkers were coming leading an army of undead men south he would have laughed at them, but that was before he’d seen a dragon. He’d grown up being told they were all but gone from the world, for hundreds of years and yet here they were, and at the same time as apparent mythical ice monsters? Yes, old him would call all of this mad, the resurrections too, but he’d grown much less skeptical of the worlds mystery’s as of late. He found himself thinking of what Benjen Stark had once told him. “You’ve never been North of The Wall, so don’t tell me what’s out there” It was hard to argue that logic after he’d been proven wrong with the dragons.

“Dragons? Fire resistant Queens? Resurrections? And little girls wearing dead people’s faces? Why not undead army’s and White Walkers? I don’t know what to believe or deny anymore.” He took a large swig from his goblet. “but I knew Jon Snow once, he may have been a brooding bastard but he was no liar. This isn't even the first time I've been warned about these Others in the past day.”

“What do you mean?” Daenerys pressed.

“Last night, after the girl escaped I went to speak to the other captives, to see if we could learn anything else about her. One of the men your soldiers took captive is a maester sworn in service to the Wall, and said he'd seen them with his own eyes.”

“And you didn't mention this because?” she raised an eyebrow.

Tyrion shrugged, “We had more important things to worry about, like assassins running about.”

“Maybe if you hadn't been so focused on her, she wouldn't have escaped.” Dany snapped.

“It's not everyday you come across people with that kind of magic.” he argued.
She sighed, “well what do we know of her then?” she looked to Grey Worm, “You almost caught her didn't you?”

“Yes your Grace, this one failed you. The girl escaped on one of the side boats, by the time someone had found a bow she'd gone in the darkness.”

“and you would have only been able to murder her with that.” Tyrion added, drinking his wine.

“She did kill at least five of our men from what I've been told.” Dany glared.

“After we raided the ship she was on.” Tyrion challenged.

“She said she was rooting for you, Your Grace. I don't know what that means.” Grey Worm added and Tyrion laughed, brushing his fingers over the iron coin in his pocket.

“It seems she's a fan of yours then” he grinned.

“I don't need the support of assassins.” she stated coldly “did she say anything else Grey Worm?”

“Aye, she'd have a drink when you killed Cersei.” That gave them all pause, and gave Tyrion a handful of eyes on him. Cersei's poison emerald eyes came to his mind, his only sister and the person who probably wanted him dead most in this world.

“Well me and the girl have two things in common now.” He stated and took a drink, it tasted more bitter than before.

Daenerys sighed, “well she's gone now, whatever her preferences. But we need to know the truth about this letter.” Dany sounded determined, “Tyrion you've met Jon before? And you were married to this Lady Sansa, you still are actually...I want you to go to Winterfell and make sure they respect the integrity of the Seven Kingdoms, and find out the truth of this apparent White Walker threat. If it's true then we can't ignore it.”

“You want me to go North? Now? But you'll be marching on Kings Landing after we arrive in Westeros!” they were taking the city from his own sister and he was expected to play the role of a diplomat hundreds of leagues away?

“I have three armies and three dragons Tyrion. I’m afraid you won’t be needed for a siege, you’d be of more use securing the North and fealty of the Starks, and as far as discovering the truth of the undead army...you can take Varys and his skills with you.” This time when she spoke she sounded more demanding, more like a Queen.

“You’re marching on my own sister, I should be there. I’m also your Hand which means I should be by my Queens side.” he wished he had a better argument but he already knew by the tone of Dany’s voice that he had no chance, worse Varys had only nodded in agreement.

“Where you feel you should be, isn’t the same as where you’re needed Tyrion, or where your Queen has asked you to be. You will be going North. Once we reach land you will take a small host of Unsullied with you for protection.”

“Preferably some who know the common tongue your Grace? It might be easier if everyone can understand each other.” Varys advised.

“Very well, by the time you’ve found your answers you can send the raven to Kings Landing, the siege should be done by then. I'm not giving up the North, so if this threat is real, this King in the North will have to bend his knee.”
Chapter End Notes

Cast Away - Etherwood
Lady Lemore escorted her below deck with Young Griff close behind. It was a relief to escape all
the curious eyes above, granted she could understand. Finding a young girl alone in the ocean was
probably an uncommon occurrence. Her eyes traveled and she found herself a little taken aback by
the shear magnitude of the boat. It was a beautiful ship, and easily the largest one she'd ever boarded.

“I knew the Golden Company was one the wealthiest sell-sword companies, but this is much more
than I would of thought they could afford...” Arya commented as they led her down a set of stairs
with a low ceiling.

“Well Griff isn't just the Captain of this ship, he's second in command of the entire Company. Only
behind the General Harry Strickland.” Lemore explained.

“Hmm...and where are you heading? Or I suppose I should say, where are we heading.”

“Westeros” she answered and looked back with apologetic eyes. “I'm sorry if you were trying to get
to Esso's, but Griff won't be turning this ship around for anything.”

“A good thing I have no interest in going back there.” Arya mumbled, glancing at a large map of
Westeros hung on the wall of the hall.

“Back?” Young Griff piped in, “I thought you were coming from Westeros?”

“No. I left Westeros years ago.” she told him, glancing behind she noted his eyes looked a shade
lighter below deck.

“Here, this way” Lady Lemore led her into a small room where she gestured for her to take a seat.
Arya slid Needle from her belt and placed it on the table so she could sit without it hitting anything.

“A braavosi blade? It's a little small.” Young Griff teased.

“Plenty sharp though” Arya warned.

He put his hands up defensively, “Pray I never find out.” Arya's glare only made his grin widen.

Lemore grabbed a small wooden box as she sat down and placed herself across from Arya, with
Young Griff by her side. “May I?”

Arya nodded but slowly unwrapped the bandage herself, chewing the inside of her lip to distract
herself from the sting. The stitches that Sam had sown on her palm were a ruin, and black-red blood
was pussing from the cut. At least the stitches on the back of her hand had held, with only dark bruised skin brushing the edges. Arya held out her hand, Young Griff's brow furrowing together as he leaned in to see.

Lady Lemore frowned and gave her a look, gently taking Arya's hand in hers. “You said this was an accident?”

“Well…” Arya tilted her head “I didn't intend for it to happen…” A smile tugged at Young Griff’s lips.

“No. I suppose you wouldn't have.” she sighed.

“So what awaits you in Westeros?” Arya ventured, “I'm assuming someone has hired you for some reason.”

The two exchanged a look before Young Griff answered, “Aye, we're going to be in the service of Daenerys Targaryen. To aid her in taking back her father's throne.”

“Daenerys?” she was relieved she'd decided to lie and say it'd been pirates who'd raided her ship.

“Something wrong?” Lemore asked, glancing up from washing her hand.

“No, I just...didn't think sell-swords were her style. No offense.” she added glancing at Young Griff.

“None taken. Once she holds the throne though, the company won't be much of a company anymore. Our men will be true knights, a part of the royal army.” he explained.

“Hence why Griff wouldn't be turning around if you asked him to” Lemore added.

“Your word is as good as gold” Arya repeated the motto of the company, recalling it from one of the hundreds of books the Kindly Man had sent her to reading over the years.

“Aye” Young Griff gave her one of his winning smiles, “We're known for our honor, not much use in hiring someone without any.” Arya smiled softly at his words. There may not be much use in hiring an army without honor, but a single person? The House of Black and White had founded an entire religion on that.

“You disagree?” he asked.

“This will hurt” Lemore cut in as she held up a needle.

Arya eyed the tiny blade in her hand, forever hating needlework in whatever form it took. “I know” she sighed and looked back to Young Griff's eyes. “No, not entirely” she grimaced as the needle dug into her skin. “but there's a time and place for everythi- fuck” she hissed.

“Sorry” Lemore looked up remorsefully but Young Griff held back a laugh.

“I'm glad my pain amuses you” she growled at him.

“It doesn't I swear, you just...never mind.” he reached an open hand toward her, “Here, you can squeeze my hand.” he offered and she hesitated. “I don't bite, I promise.”

Part of her wanted to throw some rude comment at him, but she thought better of it. Putting her temper away she placed her left hand in his. Eyeing him suspiciously while Lady Lemore subtly watched them with perplexed eyes.
“Okay, here we go” Lemore announced and Arya closed her eyes and braced herself.

“So you were saying, about honor?” Young Griff pressed, shifting his hand in hers.

“hmmm...” she opened her eyes again to watch, “A time and place for it” she managed as she saw the needle poke out through her palm. It's bloody tip brought her fathers sword Ice to her mind, dripping with crimson in Ser Ilyen's grip. “It's just not worth dying for” she muttered, squeezing his hand through the pain.

“Hey” she glanced up and locked her gaze with his, “Don't look” he told her seriously. It wasn't his command that gave her pause, but his eyes. She'd thought they were blue like the colour of the dye in his hair, but when she looked closely she could tell they were more like amethysts. “What?”

Arya shook her head, turning her attention back to her bleeding hand. “Nothing.”

“Well I've met plenty of men who'd rather die than be remembered as dishonorable.” Young Griff seemed to think aloud.

“So have I...” she grimaced, “A bloody waste if you ask me.”

“and what would be worth dying for?” his grip on her hand tightened, as if he were trying to tear her eyes away from Lemore's work and back to him.

Arya pondered his question. Family. But what good was dying for something you didn't have? Vengeance then. Yet that didn't seem like an appropriate answer. “Blood” she decided.

“Almost done” Lemore consoled.

“Hmmm” Arya breathed deep before Young Griff was stealing her attention once more.

“You know you have the calloused hand of a blind man?” he teased.

She almost laughed. remembering for a moment, her life as Blind Beth. “I'm left handed.”

“Ah, and that sword...you know how to use it?” he grinned, placing his glowing eyes on Needle.

“Better than you” she said gripping his hand a little tighter, focusing on the warmth as Lemore's tiny sword punctured her skin again.

He scoffed, “You know I've built a life on my sword?”

“As have I.” she held his piercing gaze, her face an unmoving pool while he failed to bite back another smile.

“There.” Lemore cut in “Done.”

She breathed out in relief, holding her wound up to her face and blowing on it gently. “Thank you” she sighed, taking her other hand from Young Griff's grip. Lemore took out clean wool bandages from her little box and tenderly wrapped them around and around her wound, and Arya suppressed a yawn.

“There's a spare room at the base of the ship, Young Griff can show you where it is.”

Arya nodded, “It's been a long day” it'd been a long few days, rowing and rowing. She wondered how her arms had yet to fall off her shoulders. Young Griff stood and led the way out the door as Arya grabbed Needle. Once again she was reminded of how large this ship really was, hallways
branching off in multiple directions and making her wonder how easily she could get lost. Most
ship's she'd been on you'd find yourself walking single-file below deck, but here she and her guide
could stride side by side.

“So what caused you to leave Westeros?” He asked casually.

“The War of the five Kings” she answered, eyes glued to the assorted maps and paintings decorating
the walls.

“Who'd you move to Essos with?”

“No one.” she answered honestly, not in the mood to make up some elaborate story about who Malia
was.

He frowned deep in thought “You said you left years ago? You would have been young-”

“Eleven” she answered, “My parents died during the war, along with most everyone else I knew.”
she sighed, “I guess it was more like running than moving.”

“I'm sorry” his eyes full of empathy and some deeper layer of understanding.

“You've nothing to be sorry for, you didn't kill them.” she reasoned.

He cleared his throat, “No, I guess I didn't.”

“You guess?” she eyed him sharply.

“I mean, I di-” Arya laughed as he stumbled over his words. He snorted, “very funny, here's your
room” he waved a hand to an oak door before opening it for her.

It was about the size of the room she'd slept countless nights in at the temple of the Many-faced God,
but much more cozy. Walking in she flopped onto the small bed, a thick feather mattress under her,
topped with soft furs. She closed her eyes and sighed in deep content.

Young Griff chuckled at her enthusiasm, “I'm glad you like it.”

“It's been near a fortnight since I've laid on a real bed” she said kicking her boots off. “I spent three
nights on that bloody rowboat.”

“Sounds comfy” she glanced over to see his characteristic grin as he leaned against the door.

He stood their just considering her a moment so she pressed on, “You haven't told me where you're
from yet.”

“You haven't asked.” he countered.

She gave him a mock glare, “Then I'm asking.”

“I was born in Westeros too” he confessed. “But I've been traveling pretty much my entire life.”

“Why'd you leave?”

He shrugged, “The war. Not of the Five Kings, but that fat bastard Robert's war. Most my family
was killed too, it's just me and Griff now.”

Arya studied him, the bitter anger in his eyes and the contempt he held for Robert. Arya had never
genuinely liked the man, and the older she got the clearer she saw him. A fat drunk who cared more about bedding whores than ruling his Kingdom...but he had been her father's friend. "and here we both are..." she smiled sadly. "Going back."

"To fight a new war" he agreed solemnly.

It'd been near a fortnight since she'd met Griff and his crew, and she'd become surprisingly comfortable around them. Griff himself still watched her like she was some kind of ghost haunting and cursing his very existence, but he was easy enough to avoid on a ship so large. He'd spend most his days below deck anyway, hidden away in his private quarters with other high ranking members of The Golden Company, along with his son Young Griff and Lady Lemore. Arya spent most her mornings observing Duck teaching the company's new recruits, watching as he toppled boy after boy to the deck. She was sure she could beat him, but she'd said goodbye long ago to the arrogant nine year old girl she once was, only surveying his lessons in silence. It was better this way, she told herself. Being anonymous and unnoticed was her best bet, even if it was impossible for the Kindly Man to know she'd boarded the Shyer Maid. There was just no use in drawing unwarranted attention.

Her evenings were calmer than they had been in years, yet she still found she couldn't let go of old habits she'd built over the years. Always listening in on others conversations and checking over her shoulder, watching for danger around every corner and behind every smile. Arya had to remind herself she wasn't on some mission, that she wasn't sent to kill anyone so she could stop searching for an angle, for some opportunity. All she needed was to get to Westeros. Once she was there she could worry about finding a way to the Wall, about dealing with the murderers sitting at the Twins and in her family's home.

For now she was trying to live in the present, sitting by a fire on a boat. She'd laughed when Duck and Young Griff had first shown her the cage they had built into the forefront of the Shyer Maid. Metal bars designed to imprison the dangerous flames inside, yet still free the warmth they offered. They'd sit by it most every night under the stars, sharing drinks and stories about the places they'd been and the wonders they'd seen. Arya had sat quietly at first, just enjoying the simplicity and familiarity of the Sell-swords discussions. She'd always loved listening to her father's banner-man when she was a child, to the free riders and soldiers adventures.

"Have you ever been in a real fucking battle boy?" Javer was staring down puppy eyed Tobias. "You think the gore is gonna be bad? Try the stench of the men shitting themselves." He laughed, spitting out some of his wine.

"Don't scare him" Duck accused, "It's not like he'll be able to smell any of it over his own." more laughter erupted from the men by the fire and Arya allowed a wry smile to creep upon her lips. Javer was the one who'd charged her with reeking of oranges when they'd found her, a man who could hardly form a sentence without cursing. Tobias was one of the new recruits, practically a man grown in age but a boy in every other sense of the word.

Alis gave Duck a playful shove, "Don't be an ass" she teased, honey eyes filled with mirth.

" Wouldn't dream of it" he promised, pressing his lips softly against hers for no more than a breath. There wasn't a night that went by without them showing some form of affection to each other. It would remind her of the soft kisses Eddard Stark would place on her mother's lips at dinners, the ones her and Bran would make little puke faces over that Jon and Robb would laugh at.
“Just wait till’ we get to Westeros” Javer continued, “You’ll be spending days wiping Lannister shit when this wars done.”

“If I live that long” muttered Tobias.

“You will” promised Young Griff, gripping a hand on the young mans shoulder. “We all will.”

“We'll do more than that lads” Javer grinned, “we'll be Knights, true Knights who'll get the finest pussy in KingsLanding”

Arya rolled her eyes, taking a sip of her wine. She never had more than one cup, not daring to loose her senses. In all honestly she’d never even been drunk before, even after all the wines she'd tested and became familiar with over the years. Most seemed to think of it as some rite of passage when growing up, but truth be told, being on the run as a child and then training to be an assassin had just never left time for such ordinary things. She watched Alis whisper something in Ducks ear, seeing him glance back at her with dark, lustful eyes. Yes, it seemed Arya Stark had missed a lot of customary rite's of passages over the years.

“That's not how a true Knight speaks” argued Tobias.

“There are no true Knights” Arya gave him a small smile, “Just more Javers, then worse.”

A few men laughed, none more than Javer himself, but Young Griff turned to her, “Well aren't you just full of optimism” he said softly from beside her.

Arya glanced at Javer, telling some new disgusting jape. “Better than what he's full of.”

“Aye” he laughed, “anything better than that.”

“I wanted to be a Knight once” she confessed.

“Did you know girls can't be Knights?”

“My mother and sister were fond of reminding me” she told him, wondering for the hundredth time what had happened to Sansa.

“You never told me you had a sister.” his voice lowered. Their conversation had become one of it's own, separate from the other sell-sword's.

She shrugged “I used to have a lot of things. But me and my sister...we never had much in common.”

“What was she like?”

Arya let the bittersweet memories of Sansa wash over her. “Perfect.” she smiled, “Always saying and doing the right thing...not to mention beautiful.”

He nodded, deep in thought as if trying to picture her. “Well, you have one thing in common then.” his amethysts eyes glowed with his winning smile.

Arya opened her mouth to ask what before her mind caught up with his, she let out half a laugh. “Smooth” she teased shaking her head at the compliment. “No, we didn't look alike either.”

“Still doesn't change what I said” he argued.

“What about you?” she changed the subject, “did you have a sister?”
His eyes darkened slightly and she could notice the muscles of his face sober. “No. I never had a sister.”

It was a lie, or a least it wasn't the whole truth. It seemed to almost ground her, reminding her of who she'd been only a moons turn ago. An assassin who read people as a maester did books, a girl who knew better than to trust anyone with anything, ever.

“I'm telling you I'd have my way with her!” Javer’s annoying shouts drew her attention back to the group. “I mean all of KingsLanding has seen her tits, it just wouldn't be right if I didn't.”

“What did you just say?” Arya's head turned at the danger in Young Griffs voice, which Javer clearly missed.

“Ya heard me, I'd take that fucking whor-” Arya was standing almost as quickly as Young Griff had before slamming his fist into Javer's jaw. The older man went flying backwards, his wine raining all over Duck and Alis. Young Griff had a smaller build than Javer, and Arya would have expected the older man to be more powerful, but you would never have thought it. Not with how easily he'd grabbed Javer by scruff and lifted him up like a doll.

“You lay one of your disgusting paws on a girl who doesn't want it, and I'll cut your bloody throat!” he spat. Duck was up in an instant, pulling Young Griff off him.

“You little fucking shit.” Javer spat blood from his mouth, ready to tackle Young Griff to the deck before Duck was pushing him back with his other hand.

“Calm down, alright?” Duck shouted.

“After I knock that spoiled brats teeth in!” Javer was struggling against Ducks arms.

“You can bloody well try.” Young Griff growled back, another sell-sword coming to hold him as well.

“How about when you're not both drunk?” Duck reasoned, pulling Javer away from the fire. Once they were around the corner every one else started to calm down, Tobias took his seat again with Alis, along with almost everyone else. Arya walked over to Young Griff, gently putting a hand on his arm. He turned quickly, as if ready to fend off an attacker.

Arya didn’t flinch, “are you going to hit me too?”

The fire melted from his eyes and his shoulders relaxed, “No.”

“Good” she smiled lightly and pulled him back to the fire, “you wouldn't be the first man whose nose I've had to break.”

He laughed as they took their seats once more but Arya could see the tension beneath the surface, the fury that laid underneath. They sat silently for a few moments, letting everyone else fill the void with their own chatter. Arya found herself studying him once more, considering what kind of man he really was.

He glanced over, a hint of regret in his eyes. “Do you think me some deranged lunatic now?” he muttered.

Arya shook her head, letting herself smile before speaking slowly. “I've been...known to lose my temper myself.” That was a gruesome understatement, and she found herself wondering exactly how many times she'd stabbed the Tickler at that inn. “But.” she gave him a mockingly stern look, “I've
learned not to hit every person I'd like to, it's remarkable the trouble it saves you.”

“I can only imagine” he grinned, his eyes a little lighter. “Mayhaps you could teach me?”

Arya sighed, feigning like he'd asked her the most burdensome task ever. “I guess...” she let her gaze soften on his “I could try.”

Chapter End Notes

Simple and Sweet - Jon Bellion ヾ(¬‿¬)ﾉ_hook
Losing you

Chapter Notes

Thanks so much for all the comments kindstrangers(✿´‿`) Now I must admit I love how you guys are split between Jon and Aegon right now, but sadly I won't be able to make you all happy by the end ¯\_(ODULE)_/ yet I do hope the journey is worth the read. (~˘▾˘~)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jon

Jon stood atop the walls of Winterfell gazing across an open field, the snow before him a ripped up mess. It was as though a stampede of giant shadowcats had raked their claws in every direction possible trying to tear apart a beast. The battle between the Bolton’s forces and the mix of Stannis Baratheon's men and Jon's had trampled the ground that laid before the castle. Today though it was snowing and Jon hoped it would fall deep enough to hide the land's scars. He found himself wishing the snow could cover and fill in everything else he didn't want to see, all the wounds of the men who'd survived the battle, hide the burned castle walls, the mass grave where they'd burned all the bodies.

He didn’t think he could ever forget the dreadful smell that filled the air for days after, a burning pile of hundreds upon hundreds of men and women blowing dark clouds over the castle walls. Bolton’s men, Knights of the Vale, the Wildlings, the Starks and Baratheon banner men, all once fighting each other to the death; burned in the same pile until there were no sigils left. Just a pile of charred bones and a black stain seeped in the snow.

Most of all he wanted the snow swimming around his head to fill in the heart he once had. Jon would do anything to have who he was restored to him, to feel something more than numbness and hollowness in place of most everything else. Yet there were two emotions that not even death could cure him of; grief and anger. He felt his loses down to the bone. He felt the absence of his father who had always treated him as an equal, he felt a stab in his chest when he thought of Robb’s auburn hair sprinkled with snowflakes, he could hear little Rickion’s laugh echoing in the dining hall at times, and when he looked at the towers in Winterfell he could see Bran climbing them, but only for half a second. He was living in a castle of ghosts and feared he was becoming one himself.

He found himself avoiding certain places, like the crypts where his father's body rested, or the Godswood where he had a thousand memories from his childhood. Even the hallway leading to Arya’s bedroom...he hadn’t dared step down that way since they’d retaken the castle. Just passing by it caused the grief to feel like it was trying to suffocate him, like every other time he thought of his little sister since he’d discovered she was never taken by the Bolton’s. When he learned she was still lost to him and probably would be forever.

He’d never forget the night Theon Greyjoy had rode in through the gates of Castle Black with Stannis’s men and a freezing girl on a black horse. It had only been less than a fortnight since his own brothers had betrayed him, and Melisandre had brought him back. It had been so cold that night and the snow fell so thick it would cover a man’s head in minutes. Jon had left his chambers the moment he heard the gates open, when he walked outside and saw Stannis’s men he’d felt his heart
stop with the memory of the King's letter. I will save your sister, If I can. For a moment he believed he'd really done it. Jon had run down the stairs of the Kings tower and stumbled his way through the deep snow drifts towards the girl on the horse. By the time he’d gotten close enough to see her face she’d dismounted and so had the other men, the first soldier had spoken. “Stannis sends his regards, and your sister, Lady Arya” he waved a hand at the girl.

She'd looked at him with huge frightened eyes, brown eyes. Not the dark grey eyes that he and Arya had shared, but brown. He didn’t even realize it was Jeyne Poole at first, he’d just known it wasn’t her, he’d stared at the soldier blankly, trying to comprehend how this idiot could think this girl with brown eyes was his sister.

“Th-that’s not her” he was full of disbelief, “she’s not Arya!” he’d said with such rage the soldier had taken a step back. He'd wanted to scream at them his little sister had grey eyes, not brown, but he hadn't because he’d finally recognized who the girl was. “Jeyne?” he sputtered.

She had taken her hood off of her grey cloak whilst shaking to reveal her frightened face, he could see the girl who'd once been Sansa’s best friend at Winterfell when they were all only naive children. He knew it wasn’t fair where his mind went then, and it only made him angrier when he thought of it. This had been the girl who'd bullied Arya when they were kids, the girl who'd made his beloved little sister feel ugly by cruelly naming her Arya Horseface. He couldn’t breathe with the anger seething under his skin, filling his lungs. Jon glanced over at the other man, he wasn’t one of Stannis’s soldiers by the rags he was wearing. He’d stepped forward to stand beside Jeyne, he couldn’t even recognize Theon Greyjoy. He’d never seen the boy wear such dirty rags for clothes, his hair was longer than it’d ever been and was unkempt, and grey. He seemed just as fearful as the brown eyed girl beside him.

“My lord” the soldier had said nervously “you’re sure this is not your sister?” Jon gave him a dangerous look then.

“Yes I’m sure!” he snapped, the other soldiers had exchanged looks then, realizing their mistake and probably thinking Jon insane.

“Jon” it was Theon who spoke then and took a few timid steps forward until he was standing in front of him, “They…the Bolton’s, they never had her. Th-they were passing Jeyne off as her, so they could have a better claim. A claim to Winterfell.”

Theon had tried to say it in the gentlest tone but his voice was shaking. Jon was still trying to deal with the burning fury his brothers betrayal had left him with, and when he stared into Theon's haunted face it only made it worse. All he could see was what this man had done to his family and not the shell of a person he’d become. Theon had taken Winterfell, killed the men he’d grown up with, pretended to kill Bran and Rickion, and stabbed Robb in the back. Jon balled his hands into shaky fists trying to control himself, but his rage was turning into a crushing grief, and instead of dwelling on the feeling he lashed out at the man in front of him. He’d slammed his fist right into Theon's jaw and sent him falling into the snow like a limp doll. Jeyne had let out a scream and fell to Theon’s side crying, Jon had been ready to hit him again, and again, but someone was pulling him back.

He’d struggled against the arms yelling that they let him go, when he finally broke free he saw it had been Tormund Giantsbane holding him back, he didn’t even know he was there. “Jon calm down!” Tormund had demanded, but Jon couldn’t calm down, he’d failed everyone and he’d failed her. He suddenly regretted every decision he’d ever made in that moment. He regretted ever going to serve at The Wall and leaving, he wished he’d never taken those damned vows, he wished he never turned around when he started riding south to aid Robb. He should have left the moment he heard of his
father’s arrest, he should have rode to Kingslanding and saved Arya, he could have saved his father too, and even Sansa from whatever horrible fate had found her.

He’d left them all there, Theon and Jeyne in the snow, the bewildered soldiers by their horses, the curious black brothers he hadn’t noticed before, and Tormund wondering whether or not to go after him. He didn’t, he let him storm off in his rage and anguish. He’d spent the rest of that night locked in his chambers and most of the next morning too, his mind on a loop with all the things he thought he’d done wrong; he didn’t get a moments sleep. He’d never admit it to Tormund, and probably not even to Sam if he’d been around, but he’d cried like he were a child that night. Bitterly thinking of how the gods had taken everyone he’d ever cared for, even going as far as his own life.

Uncle Benjen was most likely dead, it was a fools dream to think otherwise. Joffery had taken his father’s head, and Robb was stabbed in the back the same way he was, but there was no one to bring him back. Bran and Rickion and Sansa had been dead or gone, and Lady Catelyn who he wouldn’t even mind one last glare from was dead too. Now Arya was gone, or had been for a while, but now he’d lost hope of ever finding her.

Jon Snow was back on the walls of Winterfell, closing his eyes and trying to bid the memories to leave him be. “I wish you were coming with us.” her dark eyes cast down, her tiny hands gripping the sword he’d had made for her. He wanted her to come home more than anything, but what was even left of what they had? I never should have left.

“Jon?” Sansa’s voice dragged him from his memories.

“Hey” he turned to look to his auburn haired sister, who he thought looked more and more like Lady Catelyn every day. She was wearing a beautiful grey gown with furs around her neck to guard her skin from the cold.

“I just wanted to tell you the letters have been sent, we could probably use more ravens now” she informed him, her eyes gentle as though she knew where his mind had been.

He thought for a moment before he voiced his doubts for a millionth time “Maybe I should ride south and talk to some of the southern lords myself, it’s a lot to ask for in a letter.”

“I know, but I really think we should wait until some of them write back, that way at least we know which lords will need more convincing. Besides you’ve just become king, you can’t just go riding off right away.” Sansa gave him an encouraging but stern look.

He wondered if she was truly happy for him, he’d never chosen to be king and the thought still left him feeling a little lightheaded at times. Sansa on the other hand was the true born daughter of Eddard and Catelyn Stark and sometimes he thought she should have the bloody title instead, but it wasn’t like titles would matter when The Others came.

He sighed “It’s just I don’t like waiting here and doing nothing, winter is here and we need the support of the Riverlands and the South.”

“And we’ll get them Jon, we have the whole of the North behind us, whats left of Stannis's men, and the Knights of the Vale.”

“You’re right” he tried to sound confident but his voice betrayed his distress, but before she could call him on it he changed the subject. “Do you think they’re still out there somewhere? Bran and Rickion...and Arya?” It hurt to ask the question out loud.

Sansa paused for moment turning her blue gaze over at the field that to his relief, was being healed.
by the falling snow every minuet. “If they’re out there then they’ll find a way home. I have to believe that.”

He wished he could believe it, but if Sam was right then Bran had went North of The Wall and only the Gods knew what horrible fate a crippled boy could meet up there. Bran would be three and ten by now, almost a man grown. He might even have facial hair, a strange thought when he saw the little eight year old boy climbing around in his mind’s eye. Rickion would be of age with Arya, last he’d seen her...an impossible thing to imagine when thinking of the baby in Lady Catelyn’s arms always begging for treats.

As for Arya she’d been a little girl the last time anyone had seen her. A ten year old lost in a country ravaged by war, if she even managed to escape the capital. He wanted to believe her safe and well, but it was so hard to picture. *What would she even look like now? She’d be almost six and ten, a women grown.* She’d be older than he was when he left for The Wall, and he wondered if he'd be able to recognize her. It hurt to think of her growing up alone, without any family. Jon hoped she would hear of their victory, of him and Sansa now holding Winterfell and make her way North. But it only made him imagine her hearing about everything else. The deaths of their father, Rickion and Bran, of Robb's and her mother’s murder. It cut even deeper to think of her dead in some unmarked grave, or *worse.* Jon Snow closed his eyes and breathed deep, he would not let himself forget her no matter how much it hurt. *I’ll never forget.*

**Arya**

Arya sipped her wine, appeased by just listening to more terrible japes and reports of the state the Seven Kingdoms rested in, for yet another night. Sat indifferent as they spoke of the fall of House Tyrell at the hands of Cersei, who Javer now refereed to as the Mad Queen, though it was clear Young Griff didn't like the title. Drank her wine casually as they spoke of Eddard Stark's youngest daughter's abusive marriage to the Bolton bastard, a poor girl who cried herself to sleep near every night. Sitting as calm as ever when they spoke of the Lord Commander of the Nights Watch allowing thousands of Wildlings south of the Wall, The Bastard of Winterfell who'd been killed by his own men...

Their words drowned out and she couldn't hear anything, could hardly even see. Just the crackling of sparks shooting from the cage and striving for the stars, yet burning out before getting anywhere. *Dead. Jon’s dead.* Arya slowly placed her cup at her feet. *Killed by his own men. Javer's stupid laugh sliced through the air, the fire scorching against her skin, and her eyes burned.* She stood slowly and walked away, almost stumbling. The salt waves pushing aggressively against the hull of the ship, making her legs weak. Someone called out a name that wasn't hers, and she didn't respond.

*Dead. The words repeated in her mind. Killed by his own men.* Arya stopped and reached a hand for the railing, not trusting herself to take another step. “*The King in the North!*” She closed her eyes and she could see Robb's body...Grey Wind's head. A memory she'd tried so hard to forget clawing it's way to the surface of her mind, like a demon who'd only pretended to be sleeping. “*The King in the North! The King in the North!*”

“Malia?” a soft voice echoed off the waves and Lemore was standing before her, violet eyes reflecting the moon light. “Are you alright?”

Arya blinked hot tears away, and nodded without being able to find any words. *Killed by his own men.* She swallowed, throat tightening, her gut burning. She'd thought she'd known what anger was when the Kingslayer had attacked her father in the streets of Kings Landing, and she didn't speak for days. When Joffery had called for her fathers head, when she’d heard what Theon Greyjoy had done to her little brothers, when the Freys and the Boltons turned their cloaks...but now...
“What happened?” Lemore’s voice was a soft kiss. A cold hand rested on top hers, Arya's knuckles snow white from how tightly she was gripping the railing. *Killed by his own men.*

Lemore went to embrace her but she flinched back, “Don’t.” The flames in her chest were thawing and a soul crushing weight was starting to replace it. *Jon’s dead.* If she let Lemore hold her she’d fall apart, and might never get up again. “E-excuse me.”

She wasn’t sure how she got to the room she’d been given, but she closed the door in a heartbeat and sank to the floor. Sitting in the utter darkness, trying to catch her breath with a nine year old girls voice singing in her head,

“I wish you were coming with us.” Arya felt tears stinging her eyes.

“Different roads sometimes lead to the same castle. Who knows?”

Arya couldn’t remember how to breath, every attempt being drowned by a sob. *Who knows?* Her tiny fists shaking as she brought them to her forehead. *Who knows?* She wished she'd never left Westeros, that she'd just walked to the Wall herself, damned the odds of getting there. *Killed by his own men.* Her fist slammed the wooden floor.

“I hate needlework!” she shouted “It’s not fair!” Jon had only smiled sadly before messing her hair.

*Nothing is fair*” he said before walking away, *the shadow of a ghost on his heels.*

*Killed by his own men.* Her fist beat the ground and a sob died in her throat, her mind a turmoil of dread and such fury her whole body was shivering violently. It was all she could do not to scream, she couldn’t see, but maybe that was just the tears in her eyes.

She couldn’t stop the sobs then, thinking of Jon. She remembered his sweet smiles when he was with her, and she remembered him encouraging her to be whoever she wanted. He’d laugh at her dirty hair and torn clothes, where her mother would glare and Sansa would glance disgusted. He’d help her hide from Septa Mordane in the Godwood or the Crypts and they’d giggle when she’d walk right by them, oblivious to their presence behind some tree or stone wall. And whenever she was crying over something stupid, like Jeyne Pool and Sansa calling her some terrible new name, there was Jon comforting her and telling her how pretty she was. Even when she didn’t believe him he’d never stop reminding her.

“The longer you hide, the sterner the penance.”

Her fist punched the boards once more and she knew in that moment, she was still going to the Wall. Arya Stark was done hiding. The Kindly Man could do what he wanted to her, send whoever he liked to kill her, but not before every last person who wronged her family died screaming. A strange stillness seeped into her bones and her bloody hand reached to the cover of her bed, pulling out a slender blade with a grey pommel, soft and supple as sin. Arya held the sword in both hands, inhaling a deep shuddering breath. The weight in her chest never lifted and the fire underneath still seethed, but her hands had stopped shaking and her vision cleared.

*The Mountain, Cersei Lannister, Ilyen Payne, the Freys, the Boltons. Black brothers. Black brothers. Black brothers.* I’ll kill every last one them, make them bleed and burn.

“First lesson. Stick em’ with the pointy end.” The memory of Jon's voice brushed her ear like he were beside her.

“I know which end to use.” she whispered back, closing her eyes. *I remember.*
Chapter End Notes

Losing you - Vanic x Aquilo
but alsooo
The Home We Made pt2 - Crywolf 。

Chapter Notes

Thanks SO much for all the comments guys, truly (˚▽˚) Now regarding the shipping, I appreciate the votes, I really do, but it's not a poll. I've had the outcome planned since I started and intend to commit to it. BUT in regards to the "losing" team, I've started another fic just for them ♥‿♥
Thanks so much for reading guys<3

Most sane people hated the cold, probably because sane people enjoyed having feeling in their fingers and in their cheeks. But Arya Stark couldn't deny there was a comforting numbness to the icy winds that brushed through her hair and clothes, chilling her to the bone. A shivering breath slipped passed her numb lips, sending ghostly clouds into the trees. Her grey eyes following them until there was nothing left, while the bright half-moon caught her attention. The glowing crescent was the only thing giving her light to see by, without it she'd be hopelessly stumbling in the darkness.

Where am I?

She frowned, turning in a circle while her pitch black clock caught between her legs. She was alone. Not a sound came from the trees, no animals or rustling of branches, not even the wind whispering it's presence. Bringing her arms around herself in an attempt to warm her, she started moving forward. Her black boots were a pathetic form of protection from the heaps of snow, but her feet were burning as if she'd been walking all her life. Tall pines reached for the sky smothering the stars and the moon under their bristles, making it harder to see after every step she took.

Malia?

She turned at the voice, but there was no one there. Arya couldn't feel her ears anymore, her hair was tied up in a widows knot. She brought the black furred hood over her head.

Maliaaaa?

Arya opened her eyes. Lifting her head off the floor she blinked the grogginess away, bringing her hands up to rub at her stinging eyes.

“Malia?” The call came once more, a mans voice. Old Griff.

“What?” she called back, sitting up with her back leaned against the door. Her voice was hoarse and much more pitiful than she'd have liked.

“It's past mid-day, are you going to sleep until the bloody sun sets?” he growled through the door.

She sighed and stood up, placing Needle on her bed before cracking open her door. Old disapproving blue eyes welcomed her. “You look like shit” he commented.

“Better than you.” she opened the door fully, “what's it to you how much I sleep?”

“What's it to me? This is my bloody ship, and I didn't ask for no freeloaders. Lemore needs help in the kitchen. Duck's been training the recruits all morning and those boys need to eat.”
Arya wanted nothing more than to close her eyes and fall into her bed and stay there until they reached Westeros, yet there would be nothing she could say to convince anyone to let her. She nodded, her soul drained of the fire she'd had only a night before. “Aye” she agreed.

Old Griff's customary frown only deepened. “What's wrong with you?” clearly he'd been expecting much less compliance.

“Do you want me to help her or not?”

“Go then” he went to leave but then stopped, looking down at her shirt. “Is that blood?” Her eyes followed his, there was indeed blood smeared on her blue shirt. She plucked the fabric between her fingers, her bloody knuckles reminding her of what she'd done. “Seven hells, what did you do?”

“Nothing.” she flexed her hand and her fingers ached with defiance, beating the floor had been a stupid thing to do.

“Did you break something? Because you'll have to find a way to pay-”

“I didn't break anything.” she snapped.

Old Griff glared at her a long moment before speaking, “Come with me.” He started walking off before she even had a chance to tell him no. Closing the door behind her she followed him through the ship's endless passageways, always a step behind. It wasn't until they were practically there did she notice he was taking her to the same place Lemore and Young Griff had to stitch her hand. She leaned against the wall when they stepped in and he went and soaked a cloth in a pail.

Arya just shook her head, “Not even going to take your gloves off first?”

He wrung out the towel and tossed it to her, “You're welcome”

She eyed him suspiciously but gently pushed the coldness of the fabric on her hand. Once she'd cleared the dried blood away, there were a few little scabs resting on each knuckle; red and angry. The largest bleeding once more from only the softest pressure, and her eyes followed a little drop of blood slipping toward her thumb.

“Here, give me your hand.” Old Griff had pulled out a roll of soft white bandages while she'd been lost in her self damage. Brushing the drop away, she extended her hand. Griff wrapped it around her hands a few times before bidding it. When he was done, a sardonic smile lit her face as she lifted both her wrapped hands up.

“I'm a bloody mess.” she teased. How she managed to find humor when her chest weighed more than the Narrow sea itself, she'd never know.

“Aye, you wanna tell me why you're hurting yourself?” It almost sounded like he cared.

“Sure, if you tell me why you hate me so much.” it seemed she'd caught him there, judging by the startled look in his eyes.

“I don't hate you” he argued.

“Oh come on, you've had it out for me the moment you saw me.” Arya had never intended to bring it up, the troubled glaces he'd always send her way. Yet no matter his answer, she didn't feel she had much to lose anymore. “You might hate half the men on this ship, but I see it in your eyes. I make you uncomfortable.”
“You ah...you just look like someone I knew once.” he shuffled the roll of bandages back in the wooden box, avoiding her eyes.

“Oh” she thought on it a moment, “Not an old flame I hope?”

He gave her the shortest of glares “No.”

“Good” she eyed him trying to put the puzzle pieces together. “What did she do to you then?”

He shook his head, his eyes darkening. “It doesn't matter. The past is the past.”

“Well whatever it was, I'm not her.” he finally met her stare. “I've no interest in complicating things for you, or anyone else here. I just want to get back to Westeros and finish what I started.”

“Finish what you started?”

“Long story.”

He snorted, “I'm sure it is.” he considered her a moment, “You don't want to complicate things? Fine. Then stay away from my son.”

_My son._ The words bounced back and forth in her mind. Such a simple phrase yet it didn't feel right, somehow wrong, giving her the urge to frown. _That was a lie._ “Your son?” she repeated confused.

“Young Griff, I trust you recall meeting him?” His voice was laced with impatience. _He's not your son..._

“and what do you think I'm going to do to him?” she challenged.

“I'm sure Lady Lemore needs your help by now.” he stated coldly.

_Arya blatantly studied the black gloves she'd never seen him without, her mind connecting to a possible and dreadful reason._ “Keep your secrets then.” One gloved hand nervously touched the other under her stare, and the weight in her chest grew a little heavier with the confirmation. She sighed before leaving, “I just hope you've made your peace with them.”

Lemore was in the kitchen as Old Griff said she'd be, fiercely chopping red onions. A young boy was slicing bread while Alis and a few other girls were carrying out skinned fish to the cook-fire outside, Arya held the door for them. Such simple and mundane tasks, yet the mere thought of participating was almost exhausting.

“Afternoon Malia” Lady Lemore only glanced up a second from her work, but that was all it took for Arya to read the curiosity behind the woman's haunting eyes.

“Griff mentioned you could use some help.”

The Septa nodded, “Took you long enough” her words were stern but not bitter. Arya went to the island in the kitchen to stand beside her, without a word Lemore handed her a white onion and a knife and she went to work. Arya appreciated how Lemore didn't press on what had happened the night before, or asked about the new bandage on her hand; yet the silence was killer too. Her thoughts kept returning to Jon Snow. Last night she'd been broken with the idea of his death, but today she wasn't so sure anymore, it wasn't like _she_ actually married Ramsey Bolton after all. _Jon could still be...no._ It was dangerous to even consider it, believing that would only break her even
more when she found the truth. *Jon's dead, same as our father, same as our brothers, same as moth-

“Malia. They're onions, not rice.”

“Right” she muttered, pushing the remains of her onion away with the edge of her blade, she reached
for another one.

“Is there something bothering you? Anything you'd like to speak of?” she asked a little apprehensive.

Arya continued chopping her new onion into neat proper slices a moment before answering
“Speaking of things won't change them, or make them any better.”

“That depends on what it is” she argued softly.

“It won't.”

“Well if you change your mind I'm up at dawn every morn. I usually pray to the seven, but you
could speak to whatever gods you hold to, or just sit.”

“Thank you” she said, the weight in her chest growing at the sincerity in Lemore's voice. Arya had
spent nearly five years pretending to be someone else, acting like she enjoyed things she hated,
laughing at japes that weren't amusing, saying the words people wanted to hear and never her own
thoughts, and when she wasn't doing that; she was trying to wipe away everything that made her
who she was, and Arya was bloody sick of it. She sighed “My father would sit by the weirwood for
hours, out in the freezing cold praying. My Mother would pray too. It never saved them.”

Lemore seemed surprised Arya had even spoken, almost as surprised as she was. Yet the weight in
her chest ebbed just the slightest at the confession, it'd been so long since she'd spoken of her parents.
She could almost see them; her father sitting before the scary weirwood face whilst cleaning his great
sword Ice, and her mother kneeling and lighting candles in the Sept of Winterfell.

“Terrible things happen...but the gods, they work in mysterious ways.”

“Mysterious ways?” Arya paused over her onion, “There was nothing mysterious about the awful
things that happened to them.”

The older women stopped her chopping as well “No, maybe not...but no matter the outcome, the
gods have a plan for all of us.”

“Then what's the use of praying to them?”

Lemore only smiled sadly, “Everyone has their own reasons for speaking to the gods.” Arya shook
her head, picking up a red onion this time to focus her attention on. The bread boy left and the Septa
reached for a potato and they worked in silence once more. And once again Arya's questions about
what happened to Jon Snow were on the brink of driving her insane. “You're angry.” Lemore said
suddenly, “I get it, and you have every right to be, the world is full of injustice. But if you let your
hate consume you, it'll be your undoing. I've lived long enough to learn that much at least.”

There was truth to her words, Arya knew...*but what if hate is all you have left?* Her hatred for the
people who wronged her might be the only thing that had kept her alive all these years. The only
thing that had kept her motivated, keeping her too angry to be afraid. “Do you expect me to just
forget?”

“Not to forget. I don't know what happened to them, or you, but I can't imagine they'd wish for you
to live in the past forever. But you could move on, look forward instead of back.”
For a single moment Arya tried to imagine it. What kind of person she'd have been if that windowless temple wasn't the first place she pursued after years of anguish. Who she'd be if she never let the Kindly Man sink his claws in and tear apart what was left of the damaged little girl she'd been; so lost and alone and starving for much more than food. What might have happened if she decided to live a normal life and left when he first told her to, if she'd just been Cat and let Dareon keep singing his terrible songs. *It's too late for all of that.*

“No. It wouldn't be terrible.” she agreed solemnly. *Just too far too late.* Arya pushed her dark thoughts away, “you should try your speech on Griff next. He could use some coming to peace with his past.”

“Griff? What makes you say that?” Lemore seemed interested, yet something told her that the women was no stranger to how resentful and miserable Griff was.

“He dislikes me for resembling some girl he knew” she confessed. Lemore’s knife came down slightly harder at her words and Arya looked up “but you already knew that, didn't you?”

The older women cleared her throat, “Yes, I knew” she admitted.

Arya studied the lines in the women's face “Did you know her too?”

“Umm, not really, no.” Arya waited, letting the quiet ask her questions for her. It always intrigued her how quickly people would jump to fill the uncomfortable void of silence. “I knew her brother, and they were always close...he’d have done anything for her.”

“and why did Griff hate her?” Arya pressed.

Lemore took a drink of water, as if buying herself some time to think. “Griff...blamed her for a lot of things...things that weren't completely her fault.” she sighed. “I think it's easier for him to place all the fault on her, gods forbid anyone else was responsible.” Arya pondered her words, Lemore had left about a thousand and one details out of her explanation, but she hadn't lied. “You're right though, it would do him some good to let go as well.”

“Easier said than done I suppose.” Arya wondered for a second how well she could get along with someone who resembled Joffery. Just the thought of seeing his golden curls again made her tense, if there was someone *here* who looked like him; Arya would probably wish to punch him in the face.

“Aye, most things are.”

“So what exactly do we have in common?” Arya raised an eyebrow.

“Well she was a northerner too, to start...but I guess you just share similar features.” Lemore glanced up to look Arya in the eye. “Those grey eyes though...” the women shook her head, “Not the kind I'd ever forget.”

Arya turned her stare away, shutting her eyes a moment, remembering. Her father had been where she'd gotten them, but it was Jon Snow’s eyes that burned in the back of her mind with cold fire. His serious stony expression he'd always wear dancing before her, the one where those dark eyes would see most everything other people missed. “My brother had the same eyes” Arya muttered, “we...we were close too.” Speaking of Jon didn't ebb any weight in her soul, it only amplified the gut wrenching despair.

There was a pause before Lemore continued, “Me and my brother were too.” The women glanced down, a million memories passing through her mind and her purple eyes looking more haunted than ever before. “When they brought me the news of his death...” she shook her head slightly, “I nearly went mad with the grief.” Arya saw Lemore differently than she had before, a pang of pity stabbing
her in the stomach. *Everyone's lost someone.* “What I wouldn't do for one more day with him.” Arya had repressed memories of her family as best she could over the years, and now all this reminiscing was almost too much. And the thought of spending just one last day with her brother, had her angrily wiping a tear from her cheek.

“Gods” Arya put her knife down and groaned softly while brushing her hair back with both hands, as if it'd wipe away the pain. “Sorry, I just...”

“Didn't want to talk about it?” a small smile pulled at her lips, her violet eyes reflecting all the sadness crushing her own chest. “Might be you were right, all this talking and I feel worse than before.” They both laughed at little. “You know what?”

Lemore moved away from her chopped vegetables and knelled before a cabinet, pulling out two small glasses and a bottle half full of dark liquid. “What?” she asked, already knowing.

“It's times like these you need something stronger than any ale or wine.” she began poring the drinks and Arya was smiling despite herself. “Have you ever had Whiskey, Malia?”

She grinned, holding the tiny glass up to her eye. “Only the once, I was two and ten, and not very fond of the taste.”

Lemore laughed, “If'll be better this time, I promise.” she raised her cup too. “Cheers.” Their glasses clinked together and Arya downed the liquor in a flash. The alcohol burned the back of her throat like dragon fire as she slammed the cup down, the same moment the door swung open.

Young Griff stood at the entrance, his mouth parted in what might be disbelief. “You cracked open the good stuff without me?” he accused, a grin taking up half his cleanly shaven face. They all laughed and Arya licked the taste from her lips.

“It's not all about you.” Arya teased and he only smiled more.

“Tell me you have another glass hidden away?” he begged. Lemore sighed and bent to retrieve one more.

“I only have the one bottle you know.” The women complained as she poured the three tiny glasses.

“We're worth it aren't we?” Young Griff's smile had a way of being contagious.

“She might be, but you'll have to keep reminding me.” Lemore joked, lifting her cup.

Arya and Young Griff lifted their glasses as well, “Cheers” he whispered softly as their glasses kissed, his eyes never leaving hers as he downed his drink. She coughed a little after the second drink, and Young Griff's nose scrunched up and he shook his head fast.

“Woo. Alright, another.” he said and they all laughed.

“Are you kidding? Do you know how expensive this drink is?” Lemore argued.

Young Griff only shrugged, “You'll need it once you see Tobias's new pet crow.”

“Crow?” Arya repeated.

“Aye, flew over from a passing ship after you left last night, and it talks.” he laughed as if he still couldn't believe it. “He named it Sage.”

Arya scoffed, “As if saying a few words warrants such a name.”
“You don't know what it knows.” Young Griff told her with glowing eyes. “Now how about that drink?” Lemore's only reply was a glare.

“I wouldn't mind one more.” Arya added and Young Griff beamed.

“Please?” He brought his hands up as if in prayer.

“Ugh, fine. But you two should really know this stuff isn't cheep.” They exchanged a smirk of triumph as Lemore reached for the bottle.

“If only I had a Septa like you growing up.” Arya teased as Lemore poured them all one more shot. *Might be sewing lessons wouldn't have been quite so terrible.*

Lemore snorted, “You wouldn't have learned anything with lessons like this.” she said as she topped the last cup.

Young Griff lifted his glass, his stupidly intense eyes drawing her in. “What are we drinking to?” he asked her.

Lady Lemore answered, “To moving forward.”

She forced a smile, tapping her glass against theirs in turn. Arya would move forward sometime. Once her list was finished, maybe then she could discover a way to survive on something other than hatred. Just not today.

Chapter End Notes

Is whiskey a thing in Westeros? I'm not sure but it should be.

Kill Our Way To Heaven - MICHL
You Found Me

Chapter Notes

Apologies If this took a bit, ima try to get a chapter up every week.
Once again thanks so much for the comments guys, really (^_^) and if I haven't' mentioned this, constructive criticism is always welcomed. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jon

Winterfell was a growing storm of people, lords and ladies of the North gathering like lost ravens searching for home. Each night it seemed the Great hall was growing smaller and smaller against all the bodies milling about. A small part of Jon enjoyed seeing the castle walls filled with the people of the North, yet it was also a reminder of everything that was at stake; of all the lives he was responsible for now. It had been insane enough when he first became Commander of the Nights Watch, like he'd been doused in ice water and left beyond the wall to freeze. Now he felt he was drowning in the water.

The Old Bear's Raven was perched on his shoulder, “corn” it crowed in his ear.

“Not now” he growled back.

“Corn!” he screeched, annoyed Jon waved it away with his burned hand. The Raven took to the air before landing on a rafter above his head.

“I still don't understand why you keep that thing around.” Sansa muttered beside him. They sat in the Great hall filled with people, up on the high table as befit the King in the North and the Lady of Winterfell.

“I already told you, he belonged to Commander Mormont.”

Sansa just shook her head, picking at the meat on her plate with a fork. “It creeps me out.”

Jon tried not to laugh, “all the things we've been through this past year, and a raven scares you?” he teased.

“I never said it scared me, but it is creepy.” Her Tully blue eyes wondered to the bird above their heads. “I feel like it's watching us.” she added.

Jon followed her eyes, and the Raven's beady dark ones stared right back. “I think he is.” he agreed. “But I'd wager he's the least of troubles at the moment.”

“Maybe, but I could think of a few ways to solve this one.” she said darkly as she watched the bird watch them.

“I'm not getting rid of him.” Jon stated.

“Fine, keep your creepy bird...but will you reconsider what I asked earlier?”
Jon's stomach turned, “Now that's creepy” he muttered back, looking down at his barely touched food instead of her iron gaze.

“Jon” she sighed.

“Why don't you just take it instead?” he shot back.

“Because the masters chambers are meant for the Lord of Winterfell, and you're the King.” she argued.

“It's just a bed, why's it matter if I sleep there?”

“It's not just a bed, it's a symbol. And if it's just a bed to you, why's it matter if you sleep in it?” she reasoned, using his own damn words against him.

Jon gave her a steady glare but Sansa's eyes met his with just as much fire, “Were you always this stubborn?” he asked.

“No, but I think I've become more persuasive. It's you who's still stubborn.” The slightest of smiles pulled at her lips.

“Hmmph.” He replied, turning back to his food. His eyes darted back up as a flash of darkness swooshed down past Sansa; Mormont's Raven had come down and stolen a piece of meat right off her fork.

“Seriously?” she sighed exasperated, and Jon noticed a few people from the hall glancing up at them with mirth in their eyes. “If you're going to keep it, feed him properly.” she accused, pointing her fork at him.

Jon tried not to smile, “Maybe he likes you?” Sansa gave him a true glare then, but he enjoyed it. It was not often things amused him anymore.

“Excuse me, Your Grace, My Lady.” They both looked up as a short stout man bowed before them.

“Yes, Ser Desmond?” Sansa asked.

“I should know his name. But it was getting harder and harder to keep track of all the people coming into the castle, all the Lords and Ladies were one thing, but every Knight as well?

“There are some people at the East Gate, A women, a boy, and a Man who claims to be Ser Davos Seaworth.”

Jon's attention sparked up, “Stannis's Hand? I thought he was executed.”

“He claimes he wasn't, and he umm...”

“What?” Sansa asked impatiently.

“He says the boy is the true Lord of Winterfell...”

Jon and Sansa exchanged a look, and both instantly stood up from the table, leaving the Knight without a word. They rushed through the castle side by side, a brisk pace yet not running.

“Do you really think...” Sansa doesn't finish her question, breathless.

“I don't know.” He breathed back, his heart hammering so hard against his rib cage he thought it might break free. It was snowing when they left the warmth of the Hall, coldness pressing against them on
all sides. When they turned a corner he could see the sentries standing in a group; circling three individuals. His gaze skimmed over the older man and women with shaggy brown hair, his eyes darting to a boy who stood impatient beside them, his dark auburn hair a wild mess falling to his shoulders.

When they got close enough Jon stopped in his shock, the boy reminded him so much of Robb it almost broke his heart, yet even if he looked nothing like him; the black direwolf spoke volumes about who he was. Rickon. Sansa rushed forward, only to have the great direwolf bare his fangs. Jon followed, his heart jumping to his throat. If Shaggydog decided to attack now, there wouldn't be much anyone could do before it was too late.

“Rickon” Sansa's whisper was as a mix of awe and bittersweet pain. He was dressed in a mix of grey and black furs, his distrustful blue eyes were sprinkled with deeper shades and his messy curls were a darker red than Sansa's or his mother's ever was.

“Who are you?” he accused, in the Old Tongue. Sansa's pretty face wrinkled with a frown, and she looked to Jon in question.

He could hardly find words, “He doesn't remember us.” he muttered, and how stupid was he to think otherwise? Rickon had been hardly four years old the last time he'd seen him. Just a babe crying for treats and stumbling around on weak stubby legs. He was much taller now, only standing a couple heads shorter than Jon himself, with a small sword tied to his belt.

“My Lord” the slight man with brown eyes addressed him, his face weathered from the elements. “My -

“Your Grace, you mean.” Corrected one of the Guards.

Jon waved him off, “Ser Davos?” he guessed, hardly able to tare his eyes away from the ghostly imagine of Robb. “They said you were executed at White Harbor?”

“A rouse by Lord Manderly” he paused, unsure, “Your Grace.” He eyed the Guard, “Stannis...is he...here?” The fear in his voice indicated the man already suspected the answer.

“No” Jon cleared his throat, preparing to give the loyal lord the terrible news. “Stannis died in battle.” The older man looked to his feet, such defeat in his eyes it tugged at the heart in Jon's chest that he wasn't sure still existed.

He glanced up quickly, “The Princess Shireen?” His eyes bored into Jon's like a desperate plea.

Jon shook his head, the memory stabbing him in the gut, and look on this poor mans face digging the blade deeper. “The Queen...she insisted she wouldn't be left at the Wall again...and The Boltons, they organized an attack on the camp they were stationed in.”

Ser Davos turned away, pacing a moment as if he could walk away from his own grief.

Sansa was still staring at Rickon, a few paces away in case Shaggydog tried anything. “and you are?” she asked, glancing to the women dressed in a familiar fashion as his youngest brother.

“My names Osha, and you are Rickon's sister?”

Sansa nodded, hardly able to keep eye contact as she studied Rickon. “Where have you been?” she asked, possibly half to herself, Jon couldn't tell. Rickon didn't answer, his dark blue-grey eyes rimmed with anger and suspicion.
Rickon took a step closer to Osha and the women put a hand around the boy's shoulder in response. Behind them Shaggydog paced back and forth. "Skagos" she answered and Jon's eyes snapped back up.

"Skagos?" he repeated with disbelief.

"The only place I was sure those Lords wouldn't look, though I was wrong about that." she said giving Davos a sideways glance.

"And Bran?" Sansa wondered nervously, "Did you see Bran?"

"Aye." The women looked a little depressed by the name, but when she opened her mouth to explain Rickon jumped in.

"He left!" he growled in the Common Tongue, then continued in the Old "Like all of you did."

behind him Shaggydog let out a small mumble of discontent.

Jon frowned at the accusation. I had to leave, there was no place for me here. Not without father or Arya. "Rickon" he spoke the Old Tongue as best he could, "We did not intend to leave you."

"You still left!" he yelled back, and Jon tensed as Shaggydog turned to face him, green eyes full of malice.

"Hush little one" Osha whispered softly, running a soothing hand behind the boys back. "Bran did leave." she said looking back up "He went beyond The Wall, asked me to take care of the Little Lord here." she looked down at Rickon again and her eyes softened.

"But why?" Sansa asked.

"It's where his dreams took him." she answered cryptically.

"A friend of mine mentioned he was going to find...A three-eyed Raven?" Jon confessed, a little dubious. The things Sam had told him about Cold-hands and the Gate under the Nightfort sill didn't make much sense to him, and the idea of his younger brother in search of a bird to save the world made even less.

"Aye, the Last Greenseer." Osha confirmed.

"Greenseer?" Sansa repeated, "Like from Old Nan's stories?" she looked to Jon and he shrugged slightly. He knew no more than she did about this. "You never should have let him go." Sansa's words were more solemn than accusing.

"I told him not to, of the things that hunt beyond the Wall. He would not listen, not with that frog boy whispering in his ear." Osha complained.

"The Reeds?" Jon guessed, Sam had mentioned them as well.

The women nodded, "The boy insisted it was his destiny, and the sister was willing to follow her brother to the grave if need be."

"So that's it then?" Davos seemed to miss their entire conversation as he strolled back over, "Stannis's campaign is finished, and there are no true Baratheon heirs left?"

"I'm sorry Ser." Sansa glanced over at him, her blue eyes softer than a summers sky. "But we are forever indebted to you for bringing our brother home. Anything you need, anything at all, you need
only ask.”

Ghost arrived shortly after, becoming the only way they could calm Shaggydog down enough to bring him inside the castle. Even Rickon seemed to still slightly at the sight of him, his dark eyes going wide as he saw another direwolf for the first time in what must have been years. Each now calm enough for Sansa to bring Rickon to maester Wolkan's chambers to have a look at their lost brother, to ensure he was alright.

Jon ended up escorting Ser Davos on a short tour of the Castle.

“I know how much faith Stannis had in you, and what my sister says is true. If you need anything, all you have to do is ask us. How you managed to find Rickon…”

“It was Lord Manderly's idea” the older man confessed as his eyes looked off into the distance, seeing shadows Jon couldn't.

“Really? He never mentioned it.” How am I to trust anyone? If he was honest with himself, Jon didn't think he could ever put his faith in another person again, not after the mutiny at Castle Black. He wanted to, but even with Sansa who he knew he loved...he just couldn't fully understand what was actually going on in her head, and in turn could not fully trust her.

“He vowed he would take Stannis as his King if I brought him his liege lord.” The man explained.

“So you sailed to Sakgos?” Jon shook his head in bewilderment, “you truly are a loyal man Ser Davos.”

“Thank you, Your Grace.” The man turned to him, “and the Boltons? What became of them?”

“Roose Bolton was betrayed by his own son, Ramsey.” Jon started, his chest tightening at the very thought of the bastard. Jon had seen the things he'd done to Jeyne and Theon, met the hounds he used to hunt women to their deaths, and spoken to the people he'd left frightened of his very name. Jon had been devastated when he learned Arya had not been here, but when he liberated Winterfell and saw how things truly were; he'd been relieved his little sister hadn't spent a day in the bastards presence. “After we took the castle, I executed Ramsey Bolton myself.”

Davos nodded, “and his wife...your sister, is she alright?” his tone was apprehensive. Jon glanced away, the air suddenly heavier. He must have read something on his face, for he continued. “I'm sorry…”

“She's not-” dead? It's what he wanted to say, but what would he know of it? According to the rest of the world she was, no matter what fantasies he entertained himself with. “Ramsey never had her.” he finished.

“I see.” There was a moment of silence as both men contemplated the people they'd lost.

“Look, Ser Davos.” Jon stopped in the hallway they were in. “I'm not your King. I know I'm not Stannis, and you own me no allegiance. If anything I owe you for what you've done for my brother...but winter is almost upon us, and the great war comes with it. We need strong leaders, experienced battle commanders, and a lot more men if we have a chance of surviving this winter.” he paused, considering his next words. “I don't know if Stannis mentioned the threat beyond the Wall…”

“He did, Your Grace, his red priestess was fond of reminding us.” Davos said bitterly.
“Lady Melisandre?”

“Is she alive?” Davos asked.

Jon nodded, “Aye, and she's here as well.”

A darkness filled the older man's gaze, “You should not trust her, Your Grace. The things she's done for her god...”

“She's not burning anyone here, not under my rule. Yet it seems you're not the only one of Stannis's confidants I'm indebted to at the moment.” Daggers flashed before him and he had to close his eyes a moment to steady himself; to push away the memories of pain and the dark void that still haunted him all these moons later.

“The Lannisters aren't the only ones who pay their debts.” Davos muttered and Jon scoffed at the terrible comparison. “If there are any Gods Jon Snow, whether it be Melisandre's R'hllor or the Old ones you Northerners hold to...they're not mine. I answer to the living, and if it's true the dead have risen...then it seems I'll be standing with you; the only living man left fighting the real war.”

Jon smiled at the words, it was a rare thing for anyone to get a smile from him these days. “Thank you Ser Davos, I'm honored.”

“If Stannis respected you enough to fight alongside you, then it is I who is honored.”

After having a maid find Ser Davos some respectable quarters, Jon waited by the doors of maester Wolkans chambers. Simply leaning on a wall outside, not wishing to overwhelm Rickon. Osha came out of the room, closing the door behind her and glancing up as she saw him. “You don't look much like your brothers...or your sister.” she commented.

Jon studied the women a moment, she was from beyond the Wall he'd learned. “Rickon takes after his mother mostly, most of my siblings did.” Just not Arya. Jon cleared his throat, “We share a father but not a mother.” he explained.

The women smiled in understanding, “Hence why they call you King Snow.”

He nodded, accepting long ago he'd never escape the shadow of his name. “Thank you again Osha. He might be my half-brother, but he's the only one I have.”

“Might be I should be thanking you.” Jon gave her a confused look. “For what you've done for my people, bringing them South of the Wall and such. You're becoming somewhat of a legend you know, the King Crow who made peace with Wildlings before flying down from his Wall and conquering the entire North.”

“I didn't conquer the North.” he argued.

“You lead the battle didn't you? Taking the castle from the men who held it before?”

“Yes but-”

“Then you conquered it.” She finished.

Jon sighed, “I had a lot of help, it wasn't just me. And I inherited this castle.” He glanced around the hall they stood in, “But it belongs to Rickon now. It's his blood right, not mine.”
Osha frowned, “Are you just going to hand the leadership over to a nine year old boy who knows nothing of politics?”

“My brother Robb, Rickon's true brother, only made me his heir because he thought everyone else dead or married.”

She shook her head, “so you are.”

“It's his right, not mine.”

“He hardly speaks the same language as you people!”

“A shame he didn't have someone to teach him that.” Jon added with a pointed stare.

“I was trying to keep his identity a secret you know, not the easiest thing to do when he has a bloody direwolf following him around.” Jon sighed, pinching the top of his nose and closing his eyes. “You bloody southerners...If we have a chance of surviving this winter, it won't be a wild boy like your little brother leading us.”

“It's his blood right...” Jon said weakly.

“You figure out the politics, I don't give a damn for them. But that boy needs his family, and a proper role model, gods know there were none on that bloody island. The last thing he should have his power.”

“What do you mean, the last thing he should have?” he asked warily.

“Your brother, or half-brother as you call him...he's not just mad at you for leaving him. He's angry with the world.”

Chapter End Notes

You Found Me - The Fray \(^\wedge\) (I mean the song doesn't work as well, but I liked the title.)

This might be a weird request, but I was wondering where you guys are from, let me know if you're comfortable sharing \(^\wedge\) and thanks for reading kindstranger
The Hunger In Your Haunt

Chapter Notes

Thanks for letting me know where you guys are from, I love living in an age where I can connect with people from all over the world. And I'm in Canada btw, near Toronto. 
☞(˚▽˚)☞
Now I hold to my promise that both ships shall have their moments, but I hope you guys like this because it was fun to write. ♥‿♥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aegon

“Alis, could you fill my cup for me?” Malia asked sweetly.

Alis cheered, her blond hair waving in the wind. “Yes, Finally! I thought you'd never ask.” she teased and Aegon gave the girl beside him a strange look.

“What?” suspicious grey eyes met his.

He shrugged, “You never have more than one” he noted.

She mimicked his shrug as Alis passed her a newly filled cup of wine. “And you never have less than one” she threw back. He studied her as she sipped her cup, trying to figure out what had changed for her. Malia hadn't been the same the past few days, not since she'd left them the other night without a word. Not even getting out of bed the next day until past noon. But if it wasn't for that and her sudden affection for wine, no one noticed a thing. Only Aegon did. He could see it in her dark eyes that had somehow gotten darker, in her smiles that seemed to weigh more now. And no one questioned the new bandage on her hand, yet it bothered him. But Malia hadn't brought it up, so in turn he hadn't asked her about it.

Malia hadn't joined them for their nightly fires the past couples days as she always did either, retiring to her chambers early instead. The fire was somehow colder without her there, the spot where she'd usually sit beside him filled by some hairy sell-sword. Tonight he asked her to help him persevere through some of Javer's terrible stories, and to his joy she'd accepted. Yet it seemed she now needed more than one drink to get through an evening with them.

“Care to share the reason for your sudden thirst for wine?” he asked as lightly as he could.

She tilted her head, dark eyes seeing through him. “Just curious what all the fuss is about.”

“What do you mean?” he grinned, “Have you never been drunk before?”

Malia smiled and shook her head, but it was Alis who spoke, catching their conversation from her side of the fire. “You've never been drunk before?” her honey eyes glowed like she'd just found a golden necklaces filled with diamonds.

Malia sighed, “No” she admitted hesitatingly.

Alis laughed and shared a dangerous and calculating look with Duck who grinned in return.
“Tonight is going to be fun.” she promised glancing back. “Now hurry and finish that cup Snow, you still have some catching up to do.” Malia shook her head with a smirk but lifted her cup in a mock toast anyway, taking a rather large drink from it.

“Snow.” Tobias's crow repeated, then "Home!", flapping around their heads before disappearing back on another venture out to sea.

It became clear rather quickly that tonight was not going to be one of their early nights. Jon had already berated him about his evening habits, forever reminding him he'd need to get his act together once they reached Westeros. But Aegon didn't see the harm in having some fun before they got there, after all it wasn't like they could attack their enemy when they were somewhere in the middle of the Narrow Sea. Not to mention Aegon was never going to be a King anyway, Daenerys was going take the responsibility of ruling the Seven Kingdoms while Aegon would hold Dragonstone. Sure he'd have to find a wife then and settle down, but there was time for all that. Dany wasn't married yet either, and wasn't interested in marrying him anymore than he was her; they didn't seem to share the taste for incest their ancestors had.

“Okay, your turn.” Duck cheered, “Now what's it going to be, act or question?” It was a simple game they played often, dividing themselves into teams, they'd give each other questions to answer or tasks to complete. Each one giving their team more points. Tonight Aegon was on the team of Alis and Malia vs Duck, Tobias, and Javer. It was late enough everyone else had drifted off to their beds.

“Question.” Alis answered, her eyes glittering in the firelight as they met Duck's.

“Hmmm” Duck pondered his words, head resting on his chin as he thought. “Alight, when Aegon the Conqueror first arrived in Westeros, where did he first land?”

“That's easy.” Alis chided, “Kings-” Malia lifted a hand to shush her.

“Trick question!” she accused. “Aegon never arrived in Westeros, technically he was born there. On Dragonstone twenty-seven years before the conquest.”

“Ahhh” Duck growled in amused frustration, “Girl knows her history.”

Aegon smiled at them as Alis clinked her cup against Malia's and they drank to their small victory. He'd stopped his own drinking not too long ago, after it became clear things could get out of hand. He'd lost count of how many drinks Duck and Javer had, Tobias had more than he usually did, and Alis was sitting somewhere in the middle of them. Malia was on her fourth cup by now, her cheeks a shade darker but her eyes a little brighter. “Alright, we go again. Give us another Question!” Alis commanded.

Javer continued, “What's House Arryns words?”

Malia didn't hesitate “As High as Honor.”

“Okay genius, Martells!” Duck challenged.

Malia closed her eyes as if drawing on memories, “Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken.” she recited.

Duck kept shooting names at her, and Malia kept knocking them down. “Greyjoy”

“We Do Not Sow”

“Baratheon.”
“Ours is the Fury.” she grinned at the new game.

“Targaryen!”

Malia shook her head at the obvious one, “Fire and Blood!”

Duck didn’t stop. “Lannister.”

Aegon thought he saw Malia’s eyes darken at the name, but it was probably just the wine. “Hear Me Roar.”

“Boltons?”

Her eyes squinted slightly “Our Blades are Sharp.”

“Tully!” he lifted his hand at the impossibility of the girls perfect answers.

The lines on her face did seem to sober then, “Family. Duty. Honor.”

“You’re ridiculous! Starks?”

This time Malia just laughed, “You do know where I’m from don’t you?” her smile seemed to lighten and her eyes glowed with a strange light when she answered “Winter Is Coming.”

“Wait, wait, wait! How many points was that?” Alis raised her hands.

“No points, she was just showing off.” Javer disagreed.

“Hey, I answered every question!” Malia argued.

“Alight lets call it a tie then” Aegon cut in, “Now we need a tie breaker.”

“Our turn first.” Duck insisted, he surveyed Tobias and Javer before turning to the opposing team. “Act.”

Aegon, Alis, and Malia turned their backs and huddled together, “We need something good, something they can’t do.” Alis hissed urgently.

“Alright, alright.” He brought his hands together like a prayer as he thought.

“I have an idea” Malia whispered, her eyes not on them but studying their opponents over her shoulder.

“What?”

“Each of them has to finish a full cup of wine in one drink.” she whispered with a dark smirk.

“That’s not that hard.” Alis whispered back.

“Maybe not for Javer and Duck, but do you see how white Tobias is getting?”

“It’s cruel” Aegon warned, yet he still grinned.

“The world’s a cruel place.” she agreed. Their gaze met and the way her grin matched his own made his stomach twist oddly.

“Come on!” Duck shouted, “What’s the task?”
They all turned back around to face them “Each of you have to finish a full cup of wine, in only one drink, no pausing for breath and no retching.” Aegon explained.

Duck and Javer scoffed but Aegon thought Tobias paled a little. “Done!” Javer hooted. The three stood up for their task, each with a filled cup of wine, “You ready for this kid?” Javer glanced at Tobias. He nodded with a nervous smile and Aegon and Malia shared a knowing look.

“Go!” Alis encouraged, her cheeks cherry red from drink.

The three men obeyed obediently, bringing their cups up they started chugging. Their necks bobbing as they swallowed mouthful after mouthful, wine dripping down Javer's chin. Duck finished first with an accomplished grin, and Javer soon followed. The two men watched wide eyed as Tobias finished his cup a little slower, yet he finished it all the same without a pause, gasping for air when he was done.

“Yes” Javer chuckled and gave Tobias a smack on the shoulder, “That's what I'm talking about kid!”

“Looks like we win” Duck bragged while taking his seat.

“Now hold on, we still get a turn.” Alis objected.

Aegon turned to Malia, “It was a good a guess.” He consoled, but her calculating stare had not left Tobias, who had yet to rejoin the circle.

“It wasn't a guess” she muttered, raising a finger to indicate he should wait a moment.

“Oh gods” Tobias moaned while holding his stomach with one hand. In a flash he was running for the railing, retching all the wine he just drank and more into the sea.

“NOOO!” Javer yelled dramatically.

They all laughed at the poor boy, and Aegon shook his head glancing back at Malia. “How'd you know?”

Her eyes glowed and she shrugged, “I'm good at reading people.” she told him lightly.

“Are you now?” he teased, unable to look away from her. He'd never seen her like this, truly enjoying herself and laughing, in place of her guarded looks and subtle smiles.

“Alright, if you guys don't complete our task, then it's back to a tie.” Duck concluded.

“Oh come on, you guys are already out a team member.” Aegon countered.

“Hey, that was a cheep shot aimed at our weakest link.” Duck retorted but Malia only shrugged.

“Fine, what's it going to be?” Alis challenged.

Javer and Duck shared a scheming grin, letting Aegon know they’d had this one planned in advanced, even Malia gave them a wary stare after that. “Alis and Malia have to kiss, and not the way you kiss your mother! A real one.” Duck explained.

Malia laughed “and who benefits from that?” she taunted.

Yet the girl's smile faded to surprise fast after Alis shouted “Done!” Alis turned to her, “You're not gonna let us lose this game right?”
“I-” the girl never got the words out.

Alis grabbed Malia's face and pressed her lips against hers. There was a moment of shock as Malia registered what was happening, but the northern girl gave in; kissing the blond back. Aegon watched wide eyed and Javer brought a hand to his mouth and whistled. The way they kissed was defiantly not how one would kiss their mother, not that he would know. Yet he imagined you wouldn't cup their face, and it wouldn't last near as long, or be quite so tender. When they finally pulled apart Malia's cheeks were flushed and Alis was grinning with her victory.

“Not bad, Snow” the blond praised, brushing a hand over Malia's dark hair. The grey eyed girl only laughed and took another drink of her wine.

An odd fire burned in his stomach as he saw them together, and not the exactly the kind he was sure Duck and Javer felt. *I'm fucking jealous.* When Malia's eyes met his again she must have read something on his face because she glanced down, her cheeks a little darker as she bit her lip. Aegon glanced away too, trying to figure out why *he* felt embarrassed by the shy look she'd given him.

Aegon sat up a little straighter, “Looks like we win” he commented.

Tobias's crow flew around their heads, “*win!*” it repeated, and then “*home!*” it landed on Malia's shoulder, making her jump.

“*Seven hells*” she waved the bird away with a bandaged hand and it went screeching back into the sky in frustration.

“That was hot” the delayed and slurred words came from Tobias, sitting on his ass by the railing with his head lopped to one side as he stared at the girls. They all laughed, Aegon himself feeling a little better as he tried to extinguish the fire in his gut. The night didn't last much longer once the game ended, one more drink each and Aegon and Duck were carrying Tobias back to his bed and flipping him on his side in case he was sick again. Javer had stumbled off before that, and once they returned to the fire the girls were gone.

“Do you think they went to bed?” he asked glancing around the empty deck.

“Maybe they went together.” Duck suggested with a disgusting smirk.

Aegon laughed, yet the thought was a punch in the gut, “and that wouldn't bother you?” He teased, Alis and Duck had been sharing each others beds for moons after all.

“If Alis ran off with Javer, then I'd be *pissed.* But Malia?” he shook his head with a smile, “I'd pay to be in the same room.”

“You're terrible” he muttered glancing around a corner, yet there was one no one there. He couldn't see anyone else on the deck, and he was hardly able to see with only a few stars peaking out behind the clouds; the half-moon hidden away somewhere in the abyss above his head. *Maybe they did go to bed together...*

“You trying to tell me you wouldn't?” Duck argued, his voice rising and echoing over the waves.

“Will you keep it down? If you wake Jon he'll have both our heads.”

Duck's words were a dramatically loud whisper, “Don't play the noble prince with me.” he scolded. “You want that girl under you, more than Alis does.”

“No!” Sage flapped down and landed on Aegon's shoulder, but he ignored it's presence.
“I'm sure you would too.” He muttered, giving up on trying to find the girls. “I'm going to sleep.” Duck followed him back below deck, their feet passing softly over the wood as not to disturb anyone.

Duck was whispering in his ear as he made his way down the stairs “Maybe if one of us is lucky, they couldn't find their own rooms and-” Something had crashed behind a wall, some kind of metal. From his guess it came from the kitchen, should've known. The men tiptoed down the hall, the hinges of the door whining as he pushed his way into the kitchen. Alis was sprawled in the middle of the floor on her back, a tin bowl beside her, and a parade of red and green apples all around. It appeared Malia had sunk to the floor as well, from how hard she was laughing. One hand covering her mouth as her body shook with amusement.

“That wasn't funny!” Alis cried, “It hurt.” yet Malia only laughed harder, and in turn Alis joined her, trying to get back on her feet. Sage launched off his shoulder, gliding through the room and landing by Malia. Duck reached Alis where she struggled to get up, grabbing her by the arms and picking her up.

“Ready for bed yet?” he grinned as she held onto him for support.

“Who's bed?” she challenged with a drunk girls attempt at a seductive grin.

Duck shook his head at her, “Come on.” His friend then turned to him, “I got this one, you take care of the other.” They stumbled out of the room together and he couldn't help see the irony. The blind leading the blind.

“Goodnight!” Alis called over her shoulder and Malia gave her a little wave.

Aegon went over to where she was still sitting on the floor, wiping tears from her cheeks. “Home!” Sage insisted beside her.

Malia lifted her hands up helplessly at the bird, “I don't know where you're from” she told him sadly. “Would you take him home if you did?” he teased. “Of course” she was so sincere he had to smile. He extended his arm, “Time for bed for you too.” She looked up at him, back at the bird, and then sighed. “What do you think?” she asked the crow. “Should I go to sleep?”

“Home!” the bird cried once more.

“I know, I know, you want to go home.” she reached out to pet him, but the bird took off. Pouting a little she pulled herself to her feet, “He's homesick” she informed him once she was on two legs again.

“We'll figure it all out in the morning, I promise.” Taking her arm in his, he guided her out of the kitchen, picking up a candle light on their way out the door. As they made their way through the halls he noted he was still pretty drunk. It had been manageable before, but now with Malia leaning on him as he walked, balance was more troublesome than ever. “So what's the verdict Lady Snow? Are you fond of drinking?” he asked as they neared her room.

She hummed as she considered her words, “yes, I think I am” she giggled as Sage landed on her shoulder.

“We'll see how much in the morning” he joked as he opened her door. “but it's a good look on you”
he commented putting the candle down. Malia had released herself from his arm as they walked in, but hadn't distanced herself.

“How so?”

He wasn't sure why he was telling her, he probably sounded like an idiot. Yet seeing her smile like this...it was inconceivable before tonight. “Happy” he decided, “I hadn't seen it before.”

“Well” she whispered, wrapping her hands around his neck, “It's wasn't just the wine.” she confessed with a grin that was intoxicating. He bit back a smile and he thought she’d leaned toward him, but Sage had let out a screech that startled the both of them. The crow took to the air and Malia stumbled back, he'd tried to catch her but they both fell instead. He nearly crushed her when they landed on the bed, but if it hurt she only laughed. With her face an inch away and her body pressed against his, those daring dark eyes looking up at him...he almost kissed her. But he untangled himself from her and stood up. *She's just drunk,* he told himself.

“Allight, time for sleep now.” he muttered.

Malia nodded, “sleep” she repeated, reaching down to untie her boots. He tried not to laugh as her hands helplessly worked the strings binding her feet. She glanced up, catching his smile, “some help would be nice” she scolded, but her eyes glowed.

Shaking his head he got to the floor, sitting down completely because if he tried to kneel he'd probably fall over. Taking her leg he started playing with the strings. She was smiling, putting her weight on both hands as she leaned over the bed to watch him work. “You know Duck thought you and Alis ran off to bed together, when we couldn't find you.” he told her.

She giggled, “Is that what you thought?” He shrugged as he pulled her boot off, reaching for her other leg. “You know, after she kissed me...” he glanced up and she studied him while tilting her head, “I could of sworn you were jealous for a moment there.”

*This deep in her cups and she can read me like a book.* He scoffed, “Did you want me to be?” he teased as he wiggled the other boot off. Malia slid off the bed with surprising grace, sitting in front of him.

“You don't have to be.” she whispered and he couldn't think of anything to say, not with the way her stormy eyes were boring into him. She leaned her head forward, and though apart of him knew he shouldn’t, he leaned in too. Her lips brushed his and he melted into her, all sense of self control lost when presented with just a taste. His stomach fluttered as she sighed softly, her hand reaching behind his neck and tangling itself in his hair. She was pulling herself closer as they deepened the kiss, and he almost fell backward to the floor with her on top of him. Yet he pushed back, pressing his lips harder on hers to steady them. Her other hand reached lower, tugging lightly on his belt.

He laughed against her lips, taking her wrist firmly in his hand. “No” he whispered softly. Her forehead was pressed against his when she let out a small whimper of complaint, the sound of it mixed with her head falling on his shoulder in frustration was enough to send a rush of heat through his body. Sighing he struggled to stand and pull Malia up as well, kissing her lightly on the lips once more. If he didn't get her to sleep soon he might end up doing something he'd regret, or she would if she hadn't already. Guiding her by the hips he got her back on the bed and placed a blanket on her lap, “I'll see you in the morning.”

Those grey eyes looked up at him, suddenly so serious it made him pause. “Could you stay?” she asked. Once again she must have read him easily, for she rushed on “*Just* to sleep.” She glanced down, looking more vulnerable than he'd ever seen her. “I keep...having these nightmares...” he
almost didn’t hear her, she spoke so quietly.

“Yes, of course.” he frowned, she almost looked afraid for a second, but it was gone when he climbed onto the bed. Following his lead she laid beside him, pulling the fur blanket up for them to share. “What happens in your dreams?” he asked as she snuggled up beside him.

There was a long moment of silence and he wondered if she was even going to answer him. “I’m in this forest every night, searching for something...but I don’t know what it is.” she whispered. “And it’s so cold, and I know someone’s watching me...but there’s never anyone there.”

He shivered at her words, it was unsettling to imagine himself lost every time he closed his eyes. “Not tonight” he told her, turning to place a kiss on her head. Malia must have taken it as an invitation because she’d brought herself up on her elbow, bringing her lips to his again. For a few moments he didn’t stop her. He liked the way one of her palms rested on his chest, the taste of the red wine of her tongue, and how comfortably his hands fit around her petite waist when he held her. It wasn’t until another wave of heat rushed down his body did he know he had to stop, less he lose the ability to. “Just to sleep” he reminded her gently.

She nodded slightly, parting their mouths only to speak. “Just...to...sleep” she agreed between kisses. Laughing he pushed her onto her back, pinning her down underneath him. She giggled at the sudden movement before he silenced her with his lips. Just once more. Her mouth met his just as fiercely, giving in instantly to the change of pace. But before he could let himself fall over the brink of no return...he flipped over, pulling her against him like a child would a teddy bear.

“Sleep.” he muttered in her hair.

She growled at him, probably for teasing her so cruelly. “Sleep” she consented sighing. Aegon let himself drift off, closing his eyes and losing his sense of time in her slow breaths. Remembering the candle, he opened his eyes and leaned over to blow it out. Sage was perched above the door, his black eyes glaring down accusingly in the candle light.

Chapter End Notes

The Hunger In Your Haunt - Crywolf *

Thanks for reading kindstranger<3
Reforget

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Arya lifted her hand as snow whipped in her face, blinding her. She was shivering from the winds icy touch, even through her thick midnight cloak. Her feet ached with the numbing cold, but she couldn't stop walking, she had to keep going. Where is it? She squinted her eyes through the storm. What is it? There was nothing. Just bare tree after bare tree, their branches reaching out for each other like desperate lovers above her head; blocking most of the half-moon's light. The feeling she bore seeped deep in her bones, there was someone watching from somewhere in the dark, she knew it with complete certainty. Yet she'd given up on trying to discover who or what it was, it was more important to find what she was looking for. To find something other than wood and snow.

Her boot caught on something under the snow and she lurched forward, helplessly reaching into the empty air before landing with a soft thud. She wanted to scream. She wanted to cry. Arya sat up on her knees, rubbing the burning snow from her face. Why? What's the point? She shivered violently, contemplating just staying on the ground until she froze to death.

Her breath caught in her throat when she saw it, relief crashing over her in such strong waves tears rimmed her eyes. Arya dragged herself back to her feet, running forward, stumbling from her rash movements. The plain trees thinned until they left a hole in the forest, and in it's heart stood the weirwood. Arya stopped and found herself laughing as the weight lifted from her shoulders, the burden of discovering what she was hunting for dissipating into the night air. She went to take another step but almost fell once more, a raven was sailing toward her, screeching in furry. A scream died in her throat and the last thing she saw was it's three eyes.

Arya woke with a start, heart and head pounding. She groaned softly, lifting a hand to her temple and closing her eyes again. The hell was-

“You okay?” the groggy words came from beside her, she turned to see Young Griff in her bed. His dark blue hair was a mess and his eyes were half closed with sleep. oh. Vague memories from the night before flooded her mind, her heart now pounding from more than just the nightmare.

She managed a smile, “Yeah...it was just a dream” she muttered.

He frowned, letting his head fall back on his pillow. “The same one?”

It took her a second to remember she'd told him that. I told him about my bloody nightmares...after trying to take off his pants. She nodded, still putting together the pieces of the night before. The game they'd played, kissing Alis and watching her fall in the kitchen, wanting to take Sage home...she looked over to see the crow sitting comfortably at the end of the bed. She could remember kissing Young Griff too, tangled up on the floor with him. The way he'd denied her only making her want him more...

Arya turned to him, “Thanks, ah, for not...”

“Letting you take advantage of me in my drunken state?” he finished for her with a tired smile.

She scoffed, her nerves leaving her and heart rate steadying. “That's not what I was doing.”

“Please, if I'd had another drink you would have had me right where you wanted me.” Taking the pillow out from under her, she whipped it at his head. He laughed, pulling the pillow from his face,
“I'll take that as you admitting your guilt.”

“You're an idiot” she muttered with a smile.

“Thank you” he closed his eyes, seeming as though he'd try and sleep again. Arya sighed, drums sounding off in her head, her stomach turning in on it's self. So this is what a hangovers like. She shifted trying to get comfy, turning her body so she was facing him.

“Can I have my pillow back?”

He smiled before opening his eyes, “Do you promise not to take advantage of it's other uses?” If she'd had another pillow she would have thrown that one at him too.

“Just, give it.” she reached over and he pulled the pillow behind his back, out of reach.

“Promise?” his violet eyes gleamed playfully.

She didn't want to surrender, but she didn't want to fight him either. She just wanted her bloody pillow because it felt like an elephant had sat on her head. Arya glared at him, “I promise” she said darkly.

“I didn't quite hear that” she gave him a dangerous look then and he chuckled, swinging the pillow back over. Pushing it back into place she laid her head down, Young Griff seemed to be get comfortable as well...at least that's what she thought he was doing. She hadn't a moment to think when he leaned over and pressed his lips to hers, a soft and quick kiss before retreating back to his side of the bed. It was more than a kiss, but a question in the form of one. Did you really want me last night, or had the wine? It seemed to ask.

Arya pondered the question, did she want him? A part of her defiantly craved to close the distance between them and lose herself the way she'd tried to the night before. And why shouldn't she? She had no responsibility anymore, owed no order her loyalty or her body, she wasn't no one. She was a person once more, yet she wasn't really Arya Stark either. She might be an orphan again with no family left to her, but she wasn't some Lady expected to save herself for marriage, like she were some gift to be given away in the first place. But she could be Malia, a northern bastard with no bounds to her choices, the girl this boy seemed to want to kiss.

She studied his tense and uneasy expression one more moment, finding it kind of amusing. Without using her arms she shifted her body closer to his, inch by inch until their faces were a breath apart. She could see his muscles relax slightly, the tension leaving his body when she tilted her head closer to his. They stayed like that a moment, smiling, both pairs of eyes daring the other to make a move. Young Griff surrendered first, closing his eyes and the minimal distance between their lips. Arya sighed as she gave into her desire, taking a fistful of his shirt to pull him closer. One of his hands slid around her waist in response, bringing her against his chest and leaving a burning trail in it's wake.

There was a sweet moment butterflies flew in her stomach, until they seemed to turn on themselves, deciding to make a meal of her insides instead. She pulled away, squeezing her eyes shut while trying to steady the sudden nausea. “You feel like shit don't you?”

“Absolutely terrible” she agreed rolling onto her back. “and my fucking head.”

He scoffed, pulling himself on top of her and kissing her lightly, before rolling away again and off the bed entirely. “I'll be back” he told her walking to the door, “and remember not to take advantage of that pillow.”

Arya reached behind her and flung it across the room, she'd been aiming for his head but he caught it
anyway. “You promised!” he accused.

“That was your pillow, not mine.” she reasoned.

He grinned, “Smart ass” he mumbled throwing the pillow back on the bed before leaving. When the door closed the quiet settled in, her thoughts sobering as she had a moment to think on her dream. She'd dreamed of wolves before, as she did most nights, but yet again she'd been sucked into that other place after. *That raven...*it's three eyes burned in the back of her mind.

“*Home!*” Sage landed on her chest, startling her.

“Must you keep doing that?” she growled waving him away. The bird let out a loud complaint that rang in her head, making the pain worse. It made dizzying circles around her room before landing on the nightstand beside her.

“*Home!*” it cried again.

“Shouldn't you be harassing Tobias? I thought you were *his* pet.”

“*Home!*”

“Gods is that the only word you know?” she tired to wave it away again, but the crow jumped back out of reach.

“*Snow!*” it said as if in reply. Arya frowned, Alis had gotten in the habit of calling her that too. She couldn't help that it reminded her of Jon, Robb and Theon used to call him by his surname all the time at Winterfell. Arya stared at the bird and wondered if Jon had hated the nickname as much as he hated being a bastard, while she herself was finding it sort of liberating. No one expected anything from a bastard, a child born of lust and lies; treacherous by nature. She'd heard Griff say that just the other day, and if Alis hadn't been going on about Duck at the time, Arya might have made a scene.

Yet she found the name suited her far better than it ever had Jon. He'd been the most honorable person she'd ever known next to her father, as for Arya...she'd killed more people than she cared to count, lied more times than she could ever imagine, and treacherous would hardly be the worst word to describe half the things she’d done. She sighed, closing her eyes, the eternal weight echoing under her breast as it always did when she thought of him. *He deserved better...they all did.*

“*Home!*” Sage reminded her.

“I know.” she whispered solemnly, thinking of Roose Bolton sitting in her father's seat. *He doesn't belong there.* Sage cocked his head at her, his beady eyes studying her tired ones. “I know.” she repeated and her words seemed to satisfy Sage, for he stopped bothering her.

Young Griff returned later, a plate of eggs and bread for her to eat in bed and a glass of water. She'd been beyond thankful for the water, but the thought of eating anything just made her want to retch. Yet he insisted it would make her feel better, so she obliged; he'd had more experience in these matters after all. Arya spent most of that day in bed, while Young Griff went off to discuss things with his father. Come dinner she was feeling far better and much closer to normal, only a thinning cloud hovering in her mind to remind her of all the wine she'd had. Arya wandered to the kitchen with Sage perched on her shoulder. Lady Lemore was there, and Alis was helping her prepare dinner.

“There she is” Alis smiled knowingly when Arya entered.

Arya smiled back, crossing the room she sat on a stool, the women stood on the opposite side of her
“What’s for dinner?” she asked, picking up a piece of bread off the table.

“More for those who wait” Lemore declared, reaching over and plucking the bread from her fingers. Arya gave a mocking pout. “How much did you drink last night?” she asked and Arya shrugged.

“I think you might have even surpassed me last night, Snow.” Alis teased, honey eyes filled with mirth.

“I doubt that, considering you forgot how to walk by the end.” she shot back.

Alis only laughed, “I had Duck to help with that...and you had Young Griff, didn't you?” her eyes searched Arya's for a secret truth.

Arya scoffed, “Not the way you had Duck I'm sure.”

Alis grinned, “Still, Duck said he didn’t sleep in his bed last night...” the blond looked at her expectantly. Arya sighed, this girl was a dog with a bone. Lemore looked up as well, searching Arya's gaze as much as Alis was, her movements becoming more tense. What's her deal?

“We just slept, you know that thing people do at the end of each day?”

“Hmmm” Alis did not believe a word of it, and truth be told they'd technically done more than that. But they hadn't done anything to warrant the looks Alis was giving her.

“You wouldn't believe anything I told you, would you?”

“You're too good of a liar” she insisted. You have no idea.

“Don't you go corrupting her.” Lemore accused, “she's too good for the likes of you and Duck.”

Arya laughed at that. Corrupting me. If getting drunk and kissing a boy was corruption, then what the hell would Lemore think of the last five years of her life? The thought was somewhat sobering, and not as amusing as she'd originally thought. They probably wouldn't want to be anywhere near me. Years spent killing for some faceless god and priests who worshiped death, years of relentless lessons in the arts of murder and days washing corpses. And even before that...she'd been a ten year old who prayed for people to die more than she ever played with dolls. I'd been corrupted long before I ever crossed the Narrow Sea.

Alis seemed to agree with Lemore when it came to Arya's innocence. “Oh come on, what's the worst thing you've ever done?”

Arya opened her mouth to reply but couldn't think of an appropriate lie, the truth clearly not an option. “You'll have to get me drunk again to know that.”

“Challenged accepted.” Alis leaned her elbow on the table and rested her chin on her palm, “you're more fun when you get a few drinks in you anyway.” her lips curled up and Arya knew where the older girls mind had went. The memory of Alis grabbing her face becoming slightly more vivid; the way her soft hands had cupped her cheek and the smoothness of her lips on hers. If Arya hadn't had such tells beaten out of her, she might have blushed then. She was used to men looking at her in the similar ways, lust flickering in the corners of their eyes, but she'd never had a girl like Alis doing it.

“Next time, you two can keep your paws out of my kitchen” Lemore muttered.

“Sorry about that” Alis turned back to the Septa, “Honestly I hardly remember coming in here, just the bruise on my ass when I woke.”
Arya snorted and rose from her seat, “Now the interrogation is over, I'm going to get some air.”

“Or are you going to go find your new sleeping partner?” Alis teased and Arya looked back to give the girl a stern glare.

“Just the air.”

“Whatsoever you say, Snow” Alis grinned, raising her hands in defeat. Once more she noted the tension in Lemore shoulders, and the emotion in her haunted eyes…discomfort? anger? No…fear. Old Griff’s warning echoed in her head. *Stay away from my son.* It occurred to her then Lemore felt the same way he did, she didn't like the idea of her and Young Griff together at all. Was it because she looked like some girl they once knew? As she left she found herself wondering again what the girl had done.

“Snow!” Sage repeated stretching his wings. Arya found her way above deck with ease, the once confusing hallways of the *Shyer Maid* becoming as familiar as the streets of Braavos she'd walked a million times. Chilling air brushed her cheeks when she went outside, the sun buried under a thick layer of smoking clouds. It must be winter soon, not that she had any idea what day it was anymore. Not by the Braavosi calendar or the one they followed in Westeros, yet the winds told her Autumn was coming to an end if it hadn't already. *Winter is Coming,* she reflected. Arya walked to the front of the ship, pulling her sleeves down and wishing she’d brought her cloak as the salty mist of the sea kissed her skin.

She leaned on the railing, licking the salt from her lips. *We're almost there. “Home”* Sage chirped quietly as if reading her thoughts.

“Not yet” she muttered back, and the bird took off. Closing her eyes the girl let her mind wander the way she never aloud it to in the House of Black and White, let herself think on memories she wasn't permitted to have when she walked those dark stony halls. She found herself stuck on the image of her father, the most honorable man she’d ever known. *What would he think of me now?* She shouldn't even go there, it was futile and only made her chest hurt, yet the question still lingered. What would someone as honor bound as her father think of his daughter becoming a nameless assassin? *So honor bound, he fathered a bastard.*

The thought came unbidden but Arya would never hold it against him. Hell if he hadn't had Jon, she'd have no idea who she'd be right now. But the discomfort nibbled at the back of her mind, she didn't like the idea of him dishonoring her mother. And it just didn't make any sense to her…if he'd been willing to break that vow all those years ago, why'd he have to go and die for his honor? She knew her father never wanted to go South, but he had for Robert; he had for his bloody honor. Her family had lost everything since then…no more stories from Old Nan, never hearing her mother berate her about her stitching lessons, no watching Robb and Jon practice in the training yard, or making snow monsters with Bran. No listening to Sansa sing as she brushed Lady’s fur...

No running in the snow with Nymeria, chasing her around the pines and burying her nose in her damp fur. She could smell them then, the pine needles and their sharpness filling the air. The snow was tricking down around her but the flakes melted on her fur, and her paws ached from the cold. Clumps of ice were fastened between her toes, burning her skin hotter than any fire. Shadows moved around the trunks surrounding her, small lean shapes slithering in and out of view. A sight that would cause any man to soil himself, a sight that established she was safe and with family. *My Pack.*

She leaped forward, the strength in her shoulders unmatched by any of her little cousins. There was blood on her lips, the sweet iron tang sending rushes of satisfaction under her skin, reminding her of the kill she'd just finished. The direwolf bounded through the trees suddenly at an impossible speed, the frosty air tickling her nose, her cousins following her; unsure of the sudden change in pace but
forever loyal. She ran until her paws were aflame, until her lungs heaved and her legs wobbled. Stopping and Lifting her head in the air she howled, crying out in conquest. Her heart was pounding with the intensity of her emotions, the potency of her senses.

Hands slid around her waist and Arya's eyes snapped open, she gasped as the world slammed back around her. Misty air and a deck rocking under her feet. “Did I scare you?” Young Griff's breath teased in her ear.

Arya inhaled a shuddering breath. Did I really just do that? She’d warged Nymeria, while she was awake. She'd only ever felt the direwolf in her dreams, only ever saw through the eyes of a few cats in Braavos, she'd never seen through Nymeria's eyes like that before. Never so vividly, it was exhilarating. “No” she breathed, her arms wrapping over his as he held her.

He chuckled softly in her hair, clearly thinking himself the cause of her breathlessness. “You sure about that?” he whispered, the warmth of him pressed against her back sending sparks down her spine.

Arya bit her lip, still tasting the blood on her tongue and the snowflakes melting on her skin. I'm sure. “No” she said instead, turning to face him.

He eyed her suspiciously, his hands still holding her waist as he gave her a questioning smile. “What is it?”

“Nothing” she said, not even bothering to stop herself from grinning like an idiot. He shook his head slightly, clearly baffled by her odd behavior, but she didn't care. Running through that forest and sharing her mind with Nymeria in a way she never had before, left her with a dizzying happiness she hadn't felt since she was a child. The thrill of the power under her muscles, the comfort of her pack surrounding her, all those feelings foreign yet exalting.

Arya kissed him. It was a little messy at first given her rushed movements, but his lips quickly mended with hers as she reached her arms around his neck. She was chasing a high she didn't wish to come down from, and as one of Young Griff's hands slid up her back and pulled her against him, he was giving her exactly what she wanted. Her skin rushed with a electrifying heat as his grip tightened, and she smiled as she kissed him, brushing her palm over the soft stubble on his jaw.

There were only three things that the ebbed the empty weight that crushed her soul day in and day out. Three things that allowed her to reforget the weight where Arya Stark had lived in Winterfell with her parents, where she'd had brothers to play with and a sister who despite everything she had loved; a place where Jon Snow had accepted her unconditionally. Wine dulled the void and her wolf dreams took her somewhere else, but the taste of Young Griff’s lips and the heat of his hands on her body...it was impossible to feel anything else then.

Chapter End Notes

Reforget - Lauv ❖(・ー・)ʃ >

Idk how fast the next update will be, I have all these things in my head that I want to happen but I just need to figure out how to get there. Anyway thanks for reading kindstranger <3
Chapter Notes

Sorry, I'm not dead:) Life's just been kicking me in the ass lately but I refuse to abandon this baby. And thanks so much guys for the comments, they give me life.

Now in regards to Gilly's and Mance's sons, when I started this fic forever ago I hadn't even finished reading the books yet, so I was ignorant of the baby switch plot. For the sake of consistency in this story; Little Sam is Gilly's son and the Little Monster is Mance's, so no switch. ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jon

The snow was everywhere. Mounds of it climbing up the garnet walls of Winterfell and flurry's slicing through the air with no mercy, all night and all day for the past fortnight. He constantly found it caked in his boots, soaking his socks. The burning whiteness bathed most the hallways running through the heart of the castle too, giving up it's hold on life and leaving trails of transparent blood for him to slip on. He did find it slightly apt that he should find himself trapped by it, given his namesake and all.

JonSnow sighed as he shook out his navy cloak, white flakes leaping and dying on the bedroom's floor. He hated sleeping in here, more than he hated dealing with the ignorant southern lords who knew nothing of the North. The ones who'd doubt the Others existence and constantly bring him complaints about the Wildlings. Their never ending warnings that Queen Cersei should be his prime attention, that the Wildlings were dangerous, or this new Dragon Queen should be more of his concern. Cersei was a thousand leagues away with an army who knew nothing of winter, and the Wildlings were loyal to the only cause that mattered, and why should he care about Daenerys Targaryen landing in the South?

The women had come to this continent to take the Iron Throne, a rusted old chair that meant nothing to him. A chair that would mean nothing to everyone in Westeros if they could only open their eyes and see the real threat. She could have what she wanted from the South, take it with fire and blood as her ancestors did for all he cared. Jon only hoped she wasn't so cruel and mad as her father was rumored to be, the last thing he needed was to be stuck between the frozen claws of the Others and the burning fangs of her dragons. If he was lucky (not that he ever was) she'd be sensible enough to heed the words he'd sent her and her advisers. Sensible. What was sensible about an army of undead men and their ice monster leaders coming to kill them all? She'll think me a madman like everyone else below the Neck.

No matter the number of letters they'd sent, they'd all rendered a pitiful response. If they even answered (and most hadn't yet) it was to inform him they had no time for old lady's tales and needed to focus on feeding their own people with winter upon them. He could understand that much, he needed to find a way to stock the North with food before it was too late, yet what did it matter if there was going to be no one left to feed? As far as he could tell the dead didn't need to eat. Jon had made sure maester Wolkan had sent one last letter to the Wall, inviting Tycho Nestoris of the Iron Bank to Winterfell before he made his journey back to the east. He'd managed to broker a deal with him to feed the men of the Nights Watch, might be he'd be able to convince him to work out another
transaction on behalf of Winterfell.

Jon turned his head at the sound of a knock, Sansa pushed the heavy oak door aside before he could answer and walked in. Her soft blue eyes scanned the room a moment, memories of another life undoubtedly shifting behind that stare. “Sorry to just barge in, there's something I thought'd you like to see.” Jon nodded and turned to follow her, “you might want to put your cloak on once more.” she advised and he obliged.

They made their way through the halls, their footsteps echoing down the empty passageways. “So is it good news or bad?”

“That depends on your perspective.”

“So bad.” he concluded.

She chuckled softly, “always the optimist.”

“Can you blame me?” he muttered.

“I'm not going to say I had it worse than you, but I'd be dammed if I let my time in the South ruin my life forever.” she sighed. “That's how they win.”

Jon gave her a sideways glance, seeing a wisdom the Sansa he'd known had never possessed. “Well I'm sure whatever it is, I'll be delighted.”

She grimaced slightly, “Delighted might be the wrong word...”

“Okay, enough games what are you showing me?”

“It's Rickon.” she started, “You know how we arranged for Tormund and his son to help teach him the Common Tongue?”

“Aye.” he said warily, “what of it?” they stepped outside and onto the walkway above the training yard.

“Tormund suggested they teach him how to use a sword as well, and considering you and Robb started long before you were nine I thought it a good idea.”

“And you don't think it is anymore?” he finished for her.

“No, it's still a good idea, he needs to learn to defend himself as much as he needs to learn to speak the same tongue we do.”

“Then what's troubling you?” he could tell now she was slightly upset, her ploy at calling it good news must have been just an attempt to look on the bright side. Something Jon could never seem to do anymore.

Sansa sighed and waved below them. “He's...not terrible.” she decided. Jon looked down to see Tormund's son Toregg circling the yard with his little brother. Rickon's hair was a tuft of dark flame falling to his shoulders, his dark eyes gleaming with challenge in the light of the setting sun. Rickon was tall for his age, taller than Bran or Arya was last he'd seen them. Yet he was a kitten in comparison to a direwolf before Toregg, who they called Toregg the Tall. The larger man was even a foot taller than his own father.

“That's...good, isn't it?” Jon asked without looking up from the yard. Rickon was taking on the
offensive fearlessly swinging his wooden sword toward the older man, what he lacked in grace he made up for in aggression.

“That he can defend himself, yes...that he's had experience in the matter...less so.” Jon glanced up to see her frowning. “I don't know anything in the Old Tongue, but Tormund told me...” another sigh. “He told me Rickon said he's killed a man before.” Jon glanced down once more at his little brother swinging his sword like an ax, relentlessly giving blows despite none of them landing on anything other than Toregg's shield. His gut sank in on itself at Sansa's words. A killer at nine years old.

“Look I know it's apart of the world we live in, I know that. The Seven Kingdoms, peace, it's all built on the blood of others, by killers. They all were, Cersei, King Robert, all those Knights I used to sing songs of, even Robb and...and father.” And me. “He's just so young...”

“You're right, he's too young.” Jon muttered, his thoughts a thousand leagues away. He and Robb had been making snow monsters and playing at being knights when they were nine, so innocent and ignorant of the horrors the world had to offer. Jon had been almost six years older than Rickon the first time he'd cut a man, on the top of that mountain where he'd met Ygritte. Nine was just too young to face such things.

“But at least he knows a thing or two about sword work.” Sansa muttered halfheartedly. Jon didn't voice his doubts on that fact. Rickon was full of aggression and commitment to the attack, but he lacked any type of form. He was starting to wonder if letting a Wildling teach his brother the art of sword play had been Sansa's smartest idea. A master at arms would be a better choice, or even Jon himself.

“I'll speak to him later” Jon promised putting a hand on Sansa's shoulder, “whatever he's done in the past, he won't have to face it here.”

“Don't make any promises, I hate promises.” she muttered darkly, not taking her eyes off Rickon dancing around Toregg. “I thought I saw a raven this morning, I'll go see if it's anything worth reading.” Sansa turned her head slightly, “Seems you have company anyway.” His half sister gave him a warning stare before leaving the way they came, and as Jon glanced the other way he saw long blond hair and pale blue eyes.

Val walked with all the grace of a southern Queen, and if she were in the South Jon had no doubt she'd have two dozen lords asking for her hand. Yet they were in the North, and asking was not the way the Wildlings did things. The girl his men called the Wildlings princess had been staying at Winterfell since the castle had been held under Jon's leadership, choosing her luck by staying with him, the only “southerner” she knew. With Mance Rayder killed by Ramsey Bolton before the liberation of the castle, the Little Monster was the only family she had left, directly or indirectly.

“Lord Snow” she greeted with a smile.

“Princess Val” he gave back.

Her smile turned somewhat into a grimace. “I hear that nonsense title from half your southerners, don't let me suffer it from you as well.”

“I wouldn't call them mine.”

“You are their King now, perhaps I should be calling you King Snow instead?” she teased.

“I suppose the titles don't matter too much, do they?”

“No” she agreed solemnly. They stood their a few moments before either of them spoke again,
watching as Toregg attempted to get Rickon to listen to his lessons. Jon knew Val was still upset over what had happened to Mance, and he was sure the only comfort she found was with his son (her nephew) the Little Monster. “I don't think your sister likes me very much.”

“Sansa?” he asked surprised, “she has no problem with you.” he assured her, though it wasn't completely true. Sansa seemed to have it in her head that Val wanted Jon in her bed, though he would deny this to his dying breath. His half sister even went as far as to say she wouldn't care if he married her, that it would make sense politically, that she only wishes for him not to whore around as King Robert had. Jon had been left speechless after that comment, finally managing to tell her he wouldn't just sleep with Val.

“That's the problem, you're as honorable as father was, as Robb tried to be. He married the girl he fell in bed with to protect her honor...we both know how that ended.”

But Jon wasn't Robb and Val was defiantly not a southern Lady concerned with her honor. Val had already had a lover when he'd met her, Jarl had been his name, and Jon had watched him fall off the Wall and get impaled on tree.

“You wouldn't think it for the look on her face this morning.” It didn't seem to Jon that Val actually cared whether or not Sansa liked her, curious if nothing else.

“She's worried about Rickon” he told her “we both are” he said looking down into the yard again.

“Why?”

Jon studied her a moment, all dressed in her white furs, her long blond hair tied in a northern braid that almost reached her waist. “He's killed a man before.” he blurted.

“He's nine.” he knew the Wildlings held many different beliefs and a somewhat foreign culture to him, but surely nine was too young for bloodshed? This shouldn't be something he had to explain to her.

“Aye, he's a little young, it's true. But it's not unheard of in the North.”

Jon didn't bother to remind her this was the North. “A little young” he repeated shaking his head.

“I was only a couple years older.” she told him, pale blue eyes filling with challenge. “Should I not have defended myself when some Thenn thought he could take me?”

“I never said that.”

“No, you just have it in your head children are never faced with those kinds of decisions. I shouldn't need to tell you the cruelties men c-”

“You don't.” he said cutting her off, “I just...he's my brother okay? He never should have had to face those decisions, he should of grew up in this castle and away from death, he never should have had to fight for his life.” Jon looked her in the eyes, willing her to understand. “He shouldn't of had to. Do you get that?”

Val just shook her head sadly, “No one should have to Jon Snow. But your brother will be fine.” Her gaze followed the fighters below, “He has a whole Kingdom that loves him because of who his father was, and a brother and sister who care for him. He'll be fine...and he's still young. It's easy to forget things.”
“I hope you're right” he agreed. “How's the Little Monster?”

Val smiled then, a true smile. “Getting bigger everyday, I think he'll be walking soon.”

“We'll get him a sword to practice with.” Jon teased.

“Hmph...might be he'll become that prince that was promised your Red Priest keeps going on about.”

Jon's heart sank at the reminder that Melisandre still lurked somewhere in Winterfell. “I don't think you'd want him to be.”

“So many titles and you're not even willing to give one away?”

He scoffed, “You can call me a Lord and a King, but I was never a Prince Val. Far from it, no matter what Mel believes.”

She shrugged, “and I was never a Princess, yet you Southerners just love your titles, don't you?”

Jon smiled a heavy smile, “Come, let's see if the letter Sansa saw had anything pleasing to say.”

“Was that hope I heard in your voice Jon Snow?”

“No.” he pushed back a smile and she chuckled.

“If you say so.”

Sansa was held up in the Rookery when they found her, letter in hand and a smile taking up half her face. When she saw him she nearly jumped out of her seat, “You will not believe a word of this Jon!”

“What, What is it?” he asked, reaching for the letter but she pulled it out of reach.

“Daenerys Targaryen wrote back, and it wasn't to call us crazy.”

“Let me see.” he insisted, yet still she held the paper out of reach, “does she believe us?”

She held up a finger for him to be patient, “She doesn't not believe us” she assured him, “Listen, she writes, Anyway, for all the thing's I've seen in this world, it would be insensible to deny the possibilities of your claims. If the realm is in as much danger as you say, then you will have the support of my armies in exchange for your acknowledgment of my claim to the Iron Throne. To ensure your integrity I've sent an envoy to treat with the both of you, my loyal and trusted Hand of the Queen...” Sansa grinned once more, “You will never guess who she's sending to Winterfell Jon.”

Jon allowed himself to smile, feeling a weight lift off his shoulders at the Dragon Queen's words. With her allegiance and all the men she was rumored to have at her disposal, they might actually not die. “Who?”

“Tyrion.”

Jon could of swore his mouth was hanging wide open “Lannister?”

“No Jon, the other one.” she laughed.
“Forgive me, but I thought the Lannisters... am' they...?” Val trailed off, confused.

“Yes” Sansa assured her, “Most of them were, but not Tyrion. Looking back, he was probably the only friend I had in Kingslanding, next to Margaery.” her eyes darkened at the name, it'd only been a fortnight ago they received the news of House Tyrell's fall at the hands of Cersei. Jon placed a comforting hand on her shoulder, “Val, could you give us a moment?”

“Of course.” the Wildling gave a polite smile and left.

“Sansa what's wrong?”

“I just thought you’d want to read this part in private. I mean it's practically nothing but...it's more than we've heard since father died.”

“Of what?”

“Of Arya.” Jon's heart skipped a beat as she passed him the letter, his hands feeling weightless as his eyes scanned the words at the top.

“You have my condolences for your loses and sadly none of my advisers know the whereabouts of your youngest brothers, but one trusted companion has assured me your younger sister, Arya Stark, never fell into the hands of the Lannisters. He tells me one of Eddard Stark's men gave his life to protect her, but where she fled to after his death is unknown, would that I could tell you more.”

Jon sat down with the letter in his hand, the words running through his head on a loop as he pictured his youngest sister. Where she fled to after his death is unknown, unknown, unknown. He could see her then; one of the mornings after she'd sneaked into his room at night, her dark hair a tangle and her grey eyes clouded with sleep and annoyance.

“Will you stop moving so much?” she complained.

“I'm sure there's more room in your own bed” he growled as she pulled half the blanket from his body. “Arya” he muttered frustrated as the cold air bit at his toes.

“I don't like sleeping alone.” she argued.

“And I like sleeping with a blanket.” he informed her.

Arya had only sighed, rolled over and curled up next to him, resting her tiny head on his chest. Pulling the blanket over to cover the both of them. “Better?”

“Better” he agreed pulling an arm around her and closing his eyes.

“I wonder who it was.” Sansa's question brought him back to reality.

“What?”

“The man who died defending her, I mean the Lannisters slaughtered all of father's men but...I guess it doesn't matter, just that she got out of there.”

“We don't know that she did.”

“Jon.” she sighed, “This isn't bad news, if anything it's good.”

Jon wasn't sure, if Arya had escaped and lived, then where the hell was she? “Would that I could say I was delighted.”
I'll try to get back into the swing of things, but with my mother just out of surgery and with work, I'll be busy taking care of those. And of course all the other damn stories dancing around my head and distracting me, anyway thanks for reading kindstranger<3

Uncover Your Eyes - Young Empires  ﾟ(¬‿¬)igail
The past few nights she had avoided drinking, she didn’t want to feel so terrible again. Yet on the fourth night she decided to give into Alis’s peer pressure once more. Maybe because she forgot just how awful she felt the first time, but mostly because she’d enjoyed being drunk. She’d probably laughed more her first time drinking than she had in four years of training, and wanted to do it again.

If she was being honest with herself, the entire night she’d been drunk she hadn’t worried about a single thing. No dead family members or friends filled her thoughts, no bloody memories of the House of Black White or ideas of Faceless men coming after her. She hadn’t even thought of revenge that night, as best she could recall anyway. She felt no sadness, nor guilt, not even anger, it was the first night in years that her prayer hadn’t crossed her mind or her lips before falling asleep.

Even while she drank for the second time she knew it wasn’t just the wine keeping her dark thoughts at bay, it was the people she was with too. Arya never really had trouble making friends before, but over the recent years she’d always made them while being someone else. Always keeping a distance between them and never giving her true self to anyone, the last real friend Arya Stark made was probably Gendry Waters and she’d rather not think about him. Sure Young Griff and the others didn’t know her true name but they were getting to know her, and that’s all that seemed to matter.

The next day Young Griff had arranged for her to have a real bath and Arya was surprisingly grateful. It had been too long since she’d left Braavos, she could only imagine what Lady Catelyn would have to say about the state of her hair. Arya let her mind clear as she lied in the steaming water, doing the best she could to dissipate all thoughts of the many lives she’d lived. When she was finished she began donning new clothes that had been offered to her, it was odd to her how kind Young Griff was being, though she assumed it had something to do with his new habit of kissing her.

They’d both seen the sense in not enlightening Old Griff on their new found activities, nor Lady Lemore even though Arya was almost certain the older women already knew. In any case he’d pull her aside at times during the day, trapping her in some discrete corner to press his lips against hers, and she was becoming quite fond of it. More often than not it left her craving more, yet even though she slept in his bed the night before, the wine he’d drank had him sleeping sooner than she’d have liked.

While she was lost in thought Lady Lemore entered the room, without knocking of course, Arya only being half dressed. “Sorry I didn't know anyone was in here...” Lemore’s voice trailed off and her eye's had grown wide with concern. Arya threw the lose shirt over her head quickly, aware Lemore had just gotten a perfect view of the scares on her back, courtesy of a slaver in Volantis.

Arya cleared her throat, feeling the need to reassure her. “My life as a slave was short lived.”

“You wouldn't think it...” she muttered before remembering herself, “I’m sorry.”
She waved the comment away like it were a relentless fly, “It's fine, really.”

Lady Lemore pointed at her chest, voice hesitant “Was that from a slaver as well?”

The black long-sleeve she'd thrown on had a low v shaped neck line, and since she hadn't the chance to tie the strings, most her chest and collar bones were left bare. Arya glanced down, catching sight of the scar she was referring to. “No” the pink snake slithering atop her collar bone toward her neck had been a gift from the Kindly Man himself, for not paying attention during a training session. “More like an accident.”

“Like the cut on your hand?” Lemore asked sarcastically.

Arya grinned, pulling her damp hair to one side to tie the v neck on her shirt. “More than the cut on my hand” she shrugged, “It's what happens when you're not paying attention during a spar.”

Lemore walked over to eye her scar, disapproval clear on her face, “You practiced with live steal?”

“More often than not.” Arya agreed.

“I supposed I needn't have to tell you have dangerous that would be.” she half growled and Arya held back a smile, it was new to her; having someone care about her well-being. “Would you mind if I did your hair?” she offered. “It's been too long, and Alis insists on doing hers herself.”

Arya considered her a moment, then considered her damp hair. Admittedly she'd rather have it hang loose since it was finally starting to fall a little past her shoulders, yet the assassin in her couldn't miss the opportunity. “Sure.”

She sat herself in front of the looking glass with Lemore behind her, the mirror was far from perfect, little spots of dirt covering the pale face looking back at her. Arya noted the bruise she'd been given by Daenerys Targaryen's men had completely faded as well, leaving her complexion as pretty as the Kindly Man and the Black Pearl of Braavos had always insisted it was. It wasn't until her internship with the courtesans had Arya began to truly understand her own beauty, and the power it could grant her.

“So” she started as Lemore began plucking apart stands of her hair to braid together, “Why the interest in doing hair?”

Lemore shrugged absentmindedly, her attention focused on her work. “Just something I always did when I was younger, not as many ladies to work with in the Golden Company.” The Septa gave her a teasing smile through the mirror and Arya forced one back. Yet she couldn't help but mull over her choice of words. Ladies, not women but ladies.

“I always hated it, thought it a waste of time. Why sit inside and let my mother do my hair, when I'd just mess it up anyway? Time I could have spent outside, building snow monsters or swimming in a hot spring.”

“I can't imagine you were the most complainant child.” Lemore japed, and once more Arya forced a smile.

“No.” she agreed quietly, after a moment she pressed on. “Where are you from Lemore?”

“Ah, The South, why?”

Arya shrugged, “Just curious how a Lady of the South became a Septa to a Sell-Sword's son is all.”
This time it was Lemore forcing a smile, “I'm no Lady, and Griff just wants the best for his son. As for how I got here.” she sighed, “That's a much longer story Malia.” Arya kept her face as still as stone, Lemore had fell right into her trap, denying being a Lady, the lie clear on her lips. A Lady of the South then, acting as a Septa to a Sell-Sword, while an old man dying his hair was pretending to be his father. What the hell was she in the middle of?

“You know I don't know that much about you either, or how a girl born in the North found herself living in Essos. It must be an interesting story” she ventured, pulling Arya's hair back uncomfortably. Now it seemed she was the one being interrogated.

“Interesting is one word for it. But I always thought Essos offered a better life than the West.” Lemore gave her an odd look and Arya grinned, the slaver scars weren't a good example, so she tried to explain. “Yes, there's terrible men on either side of the sea, no doubt, but in Essos...everyone knows who the monsters are, and the monsters aren't pretending to be anything less.”

“And the monsters in the West?”

Arya shook her head, “Girls sing songs of valiant Knights, the Noble Kings, and sweet Princes.” she smiled bitterly, “It's all bullshit, the songs got it wrong. They're the real monsters.” What would a bastard know of Kings and Princes? She had to be more careful with her choice of words.

“Surely they can't all be bad.” Lemore reasoned. “I was...a handmaiden once. The Lady I served was kind.”

“Who's handmaiden?”

“A Lady of House Fowler” she answered, lying.

“Fowler.” Arya repeated, watching the women's face intently through the mirror. “They were sworn to the Martells, no? Same as the Blackmonts, Tolands...and House Dayne of course...” she was too busy reciting the names from memory she almost missed the way Lemore's lips tightened at the name Dayne.

“You sure know a lot about the South for a Northerner.” She muttered as she twisted Arya's hair together.

“I had a...mentor of sorts in Braavos. He had me read as many books as he allowed me to learn sword techniques.” Yet Arya persisted with the topic that unnerved Lemore, giving a little piece of herself away in hopes for more information. “You know I met a Dayne once.”

Lemore froze, her eyes meeting Arya's in the mirror, violet circles widening. “You did?”

Arya pretended not to noticed the women's reaction, answering as nonchalantly as she could. “Edric Dayne, technically the Lord of Starfall.”

“How did you meet him?” Lemore continued, clearly Arya had hit a mark by the intrigue in those haunted eyes.

She paused a moment, considering how much to tell of her past. Did anyone in Westeros even know about her time with the brotherhood? Or did everyone just think she married the Bolton bastard? “Edric was Beric Dondarrion's squire, me and a couple other boys we...well we were on our own in the Riverlands. A few men of the Brotherhood found us, took us to their camp. And that's where I met him.”

“I'm surprised they took you to Beric, I always heard his whereabouts were a trade secret.”
Arya snorted, “It was. Finding him took weeks.”

“But why would they bring you to him?” Lemore pressed, but Arya had already thought of the lie.

“Gendry, one of the boys I was with, he was an apprentice Smith and they needed one. He ended up swearing his sword to them... if he's still alive he'd be Ser Gendry of Hollow Hill now.” The words left a bitter taste in her mouth, though she knew she should be long over his choice by now.

“And Edric, what was he like?” She definitely cares about Dayne.

“He was Kind, a little shy but brave. He fought in the battle of the Mummers Ford, I heard he saved Beric once, he thought he could fight the Mountain.” Arya shook her head slightly at the thought, “They were sent there... by Eddard Stark” The name felt so strange on Arya's lips she couldn't help but picture him. His dark hair and dark eyes, and his voice. “The lone wolf dies but the pack survives” Oh how wrong you were father.

Lady Lemore took a moment longer to respond, a deep sadness and what might be longing in her gaze. “He does sound very brave” she said distantly but Arya couldn't think of anything else. Here I am trying to figure her out but I can't even think straight. She missed her father too much in that moment, and as Lemore finished her hair she thought of her mother attempting to do the same years ago. “Especially if he fought in the same battle as the Mountain.”

Arya closed her eyes to see the beast of a man, towering over the captives in that abandoned village by the Gods Eye. Saw the fear in the eyes of the girl he executed in front of all of them, cutting her right in half as an example to those who thought of resistance “Beric was an idiot to lift his sword to him, Gregor Clegane was more than twice the size of him.”

“You've met Ser Gregor?”

“Ser Gregor” she couldn't help but mock his title “Like I said before, the Knights were the real monsters of Westeros.”

“From what I've heard, he's one of the worst.” she muttered while standing up, “Well I'm all finished.”

Arya raised an eyebrow, “A northern braid?” she noted as she pulled it over her shoulder.

Lemore grinned almost mischievously, “I couldn't help myself, but I advise you avoid Griff. You look more like that girl from his past than ever.”

“You never did tell me how she died.” Arya couldn't help but wonder.

Lemore looked hesitant to answer at first “While giving birth to her son.” The truth.

“And her son? Did he live at least?” Arya couldn't help but wish he had.

Lemore smiled, “He did, her brother raised him” Arya nodded. But he grew up without a mother. It made her think of Jon but she pushed his grey eyes from her mind, less she drown in them. Arya thought of the girl's brother, hopefully he had a peaceful reminder of his sister in her son. “You remind me of her sometimes, you even look like her” her fathers words echoed in her head and Arya felt lightheaded. It was as though she was on the edge of a cliff with all the answers below her, but if she tried to glance over the edge, she'd fall.

“The girl, what was her name?”
“Marry” Liar. Arya turned away and studied the braid in her hair. “Do you like it?”

They're all liars, Lemore, Old Griff and Young Griff, none of them are who they say they are...but neither am I. “I haven't worn my hair like this since I was young.”

“You still are young Malia” Arya smiled but it didn't reach her eyes.

“Excuse me.”

Not long after her escape from below deck she noticed Young Griff with his back to her, he was standing at the side of the ship watching the sun set, and she decided to join him in hopes of clearing her mind once more.

“Wow” he blurted when he saw her.

“Amazing the things a bath can do, isn't it?” she teased, resting her arms on the railing beside him.

“Yes, I mean you looked great before but...” he seemed to have lost his words and Arya let herself smile. He looked handsome today, his dark blue hair hung a little messy, falling past his ears. He still kept a clean shaven face but his eyes that sometimes looked blue because of his hair dye, were a perfect light purple in the setting sun.

“You can thank Lady Lemore for the braid” she reflected, unenthusiastic.

“Ahh, don't girls love doing each others hair?” he grinned resting his elbows too, copying her body language.

“Most girls maybe, I was never fond of it. Having tidy hair meant being expected to keep it that way.” she ran a hand over the braid and let it rest on one shoulder.

“Something tells me you don't do what people expect.” his eyes had an odd glint in them that made her stomach flutter, but she pushed that feeling away.

“and what makes you say that?” she challenged tilting her head and giving him a sideways glace.

He shrugged never losing his stupid grin “I've always thought myself a good judge of people, but you Lady Snow are a mystery.” she couldn't say why but the title unnerved her.

She shook her head slightly and looked back at the waves of green-blue water, “I'm really not a Lady, Griff” she could feel his eyes on her.

“You don't like the title?” he guessed correctly, “Bad experience I'm betting. Did some Lady from a great House spit on you from her carriage? Might be she ripped you off on a dress you made? Or maybe she stole the love of your life with an arranged marriage, I mean how could he say no to a noble Lady?”

Arya gave him a shove in the arm “Oh shut up” but his teasing didn't end.

“That was it, wasn't it? Don't feel too bad I'm sure his father never gave him a choice. I bet he begged him that he could marry you instead, I mean why wouldn't he?” his eyes were gleaming.

Once more she ignored his compliments “I didn't think it was possible for someone to be so
annoying.” she decided but he only laughed.

“I do like exceeding peoples expectations” he sighed and she could feel him looking at her again.

“Have you ever swam in the middle of the ocean?” he asked suddenly.

Arya gave him a strange look “Only briefly”

“There's nothing more freeing, not being able to see anything but the water wherever you look, and knowing no matter how deep down you sink, you'll never reach the bottom...it's a little scary.” he admitted and Arya chuckled.

“You're scared of water?” she teased.

“Not the water itself, but the mystery of it.” she looked up to meet his gaze, they stayed that way a moment while she tried to figure out what he was getting at. She glanced back at the waves, giving up on trying to read his thoughts.

“Wha-” she hardly got the words out when he grabbed her waist and pulled her against him, leaning his back against the railing...and then she was falling in his arms. Salt water stung her eyes and flew up her nose before she could break to the surface, and away from Young Griff's grip, gasping for air. He was floating in the dark water beside her, his hair plastered to his smiling face. “What the hell!” she shouted, biting back a smile of her own.

“I thought you'd want to try it!” he said defensively.

Arya splashed a handful of ice cold water into his face, “You didn't even know if I could swim you idiot!” she accused.

Young Griff swam toward her, “Clearly you can.” he said pushing his hair from his face. She felt his hands reach for her under the waves, tugging her against him again. “Besides, it's hard getting you alone.”

“You had me alone last night, but I guess sleep was more important.” she countered.

He scoffed, biting his bottom lip “I drank too much.” he confessed.

“I noticed” she whispered back as he leaned in. Instead of kissing him like he so clearly wanted, she shoved his head under the water.

She sprang away as he broke above the surface, wiping the salt of the sea from his eyes. “You're stronger than you look, you know that?”

She grinned, leaning her body upward she floated on her back. A couple stars were peaking out in the dark pink sky, impatient for the sun to fully set. Little diamonds shinning through the pale blood that was quickly fading to navy silk. Closing her eyes she let herself sink. This was something she'd done often when she was younger, letting her body move through the springs on the water's terms. She saw Bran lying broken in his bed under the lids of her eyes, she saw her father handing her Needle with a tired smile, saw Syrio telling her to run...but she was competently weightless too, she could hardly feel her body, she was nothing, no one. Only the ache in her lungs reminding her she was still alive.

Strong hands were pulling her back to reality, and reluctantly, she let them. “I thought you drowned for a minuet there!” he accused, his playful grin gone. “Do you have a death wish?” She blinked the stinging from her eyes, trying to push the sudden melancholy away, yet it clung to her as the water
“Everyone dies, you don't have to wish for it.” she muttered.

Young Griff had pulled her against him, a frown darkening his handsome face. He opened his mouth to speak but a whistle cut him off. “Cozy down there?” Duck shouted from the ship, his wide smile clear through his scruffy beard.

Arya shifted her body from his, just in time as Old Griff's and Lemore's heads rose above the railing. “The hell are you two doing?” Old Griff shouted.

“Hell!” Sage screeched beside them.

Arya mustered a small smirk, “You need to find better ways of getting alone time.” Young Griff only grinned like it were a challenge.

By the time the sun had fully set Young Griff had gifted her with a red shirt of his own and she’d managed to find a pair of fitting breeches, which she needed after swimming. She abandoned the bandages on her hands and hadn't bothered to replace them. Once her hair was dry she realized the braid was nonredeemable too, and took it out. Young Griff had laughed when she did, brushing his hand over her wildly curly hair.

“It's your fault.” she accused, attempting and failing to tame the curls with her fingers.

“Good, I like it.” he gave back.

Arya had only shook her head, muttering “stupid.” over and over.

They hadn't truly spent that much time in the water, yet Arya was oddly exhausted by the time Duck had built a fire at the head of the ship. Only two cups of wine in and she was fighting off yawns, digging a nail into her finger in an attempt to wake herself up.

“Tired?” Young Griff gave her a teasing smile, but she thought she could see a hint of drowsiness in his eyes too.

She fended off another yawn, “Hardly.”

He stood, extending a hand, “Come on.” Ignoring Alis's raised eyebrows and excited smile from across the deck she took his offer. He led them below deck, walking ahead of her but still holding her hand.

“Are you going to tuck me in?” she japed.

“No, I'm going to feed you.” he told her over his shoulder.

She gave him a confused look as he dragged her into the kitchen. “I'm not hungry.” she argued.

They broke apart as he began fishing around under the counter. “Someone told me once, the way to a girl's heart is through her stomach.”

Arya snorted, but didn't bother to mention finding her heart would be as hopeless a feat as getting his “father” to laugh. Straying over to the counter she shifted through the papers left there, a couple poorly drawn sketches of what looked to be Kings Landing, a few maps, and a calendar with black X's to mark off each passing day. She held it a moment frowning at the date, knowing it meant
something. She blinked when she remembered.

“Malia,” it was clear by his tone she’d just missed something.

“What?”

“You sure you’re not hungry?” he asked, holding up a pile of purple grapes by the steam.

“Yeah.” she mumbled glancing back at the Westerosie calendar. Young Griff shifted around the room, positioning his body so he was peaking over her shoulder. “Is this accurate?” she asked, turning her face to his. He was standing so close to her she could smell the sea salt on his skin.

“Should be, you know how particular Old Griff can be.” Arya glanced back at the date. “Does it mean something?”

“Sort of...” she cleared her throat, debating on whether or not to tell him. “It’s ah...it’s my name-day.” she placed the calendar down, her eyes not leaving the page.

“Truly?”

“Truly.”

Young Griff turned her around by the shoulders, a soft smile on his lips “Happy Name-Day.”

“Thank you.” she mumbled.

“How old are you now, seven and ten?”

“Six and ten.” she corrected.

“Huh.” It’d been more than half a decade since she’d seen a member of her family who wasn’t a corpse. “Don’t be sad.”

“I’m not sad.” she argued.

“Those dark eyes give you away, just so you know.” Arya didn’t know what to say to that, no wonder the Kindly Man had been so hard on her if even Young Griff knew when she was lying.

“I think I’m just tired.” he nodded and guided her back through the halls, grapes forgotten. She thought Young Griff was acting strange as they walked, he was quiet and she was worried she’d upset him somehow, and she was still mulling over that fact it was truly her name day. When he paused after she opened her door, she gave him a questioning look.

“Is something wrong?” she looked up at him while he leaned against the door of her room.

“What? No. Nothing’s wrong, I-” he sighed and suddenly he was pressing his lips against hers and one of his hands were cupping her face. Admittedly she hadn’t been expecting that, but his hand had found her waist and the moment he pulled away she knew she didn’t want him to.

“I don’t like it when you’re sa-” Arya didn’t want to hear it, she didn’t want to think, so she brought her lips to his again, wrapping one hand behind his neck. He kissed her back softly, sliding both his hands on her hips. He pulled her closer to his chest as they kissed, he tasted like the sweet red wine they’d been drinking. Everything else that had bothered her slipped away and all that was left was Young Griff’s mouth on hers, and the rush that came with it, the sparks of a fire building inside her. When he finally pulled away again, they both had to catch their breath.
His forehead against hers, he leaned in and kissed her lightly once more and whispered, "Goodnight." He pulled back but she held him there, Arya didn’t want him to leave, nor did she want to be left with her own thoughts. All she’d do if left alone was think of the last name-day she’d celebrated, the last one she’d been at Winterfell for. Keeping her eyes locked with his, she stepped in front of the door and leaned back until it closed softly. He gave her a wicked grin then, sending those sparks alight with flame, she was hardly able to bite down her own smile.

“And what do you think you’re doing?” he spoke almost like he was gently scolding a child, taking a few steps towards her until there was barely any space between them, she had to tilt her head up to keep eye contact.

“What you should have done” she whispered and had to step on her toes to reach his lips this time. He bent down to make it easier but he groaned, and pulled away too soon.

“You’re drunk” he muttered and she glared at him, she’d only had two cups. She could feel the tingling feeling on her lips, but she wasn’t near as drunk as she’d been before, and she knew what she wanted.

“You drank more than I did” she retorted with a frown but he just smiled.

“That’s because I can drink more than you” he reasoned.

Instead of calling him stupid like she wanted to, she paused to think and began playing with one of the strings of his black shirt. As an idea popped into her head she couldn’t help but smile at herself before speaking, “You wouldn’t deny a girl on her name day, would you?” she asked innocently, grey eyes boring into him.

He glanced around as if for an answer and shook his head smirking, but then his hand was holding her face again and he was kissing her. She found herself laughing against his lips at how easily she’d won him over. His hands shifted from her throat down to her stomach, while she found her hands fumbling to untie the knots of his shirt. As an idea popped into her head she couldn’t help but smile at herself before speaking, “You wouldn’t deny a girl on her name day, would you?” she asked innocently, grey eyes boring into him.

He glanced around as if for an answer and shook his head smirking, but then his hand was holding her face again and he was kissing her. She found herself laughing against his lips at how easily she’d won him over. His hands shifted from her throat down to her stomach, while she found her hands fumbling to untie the knots of his shirt. His lips left hers and he pulled the shirt over his head with ease, and tossed it to the floor. There was only a moments pause before her body was being pressed back against the door, his lips leaving a burning trail down her neck, making her sigh. One of her hands brushed over the hard muscles of his bare chest, running down the silk smooth skin of his abdomen. The other pulling his face back to hers so she could taste him again.

His hand was sliding lower and lower down her stomach, her breath catching in her throat when it reached it’s mark. A small hum escaped her lips as his hand went to work between her legs, clever fingers igniting a fire she’d never known. Her hips instinctively moving with the motion of his hand, she ran her lips down his throat and pulled at the belt around his waist. His palm retreated too soon in response and ran down her arm, pulling her toward the bed and leaving a wet warmness on her skin. They barely broke apart as they stumbled towards the bed behind them, she landed with a soft thump with her back on the soft black furs, and she helped him pull his shirt off her.

Arya felt him pause, when she followed his eyes she felt suddenly nervous, she had collected more than her fair share of scars over the years. She found herself looking away, for once not wanting to read his reaction. Her eyes strayed above her collarbone, to the pink scar the Kindly Man had granted her. Next thing she knew she could feel the weight of his body pressing her down on the bed, the warmth of lips covering the scar her eyes had just fallen upon, and burning their way down her chest. Her nerves were forgotten when his hand cupped her breast and she felt his hardness pressing against her thigh, even through their breeches she could feel the dizzying heat.

Arya pushed him upward until his body turned, swinging herself on top of him. She pressed her mouth fiercely to his before reaching a hand down his body with deliberate slowness. He let out a
small gasp as her hand wrapped around his length, she could feel his warmth swell beneath her touch. She grinned darkly against his lips, enjoying the thrilling power of it. It was one thing to hold a man’s life in your hands with a blade to his throat...but with this, he was completely at her mercy by simply holding him, and they both knew it. She left wet kisses down his throat, chest, his stomach, all the while running her hand up and down the heat of him.

“Malia...” he warned her, breathless.

She ignored him. Pulling his breeches down and taking him in both her hands, but suddenly not so sure of herself; she’d never done this before. She’d heard many girls speak of it, the Black Pearl even gave her and the other hand maidens lessons on the topic, yet this was her first time. Arya pumped her good hand up and down the smoothness of his skin, his moans helping swallow her fear. His body tensed after she kissed him, his head falling back on the pillows when she ran her tongue from root to tip and back again. The heat of him surprised her, she hadn't expected he’d be so hot, or so hard. He breathed deep when she bushed her lips softly over his crown. Licking her lips, she took him fully in her mouth.

He groaned deep and instinct took over her movements, doing what felt natural. She lost herself in the heat of it all. His fingers gripping her hair, guiding her up and down his length, her fist still pumping his root. She knew he was hers then, completely and helplessly hers. She moaned, tasting the salty sweetness and savoring the power. Relishing in every groan and shudder she caused with just the simple movements of her tongue.

“Malia...” he gasped, as if trying to warn her again, his grip tightening in her hair, his body trembling. Arya didn't stop as every muscle in his body tensed, his breaths becoming ragged as he tried to get air in his lungs. His whole body shuddered and she moaned as he filled her mouth with sweet, salty heat. It was intoxicating, the taste of him, the control she had over him. Her hands only releasing, when he gently pushed her away.

Arya climbed back up the bed to lay beside him, a wet wicked smile on her face as she watched him try and collect himself. “You okay?” she teased.

He nodded with eyes still closed, grinning his stupid grin. “I'm glad you made me stay” he muttered and she laughed. Licking the taste of him from her lips, she sighed and closed her eyes too, resting her head beside his. The moment her body relaxed a burning hand was running across her stomach, teeth tickling and biting at her neck. She hummed with pleasure in response, not opening her eyes, not wanting to see, just to feel. One of his hands returning to the slickness between her thighs, the other pitching a nipple hard enough to make her gasp. His kisses were laced with soft bites as he moved lower down her throat, her chest, taking one of her breasts in his mouth. A breath turned into a moan as his finger bushed gentle circles over her most sensitive parts, his mouth still suckling her, she ran her fingers through his hair pulling him closer.

Her stomach knotted as his kisses burned lower, she knew where he was heading. Her nerves catching up with her, her hand pulled him back, “…You don't have to” she breathed.

Young Griff smiled wickedly, “I want to.”

Arya bit her lip as he pulled her breeches off, goosebumps running up her spine as she was laid bare before him. One of his hands pushed up her leg, his kisses brushing the back of her thigh. His lips moving at an agonizingly slow pace, closer and closer, tearing away her fear and leaving her with a burning frustration. Lust trumping fear now, she gripped his soft hair, gently pulling him in. Her breasts were coming quicker, her pulse thundering under her skin. She sighed as his fingers gently parted her folds, and he kissed her softly for the first time.
“Oh gods...” she moaned.

Her back arched as he brushed his tongue over her throbbing bud, making small circles around, and around her center. Silent pleas left her lips, her legs parting by their own volition, toes curling. The sensation of his mouth was almost overwhelming, a burning fire growing faster and hotter every moment. But she reveled in every second of it, gripping his hair, willing him to take her, to burn her fire hotter. His tongue found a rhythm and she whimpered helplessly, inhaling deep to swallow her shivering breaths. The pleasure was blinding, building, all consuming; she didn't know how much more she could take, but she never wanted it to end.

“Don't stop...” she pleaded, close, so close.

In response she felt another pressure, hot and warm. Parting her lips, he slowly eased a finger inside of her, her legs trembled, a low groan escaping her. She'd no idea where he'd learned this from, but it didn't matter. His tongue and finger strumming the same song, faster and faster, leaving her breathless and withering. Her fists gripped the furs, trying to hold on to the weight of the storm, but failing all the while. Her hips bucked as the heat enveloped into an all consuming flame, blinding stars against her eyes, her spine arched, her thighs trapping him between her legs as she cried out. He left her no time to catch her breath, pulling himself upward and locking their lips into a long, hungry kiss; the taste of her want mingling on their tongues. He left her no time to think, his body pressed against hers, skin on skin, the ripples of her climax still tingling through her bones, leaving her dizzy. He left her with no time to prepare, his arm dragging one of her legs around him, pulling her in, his hardness pressing against the softness between her thighs, thrusting upward.

He left her no time to catch her breath, pulling himself upward and locking their lips into a long, hungry kiss; the taste of her want mingling on their tongues. He left her no time to think, his body pressed against hers, skin on skin, the ripples of her climax still tingling through her bones, leaving her dizzy. He left her with no time to prepare, his arm dragging one of her legs around him, pulling her in, his hardness pressing against the softness between her thighs, thrusting upward. She gasped from the unexpected pain, harsh and sharp. Gods it hurt, more than she thought it would. Their lips broke apart as he pushed and pulled, thrusting carelessly, stealing the breath from her lungs. Her hands gripped his back tight, nails digging into his skin, trying to pass on some of the pain she was receiving. But he didn't slow, his thrusts only growing harder, faster, more urgent. Against her wishes a muffled cry left her lips, but he was inside her, so hard and real she couldn't help it. Whether he sensed her pain or not, he brought his lips to hers again, bringing a hand to caress her neck. She felt it then; the embers of the flame that had torn through her before, consuming and blinding her. A taste of sweetness in the midst of the pain.

His body tensed once more and he buried himself inside her, his body shuddering, his head falling next to hers as he collapsed atop of her, whispering a name that wasn't really hers. Arya sighed with relief as he untangled himself from the aching between her legs. He rolled away and breathed deep, pulling her face towards him and kissing her. A deep, long kiss that the singers would write songs of, the type a Lady would swoon for. It was sweet, so sweet, but not sweet enough for her to forget the throbbing pain he'd left her with. Pulling his bottom lip between her teeth, she bit down.

“Ow” Young Griff reared back, lips stained red. “That hurt.”

“You think that hurt” she growled softly.

“I didn't mean to hurt yo-” he paused “you're bleeding.” he whispered, eyes going wide.

Arya looked up and brushed a thumb across his lips “We both are.”

Chapter End Notes
#Thesmutthatwaspromised
Thanks for reading kindstranger and thanks so much for the comments, love those. This one's a little longer considering the wait, and well half of it's sex xD which I still can't decide if I love or hate that scene but whatever, until next time (/ᐠωᐟ\)/*:・ﾟ✧
Note to the Jon x Arya readers, thanks for your patience (don't kill me)◎ _ ◎
Feel Something -Jaymes Young ヾ(●_●)ﾉ♪
It was almost completely dark in her room, and if she had to guess, she'd say the sun would be rising soon. Young Griff was snoring softly beside her, and she shifted to wrap the blankets closer around herself. She wasn't used to sleeping naked, and the wrong movements had cold air biting at her exposed flesh. Her movement must have woke him, for he rolled over onto his back, “What are you doing?” he muttered.

“Nothing.” she answered, eyes directed out the moon shaped window. Arya turned her head to see him looking at her.

“It's the middle of the night, go back to sleep.”

“It's almost dawn.” Young Griff let a low growl at that, a deep throaty complaint before staring at the ceiling a long moment, wheels turning behind his eyes.

“What is it?”

“What's what?” he asked innocently, glancing back to her.

“What are you thinking about so seriously?”

He shrugged his shoulder “I'm not.”

“You're lying” she told him propping herself up on an elbow.

“And how would you know?” he teased.

“I know when anyone’s lying” he grinned, clearly not taking her seriously.

“And how’d you gain this superpower?” he asked pulling her closer to him playfully.

“It’s not a superpower” she pulled back and ignored his disappointed eyes “Just tell me” she ran a finger down his chest, it was almost completely bare. She did notice the little silvery blond hairs on the lower part of his stomach, shimmering in the limited light.

“Fine, but you’ll probably think it's stupid” he paused and searched her face before adverting his eyes from hers, almost shyly. As if to distract himself he started twirling a strand of her hair around his finger. “It's just, you didn’t tell me you were...a maiden”

“Oh...does it matter?”

“I don’t know, some girls seem to consider it...” he paused searching for the words “a special thing.”

“You should tell that to the whores in the brothels.”

“I meant their first time” he glared at her.

“Why? Was I supposed to save myself for marriage, like some present to be given away? Now forever ruined?” he frowned and she sighed, “people are stupid” she concluded as she rested her head on his chest.
“Well, they say you never forget your first. You’ll never forget the handsome man you met on your trip back to Westeros” she could hear his smile.

“I wouldn’t forget you anyway, I have too good a memory.”

“I don’t” he said flatly

“Don’t worry, you won’t forget me” she mumbled, smirking.

“Why’s that?” she could hear his smile again.

“You just won’t” she confirmed and he ran his finger up and down her arm, making her shiver.

“You were right by the way”

“Right about what?”

She sat up to look him in the eyes, “That was stupid” his grin matched her own and he pulled her into a kiss. Arya shifted her body on top of his, the warmth his skin on hers burned the sleepiness from her bones and made her forget the chill.

When she finally slept she dreamed she was in the snow filled forest. Arya still wore all black with her dark hair tied in a neat braid, and everywhere she looked she only saw snow and shadows. This time though, the moon was complete and the forest was reasonably brighter than before. Yet she still couldn't find anyone, and the feeling of eyes scurrying over her skin never left her.

When a branch snapped behind her she reached for her sword, but it wasn’t there. She kept moving forward, thinking the weirwood had to be close to here, but she stopped when realized she could hear a river. Somehow the sound of rushing water echoed in her ears, splashing behind her ears and from all directions at once, making her head spin. Arya brought a hand to her temple, trying to push the eternal sound out of her head, and that's when a wolf howled. If it was coming from a hundred thousand leagues away, or the center of her mind, she could not tell. Hundreds of them, all at once took up the chorus, howls laced with such pain and loneliness it brought tears to her eyes. Arya brought a hand to her temple, trying to push the eternal sound out of her head, and that's when a wolf howled. If it was coming from a hundred thousand leagues away, or the center of her mind, she could not tell. Hundreds of them, all at once took up the chorus, howls laced with such pain and loneliness it brought tears to her eyes.

She nearly jumped out of her skin when a raven cawed behind her. It sat on the low hanging branch of the giant weirwood tree, a tree that was not there a moment before. It poked its head from behind the cherry red leaves and squinted at her, with three eyes. It cocked it’s little head curiously while the wolves howls thundered against her skull and the river roared in her ears, but she couldn't see any of it. All that was there was the trees, the snow, and the three-eyed raven. She couldn’t say why, but she felt it was the raven's fault.

“Make it stop!” she shouted and the black bird visibly flinched. The sounds were so loud in her head she thought they would crush her, it was making it harder and harder to breathe. She brought her hands over her ears in a desperate attempt to block out the noise, but it was useless. She just fell to her knees in the cold snow before the tree, crying.

“Leave!” the raven’s voice sliced through her head louder than anything else, making her cringe, the voice so familiar yet foreign it sent chills down her spine. I don’t know how! She wanted to yell, but she couldn’t find the strength. She glared at the bird and the bloody tears streaming from the solemn face on the weirwood, the tree was almost calling to her she thought, but she couldn’t move. “Go home!” the voice boomed again and when the wolves cries split in her mind, Arya thought her ears would bleed. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she squeezed her eyes shut and screamed, still trying to helplessly cover her ears.
She was shaking, no she was being shaken. Arya opened her eyes to see Young Griff’s wide ones hovering above her. “Shhh you're okay, hey, Malia. Wake up!”

“I-” she bolted up, trying to collect herself with shuddering breaths.

“Are you alright?” She nodded, one hand on her aching temple.

“You were yelling, and you're crying” Young Griff’s eyes were round with concern, one hand reaching out the wipe a stray tear from her cheek.

“It was just a dream, it wasn’t real” she wasn’t sure who she was trying to convince, but when Young Griff reached for her hands she realized how much they were still shaking, so she brought them into fists.

“What happened?” he asked softly.

*I don’t know.* It was far from the first time she dreamed of that forest, but it was the first time she’d heard the mourning wolves and the river. *And then the crow with three eyes again.* “There was this stupid crow” she muttered trying to figure out what it meant, if it even meant anything.

“Was it the same place as before?”

“Sort of...you know what, just forget it. I’m fine, I swear.”

Young Griff frowned, his amethyst eyes full of doubt. “If you say so.”

She gave him a practiced smile and pressed her lips lightly on his before leaning away, but he pulled her back into a kiss. Arya tried to welcome it at first, but images of a bleeding tree and a black bird distracted her. *“Leave!”* *I know that voice.* But she didn’t, not really, but part of her felt she should have, a part of her she’d spent years trying to forget. She pulled away from Young Griff.

“Later” she promised, he let out small groan as she began putting her clothes on, his eyes hungry as he watched. “You should probably go to your own bed, before your father starts looking for you.”

“He can look all he wants” Young Griff perched himself on his elbow.

“He hates me enough as it is.”

“He doesn't hate you! He's just that grumpy with everyone.”

“He may be grumpy, but he's not that grumpy” she picked up his pants off the floor a threw them at his head “Now get dressed!”

Arya felt the warmth of the sun on her face as soon as she opened the door above deck, even with the cold winds, the sky was clear. It promised to be a fair day for autumn. She tried to clear her head from the dream, but when she did her only thoughts were revolving around Young Griff and the feel of his lips against her skin. She was stuck between reliving a nightmare every time she closed her eyes, or some stupid girl’s fantasy.

In an attempt to to distract herself she sat and watched the sell-swords practice, it looked like Duck was teaching Tobias some basic Westerosi moves. Tobias glanced over and waved as she approached, “Good morning Malia” and with that, Duck shoved Tobias to the ground with his shoulder.
“That was cheating!” Tobias protested while standing back up.

“You were distracted!” without taking his eyes off Tobias, Duck spoke to her with a smile “Good morning Malia”

“Morning” she sat on a barrel out of the way to survey the session, there were a handful of other sell-swords and sailors watching as well. Old Griff was there too, but Arya sat far away from him. She tried not to grimace as Duck and Tobias continued to practice for most of the morning, when over and over as Tobias would end up knocked to the ground with Duck looking far too smug.

“Come on, I've been teaching you better than that” Duck insisted as Tobias picked his sword from off the ground, despite herself, she scoffed at that.

“What's so funny?” Duck looked to her.

“Your teaching methods are what's so funny. I mean, unless you're teaching him how to die a hundred different ways, then please, continue.”

“You're going to get knocked down when learning to fight.” he rolled his eyes.

“Aye, and you need a lesson to learn to fight. You could at least show him to pivot so he stops tripping over his own feet.”

He smiled at that, “Leave the teaching to the men, who actually know how to use a sword.” he turned away from her and back to Tobias, but his arrogance was enough to get her on her feet.

“Alright, teach me your way then, as a man who knows how to use a sword.” she opened her hand to Tobias's training sword, “May I?” he handed it over.

“Look I didn't mean any offense.”

She shook her head, “No one’s offended. Come on, you're not scared to be beaten by a girl are you?”

“I don't want to hurt you” he insisted.

She lifted her blunted blade, taking up the water dancer's stance. “No fear of that.” When Duck still didn't move Old Griff cut in.

“They're training swords, she'll be fine.” when Duck looked to glare at Old Griff, Arya's arm flashed out and knocked his sword right out of his hand, and it went sliding across the deck.

“You really shouldn't get distracted.” she teased and glanced at Old Griff, she wasn't sure if he cared if she got hurt or not, but he was amused. As were a few other bearded sell-swords. Duck on the other hand, was clearly not as he went to retrieve his sword.

“Alright, just don't cry” he lifted his sword and lunged without warning, his first blow aimed at her chest, but she could tell as he continued he was just testing her reflexes. Probably still doesn't want to hurt me. But Arya didn't care if she got hit, besides, she already knew she wouldn't after weeks of studying his swordplay. So she took the place of offense, he was strong but not near as quick as she was, and his technique was the same as any Westerosi knight. Arya was a water dancer though, sure she knew all kinds of different styles to execute her sword work from her all her lessons, but the water dance had been her favorite since she had met Syrio Forel.

Duck continued swinging rushed blows and she kept dancing away easily, wherever he looked with his dark blue eyes gave away his next move long before he lifted his sword again, giving her an
excessive amount of time to avoid his attacks. She could hear the men laughing but she drowned them out, not letting them disturb her art. She could tell how frustrated Duck was getting and the girl she used to be couldn't help but be slightly satisfied, maybe he'll stop being so cocky now. After a few more blows she decided to put an end to it, dodging a strike that might have actually knocked her senseless; she brought the tip of her dull blade to Duck's throat.

He huffed out a deep breath before swiping the end of her sword away from his neck, his face sweaty and red, from frustration or fatigued, or both. Arya turned away from him and handed the sword back to Tobias, whose brown eyes were wide with wonder. “One more thing, never underestimate an opponent.” Tobias's grin was enough to bring a true smile to her lips.

Aegon

Aegon took his time in his chambers, picking what to wear, washing his hair, he even tried reading a book on the history of Pentos. It was no use though, he kept thinking about Malia. His eyes would see the words on the page but his mind's eye only saw fair skin and grey eyes. He knew he was being childish, if Duck knew how he really felt he'd never hear the end of it. But Duck was different than most men, or maybe Aegon was.

Duck didn't overthink what Alis thought of him, he was only concerned with the next time he'd lay with her was or if she would laugh at more of his poorly made jests. Aegon found himself questioning why Malia had wanted him at all, was it just for his handsome face? He was no stranger to the attention of girls, but with Malia he found himself wanting her affections to be because of something more. She was easier to talk to any girl he'd met, let alone a girl he lay with. Yet he still hadn't told her his true name.

Truth be told when he fist met her he couldn't deny the fact he wanted her, but he'd only wanted to bed her then. But if she noticed the way he first looked at her then she never betrayed it, she never betrayed anything really, only a few times had he broken through her stone wall, and the once she'd been very drunk. Even then he wondered if he really broke through anything, or if she'd just grown tired of supporting the pillars of the fortress that was her mind.

Aegon knew he should be focusing much more on his plans for when he reached Westeros. For now they were to sail to Salt pans and meet with Daenerys’s Hand, Lord Tyrion. There were things she wanted them to know that she didn't trust to be sent with a letter, and they'd just received a raven the other day informing them of the meeting. Why Daenerys had chosen the son of Tywin Lannister as her Hand, was still beyond him. As witty as he'd been when Aegon met him, he saw no reason to trust him with such power. Even if he did kill Tywin, one of their enemies, it just made him a kinslayer and damned in the eyes of Gods and men.

But after Salt pans they would sail for Dragonstone (Unless Tyrion told them otherwise) and claim it in the name of the Dragons, once things have been settled there they'll probably look for an alliance with the Tyrells of the Reach. If the rumors were true of Cersei killing half of their family in a blaze of wildfire, then if there were any Tyrells left, it shouldn't be hard to find common ground. Aegon was also aware Daenerys would want him to be married to form an alliance, Jon Connington wouldn't stop reminding him of this particular duty. Whether it be to a Dornish princess or a Lady of the Reach Aegon still didn't know. I'll be married to whosoever father has more power.

He reminded himself this was his duty as a prince. His father had married a Dornish woman too, but if the stories were true he ran off with the Northern she-wolf. When Aegon had questioned Jon Connington about this, he'd only told him that girl was the worst thing that ever happened to Raehgar, that if not for his folly with Lyanna Stark he'd be King of the Seven Kingdoms today. But if Lyanna was anything like Malia, Aegon couldn't help but sympathize.
When he finally went above deck his eyes found Malia first, her dark hair was put in high pony tail, stray strands brushing the sides of her rosy cheeks. Tobias was standing beside her with his brown eyes bright with excitement, a few other sell swords also seemed interested.

“Who taught you how to fight?” Tobias asked, *he might as well be bouncing up a down.*

“What's going on?” he asked, smirking at Malia. He couldn't help it considering their last encounter. When he looked away though he saw how red Duck's face was, and his smile fell.

“Malia just kicked Ser Rolly's ass!” Javer hooted.

“She didn't kick my ass” Duck growled.

“It was amazing!” Tobias cheered.

“It wasn't amazing.” Malia shook her head at Tobias, “It just wasn't...typical Westerosi sword play.” surprisingly Aegon thought she seemed almost uncomfortable, a rare sight.

“No it wasn't” Jon had walked over to the small circle that was forming. “The Braavosi Water Dance, no?” Malia nodded.

“Dancing?” Ducked asked with clear scorn.

“Dancing.” Malia confirmed her voice and eyes hardening.

“Impressive, none the less.” Jon added, surprising everyone.

Malia gave him a suspicious look, “Thank you.” Jon's only response was a grunt. “Anyway, I'll let you guys practice” she said, moving to leave.

“Can't you show us more?” begged Tobias

“Umm, I'm not much of a teacher” she said awkwardly, “besides you're going to Westeros, best learn Wesertosi techniques.”

“I need to talk to her anyway, I'm sure Duck has plenty more to show you” Tobias's face fell and Aegon gave Duck a reassuring smile. Duck turned the other way, his pride clearly wounded.

“Actually I'd like to have a word with you” Jon cut in “I'm sure Malia wouldn't mind some time alone.”

Jon gave her a look and Aegon could feel an odd tension. “Not at all” her voice was as cold as Jon's was, “Excuse me.”

Jon Connington put one gloved hand on his shoulder and guided Aegon away from listening ears.

“How'd you sleep?”

“Fine, why do we have to talk privately?”

“You didn't sleep in your bed last night.” he said it as an observation but Aegon knew it was an accusation. *He knows.*

“You point?” he asked and Jon stopped walking.

“You know my point. You bedded that girl, didn't you?”
“Why does it matter?” Aegon appreciated everything Jon had done for him all these years, he truly did. But he was tired of him trying to control every aspect of his life.

“You're the heir to the Iron Throne after Daenerys, your firstborn will sit the Iron Throne, you can't go around fucking whores!” Jon snapped.

“She's not a whore.”

“How would you know? She could have bedded a hundred men before you.”

“Because I do” he insisted thinking back to last night, it had been her first time. The thought still made him a little nervous, and oddly guilty.

“How could you possibly—” realization donned Jon's features “you didn't.” Aegon didn't say anything, but he could tell how angry Jon was. He didn't understand why though. why's does he care so much who I lay with? I'm not a King and might never be one, I'm not even betrothed to anyone. As if knowing Aegon's confusion, Jon continued.

“Dammit Aegon, what if you got a child on her? You can't marry her, no matter how much you fancy her she's still a bastard. There's no possible way it'll end well, and now you've taken her maiden head! You'll break her heart.” no, she'll break mine. A voice whispered in the back of his mind. “Wait, you didn't tell her anything right? About who you really are?”

“No I didn't tell her anything.” he mumbled.

“Good.”

“Not like it matters, once we get to Westeros everyone will know.”

“Well we're not in Westeros.”

“I still don't see why it matters if she knows.”

“Maybe it's why she slept with you.” the words were a punch in gut.

“That's not possible” but even saying it, Aegon wasn't sure.

“She sees more than you think” Jon shook his head in frustration “I told her to stay away from you.”

“You did what?” He could feel his anger sparking up, he' never been good at keeping his temper in check.

“Look I know trouble when I see it, and she's—”

“That wasn't your decision to make! I might owe you my life, but you don't get to choose how I live it.”

“Ageon-”

“No, I'll only ever be king if Daenerys dies, and she has three bloody dragons! I'll marry who I have to, when I have to. I'll do my duty like you taught me, and won't break any vows like my father did. But until then, I'll spend my time with whoever I like.”

With that he stormed off, not thinking or looking where he was going. He paced the deck at first, but every time someone glanced his way it made his skin itch. He wanted to scream or punch something, mostly punch something. Instead he went back to his room. He expected he'd go and lie down in an
attempt to calm himself, but there she was. Malia was sitting on his bed (which was twice as large as hers) reading the same book he was staring blankly at earlier. When she looked up at him and he saw her grey eyes soften, he felt most of his anger melt away. “Hey” his voice was hoarse.

“Hey” her voice was even kinder than her eyes.

“I didn't know you could read” he blurted and she smiled sadly, closing the book and placing it on the bed.

“My father taught me” she confessed. It was hard for him to imagine her with family for some reason, maybe because she'd been so independent since she boarded. Malia looked back to him, “Griff knows, doesn't he?”

“Yes he knows” she sees more than you think. Aegon took a seat next to her. For a moment he thought she'd ask him what happened and what Jon had said about her, but she didn't and he was relieved. She only sat quietly, the grey seas in her eyes hiding a thousand thoughts he'd never learn.

“It's because of how much he cares about you.” she said.

That made him frown, “It doesn't mean he gets to control me.”

“No...It means he just wants what's best for you.”

“Why are you defending him?”

“I'm not defending him, It's just...never mind” she stood and went to leave but he grabbed her arm.

“Wait” they stayed there a moment with him just holding her “Explain it to me”

Her face was as solemn as ever and it made her all the more beautiful. “He thinks I'm bad for you, right? It's probably true is all” he stood up and held both her hands in his.

“Why would you think that?” she shook her head and gently pulled her hands away, he swallowed trying not to feel hurt.

“It's just...look I had a plan okay? Go back to Westeros and finish what I started, go and find my family or what's left of them.” she looked at her feet “If there is anything left.” she corrected. “This ship was not apart of the plan, you were not part of my plan....” she was silent a moment and not looking him in the eye. “When we reach shore I'm gone, you understand that?”

Her words cut deep but he forced himself to keep an unchanged face, “I know...but we're not in Westeros yet, and just because something has to end does that mean we shouldn't enjoy it?” He had her there he knew, finally she held his gaze.

“I suppose it doesn't” for a second Malia was almost shy again, the way she had been when he was helping her undress the night before.

He moved a finger down the sleeve of her arm, “Good...” he whispered taking a step toward her “because I don't think...” he slid his hands around her waist, savoring the grin she tried to hold back by biting her lip. “That I could handle the rest of this trip...” he began leaving a trail of kisses up her neck “seeing you everyday and not...” he paused, his lips an inch from hers.

Her dark eyes looked up at him with pure challenge, “and not what?” she whispered and in that moment he wondered where the hell she'd come from. The North she had said. Escaped off a ship stolen by pirates and floated right into his. A young northern women who was a warrior and
completely and utterly mesmerizing. He'd thought he'd wanted to sit the Iron Throne, to avenge the family he never knew. But now all he wanted was to sail this ship forever.

Aegon kissed her fiercely, not thinking about how much it would hurt when he'd have to stop. And in return she kissed him just as hard and when her hands started exploring his body he felt his skin rush with a wave of heat. Quickly he reached down and picked her up and she wrapped her hands around his neck and she laughed. A beautiful and rare sound.

He carried her to the bed all the while not separating his lips from hers, and it wasn't long before they were tearing off the clothes they'd only put on a few hours before. He was more aware that he was the only person she'd ever been with, keeping this in mind he wanted to make it all the more pleasurable for her. And it seemed the weeks sailing to Westeros were flying by faster than anything had in his life. Jon had stopped trying to control everything Aegon did, and Duck got over being beaten by a girl. And most nights he and Malia had their fill of wine and of each other. He found himself lost between her legs and wondering what was sweeter, making her laugh and seeing her grey eyes light up with rare joy, or the the sound of her moans and the feel of her claws digging in his back.

Chapter End Notes

Okay I want to say two more chapters before they reach Westeros \(•○•) /
& I got some mixed reviews on the sex scene last chapter, which is understandable. I would like to clarify though, that in my mind anyway, If Arya didn't want something she wouldn't take it.
Anyway, thanks for reading kindstranger <3 and thanks once again for the comments and the patience of the JonxArya shippers, I'm very excited to get to that part, tbh I've already started writing it loll (‘σ’)
Your Life - Stephen ＼(^皿^/)／
So it's been a minuet...(°□°)ʖ but I'm determined to finish this, and since it's been so long here's two chapters in one. Also, writers block is a bitch. (¬_¬)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Arya

“Dinner?”

“Dinner.”

“We eat together all the time...you're not making this some type of thing, are you?”

Young Griff smiled, amethyst eyes lit with amusement, “It's not a thing, and everyone else will be there anyway.”

Arya scoffed, “Did you find everyone else new clothes for this dinner?” she gestured to the navy blue shirt and black breeches on the bed. The long sleeve wasn't as fancy as any high born Lady's clothes, but the fabric was soft and the stitching nicer than anything she'd worn in a long time.

“I didn't want you to feel under dressed is all.” he said, “Lemore and Alis will probably wear some kind of dress, and you did say you didn't like dresses.”

Arya picked up the shirt before eyeing him mockingly, “So he listens.”

He snorted, “Of course I listen.”

“Listen!” Arya rolled her eyes at Sage, the crow was perched on the end of her bed.

“Yes, you should try it sometime.” She muttered in response.

Young Griff smiled before leaning in and kissing her softly on the cheek, “I'll see you at sunset then?” He asked as he went to the door.

“Will there be wine?”

“Only the best kind.” He teased.

“Aye, I suppose you will then.” She agreed reluctantly.

They were only a few days away from Westeros, only a few days before she'd say goodbye to Young Griff and the rest of the crew. The whole time she'd spent with the House of Black and White she'd met countless people, made foes and friends, and hardly ever said goodbye before simply disappearing one night. It was easier then, losing those friends had never hurt near as much as losing her home or family, or even Gendry and Hot Pie. Yet the more she thought about how close they were to Westeros, the more a small part of her wished this ship would never reach land.

These past couple months had been simple, simpler than any days since she fled the Red Keep.
There was no traveling in strange lands, no fearing for her life in Harrenhal, no lesson to be learned from every task the Kindly Man would have of her. There was just the normal life of a sailor, beautiful sunsets, and nights spent drinking in good company. But if Arya had learned anything over the years, it was all things came to end, good or bad, one way or another, circumstances would change. There was no such thing as forever in this life.

The crew could feel it too, she could see it in their eyes; in the way they laughed less and their smiles weighed more. Everyone knew what it would mean when they reached Westeros, war and blood, death and loss. The adversity she would face when she reached land was different from theirs, and she didn't fear for her life like most of these men did, but the promise of death and blood in the coming months were as certain as winter for all of them.

“Home!” Sage cried and landed on her shoulder, interrupting her thoughts.

“Soon Sage, soon.” She promised, throwing her cloak on she went above deck. Dark clouds hung low in the sky, filling the air with the smell of the coming rain, mixed with the salty waves of the sea. They crashed against the front of the ship, swaying the wood beneath her feet. The deck was unusually bare this morning, and she figured most men would be hiding away from all the rain the sky was promising. She sighed as she leaned against the rail, closing her eyes and tasting the salt from the mist clouding around her.

Arya let her mind wander, searching for the familiar warmth of Nymeria, and when she found her the cold chilled her to the bone. North, she was further North than she'd been before. The snow reached past her ankles and numbed her paws, flurries swam around her head. They helped conceal the shadows of her little cousins, that and the dark pines of the forest. Dawn was just breaking through the clouds, only a faded pink glow hidden behind a wall of grey.

Her cousins howled in turn, hundreds of voices crying out in unison; a warning to some but an invitation to others. She sat in silence, watching the glowing behind the clouds, wondering when or if she'd ever see the sun once more. The voices died, and the chorus of birds took up it's place, and just as the girl inside her head almost let go, another voice struck her in the chest. Brother. She knew instantly the cry of another direwolf, one that belonged to her first pack.

“What are you doing?” Arya opened her eyes with a start. “Did I just sneak up on you?” Alis laughed “Gods I didn't think that was possible.”

“I knew you were there.” She lied with a grin.

“Bull, you almost just shat your breeches.” Arya just rolled her eyes. “Where were you?”

She shrugged in response, almost home. “Nowhere.” Alis just gave her a long stare, blue eyes determined in finding an honest answer. “I was just...” wondering if it was Summer or Bran. Arya had heard a tale that once a warg dies, they live a second life in their animal. If it were true, then Bran would still be alive, in a way at least. “Thinking of my brother.”

“Hmm, older or younger?”

“Younger, though I had older brothers.”

Alis looked out at the sea, “So did I, once.” Arya gave the older girl a long look, grief and loss clear in the depths of her gaze.

“What happened?” she asked gently.

Arya gave a sad smile, “It's not the kindest story Snow, and I don't want anyone's pity.”
“You'll get no pity from me.” She promised.

“I had two brothers, Ethan and Theo, they were five and seven.” Alis sighed, “I'm from Lys, and there was a disagreement over land.” She snorted. “Or a squabble you should really call it, wealthy and greedy men having a pissing contest and bickering over who's name belonged on which blade of grass. Anyway I was thirteen when the Tyroshie decided the blades of grass my family home rested on, should belong to them. And the rest well...”

“The Disputed Lands” Arya mumbled.

“You really do know your history.” Alis gave her sideways look.

“The borders of Myr, Lys, and Tyrosh have been ever changing for decades.” She admitted, “Some call them the quarrelsome daughters of the Free Cities, all of them building their wealth on trade and salves.”

Alis nodded, turned her head back to the sea. “We were all sold, my mother as well, but my father...he wasn't.” Arya knew by the tone of her voice, her father had died that day. “That was the last I saw of them, but I escaped my captors, made money where a could, and eventually met Duck.” her blue eyes glowed, “And thank the gods I did.”

Arya pondered her words, “It's all such a waste.” she thought then, as she found the similarities between their lives, and their losses. “One man with power decides he wants his name on something, want's his ass in a damn chair, and thousands die for it.” She didn't bother to hide her bitterness. “Or women.” she added.

Alis gave her an odd look, “You don't believe in the war we're sailing into?”

“In the Dragon Queen?” she shook her head, “I don't know.”

“But she broke the slave trade in Mereen, freed thousands in Astapor. I think she'd make a great Queen in place of Cersei, they say that women blew up half the city. She let thousands of her own people burn for god's sake.”

“I've no doubt anyone would be better than Cersei, don't think for a second I'd support that bitch. It's just...” death, always death. Valar Morghulis. “I don't know.”

“Death!” Sage took to the air, making small loops around their heads, landing beside Alis. “Death! Death! Death!” his cries echoed her thoughts, making her stomach crawl with spiders.

“What's your story then, Snow?” Arya raised an eyebrow. “Oh come on, I showed you mine, you show me yours. That's how it works, right?”

Arya smirked at her choice of words, “Is it? I don't recall.”

“Oh come, can't be as bad losing your whole world in one night.”

She could only smile at the irony, “Alright. My father was a great lord, who lost his head for treason, so after being taken as a war prisoner and almost ransomed, I learned the rest of my family were murdered. So I crossed the sea to join an ancient order of assassins, but that didn't work out, so here I am.” Arya waved her hands dramatically and gave her a wide smile.

Alis grinned, “A Lord's daughter then?”

“I might technically be a princess...” Arya gave her a serious look.
“Fine, keep your secrets Snow.” Alis scoffed, “Good story though.”

“Hardly.”

The rest of the day she spent with Alis and Lemore, helping to prepare a fine dinner, though no one gave her a reason why. A meal like this made her think they were celebrating something, but if they were Arya couldn't think of any reason. So she chopped whatever foods were sent her way, onions potatoes, even a few apples.

When dinner finally rolled around that night they sat in one of Old Griff's private rooms, one she hadn't been permitted to be in yet. The table was set, a plate for each of them, there were even a few servants standing to the side. In all honesty when Griff led her in, it almost made her uncomfortable, the sight was eerily familiar. She couldn't help but notice the five seats at the table, the same number of her family, the same set up they'd have at their own dinners when she was a girl. There was even no seat for Jon, as would be expected from her mother.

She smiled as Young Griff pulled out a seat for her, she sat beside Lemore who was at the end of the table opposite of Old Griff, while Duck and Alis sat across from her and Young Griff. Young Griff had been right before, Lemore and Alis both wore dresses, even Old Griff and Duck were wearing fine tunics and Arya's curiosity flared. She didn't voice her concerns or her questions, just continued listening to the polite chatter as the food was laid before them. They'd even had a couple servants for the dinner, holding flasks of wine and standing nonchalantly to the side of the room.

“Who would have thought salted beef could taste this good.” Duck mumble through a mouthful.

“It's amazing what copping some veggies will do, I could show you how it's done if you'd like.” Lemore offered.

He only scoffed in return, “I'll be more likely to be spending my time with a much bigger kind of knife in my hand, once we reach Kings Landing.” Arya watched as Lemore faked a smile.

“The war won't last forever.” Alis reminded him gently, “They'll be time for all sorts of things.”

“Not if I make my way up to King's Guard.”

“I think you mean Queen's Guard, and I doubt it.” Young Griff teased. Arya doubted it too, but decided against voicing her opinions, less she let her and Duck's uneasy peace collapse.

“I'll make it before you ever will.” He shot back, in typical fashion.

“Is that really what you want?” Alis cut in, “To stand around with your dick in your hand, and taste the Queen's food for her?”

Arya and Young Griff held back smiles as Duck gaped at her, “I wouldn't be standing around with my-”

“Enough.” Old Griff barked, “Being a member of the King's or Queen's Guard is an honorable position, whether anyone at this table is capable of achieving that or not.”

“Or if Daenerys thinks them capable.” Lemore added.

“And if you're lucky, she won't be burning people alive like her father was.” As was common of her
once nine year old self, Arya would never realize she'd misspoken until it was too late. The room was loudly quiet, and being at the center of the heavy silence, she moved to fill it. “I'm sure she won't be...”

“No, she won't.” Young Griff added a little too forcefully, and she gave him a questioning look.

“She's not wrong.” Old Griff cut in, looking his adoptive son in the eye. “King Aerys lived up to the name of the Mad King, he'd burn who he liked when he liked. If he hadn't went and burned Lord Stark, the Targaryen's might have still held the Iron Throne to this day.”

Arya frowned, “Lord Stark?” she asked without thinking.

“We've hardly ate and this is our topic of discussion?” Lemore cut in scornfully.

“Sorry...I'd just never heard that story.”

“You never knew Aerys killed Rickard Stark and his son? That was practically the start of Roberts Rebellion.” Alis added surprised.

“I'd never heard the burning part.” She clarified.

Duck shook his head slightly, “They say the Mad King laughed as he burned the man alive with wildfire, cooking him slowly in his armor. All the while his son watched, being strangled by a cord as he tried to save him.” he spoke as if it were some horror story for a campfire.

Arya stared at him a moment, and as she processed his words she found herself setting down her fork. “Oh.”

“Lord Stark and his son should have known better than to make demands of Kings.” Old Griff put in.

“They took his daughter.” Arya found her self speaking out of turn again.

There was a pause and a few awkward glances before Young Griff spoke. “Allegedly. People say she ran away with Rhaegar.”

“And some say he raped her. It's doesn't change the fact Aerys was a monster.” Arya searched his eyes, expecting him to agree with her, as any sane person would. “What, do you think things would have been better if the Targaryen's won the war?”

“I guess we'll never know.” He answered flatly and Arya looked to her wine, mind turning. If Aerys had won, her father would be dead and her or her siblings never born. It was an odd thought, and all it might have taken was for Rhaegar to win the battle at the Trident.

Lemore waved her hand to one of the servants and two of the sprang into action. “How about a toast?” she said lifting her glass once it was filled. “It's been a long time coming but here's to finally making it to Westeros.” she gave Arya a smile, “All of us.”

“To a new beginning.” Alis lifted her cup and the tension mostly left the room.

Old Griff almost smiled, “We're not quite there yet.”

Duck nodded seriously, “It's true, we still might get lost at sea, crash when we get to shore, we could all drown...” Lemore cut him down with a look and he stopped with a grin. “Or we'll make it just fine.”
Make it in time to die in a battle for Kings Landing. Arya shook her dark thoughts away and stirred the fresh wine in her glass slightly.

“Anyway.” Lemore went on as Alis sipped at her drink eagerly. “To Westeros, and to a Targaryen sisting on the Iron Throne.” The women's eyes glowed as they met Old Griff's and then Young Griff's. Arya felt more questions burning on her tongue, but decided to wash them down with the wine. Time slowed as the cup met her lips, her instincts suddenly stimulated and her heart pounded in her ears as conclusions raced through her mind. Before she'd even met them her hand swiped Young Griff's drink from his mouth, his cup crashed into the dishes and the red wine splattered onto the table.

Everyone froze, drinks to their mouths and looking at her like startled deer. “The wine...” she hesitated, looking at the cup in her hand, was she losing it? She brought the cup to her nose and smelled the tainted sweetness.

“What are you-” Young Griff was interrupted by a cough. Alis's face screwed up uncomfortably, her fingers rubbing her throat tenderly as she sputtered.

“Alis...” Ice crawled up Arya's arms and dread sank to her stomach. “No...”

Alis coughed harder, one hand reaching out to grip Duck's shoulder. “Alis.” He held her back, his voice startled, confused.

The blond girl stared into Arya's eyes, fear making her pupils dilated. “Sn-ow?” she managed before another out burst of coughing shook her body. Time began to move oddly, somehow they were all standing except for Duck who was holding onto Alis, trying to give her water. Arya backed up until the wall prevented her from stepping any further. The Strangler. That was the poison the wine had been laced with. The waif had taught her all the ways of detecting it in drinks or food, the best ways to break it down and how to extract it from the flower, a plant only found in the Jade Sea. It constricted the victims windpipe, suffocating them. Arya had never seen it used before, but she'd always wondered...

It had been the same poison that Joffery had succumbed to. She couldn't guess how many nights she'd imagined what the effects would look like on someone, especially him. Had he really tore his own throat open in an attempt to breath? Had his face really turned as back as coal? Like the stories told? Alis's face was turning red and tears were streaming down her cheeks, Lemore and Duck were crying as well. And there she stood, all her child wonders about to be answered, and she couldn't face them.

She was dimly aware of someone grabbing her arm but she torn herself free and kept going, she couldn't get Alis's fearful blue eyes out of her head, couldn't stop imagining her tearing open her throat and her face becoming black. Arya burst onto the deck, rain and salt whipped in her face in the dark, but she hardly felt it. Her stomach was turning over and over and once she reached the railing she lost what little of the dinner she'd eaten. Stepping back and rubbing a sleeve across her mouth she tried to regain her composure.

Alis was undoubtedly dead by now, someone had tried to kill them. All of them. The Kindly Man's sweet smile filled her horrified thoughts. No, no that's impossible, they couldn't have found me here. They couldn't have even caught up to me yet. She pushed her guilt down, her rationalization convincing her this had nothing to do with her past, this had nothing to do with the things she'd done. They would have only killed me. The old man's lesson had been key in being a Faceless Assassin, “Are you some butcher, killing anyone who stands in your way?” his accusation rang in her head.

The deck door swung open as she paced, Old Griff's red wolf cloak snapped in the wind and he
lifted a hand to cover his face from the rain. He peered around frantically before his wild eyes found her. “What did you do?” he growled in the night.

Arya could only gape at him, “Me?” he stepped closer, “What makes you-” His gloved hand grabbed her by the throat before she could finish, slamming her into the cabin wall of the ship, and the world spun.

“You knew!” he spat in her face, but she couldn't focus with her head pounding. “What did you do?” he screamed again, shaking her like some kind of doll, cutting off her breath. She wondered if she wouldn't be the only one to suffocate tonight. Dimly someone else was screaming, Lemore she realized, she was hitting Old Griff’s shoulders.

“Let her go!” her voice was high pitched with fear, “Let her go!” His finger's tightened around her neck and momentarily her senses came back to her, Arya kicked out and his knee buckled under the pressure. Old Griff stumbled and Arya broke free, falling onto the wet deck a couple feet away, coughing almost as hard as Alis was. “What is wrong with you?” Lemore was still screaming.

“She killed Alis!” Old Griff yelled back, “She knew and she killed her, she tried to kill all of us!”

“Have you lost your goddamn mind? Why would she do that!”

Arya coughed again before standing up, she felt hands trying to help but she pulled away from them. “Don't.” she looked up to see Young Griff’s wide purple eyes, his face stricken pale from witnessing death.

“Malia...wha, how did you know?” his voice was hollow and she guessed he was still in shock.

“Because she planted the poison, and got cold feet.” Old Griff accused.

“Why would I kill you?” she asked exasperated, “and Alis...” her voice almost broke but she held onto her anger. “If I wanted you dead then you'd be dead.”

“You knew.” Old Griff was a dog with a bone, obsessed with the only thing he knew for sure.

“So what I know what poisoned wine tastes like, If I didn't you'd all be dead right now!”

“And who the hell are you then? Who taught you that?” Old Griff stepped threateningly closer.

Arya didn't back down, meeting his stare head on. “How about you tell me who the hell you really are?” she stepped a little forward, looking up at him despite the rain falling in her eyes. “Because it was your dinner table we were sitting at, your ship and your crew, and last I checked no one uses poison as rare as Valyrian Steal to kill some bloody Sl...swords!” Her words gave them all pause for a moment, and Arya stepped back, her head still spinning. She brought a hand to her temple and turned away from him, suddenly dizzy.

“What do you mean by that?” Lemore's voice was as brittle as straw. “Rare as Valyrian Steal?”

She took a breath to steady herself before explaining, “Maester's call it the Strangler, and making it take's time and coin, hardly anyone knows how it's done. It's...” she paused thinking of her sister and the song's she'd heard, of Sansa dropping it in his wine.

“What?” Young Griff pressed.

“It's the same poison they used to kill Prince Joffery at his wedding.” They stood there silently in their make shift circle, the rain crashing on the deck around them, the waves rocking the wood under
their feet. Everyone's faces were paler in the moonlight, Lemore's haunted eyes distant and empty, Old Griff's hard as stone, and when she spared Young Griff a glance he was staring at his feet.

“Joffery Baratheon was a King, not a prince.” Old Griff muttered, “The Strangers the kind of poison used on Kings.” He and Lemore shared a look and he walked off, back into the heart of the ship.

The silence between them hung as heavy as death, and Arya could only meet Lemore's broken eyes a moment before leaving. There were too many emotions swimming in their indigo depths, sympathy Arya had no interest in, grief from her own loss, and questions. Lemore might not think her guilty of Alis's murder, but there was suspicion brimming under those irises. She hurried down the stairs, her heart sinking as footsteps followed her.

“Wait, Malia!” Arya had kept walking until she'd made it through her own door, but came to the realization she couldn't just lock him out.

“What do you want?” she asked exasperated as she turned around and Young Griff raced in behind her.

“What do I want?” he repeated angrily, “Alis just died, and you're what? just going to hide in here?”

“I can't do this.” She said gritting her teeth. “If you need some shoulder to cry on, I'm not it.”

“I came to see if you were okay!” It was half a lie, she was sure. He'd been crying and his voice was on the edge of breaking, and Arya knew he didn't want to be alone, but she needed to be. She stepped back and ran a hand through her damp hair, only to have her fingers come back sticky. Blood glistened on her fingertips and how hard Old Griff slammed her against the wall, registered with her pounding head.

Young Griff stepped forward, “He really hurt you...”

“Don't.” she reeled back, “just don't okay? I can't do it anymore, whatever this was.” she gestured between them. “It's done.”

“I-I don't understand.” His eyes were bright with hurt and confusion. “What does Alis...what did this have to do with us?”

Arya closed her eyes a moment, Alis's panicked face flashed back at her and her stomach twisted. She couldn't handle any more of this pain, for so long she kept her distance, she'd been no one and had no one, needed no one. Learning of Jon's death had almost broke her, and she couldn't risk her heart anymore, Alis was her breaking point. “I just can't.” she muttered, and took a breath. “I don't know who the hell tried to kills us tonight, I don't even want to know what's going on with you and your father and this entire ship. I'm just done.”

“Less than a day” The sun had just fallen under the sea, leaving half the sky pink and the other sapphire blue.

“Really?” Tobias asked in a hushed voice.

“Home!” cried the raven on Tobias's shoulder “Home!” The bird took off around their heads, landing on the bowsprit on the ship.
“And then we'll have finally reached Westeros” Old Griff was standing at the front of the ship with Tobias beside him, Arya stood a few paces back sipping a cup of red wine. “Half a day, then you're gone” he shot a glare at her.

Arya didn't look up from her wine and cradled the cup slowly, “and how many more days do you have?” she asked flatly, wondering if Old Griff would ever come clean about her suspicions.

Tobias squinted his eyes in confusion, “What do you mean?” Tobias and his soft brown eyes were at least four and ten years of age, almost a man grown, but Arya couldn't help see how innocent and naïve he still was. Jon Snow had been the same age as Tobias last she saw him and was never so blind, and even Bran, who was eight last she saw him; saw twice as much as this boy did.

“Nothing” she drank the last sip of her cup and retreated to the back of the deck to watch the moon rise.

It had been two nights since she talked to Young Griff and everyday before that had been so calm. Weeks of omitting thoughts of her family, giving into her passions, desires, and losing herself in cups of wine and nights between Young Griff's sheets. Arya Stark could of swore she had true moments of sedated peacefulness for the first time in her life. The only thing that ever bothered her then and still, were her dreams. Over and over again the same dream in the same snowy forest with the same bloody three-eyed crow where she could never reach the damned tree. She thought she might be losing her mind but there was no one to tell, no one to talk to.

Neither her or Young Griff made moves to speak to each other, not since the night Alis had died. The day after everything they held a service of sorts for her, wrapping her body in blankets and tossing her into the sea. Arya had kept her distance, but still showed her respects. Lemore said a prayer to the seven and she thought of saying her own privately, but she didn't know what Gods Alis kept to or even what to pray for.

So there she stood, by herself at the back of the ship watching the last edges of the sun sink beneath the waves, a little tipsy and holding an empty cup of wine.

“Is beautiful, isn't it?” Arya had heard Lady Lemore's foot falls behind her but didn't brother to turn around and greet her, hoping she'd just leave.

“It is.” Arya agreed still watching the waves. She wouldn't admit it, but she'd been drinking almost the entire time since Alis had died. It helped her sleep and kept the nightmares from being so vivid. More than that, it helped her not focus on all the problems she faced once she reached land, and somehow it even made the tormenting thoughts of Jon and Alis deaths less real.

“I doubt you get many sunsets like this in the North without the sea around.” Lemore commented but Arya didn’t see the need to respond so she continued. “Is that where you're planning on going?”

Why do you care? “I suppose I'll make my way there eventually” The Riverlands first. “Might be I'll pay the Wall a visit” maybe see Jon's grave if they had the decency to bury him. But if she was honest with her herself, her interest in the Wall had nothing to do with the dead.

“The Wall?” she could feel Lemore looking at her like she was crazy “Malia do have any idea how dangerous that would be?” Arya didn't answer her. “Anyone with an interest in surviving the winter is heading South.”

Arya let her grey eyes meet Lemore's purple ones, she noticed how especially pretty they were in the dim light of the sunset. “Don't you waste your time worrying about me Septa.”
Lemore's face hardened then and she no longer looked the part of a kind and helpful Septa. “You don't plan on surviving the winter do you?” Arya continued to watch the sunset and wished her cup wasn't empty “Griff told me what you said, about having unfinished business in Westeros. I've been keeping an eye on you Malia, and I think I have an idea what kind of business you're going back for.”

“You don't know what you're talking about.” Arya wanted nothing more than to be left alone.

“Don't I? Tell me, what is the plan? Kill who needs to be killed and then off yourself? We've all lost something Malia, that doesn't mean you just give up!” Lemore was distraught, over Alis or actually caring about her, she couldn't say and she couldn't care.

Arya turned and snapped on her “I didn't lose something, I lost everything!” she hated Lemore in that moment for making her lose her temper, almost as much as she hated herself for letting her.

“Malia-”

“No.” She cut her off, “You're almost right about me, but I've been watching too. You want to know what I see? Liars. All you've done, all any of you have done since I got on this damn ship, is lie to me. You're lying about why you're going to Westeros and I know you're not just sell-swords, you even lied about who “Marry” was, and the only ones who told me their real names was Alis and Duck.”

Lady Lemore paled a bit “How...did Young Griff...”

“No. He didn't tell me anything, just more lies. And you know what? I don't care. Pretend to be whoever the hell you want, gods know I have. But don't talk to me about giving up, I'm still here.” There was an awkward silence then and Arya almost jumped when Sage landed on the railing right between her and Lemore.

“Is everything okay here?” she turned her head to see Old Griff, of all people watching them.

“We're fine Griff” Lady Lemore answered before she could.

“Fine!” the raven cawed, “Fine! Fine!”

“You're sure?” he asked and Arya rolled her eyes and faced her back too him, the sun had almost completely set now.

“Yes, now get back to ordering people around or something.” Arya could hear Girff's steps drown out but not completely, he was still listening. Nosy old man. Lemore's voice was quiet as if she too sensed that Old Griff hadn't left them completely alone. “Well if you're gonna be reckless about it, you could at least get yourself a bigger sword.”

Arya let out a small huff of amusement and some of the tension left her shoulders “I will.”

“Sword!” The bird cawed as it strut back and fourth “Ice! Sword!” Ice, her father's blade came to mind and Arya gave the bird a strange look. Lemore did too.

Trying not to think about the it Arya continued, “It was a gift from my brother” she confessed not taking her gaze off it's black beady eyes.

“Does it have a name?” Lemore inquired.

“Needle.”
Lemore smiled a moment before placing her serious gaze back to Arya, “And what would your brother think of your plan?”

“Plan!” the raven echoed, “Home!”

“The dead don't have opinions.” Arya countered and Lemore gave a sigh of defeat.

“Dead!” Sage cried “Jon!” Arya flinched from the name and took a step back. “Dead, dead, dead!” it sang.

Old Griff came back around the corner with puppy eyed Tobias, “What the hell did that thing just say?”

“Jon!” it repeated and she started to regret the wine she drank as her stomach flopped. The bird flew up and started pecking on Old Griff's head “Dead! Dead! Dead!” Old Griff began cursing and swatting at it but the bird swerved around him and landed on the railing again, this time her and Lemore took a step back together.

“King!” it sang next “Alive, alive, alive!”

“That bird's fucking possessed” Griff growled at Tobias who looked terrified, but when Arya took a second look at Girff's angry blue eyes she could see a hint of fear. She couldn't blame him either because she felt it. Jon, dead, dead, dead. It's high pitched voice echoed in her mind as she watched the raven watch her, it's dark eyes beaming at her...

Arya couldn't say how it happened, she'd been standing there watching the raven just like everyone else. Trying to understand what it was saying, trying to know why it was saying those things. Accidentally she reached for it as she did Nymeria. For a split second she was looking through it's eyes, she could see herself, Lady Lemore, Tobias, and Old Griff all watching her on the deck, but only for a second. For the next it felt like someone was crawling, then tearing and clawing through her thoughts; her memories.

“Oh.” The wine cup slid through her fingers but when it shattered below her, it sounded like it was breaking under the sea. Arya's hands instantly went to her head, the world's colors mixing together. Fire was burning with scorching heat inside her head. She felt her fingers grip her hair as she started to pull on it, trying to get the thing out of her head all the while screaming in agony. Distantly she could hear the raven screeching almost as loudly as she was.

“Malia!” it was Lemore, her voice full of panic. Arya thought Lemore tried to catch her as she sank to her knees but she failed, her head hurt so much she didn’t even feel the shards of glass she was collapsing on to.

Arya had thought it was the raven she'd been reaching for, but it wasn't. It was someone else. She could feel him in her thoughts, hearing the things she could, tasting the blood in her mouth as she bit her tongue, and seeing the deck of the ship through her eyes. Despite her screams she managed to close her eyes, trying to keep him from seeing through them. They're mine not yours! She thought desperately willing him to leave, to give her body back to her. Please! She wanted to say these things, but all she could do was scream.

When she opened her eyes she wasn't on a ship anymore but in a cave, and when she moved her feet the sounds of crushing bones welcomed her. Arya wasn't looking through her eyes anymore, but she could see giant weirwood roots that resembled white snakes devouring the cave and the remains of an old man. Half his skull was showing and it made her think of the Kindly Man's illusions, but this wasn't an illusion and the man's one red eye glared right through her. Accusing her, somehow
blaming her for this. Even through the excruciating pain she managed to glance down and see the shape of a young man sitting between the roots below the decaying corpse. *Bran.*

Arya gasped, feeling her lungs fill up with air. She was back on the *Shyer Maid,* and she could breathe again. Her ears were her own and there was no one looking through her eyes but herself. The pain in her head was fading slowly but only to be replaced by the sting of the glass in her knees, her scalp burning where she'd pulled her hair, and her tongue throbbing where she'd bit down on it.

“Malia, are you okay?” Lemore was on the floor with her rubbing her back. Arya was breathing shallow quick breaths, trying to calm herself. *What just happened? Where the hell was I? “Malia?”*

Arya nodded in reply not able to find words. *Bran, I saw Bran. Didn't I? *She wasn't sure anymore, *Bran's dead.* When she looked up she saw Tobias with tears in his eyes, Javer had approached with a cup of ale in hand and eyes of an owl, Young Griff was fast approaching, and Old Griff stood towering over her with the body of Sage in his hand. He'd snapped the bird's neck by the looks of it, and was holding it by a wing. *Thank you.* She might have even said the words but her head was echoing with pain, she could still feel the remnants of the person in her mind. Like she'd been drowning and even though she was out of the water, she was still soaking wet with nothing to cover herself.

“What happened?” Young Griff asked first.

“The hell if I know” Old Griff answered looking the dead bird in his hand up and down.

“I know what she is” Javer slurried his words, “A demon!”

“Shut up Javer, I don't have time for your stories” Old Griff grunted.

“This is more than a story Griff! Have you never heard of Skinchangers and wargs?” he continued, “They're all from the north, just like her. They control animals with their minds. They start by just dreaming the beast but then they become it. It's not something they can fucking control, she's a demon Griff, she'll be more beast than a girl soon.”

Arya coughed and spit the blood out of her mouth, then used her sleeve to wipe her lips. Her limbs felt worn out but she attempted to pull herself up using the railing of the ship.

“Just stay down” Lemore encouraged but Arya didn't listen.

“They're just stories” she muttered as she stood up, her ears still ringing.

“Skinchangers are real?” Tobias asked in a small voice, looking at Javer.

“They're not” Young Griff corrected but Arya could hear the doubt in his words.

“They are, and she is one. I say we throw her over board now. Her existence is blasphemy, I'm surprised our ship hasn't fucking sank yet!” as Javer rambled on and on and her head wouldn't stop pounding, the same way the drums once had at the Twins.

“I'm not...” she put a hand to her forehead and made a small groan as another sharp wave of pain hit her, “...” but she had no words again. Darkness began clouding the edges of her vision and for a heartbeat she thought the sun had finally set, until her head felt like it had left her shoulders. The weight of her head was gone and the feeling in her arms and legs slipped away, she tried to hold the railing for support but it was no good. Last she saw was Young Griff's round violet eyes full of fear.

It was as though she was floating under the ocean, drifting aimlessly under waves that blocked out
the sun. Once in a while she thought she could hear distant voices but she could never make out who they belonged to or what they were saying. Arya couldn't say how long this lasted but she didn't mind, it was oddly peaceful and she wasn't sure she wanted it to end. When it did though it was hard to open her eyes, she'd had trouble waking up in the past but it was never so hard as now.

Arya lifted her eyelids to a dimly lit shelter, in a few moments she made out the familiar shape of the cave she'd seen earlier. She had time to take it in now, to notice the skulls and bones that lined the walls and floor, how the weirwood roots seemed to escape from everywhere, and how cold it was. This time though she was alone, at least she thought she was. There was no man being suffocated by the tree or a boy that looked like her brother sitting under it, but there was the shape of two wolf puppies tumbling over each other in front of the weirwood face.

The sight brought a smile to her face and she stumbled over the bones of the dead to see one dark grey pup and one white pup wrestling over the roots. She bent over and picked up the dark grey pup and it barked a high pitched excited bark that made her laugh for no reason she could explain. The sound of a squawking crow made her turn around abruptly, there was no crow but the shape of a boy standing in front of her. When she looked down the puppy in her hands was gone.

"Bran" she breathed glancing up to see red hair and blue eyes. She was still feeling the peacefulness from her dark ocean, without thinking she embraced him. To her relief he wrapped his arms around her too.

"I'm so sorry." He murmured in her ear but she had no idea why, and she didn't care. She just hugged him tighter while closing her eyes, only her wolf dreams had ever felt this real. "Arya, you have to wake up."

"I'm sorry too, for what happened to you" she pulled away and looked him in the eyes "If I ever see Theon again I'll-"

"Arya, forget about Theon. I never meant for this to happen...I didn't think you'd..." He sighed "It's my fault this happened to you, I just wanted you to listen. I just wanted you to go home." There was so much sorrow and guilt in his voice.

"And share it with the Boltons? Bran we don't have a home anymore, they took it." Arya was suddenly confused, wondering if she was really having a conversation with her brother's ghost.

"The Bolton's have met their fate, but you have to go home, you have to find Jon. You two-"

Arya cut him off, "Jon's dead Bran, and you...you're dead" she took a step back and looked at the cave she was in, fog had started to conceal the bones on the floor "You're all dead" she muttered half to herself.

"No, Arya listen you have to wake up and you have to go home. We're out of time." he glanced around seemingly horrified by the fog that had now devoured the bottom part of their legs. "You have to wake up!" The urgency in his voice reaching her bones.

"I don't know how!" she looked around desperately but saw no way out of the cave, no entrance and no exit, only the tree. She realized then what she had to do, what she'd been trying to do ever since the dreams had started. Arya walked, bones crunching under her feet as she stood in front of the weirwood tree.

"Arya you can't." Bran started but Arya only studied the tree's grieving face and bloody tears.

"I'll avenge you little brother, if I ever get the chance. I promise." she told him lifting her hand
tentatively.

“Please.” The fog had reached both there chests now and she couldn't see the edges of the cave anymore. “I don't know what will happen if you do this.”

“Do you know what will happen if I stay?” she asked and Bran looked stricken. “I'll die,” she thought.

“Goodbye brother.”

“We will meet again” he told her confidently as the fog blurred her brothers features. Arya only smiled feeling the tears fill around her eyes and placed her hand on the white wood.

The world was ripped away and she was falling, she couldn't help but let out a scream of terror. “Arya!” she whipped around to find herself in the dark snowy forest, not again. Arya heard her father calling her but there was no one there. Then all she could hear were people calling her.

“Arya Horseface!” Jeyne Pool's childhood voice echoed in Arya's mind and she found herself for a moment standing in the Godswood of Winterfell. There stood a thin girl in a grey cloak, a bruised cheek, and haunted brown eyes. It was Jeyne, only older. But the vision was gone as fast as it appeared.

“Arya Underfoot” she was in the smithy with Mikken who was smiling down at her, his eye's bright with amusement. She felt suddenly warm seeing the familiar face but that was ripped away too, his expression fell and blood began seeping through his eyes and mouth. He's dead, Arya flinched back and the world slipped away again.

“Arri!” someone else called but Arya couldn't hear who, she was surrounded by falling snowflakes and before her laid a pool of blood, and somewhere a wolf howled.

“Hey Lumpyhead!” There was Lommy Greenhands being stabbed in the neck by a smirking Raff in front of her. She saw him dying before she heard him call her. A moment later she saw herself standing over Raff's dead body in Mercy's room in Braavos. “Valar Morghulis” no one whispered.

The names came fast then. Almost too fast for Arya to hold onto, “Weasel!” Weese hissed at her with half a throat, “Nan!” Roose Bolton shouted with a bloodied sword in hand, “Wolf bitch” The Hound spat from a half dug grave.

“Stop it!” Arya shouted and the voices went away, for a moment anyway. She stood in the forest again in front of the weirwood, alone.

“When the white winds blow” The hair on the back of her neck rose at the sound of her father's voice again. “The lone wolf dies but the pack survives”

“There is no pack” tears brimmed her eyes, she still could not see him. “You're all dead.”

“DEAD!” screamed a crow with three eyes and the sound sent her falling backwards. Before her was finally her father. He was on his knees as Ice loomed above his head, Arya screamed helplessly all over again as she watched the sword fall and her sister collapse to the ground.

Her ears were pounding with the bone chilling sound of drums. Dread washed over her and she knew where she was next. No, please no more. The visions were not done and Arya could not end them. There stumbled Robb with an arrow through his shoulder, he looked older and his hair was longer than she'd ever seen it, but what stood out most was the fear in his blue eyes.

Roose Bolton shoved a sword through his chest. Arya wanted to scream, she wanted to cry, but there was nothing she could do. She couldn't even breath. “Mother” Robb called, and even softer “Greywind” as his eyes clouded with death Arya couldn't help but turn away, only to see her mother.
Lady Catelyn had brought her nails down her face, leaving bloody tears dripping from her eyes. Her scream cut through what was left of Arya's composure. A man lifted a dagger to her throat but Arya Stark closed her eyes this time, refusing to watch.

The sounds faded away and Arya dared to open her eyes once more. She was shaking, and if she could cry she would have. It was so quiet all she could hear was her own shivering breaths, and it was so dark she could only see the snow blowing in her face. As she walked forward she thought she could hear the sound of swords dancing against each other but it was so distant, she didn't think she could make it there if she tried. The air was ice pressing on her lips.

Just as she thought she was getting close she had to stop, there was a wall in her way. She looked side to side and up but there was no end in sight. *The Wall, I'm at The Wall.* Her thoughts went to Jon Snow. *Please, just be okay.* Arya Stark had told herself that Jon was dead, but there was some naive sliver in her mind that held on to hope for him, for him and Sansa.

“Jon?” she called, her voice disappearing into the wind. Arya saw she was wearing the same dark clothes and neat braid from her other dreams.

“Little Sister.” Arya turned looking for him, her heart almost beating out of her chest.

“Jon!” she called again not seeing anything but snow. “JON!” she screamed his name while struggling to keep her eyes open. The snowflakes were burning them. There were no more answers and Arya stumbled through the snow trying to keep her cloak from blowing away, or taking her with it. As she walked she could see the snowflakes creating pictures in the wind.

She saw solders fighting in a battlefield covered in blood before the snowflakes dissipated, then there was a women and man kissing before a weirwood, and the sight brought her unexplainable joy, but it blew away with the snow too. Before her was Bran as young as the last time she saw him, and then there was Jaime Lannister pushing him out the broken tower's window and she stood frozen. Arya saw a lion digging it's claws into a grey she-wolf, she saw a white wolf breathing fire, she saw the Titian of Braavos collapsing beneath the weight of a thousand birds, there was even a grey women made of stone with bloody tears seeping from her eyes, and a hundred blue candles floating in the storm...no, not candles... eyes . That's when she saw him, but he wasn't an image made of snow.

Kneeling in the snow beneath the shadow of The Wall and the sunless sky, was a man all in black. Same as her. As she pushed herself forward his face became more clear, Jon. She wanted to call his name but the words died on her lips. He was bleeding she saw, it was dripping down his chest and wetting the ground. No. *Please, no.* Her last brother tore a dagger from his chest and smoke began to cloud the wound and he whispered his direwolf's name. As Arya watched him fall face first into the snow, she became the person falling in the snow.

It was so cold her skin went numb. As she lifted her face from the earth, she felt her heart being filled with so much grief it was crushing her. The air tasted of smoke and blood and burning flesh, the cracking of fire burning in her ears. Arya could hear men screaming in the darkness and when she tried to get up she found her limbs weak and useless, covered in blood. *Nymeria.* Her wolf's name was more of a silent prayer than anything. Summoning all of her remaining strength she pushed herself to her knees, only when she looked up, she could feel the weight of her own end pressing against her throat.

Death's blood red eyes marked her.

Chapter End Notes
And thanks so much for reading guys, and for any comments, I'm going to get off my ass and start answering all of them from now on <3
Hello again kindstranger, I just want to thank you all for still wanting to read this because I know my updates have become very spacy. But no matter how long it takes I'm not abandoning this story and that's a promise:

When Arya woke she didn't move but simply opened her eyes. She opened them to a room dimly lit with a candle that carried the scent of lavender through the air. As she laid there she felt eerily calm, her mind was clouded with the last part of her dream. *I was about to die.* Arya Stark wasn't afraid to die, it only meant she'd be reunited with her family again, or she'd go back to what she was before she was born, and that wasn't so bad.

She turned her head to see Lady Lemore leaning over an oak desk whilst picking at a plate of a roasted bore. Arya slowly tried sitting up but she felt dizzy and when she went to speak her throat was scorched by flames. Lemore turned her head and her pretty eyes went wide.

"Malia" she looked at her stunned and Arya made a motion to her throat. Lemore caught on quickly and poured some water into a cup before hastily passing it to her. Arya drank it without hesitation and began coughing when she tried to clear her throat. "I thought you wouldn't wake."

"How long was I out?" she managed to rasp.

"More than a day." Lemore eyed her cautiously.

"Really?" It had only felt like a few hours. Arya looked around the unfamiliar room and realized she could hear the sounds of voices below her, men laughing and shouting. As she looked out a window she saw it was night and there was an apple tree outside. The room wasn't moving either. "We're in Westeros..."

"We are." Lemore nodded after following Arya's glace out the window. "We're still in Saltans for now, not a very busy port these days. Old Griff doesn't plan on staying long but Young Griff insisted we should stay until you wake."

"I'm surprised he cares."

Lemore just shook her head, "You know he does." *No, I don't, I can tell when a man lies but I'm no bloody mind reader.* Lemore sighed "Some servants just brought up a bath for me, but it's yours." Lemore stood and gestured to the center of the room. Arya looked up in surprise as Lemore ran a hand through her hair, a soft smile on her lips "I can't tell you how relieved I am you woke up..." she sighed, "There's much to discuss, but for now enjoy the bath."

"Thank you," Arya muttered before taking another drink of water to soothe her throat, but as the women went to turn away something in her chest pulled. "Lemore..." The septa half faced her. Arya took a moment to commit the women to memory, her dark hair pulled into a messy bun and her tanned skin contrasting the faded pale blue dress she wore. Something about the shade of her eyes and the wrinkles hovering around them spoke of the things she's seen, there was wisdom Arya hadn't the chance to attain, and secrets she'd never unearthed. "Thank you."
"Malia, you just said that." Despite her playful tone, there was a seriousness in her gaze.

"I didn't mean the bath, I meant..."

"I know." The women's older face softened as she cut her off, "Clean up and we will talk later, or in the morning if you prefer. There are things to be settled before we see you off." Arya forced herself to smile and nod as Lemore left, the guilt of not saying goodbye already bubbling in her chest.

The night sky was filled with smoke and the sounds of men screaming. It reminded Arya of her dream that was filled with visions, the one Arya felt Bran had sent her. Though it made no sense for her little brother was surely long dead, yet why else would he be the only one who could speak to her? But the sight before her was not the one from any vision, but a dream she had conjured and brought to life all on her own. Arya couldn't smell blood or the burning of any man's flesh from her position on top of the hill, and the snow only covered the ground in a thin layer this far south.

A loud crash had Arya's mare crying out in fear, but it was an almost satisfying sound to her. It was hard to see but Arya was nearly certain it was the dining hall of the Twins that had just collapsed under the weight of the fire. The girl wanted to smile, to feel accomplished. Walder Frey was dead, as was every other Frey that took part in the destruction of her eldest brother's campaign (and possibly a few more she tried not to think about.) Their skin melted and their bones charred, she'd wanted this for years. But as the thick smoke clouded the stars above her, Arya Stark had never felt more alone. Maybe once the Boltons are dead...maybe once Jon's killers are under the ground. Even the thought made her feel more hollow than before.

I'll never feel whole again.

Arya had skipped out on Young Griff and his crew before the sun had risen, she'd spared not a goodbye for any of them. Since then she'd managed to travel alone, as was safest for herself and anyone else in the world. But the loneliness was a deafening song that echoed in her heart, the absence of distractions leaving her in the solitude of her suffocating thoughts. Her emotions were a tidal wave that grew more and more each passing day, and somehow she'd been stupid enough to think the fall of House Frey would bring her some kind of closure.

House Frey was gone, yes...but still was House Stark.

She stood there for more than an hour, watching the burning blaze reach its climax and slowly simmer as the smoke turned from black to grey. Hundreds of wolves howled in the distance, the only thing that brought her any comfort, accompanied by the anticipation of a long-awaited reunion. She sighed softly in slight content, not everyone has gone and died while I was gone.

Arya drew her sword in a breath, not Needle, though she still had it on her hip. She drew a long sword she had picked up on her way North from a smith working on a small farm. He'd made it for a boy who was not yet a man, so it was small enough to fit her hand. She'd paid him well for it, with coin she'd stolen off some thieves not far from Saltpans.

The hair on the back of her neck rose and not a few moments later six men came slipping out of the woods on different sides of her. Anger burned in her gut, how did they all manage to sneak up on me?

"Put the sword down girl." One man demanded, his dark hair was a mess and he looked to be at least
forty and wore tattered robes, on second glance, all of their cloaks and breaches were tattered and dirty.

"You first." she offered back, glancing at the long sword in his hand.

He smiled a disturbing toothless grin, "You're a funny one, pretty too." Arya tightened her grip on her sword as the men shuffled closer.

A man with dirty blond hair and faded red robes spoke up next, "No need for you to get hurt girl, we just have some questions is all." Arya thought he might have been handsome in his youth, but now his skin was wrinkled and dragged off his face.

"No need for you to die either, you should keep on the way you came." She threatened, taking a step to the side so they couldn't trap her between them.

A few men laughed, but there was a young boy who looked to be about eleven with blue eyes who didn't even smile. He's never been in a real fight before, she guessed by the stiffness of his stance. "Last chance, in the name of the Brotherhood without Banners, put your sword down." The dirty blond said.

"The Brotherhood?" That was interesting to say the least, she'd seen all the corpses they'd left decorating the forests around The Twins. "If Berric wants a word, he can ask without threatening me."

"Berric's dead." The toothless man informed her.

"and then he comes back, trust me I know." She searched the men's eyes but only saw darkness and bitterness in them.

"Berric didn't come back this time, now for the last time, put down the sword." The dirty blond sounded as if he was losing his patience. Arya Stark didn't put her sword down. One man whose face was lined with impatience lunged at her, she ducked below his clumsy cut and brought her sword singing throughout the air. There was a slight pull on her arm as the blade cut through the man's throat easily. A pause full of shock followed as the man fell to his knees, dropping his sword and bringing his hand uselessly to his bleeding neck.

As he fell and went limp the men watched wide-eyed with horror as their friend lay bleeding in the dirt, turned to mud from the light snows. The night air was icy on her skin but the feel of a man dying on her sword washed the cold away. "This is your last chance, leave me be an-" Arya wasn't given the opportunity to finish her threat before the next one came for her, and the next, and the next, and they were all swinging their blades in her direction.

She dodged their cuts swiftly, she was sure one of them had just slashed the other trying to cut her down, and with that chaos she managed to slid her sword through the toothless man's gut and ripped it out, ready to strike down the next. Arya was sure she could have cut them all down if not for her own naive mistake, the stupid boy had decided to lunge for her. If she'd only cut him down instead of hitting him in the face with the pommel of her sword she would have been prepared for the dirty blond man's attack from behind.

When she woke the air was colder than it had been at the Twins, but she couldn't see anything. The wooden floor below her was rocking up and down and Arya knew then she was in a wagon, and as she lifted herself up she learned her hands were binned tightly by rope. Before bothering to listen to
her surroundings she brought her hands to the hood over her head and tore it off. She blinked a moment at the bright light in her eyes.

Arya looked around at first, but when she saw who was sitting across from her, her mind drowned out all other surroundings. She couldn't notice the snow covered forest they were traveling through or the two men and the boy leading the horses and wagon; the people who'd taken her captive. She couldn't feel the bruised lump at the back of her head, and she hardly looked at the giant women and young boy sitting between them either. *Jaime Lannister.* Arya's heart went cold.

Jaime smiled when he saw her face, "So it was a tiny girl who cut down three of your men?" He taunted the dirty blond man. Her captor looked over at her and Arya met his eyes a moment, he glared at her with pure hatred and ignored the Kingslayer. "I'll admit my pride might be wounded if you hadn't sneaked up on us in the night like cowards." Still, no one answered him, and Arya couldn't tear her eyes away. This was the man who'd murdered Jory, the man who'd attacked her father, and if her dream was true; this was the man who'd pushed Bran from the tower and crippled him.

Jaime tilted his head after giving her a second glance and squinted his eyes, "Have we met?" Jaime's left hand was tied to the bars of the cage and the stump of his right arm hung uselessly on his lap. The clothes he wore were torn and covered in dirt, and the cage smelt of shit and piss.

She held her silence a moment longer, all the while glaring daggers. Jaime frowned clearly confused as to who she was and Arya glanced over at their captors, "I thought you had questions for me?" she pressed.

"I think I'd rather watch the lot of you hang than speak." Answered a ginger who survived their first encounter. The dirty blond paid her no mind and the boy whose nose she must have broke only looked uncertain.

"Hang me last then." she decided looking back at Jaime, "So I can watch him suffer. At least then I'll see one last nice thing before I die." She could feel all the men give her looks then, even the huge blond women whose face appeared to have been savaged by some animal looked her way.

The ginger man chuckled a little at that, "No doubt My Lady will want to see him suffer as well, might be you'll get your wish."

"Who are you?" The big women asked and when Arya stared into her blue eyes, she was ripped back to one of her wolf dreams. Arya had almost forgotten when she'd let Jaime and the rest of them live, all for Gendry's sake.

*Nymeria.* "No one important." Arya Stark allowed her self a smile then, if she couldn't find a way out of this cage then she knew Nymeria would be somewhere in the Riverlands, all Arya had to do was find her.

"I'm Brienne of Tarth and this is Podrick Payne, and you know Jaime? How?" Arya studied the women but didn't answer her, *if you're all here then where is Gendry? Is he still apart of the Brotherhood? Or dead? She didn't like the last thought for any discernible reason.

"You said Beric was dead." Arya turned her attention over to their captors again. "Why didn't Thoros bring him back again?" Jaime seemed to find her question amusing whereas Brienne looked rather disturbed at the idea of resurrections.

"And what would you know of it?" challenged the dirty blond.
"I just want to know how he died." and she did, who killed him for the last time? And how? If Thoros could bring him back after being nearly cut in half by the Hound, then what had truly ended the Lightning Lord?

"How does she know about Beric being brought back?" asked the ginger, but he'd started speaking in High Valyrian.

"I don't know, but our Lady will want to know what she was doing at the Twins." The blond answered in the same tongue.

Finally, the dark-haired boy who they were with spoke up, with a perfect High Valyrian accent and Arya realized he must be from Essos. "Do you really think she burned down the Twins? All by herself?" he asked with fear and what Arya thought was a hint of awe.

"I don't know. I would have thought that mad before..." The blond gave her a wary look, "Before she cut down half our men." His eyes were rimmed with hatred again.

"Why don't you speak the common tongue so the rest of us can understand you?" suggested Jaime, he seemed beyond annoyed, but Arya couldn't help but enjoy how helpless he was. Even if she wasn't faring any better off at the moment. She almost wanted to apologize for what happened to the rest of their men, for what she did to them. But what was she supposed to do? Stand by and be captured? *I'm in the bloody cage anyway.* She pushed that thought to the back of her mind.

They traveled the better part of that day in silence, which turned into the better part of most days. Arya decided she didn't want to waste her breath on the Kingslayer or this Brienne of Tarth, and she saw no reason to make friends with a boy named Payne; who was probably just going to be hanged with the rest of them. There was no point in talking to their captors either, for she found they gave her no answers. She only learned things when they spoke High Valyrian.

She quickly discovered they were being taken to the new leader of the Brotherhood without Banners, whom they called Lady Stoneheart. She didn't need to be told they were heading North because that became clear rather fast. Arya learned their names as well, the boy's name was Lucas, the dirty blonds name was Harden, and the ginger was Jarvon. She assumed by his accent that Harden was from Westeros, probably the Riverlands, Jarvon was too. Lucas though, Arya guessed was from Volantis.

Neither of the men were particularly interesting, both seemingly on a mission to bring Jaime and Brienne to Lady Stoneheart to be executed, Jarvon thought Brienne should be spared but Harden didn't seem to care what happened to her, or Podrick. Lucas was slightly more interesting, with his Volantis accent and his lack of knowledge of the common tongue. More surprising though were the flame tattoos he had around his wrists, Arya had seen those before.

"We're almost there." Harden told them with a smile one night, he'd just finished making a fire for the group. Not that she or the rest of them in the wagon would get to sit by it, they rarely even gave them food. Arya could feel herself getting weaker every day, and it became even harder for her to try and reach Nymeria. She knew the direwolf was somewhere North of them because there was more snow where she was, but Arya could no longer concentrate properly to connect with her.

Tonight turned into one of the nights their captors didn't share their food, as was the night before. Arya closed her eyes in frustration when the smell of the chicken they were cooking reached her, her stomach was hurting with the all too familiar pain. As she closed her eyes she thought back to when she was a girl starving in the woods with Gendry, Hot Pie, Lommy, and Weasel. Lommy had given her the name of Worm breath then, but even now Arya didn't think she'd mind eating one. The thought made her smile.
"What's so funny?" Arya opened her eyes to see Jaime's scowl.

"Have you ever eaten a worm?" she asked, too tired to remember how much she hated him.

"What? No." He looked at her like she was crazy.

"That's disgusting" Podrick answered, just as tired.

"You'd be surprised how much better they taste opposed to starving to death" she informed the boy.

"and you would know?" Brienne raised an eyebrow.

"This isn't the first time I've missed a meal or two" she muttered, closing her eyes again.

"I think my stomach is eating itself" Podrick complained, "It hurts so much."

"We'll be okay Pod." Brienne consoled.

"Don't lie to him, we're far from okay." Jaime growled.

"I'm going to starve to death." The boy sounded ready to sob.

"You're not going to starve to death" she told him, eyes still closed.

"Don't you start lying too." Muttered Jaime.

She pushed her heavy eyelids open just to look him in the eye, "We're not going to starve to death. You're going to be executed, remember?" It was clear by their faces her eerily calm tone was slightly unnerving. Arya glanced at Pod, "You've nothing to fear, death is the end of pain. A gift." she smiled softly at the irony.

"She's just starving...not thinking right." Brienne offered uncertainly.

"You're mad" the Kingslayer glared, "and I think you mean we're going to be executed."

Her mind was a blurry fog, and her stomach indeed felt like it was eating itself, but she wasn't mad. "I'm not going to be hanged." She insisted.

Jaime shook his head, "I've done nothing to them and they want to kill me, you killed three of their men."

"Two of their men." She corrected "The other fell on his friend's sword, not mine."

"Which is why you're going to be hanged." He concluded.

"That's not how I die Lannister." Arya's dream flooded behind her eyes...the red eyes of death freezing her in place..

He shook his head, "Crazy bitch" he muttered. There was a pause before Jaime called over to the fire "Hey!" all the men looked up from their meals, "why don't you share some of that eh?"

"Shut your mouth Kingslayer, or we'll cut out your tongue and feed ya that instead." Harden growled back.

"I thought you wanted to hang us?" Jaime yelled back, "you can't do that if we all starve to death."

"Don't die tonight and you'll be plenty alive to be hanged later." Harden answered and went back to
his chicken and ignoring them. The night went on in mostly silence, it was only a few hours until their captors went to sleep and left the boy, Lucas, to stand the first watch.

"So you know how to use a sword?" Brienne suddenly whispered from her side of the wagon. 

Arya watched her a moment "I do."

"Good, because when we get out of here you'll need to defend yourself." Brienne was biting at the rope tied around her writs.

"and how exactly do you plan on getting out of here?" Arya ventured.

Jaime smiled at that and pointed his stump at his chained left hand, "This bar is loose, but when I take it out we'll have to be quick. You think you can get your crazy head on straight for it?" Arya listened in silence as he explained how he'd have to escape the wagon first, and considering she was on the opposite end she'd be last. Once they got their hands on the swords they'd be taking their captors horses along with their lives.

Arya watched him carefully, once I get my hand on a sword you'll be dead too. "When?" she said instead.

"Soon." Brienne whispered, "Once the boy becomes tired." Arya nodded and watched the boy a while. He was too young to die for these old fools who ran with the Brotherhood.

"We don't kill the boy" she whispered suddenly.

"We kill who gets in our way." Jaime answered annoyed.

"You can't stop a boy without killing him?"

"I don't spare those who take me captive."

"Well we're not all in the habit of killing children." she accused, glaring at him.

"and what the hell does that mean?" he whispered a little too loudly

"It means-"

"Shhh" Brienne interrupted, "do you hear that?" and Arya could, the sound of horses hooves was trampling through the woods. Lucas heard it too for he jumped up and gave Harden and Jarvon a shove to wake them. The two men and the boy grabbed their swords and stood ready for whatever came out of the woods, Jaime seethed at the lost opportunity.

A few moments later three men came riding in past the undergrowth, then Harden and the rest relaxed when they saw who it was. Arya tensed. One man with a faded red cloak that was almost pink, one in black, and the last in yellow. Seven hells. Before her was Thoros of Myr, Harwin, and Lem Lemoncloak. Arya wanted nothing more than to go along with Jaime's plan then, cut her way through these men, grab a horse, and head north.

"Thoros!" called Jarvon, "You nearly scared the piss out of us! What are you doing sneaking up on us in the night?"

"Heard you were close is all." He replied climbing off his black mare.

"Heard you caught us a lion too" cheered Lem, "I wanna look." He walked over to the wagon as Harwin went to stand by the fire. Maybe he won't recognize me. Arya thought with little hope, she
had longer hair now and didn't look much like a boy anymore.

Lem laughed at the sight of Jaime, paying her no mind. Thoro's came over as well "Ser Jaime." He greeted mockingly, "Not looking so well as the last time I saw you." He added.

"Still looking better than you." Jaime told him bitterly.

Thoros smiled making his way down the cage, he saw Brienne, "Lady Brienne." He seemed surprised and turned back to Harden and Jarvon. "What's she doing in here?" He looked around, "and where's the rest of the men we sent?"

"You can ask the wench beside her about them." Harden informed him darkly. Harwin started walking over but stopped when his eyes met hers, and his went wide. "Found her watching the Twins burn to ash."

"Seven hells" he whispered, Thoros turned his head and then everyone's eyes were on her.

Thoros blinked like he was seeing the sun for the first time in years, took a few steps closer as if to be sure. "My god" he turned back to Harden, "Open this bloody cage, now."

"Like hell I'm going to do that, she killed **three** of our men!" Harden argued.

"Do you have any idea who she is?" Harwin asked in disbelief.

"It's been a long time" Arya noted, speaking to Thoros.

"Aye, it has been My Lady..." He was still looking at her like she wasn't real, with fear and what Arya thought might be hope.

"My Lady?" Jaime repeated dumbly.

"Who the fuck is it?" Lem stretched his neck over to see in the dark "Oh...you" his eyes darkened and Arya might have smirked if she wasn't so exhausted.

"Lem" she added to her greetings. Lucas, silent as ever, handed the keys to Thoros and he started to unlock the chains holding the door shut.

"The rest of you make a move, and I'll cut off your hands too" Lem threatened with a sword pointed in their direction. With the door opened, Thoros gave Arya a hand climbing out of the cage. Her legs were stiff and she almost stumbled but caught herself, and Thoros held her steady with his hands. Arya took a step back from him. He was shorter than she remembered, but she supposed she was only taller.

"Are you alright My Lady?" He asked with clear concern but Arya didn't care for it.

"Fine." she stated but held up her bounded hands expectantly. Her wrists were smeared with blood from how tightly the ropes were tied, Thoros took out his dagger.

"You're just going to let her free? I just told you she killed three of our men, **good men!**" Harden was outraged.

"Two" she corrected again "and I gave them the same warning I gave you, the first time we met." Arya told Thoros as he cut the ropes around her hands, there was sharp pain followed by cool relief.

"I have no doubt, My Lady" He was still looking at her with wide nervous eyes. "We thought you dead."
"Well, who is she?" Harden asked, his temper clearly not fading.

"Arya Stark, trueborn daughter of Lord Eddard and Catelyn Stark" Harwin informed them. Arya rubbed a hand on her sore wrist, the right one was still bleeding. Her skin crawled at the use of her full name, something she hadn't heard in a long time. The other men looked at her with shocked eyes, but Arya glanced at the wagon. Inside was a caged Jaime whose mouth was tight with anger, but Arya could see the surprise in his emerald eyes. Brienne was even more astonished than any of them, with part of her mouth hanging open.

Jaime's face was dark "A bloody Stark."

"You're sure that's Lady Catelyn's daughter?" Jarvon asked with uncertain eyes.

"We're sure." Lem answered, looking none too happy to see Arya alive.

Harwin got to his knees "My Lady, you must forgive me. I failed you before, I've failed the memory of your father. Allow me to serve you now, to swear you my sword. To make amends for the past."

"Words are wind Harwin. I don't need your sword, and nor do I want it." Harwin looked stricken by her harsh words. There was a time she thought of him as her father's man, but now she saw him for what he was. A coward hiding with a band of craven outlaws. Outlaws who terrorized their enemy at night, but ran to the safety of the shadows when the sun rose. It was one thing to seek out revenge, it was another to kill whoever held the same banner.

"My Lady" Thoros cleared his throat "I know your memory of us may be distorted and your opinion poor...but we are not the association we were before. Travel with us, we can protect you."

"I've seen the kind of association you've become," and she had, all along the road north she'd heard tales of how ruthless the brotherhood had become, but she didn't need the stories after the things she saw. "The bodies littered all over the forests, the corpses you've left to rot in the trees." Thoros swallowed uncomfortably at her words, "Not exactly the justice Lord Beric believed in if I remember correctly, though my memory may be distorted."

"You tell it true My Lady. The Brotherhood has become a shadow of what it once was, but I know Lady Stoneheart would like to see you...maybe you..." he paused awkwardly. "The sight of a Stark alive and well, it would lift all the men's spirits. Give them some hope that winter will end."

"Winters hardly began." Arya squinted her eyes suspiciously at him, it was clear he was leaving something out. "You're heading north?"

"We are." He agreed.

"Why?"

"I've seen things in the flames, impossible things. Men from the far north say they've seen them as well...the dead marching south."

"You really believe all that nonsense?" Jaime's voice was full of mockery but Arya ignored him.

"I haven't seen anything in any flames...but I've heard stories as well. Once again Arya thought of her vision, the blue eyes glowing in the storm. It was clear to her that Samwell Tarly had been telling the truth, and with these monsters seeping into her dreams, Arya could not deny their existence.

"I've heard stories of dragons born again, it doesn't make it true." Jaime argued once more.
Arya smiled at that, "The dragons are far from stories Lannister, your dear sister will learn that soon enough."

"Daenerys Targaryen?" Thoros spoke the queen's name as a question.

"She already began crossing the narrow sea, an army of Dothraki and Unsullied at her back. The Golden Company, and the dragons too...Cersei doesn't stand a chance." She informed them.

"She should be marching her armies north instead." Lucas insisted in High Valyrian.

Jaime rolled his eyes at what would sound like a string of queer sounds to him, but Arya replied in the same language as the boy. "She's spent years building her armies to take back her father's throne, it will take more than a few stories to convince the dragon queen to march north."

Lucas looked at her surprised as did Thoros but it was Harden who spoke "you speak Valyrain?" he asked annoyed.

Arya smiled "I do."

Harwin cleared his throat, "So will you come with us mi'lady?"

Arya eyed the men before her, there would be no harm in traveling with them for a while, she told herself. "I will, but I want my sword back."

Thoros smiled "Of course milady."

"And one more thing, the bar that's chained the Kingslayer's hand. It's loose, and unless you want him cutting our throats tonight, you should fix it." Arya couldn't help but savor the enmity on Jaime Lannister's face.
The cold was a thick blanket over the land this far North, the snow swallowing up her ankles like death. If she were to guess Winterfell was less than a weeks ride from where they were, maybe only a few days. She hadn't been this close to home since she was nine, back before her world had turned upside down. But she told herself Winterfell was no longer her home, it wasn't a home without her brothers, without her parents or her sister, without Jon Snow.

The rumors she'd heard and the tales Thoros and Harwin had heard were even more confusing than the ones in the South. They'd tried to tell her Jon held Winterfell, that the Bolton's had fallen after meeting Lord Stannis's Army, mixed in with the Wildlings and Knights of the Vale, but Arya dismissed them. They were all too confusing and contradicting, people believing Stannis was alive and ruling, others saying he was dead and her brother took his place after executing the Bolton bastard Ramsey, her dear old “husband”.

But Arya was done with stories and finished with having hope. No matter what was said about Jon, her dream of him dying in the snow still haunted her when she closed her eyes. It was a dream that was more than a dream, a feeling of truth to it she couldn't quite shake. So she dismissed the rumors and focused on discovering the truth herself, crushing any feelings of optimism or wishful thinking before they had a chance to wrap themselves around her heart.

As the men settled down for the night Arya made her way to the wagon. She had no intention of speaking to Jaime but his companion Brienne was sparking her interest as time stretched on. For days she'd been watching Arya, her blue eyes glued to her, especially when she thought she wasn't paying her any attention. The three prisoners looked up when they heard her feet crunching in the untouched snow.

“Well if it isn't Lady Stark herself, back from the dead. Must be nice being on the other side of these bars.” Jaime accused with all the sarcasm she thought he could muster. He looked terrible, his hair a greasy mess, dark circles clouded under his green eyes, and the beginnings of an unkempt beard. Far from the gallant knight who'd ridden into the Winterfell all those years ago.

“I was never dead.” she told him simply.

Jaime eyed her up and down, “I should have recognized you, you look just as your aunt did.” The words made her uncomfortable, her father had told her the same thing once.

“So I've been told.” Arya looked to Brienne, “Why are you here? Why does this Lady Stoneheart want you dead?” why are you so obsessed with me...

Brienne was staring at her like she was one of the Children of the Forest, come down from the trees to ask her advice. “I-I don't know milady”

Arya pushed down her frustration at Brienne's lie, “Why are you even in the Riverlands? Tarth is south, and a lot safer.”

Brienne hesitated and Jaime answered instead “She was looking for you. You and your sister.” Arya searched for a lie in Jaime’s eyes but couldn't find one, “She personally served your mother, who
tasked Brienne with bringing me back to Kingslanding alive, for the safe return of you and Sansa.”

“I was never a prisoner in Kingslanding” She pointed out.

“A fact none of us knew, and by the time we got there Sansa was gone as well.” Jaime added.

“I was searching for months milady, until the Brotherhood found me...” Brienne trailed off looking uncomfortable.

“And did you find anything? About my sister?” might be she's somewhere safe, if even Jaime doesn't know where she went.

“I didn't. I'm sorry. I thought I had found a trace of her but it was your trail I'd been following, not hers...”

“and what did you find out?” Arya pressed.

“I heard that a Stark girl had been kidnapped by the Hound. I thought it was Lady Sansa but a brother on the quiet isles told me it'd been you, not your sister. That it was Sandor who was the last to see you alive before he died.”

Arya nodded, “I told him not to go in that stupid Inn” she muttered absentmindedly, thinking of Clegane dying beneath that tree.

“The Inn at the crossroads?” Brienne asked and Arya nodded again.

“I heard the Hound butchered Lannister soldiers, him and a boy.” Jaime added eyeing her, “you were the boy?”

“I was, but it wasn't that simple.”

“It never is.” Jaime agreed, oddly somber. There was a moments silence, “you could free us you know” he said.

“After the things you've done to my family, why would I do that?” Arya was offended he'd dare ask.

“I've done terrible things, it's true. But to be judged and hanged by some outlaw? Where's the honor in that?” he said it as though it should mean something to her.

“and I should care? After you attacked my father in the streets of Kingslanding and led an army against my brother Robb?”

“After your mother kidnapped my brother on false charges.” Jamie continued.

“Yes, I remember that she thought Tyrion tried to have Bran killed.” Arya felt suddenly calm.

“Exactly” he seemed to think he was getting through to her.

“But that doesn't make sense, he hadn't the motive.” Arya waited patiently for Jaime to understand what she was getting at.

“I didn't send the cutthroat after your brother!” he rushed, catching on.

“No, you didn't.” Arya agreed, seeing the truth in his face. “But you were the one who pushed him out the window in the first place.”
Arya saw a flicker of guilt run across Jaime Lannister's face, *so it's true then. My dreams were real.* She pushed the grief from her heart. *Jon's truly dead and soon I'll be too.* Arya bit her lip, her stomach twisting with an odd bout of dread, either from the thought of her own impending death or the idea her dreams holding the future and past in them.

“How'd you know about that?”

“You just told me.” she answered in an empty voice, coming to grips with her fate. Arya turned and left them there, the sinking feeling was making it hard to stand.

“Where did you go mi'lady?” Harwin asked tentatively as they sat by a fire that Jarvon and Lucas had spent the better part of an hour struggling to make. “We thought you went to Salturans, but after the massacre...”

“You thought me dead?” Harwin nodded. “I didn't stay there long, caught a ship going east with what little coin I had. I only returned to Westeros a moon's turn ago.”

“Are you heading home?” he inquired.

“There's nothing at Winterfell for me” she told him while taking a drink of ale that Thoros had brought with them.

Harwin gave her a strange look and pulled his dark cloak closer around himself, as a shield from the cold. “I know you didn't want to hear what we said before, but your half-brother—”

“My brothers are dead.” she told him with complete certainty. *Jon.* Harwin's words sent a shiver down her spine, but all she could see was her half-brother keeling in the snow, smoke clouding the stab wound in his heart.

“As you say milady...” Harwin kept eyeing her from his side of the fire.

“What?”

“Nothing...it's just...Jarvon told us where he found you, watching the Twins burn. They say Walder Frey and all his sons are dead.”

“They probably are” she agreed, “*It was* a terrible fire after all.”

“And you had nothing to do with it?” he wondered, eyes suspicious yet disbelieving, it was as though he was waiting for someone to tell him he was crazy for even thinking her responsible.

“And how would I have done that Harwin?” she tilted her head innocently.

“I don't know...” he looked confused and afraid but Arya wasn't going to tell him the truth. She'd let him ponder over what would seem impossible to him, sure maybe the whole of the Brotherhood couldn't take down the Freys, but for a single well-trained assassin? Harwin could never wrap his head around what she was truly capable of.

The rest of their group began to set themselves up around the fire, saving her from any more questions Harwin might have had. Lucas sat on the same log as her, his dark hair black and glossy when hit with the firelight, his young blue eyes somehow held an element of wisdom as they studied the fire before them. “Do you speak the common tongue?” she asked, she hadn't the chance to talk to the boy yet.
The boy shook his head with a discontented face, holding up a hand with two fingers an inch apart. “A little.”

Arya switched to High Valyrian, “It's okay, I've spent years speaking Valyrian, high and low.”

“You lived in one of the free cities?” he asked, eyes full of curiosity.

She smiled, “Braavos mostly, but I've seen most of the others. You're from Volantis?”

He nodded half a smile on his lips. “How did you know?”

“I had a feeling after hearing you speak but...” she pointed gently to his wrists, though they were covered now she remembered the flaming tattoos wrapped around his skin. “The tattoos were what sold me.”

Lucas pulled up his sleeve, the red and orange tongues licking up from his gloves, “You've been to Volantis?” he asked solemnly as he examined his own skin.

“I have, though only briefly...you don't have to speak of it if you don't wish to, you severed at the Temple of the Lord of Light over there?”

The boy's features were stoic as he nodded, “I did.” Arya hummed lightly thinking back to the time she saw the massive temple, thrice the size of the Great Sept of Baelor. From what she knew anyone who served there had once been a slave, bought and trained to be one of three things; a priest, a temple prostitute, or a warrior. “I was to be a priest.” he added.

“But you left.” she concluded aloud.

“R'hllor is the one true God, this I know, but the priests there...” his eyes clouded with uncertainty for a moment and what she thought might be guilt. “They did things, made me do things...I don't think our God would approve of.” He looked back up at her, “and I didn't leave, I ran.”

Arya had figured as much, worshipers of many Gods took their religion very seriously, and any hint of rejection could be met with fatal consequences. She turned her gaze back to the fire a moment, the Kindly Man's once gentle smile seemed sinister as it seeped its way into her mind. “I was about your age when I sought out a priest's aide...their guidance and my stubbornness led me to do things...” she glanced back at Lucas, his blue eyes lit with understanding. “Things I shouldn't have done either.”

“And which temple did you seek?” Thoros's voice cut in their conversation, still holding to High Valyrian.

Arya glared upwards, annoyed he'd been listening to them. “Doesn't matter now, I left as Lucas did.”

“So you ran away too?” He finished for her, “A bad habit, I'd think you'd learn better by now.” He was teasing her lightly, of the time she'd fled him and ran straight into the Hound's hands.

“At least Sandor truly tried to take me to my mother.” she shot back with little humor.

The man's wrinkled face grew serious, “Yes, I heard he was seen at the Twins the night...the night of the Red Wedding.” Arya looked back at the flames in a sorry attempt to distract herself from the bloody memories that filled her mind. “I'm sorry...” he took her silence as confirmation.

She blinked but kept her eyes closed a moment too long. “It wasn't your fault.” she forced herself to say. Even if the child in her resented him for not getting her to the Twins sooner, the logical part of her mind knew she'd be dead now if he had.
“You should have never been there.” He told her as he spoke to the flames. “This country has been falling apart since your father's death, and after what Lord Walder did...finding honor in the South is rarer than a weirwood.” she listened quietly, not feeling the need to agree verbally. “But no matter how dark things are, I fear it will only get worse.”

“How so?” Lucas asked.

“You know how boy, you've seen them in the flames too.”

“Oh...that.” he frowned.

“The Others.” she guessed with little doubt of what he was talking about.

“Tell me, what have you heard of them?” Arya explained quickly how she'd met someone who'd been North of The Wall, who'd claimed dragon glass could kill them, how there was a difference between the Others and the undead they used to fight for them. “Westeros isn't ready to face such a threat.” he said when she was finished

“I guess you'll have to see.” she told him, wrapping her black cloak around herself. It was a simple cloak with no fur around the hood to warm her, so she kept her hair down to help cover her ears, but even her boots were too thin for this weather. She was lucky Lucas had offered her his extra pair of leather gloves.

“Might be you'll have to for me.” he muttered quietly, a dark look covering his eyes.

Arya didn't question him, but stood up to leave while grabbing a loaf of bread when no one was looking. She held it under her cloak as she made her way to the side of the clearing where the wagon sat. Brienne was crouched in the middle of the wagon, Jaime and Podrick huddled on either side of the large women. She would have offered them another blanket if there was one to give, but the members of the Brotherhood she was with weren't the most supplied. Even with the snow, she was quiet on her feet so she was practically beside them before Brienne looked up in surprise.

Pulling the bread from under her cloak she handed it to the women through the bars and Brienne reached for it, stirring Podrick and Jaime. “Thank you milady.”

Arya glanced curiously behind her shoulder a moment as a few more horses rode up to the fire, but judging by the greetings, they were just more men from the brotherhood. “Why are you feeding us?” Jaime's question drew her attention back to them. “Don't you want me dead?”

She ignored his ungrateful scowl, “All I ever wanted was justice for the things that befell my House, watching you starve to death isn't justice.” She muttered the last part.

“But watching as some outlaws hang us is?” He challenged.

“Last time I traveled with the brotherhood they gave men the chance of a trial.” She offered with little enthusiasm.

“You think I'd win a trial here?”

“No I don't.” she smiled lightly, “Maybe try trial by combat, give the people a show.”

“You're as heartless as Cersei.” her smile faded, “What, don't like the comparison?”

“If I was as heartless as your sister, you'd be dead by now.”
“You know what, forget it, watch me hang. But what about them?” Jaime looked to the other occupants of his tiny quarters. “Are you just going to stand by as they hang an innocent women and boy?”

“What do you expect me to do about it?”

“You're a Stark.” he said exasperated, “Your brother was King in the North, you're the most Highborn person here, more than me! You could make a bloody difference and you know it.”

If she was honest, she hadn't really considered it. Sure she wasn't looking forward to their execution but she hadn't even asked why they were being executed. Arya tried to push away the guilt from her apathy, a younger her would have never stood by with such indifference, even when she was a helpless mouse in Harrenhal she dreamed of justice.

“You son of a bitch.” Arya looked up, confused by Jaime's sudden outburst until she realized he was staring behind her, so she turned. Hair as black as pitch and eyes as blue as the Narrow sea met hers, and for a heartbeat she froze.

“Arya.” his voice was deeper, and he was taller and broader. “I-I thought you were dead.”

“I'm not.” was all she managed to say and she attempted to push away her shock, but his eyes were lit with relief he had no right to feel.

“You two know each other?” Jaime didn't hide his disdain. Gendry nodded, still staring at her. “and you couldn't have mentioned that when we told you Brienne was looking for her?” Jaime was pissed, almost as pissed as she was starting to feel.

“She wanted to know where Arya was, not where she'd been.” Was his excuse, he gave the people in the wagon a quick glance before meeting her eyes again. “W-what happened to you, where have you been?” he blurted.

Arya shrugged, “I left Westeros, there was nothing for me here.” her tone was ice.

“Arya, I... I'm so sor-”

“Don't bother, Ser Gendry.” she shot back, she couldn't describe it but it somehow felt he'd abandoned her just yesterday and not years ago. “It's been a long day of riding, and I'm tired.” she went to leave but he grabbed her arm.

“That's it? That's all you have to say to me?” She was outraged by the anger in his eyes.

Arya tore her arm free, ignoring their audience in the wagon. “What else is there to say?”

“How about an explanation? Like where the hell you've been for the past four years!”

“I owe you an explanation? Are you kidding me? You left for your precocious brotherhood in case you forgot.”

“I didn't leave, you ran away!” he shouted back, “I thought you were dead after the massacre of Saltpans, I blamed myself.”

“Stop acting like you gave a damn what happened to me, you were ready to up and leave, the same way you wanted to leave Lommy and Hot pie to fend for themselves.”

“I never wanted to leave them! But you know for a fact we would have been better off without
“We would have been better off without you, you’re the one who got us taken prisoner!” she accused.

“You got yourself taken prisoner, you should have just went on without me!”

“That’s what you would have done, isn’t it? Your right, I should have left you there, and I should have left you to die in Harrenhal after.”

“If I recall it was your handiwork that left half the people there raped or murdered.”

“That was Roose Bolton and Vargo Hoat's massacre, not mine!”

“Started by you and your beloved Jaquen H'gar.”

“He was helping me, why did you even hate him so much?”

“Because he was a murderer! You were insane to think him any better than Rouge or Biter.”

“Everyone here is a murderer Gendry, look around you! I’d been dead before my tenth name day if I never picked up a sword.”

“There's a difference between defending yourself and being an assassin Arya!”

“I know.” her voice flattered slightly, her horrifying past catching up to her. “What do you want from me? The details of my life in Braavos?”

“Braavos?” Gendry took a step back with a look of almost disgust. “Did you actually go and find him?” She hesitated and he went on. “Don't tell me you were stupid enough to go looking for that psychopath!”

“What ever I did over there is none of your damn business!” she snapped, “You can say I ran all you want, but you left! You chose Thoros and Beric over me after everything, you chose them.”

“And if we'd done what you wanted things would have worked out just great?” No retort rolled off her tongue and Gendry seemed to regret the words as soon as they left his mouth. The silence stretched on a moment with three pairs of wide eyes watching from the wagon. His voice softened “Arya...I-”

“Don't apologize now, not when you're right.” she was done yelling at him but her tone was colder. “If we'd done what I wanted, we'd be as dead as my mother and brother, just more corpses for the Frey's to mutilate and parade around like trophies.” All the fight was gone from his eyes. “I've nothing left to say to you Gendry, and I don't give a damn for the Brotherhood either. I'm going North to find out the truth of what happened to my brother, and finish what I started years ago.”

“Your list.”

“My list.” she agreed, “and you'll stay out of my way unless you want to join the Frey's in a pile of your own ashes.”

“The Frey's...” his blue eyes widened, “but how could you possibly...”

“I've been done just defending myself for a long time Gendry, you know that.” her anger and sense of betrayal was clouding her thoughts and her glare wandered over the wagon and back to Gendry before leaving. I should have let the wolves tear you all apart.
Thanks so much for reading:) I'll try to work more but I've been struggling in my mind with how I wish to write the next couple chapters since I started writing this story. Anyway Welcome back Gendry!
Chapter Notes

Whaaat? another update?? I know it's only been days instead of weeks or months since the last one, but I figured since it's done I'd post it (◕‿◕✿)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tyrion

Winterfell was one of the oldest Castles in the Seven Kingdoms, hundreds of years older than Kings Landing. And the name was oddly but sadly fitting, snow held tight to the castle walls throughout all the seasons, and it had fallen three times in just the past five years. But no matter how many times the buildings burned away and were rebuilt, the dark stone walls stood strong as ever, even when frozen.

“All these years and stories but this is the first time I've been here.”

Tyrion glanced up at Varys huddled in his forest green cloak, grey fur nestled around his neck. He had to resist a smile looking at the man, the furry hat on his head was just too priceless. “Here it is in all its glory.” The two of them shuffled forward in what was knee deep snow for Tyrion, two dozen Unsullied and their horses trailing behind them, luckily the closer they got to the gate it was flattened enough he didn't look so much like a struggling child. The great gate leading into the castle was already open, they could see Tyrion and his group from miles away.

As he walked inside he couldn't help but notice ash stained on the stone walls, from which battle he couldn't say. The soldiers looked down on him with not a smile or welcoming face among them, some bearing scars and injuries from the most recent siege of Winterfell. But finally the men parted and he could see a familiar face, two even. Jon Snow stood in the center, no crown resting on his head as most Kings would insist upon. He was no doubt older than the last time he'd seen the boy, he was a man grown now, his face bore new scares and his tired eyes spoke of war and death.

Beside him Tyrion had to take a double take of the young child he was once forced to marry, Sansa Stark stood tall and proud, her blue eyes steady and strong. A far cry from the girl he'd known, back then he wasn't sure if the grief would ever leave the poor girls gaze. But she wasn't a girl any longer and Jon Snow was no green boy. They'd been children last he'd came to this castle and now together, they ruled it.

When Tyrion approached them, he was uncertain if he was going to be welcomed. “Lord Tyrion.” Jon greeted him, and the hint of a smile that touched his face was all he needed to push away his misgivings.

“King Snow, it's been a long time.” Tyrion bowed polity and glanced up at his wife. “My Lady, it's good to see you found your way home.” he was genuinely happy for her, but a small part of him still remembered how she'd disappeared and left him to take the fall for Joffrey's murder.

“It's good to be home, My Lord.” her smile was sweet but he wasn't sure it was real, after all, she'd faked every smile during their marriage. Next to her, a young boy of perhaps ten shuffled on his feet impatiently, his hair and eyes a shade darker than Sansa's, he shot Tyrion a glare. “This is Rickon” she went on, “He just recently came home.”
“I thank you for your hospitality.” he bowed his head to the boy.

“You're not welcome here.” he spat back, hate in his eyes.

“Rickon.” Sansa's hiss left him quiet once more and Jon cleared his throat uncomfortably.

“We have chambers prepared for you and your men, and...?” His grey eyes had landed on Varys, the only one of them other than Tyrion who wasn't dressed as a soldier.

“Lord Varys.” Sansa finished before he could introduce himself, “You're severing Daenerys Targaryen now too?” her eyes were suspicious.

“Yes My Lady, I believe Queen Daenerys is our realms last chance at true peace, a sentiment I hold quite dear. Though I'm sure Littlefinger has filled your head with different ideas about me.” Sansa's face grew colder. “He was the one who assisted in your escape of the capital, was he not?”

“He was.”

“How is he faring these days?”

“Dead.” The hint of satisfaction in her eyes chilled Tyrion more than the northern winds. “The Knights of the Vale had no time for his games My Lord, and the North has no interest in any either.”

Varys nodded, a forced smile on his face. Yes Sansa was no child anymore, and judging by the look in Jon's eyes Tyrion didn't want to know the things he'd seen, even little Rickon was a small red-haired ball of fiery anger. How many families were corrupted and ruined by the war my family started? He didn't even dare to ask if there had been any news of Bran or Arya.

**Arya**

She had managed to evade Gendry all morning but she could feel his gaze on her as thickly as the cold. Arya had always believed winter wouldn't phase her too much, being born in the North, but the summer snows from her childhood were nothing like the blizzard she'd woken up to this morning. The horses were freezing, and Jarvon's horse died in the night leaving him traveling on foot. Even with the terrible conditions though, shortly before nightfall the barn they were heading to made itself visible through the ironwood trees. As the branches cleared her stomach dropped, and something other than the cold sent a shiver down her spine.

Arya slid off her mare, the snow swallowing up her boots as her ankles felt the freezing touch of the snow. A few men milled about, none of them looking happy. It was quite the contrast to the singing band of outlaws she'd run into as a girl, there wasn't a smile to be spared between anyone. The barn towered over them, the pale grey wood it was made of looked much too old and a pitiful protection from the cold. On the front of the large doors hung a small sign, *Winter's Castle.* she snorted softly, this was far from any castle she'd seen.

“Arya.” she frowned as Gendry approached her, and she ignored him. “Look please, I know you don't want to talk to me but there's something you need to know.”

“There's nothing I need to know from you.” she muttered, eyeing the stables where the men were taking their horses.

“Arya, it's about your mother.”
This time she met his eyes, swallowing her uncertainty she let him go on, “What about her?” Gendry looked more uncomfortable than he did back in that brothel, when he opened his mouth no words came out. “Just spit it out.”

“S-she-”

“Gendry!” Thoros called from the doors of the barn, “help me with something, now.” His blue eyes cast down, he turned away, leaving her with a burning question she didn't even know how to ask. *What about my mother?*

Arya took her mare to the stables herself, but she could feel a thousand eyes on her as she walked. Their gazes were unsettling for a reason she couldn't explain, for it wasn't just the simple fact she was a Stark “back from the dead.” Their stolen glances of her were laced with fear, and Arya didn't think they were exactly scared of her. She was sure they'd heard the rumors she was responsible for the fall of House Frey, yet it seemed the men who stared at her knew something she didn't.

“Mi’lady.” She turned her head as she left the stables to see Harwin. Wherever the sun was hidden behind the clouds, it was starting to set and nighttime darkness had started to creep in while she tied up her horse.

“Yes.” she wrapped her thin black cloak a little tighter around herself, the forbidden feeling she had when she saw the barn sending another shiver down her spine. She thought it had something to do with the nervous look in Harwin's eyes this time.

“Lem spoke with Lady Stoneheart, s-she'd like to see you.” Arya held the man's gaze but he couldn't look her in the eyes for more than a moment. “I'm to escort you.”

She wanted to ask, she wanted to shake him until he told her the truth before she followed him into the creepy barn, but she could not bring the words to her lips. “Okay.” was all she said, her stomach twisting in ways it never had before. As they walked towards the doors the men of the Brotherhood watched her, fear, hope, even despair clouded their eyes but she continued to look forward.

The air inside the barn was warmer, not much warmer, but a fire at the center held most of the warmth the wide room offered. Men and a few women looked up as she walked in, and she spotted Gendry in the corner, at least forty barrels stacked high on the wall behind him. His eyes were filled with sympathy but she knew her own face was an unreadable mask. Harwin stopped outside the door as he led her to the room near the south end of the barn, “Milady...you remember Lord Beric.”

Arya tilted her head slightly, “Of course I remember him.”

“And you remember his...predicament, the things Thoros did to bring him back and the state that left him in?” Arya nodded, though she wasn't sure which state Harwin was referring to. Did he mean how forgetful Beric had become of his past life? “Lady Stoneheart has faced similar trials, she doesn't look...as she once did.”

*So Lady Stoneheart was brought back too.* Arya resisted the urge to roll her eyes, Harwin had no idea the horrific things she'd seen, even before she'd run into the Brotherhood without Banners the first time. Despite her unwavering distressing instincts, she put on a brave face, “Harwin, I'll be fine.”

“As you say Milady, I'll be outside.” Harwin opened the door for her, and Arya forced herself to walk through despite the temptation to run the other way.

The room was dark, only a couple of candles and the hearth where Lady Stoneheart sat was lit, her back to Arya. The women's navy blue hood covered her head, but when Arya moved closer the
women didn't stir. She stood there a moment, awkwardly as the new leader of the Brotherhood didn't seem to acknowledge her existence. Her dark eyes scanned the room quickly but were caught by a glimmer of bronze, unconsciously her hand wrapped around Needle's hilt.

The crown was lined with black iron spikes, forged into the shape of long swords. In half a beat the crown was off the table and resting in her hands, her mind drowning in itself as she turned the metal over and over. Arya couldn't describe the gut-wrenching feeling she'd had when the Frey's cheered that night, *The King in The North, The King in The North, The King in The North!* She'd sat there helpless in the Hound's arms as Robb's body had been brought out, Greywind's head in place of her brother's. Even to this day, the details of the memory stayed sharp and clear in her mind; the smell of burning smoke and bodies, the mud covered in her face, the drums and cheers and screams, and the crown resting on the Direwolf's head.

“You recognize it?” Lady Stoneheart's voice was a terrible rasp, Arya looked up. The women had stood as she'd been lost in her own mind, her cloak hung over her head covering her face but one of her pale white hand's rested over her throat when she spoke.

“Yes...” she looked down at the crown quickly as if to be sure it was the right one, “I only saw it the once but I never forgot it.” When Arya glanced up again she couldn't tear her eyes away from the Lady before her, her stature was eerily familiar and as her too white hands pulled her cloak back, Arya's already harrowing world slipped from under her.

The crown was weightless in her hands, yet somehow it was suddenly slippery. Lady Stoneheart's cheeks were torn to strips, a piece of her skull visible from under her thin brittle white hair. Her skin was too soft, like the faces that hung on the walls beneath the Temple she'd lived in for years, the faces she'd worn like dresses once. A horrific thing to do, she thought then. The reanimated corpse of her mother stood not six feet away but all Arya could think of was how sinister wearing another person's skin was. Was this some kind of trick? Was someone wearing her dead mother's face?

The woman's hand went to her throat again. “Arya...my little wolf.” she whispered. The thing resembling her mother stepped closer but Arya's feet were nailed to the ground, and she could not move if the Seven Kingdoms depended on it. “You're so beautiful.” Water was rimmed around her mother's blue eyes, a paler blue than she remembered. *Tears, she's crying.* Even as the pale white hands reached toward her she could not move, and as they gently pulled Robb's crown from her fingers Arya looked down at her hands.

Blood was dripping down both her wrists, she'd cut her palms from her iron-tight grip on the little black swords. Her hands were shaking violently and she quickly wiped them on her cloak, sucking in a shuddering breath in a futile attempt to steady herself. *Calm as still water. No one has no feelings, calm as still water. No one has no fear, calm as still water. No one has no mother...but I did, I do.*

“I...” Arya stared at Lady Stoneheart but no words made it to her lips, for no words could be formed in her head. Despite her icy fear she never reared back as Lady Stoneheart pulled her in for an embrace, she let the women hug her. The seconds slipped away before she could catch them, before she could blink, and her mother stepped back, “Mother...” the word slipped out.

Lady Catelyn nodded, using her hand to cover the gash in her neck again, she spoke. “Lem told me where they found you...” The pale blue eyes searched hers, for what she wasn't sure. The thought of what her parents would think of who Arya had become had always lingered at the back of her mind, but knowing they were long dead she'd managed not to let the question fester, much. But here stood her mother, her mother who was dead yesterday and alive in front of her now, asking her if she'd murdered an entire House.
Her childhood excuses and sins ran through her head. *It was an accident, I never meant to ruin my dress mother. I didn't start the fight, Sansa did. I didn't say that Jeyne's lying. What was Arya to say now? I didn't lock all those men in the dining hall? I didn't set the building on fire and watched until the whole of the inner castle was nothing but ash? I didn't stand there and imagine Lord Walder Frey watching all his son's burn alive, hoping he felt as helpless as I had the night you died.*

“T-they betrayed House Stark.” she blurted, “They killed Robb, they killed you. They deserved it.” *They deserved it, they deserved it.* They had to after the things they'd done, *I've no reason to feel guilty for what I did.*

“Yes.” The women rasped, “They did.” Lady Catelyn hugged her once more and Arya hugged her back. “I'm so proud of you.” The whispered words found her ear and chilled her to the bones. *I'm proud of you. I'm proud of you. I'm proud of you.*

Arya pulled herself back, “I'm sorry, I need...I just need a minute.” she needed a lot more than a minute, she turned and fled the room without looking behind her. She sped walked past everyone in the barn, oblivious to the stares. *I'm proud of you.* Arya burst through the front door, the icy air filling her lungs as she gasped for breath. Heads snapped in her direction; two men she didn't know, Brienne, Jaime, and Pod in chains, and of course Gendry Waters.

Gendry dropped the sword he was holding and was beside her instantly, his hands reached for her shoulders but she pushed him off. “Hey, just take a breath.”

“Take a breath?” the thought was outrageous, “You knew about her.”

“I tried to tell you!” he said desperately, “you wouldn't speak to me.” Once again, annoyingly, he was right.

“What the hell happened to you wolf bitch?” Jaime asked dryly, “didn't think you'd be one to cry so easily.”

Arya wiped at her eyes but only smeared her own blood on her cheek, she didn't realize she'd been crying. Her gaze met Brienne's, no curiosity roamed the women's face, only sympathy, and understanding. “You knew.” she accused.

“Milady, I...”

“You could have said something!” she snapped, Arya breathed deep but all she felt was a burning anger, *was everyone a bloody liar?*

“What happened to your hands?” Gendry's fingers touched hers but she ripped them back, she couldn't look him in the eyes any longer, she couldn't bear to look at any of them. Arya took off towards the trees. “*Arya!”* he shouted but she ignored him.

She knew it was cold, she knew she'd lost the feeling in the tips of her toes, her fingers, her cheeks, and lips completely numbed. She knew she should turn back, back to the fires and the warmth, lest she die out here in the freezing cold. The sun had already set, a least an hour ago and she'd been walking aimlessly for twice that long. She stopped, standing still in the darkness, tall pines towering over her on all sides, the urge to scream bubbling in her chest. Now that she wasn't walking the weight she'd been trying to evade caught up to her, with weak knees she dropped into the snow.

*I'm so proud of you.* Arya brought her hands to her head like in her nightmares all over again, but there was no crow screeching at her, just the voice inside her mind she could never escape. But more
than just her skin went numb then as her nightmare flashed before her mind, *a women made of stone with blood seeping from her eyes. Lady Stoneheart.*

It wasn't fair, none of it was. She wanted her mother back and now she was here, she wanted to learn the magic Jaqen held and now she wielded it, she craved her revenge like an addict and she'd consumed it. *I'm so proud of you.* Why did she still feel so hallow? *What would my father think? What would Jon think?* No matter how hard she tried she knew neither of them would be proud...and neither would Catelyn Stark, the women who raised her would never have felt pride over murder, especially at the hands of her youngest daughter. *Justice.* A little voice argued in the back of her mind. *No, murder.* Another affirmed. Nothing made sense anymore.

When she breathed her exhale clouded in front of her despite the darkness, little shards of moonlight slipping between the pines around her. Arya closed her eyes and oddly as she sat in the numbing snow something burned in her chest, her fingers tingling with an unexplained sensation. The anticipation was similar to what she felt earlier, but there was no forbidding feeling, just a peaceful calm. A twig snapped and her eyes blinked open, and dozens stared back at her.

For half a second fear stilled her, but it faded away when a pair of molten gold eyes caught hers. *Nymeria.* Arya breathed out a laugh of disbelief, even if the dozens of wolves wanted to tear her apart for a small meal she knew they never would, not without the command of their alpha. Nymeria stalked forward slowly, her fur a beautiful mix of dark grey and white, her eyes never leaving Arya's the closer she got. The lump in her throat grew when her direwolf was only an inch away, for years Nymeria had been with her in her dreams, absent but never gone. “The world took everything but it couldn't take you.” Nymeria whined and like a mad women, Arya dragged the feral animal into a fearless hug.

It was midnight by the time she walked back toward the barn, her body half frozen but her mind sparkling anew with flame. She could feel Nymeria's presence more than she had in years, a warm cloud at the back of her mind she could fall into if she had the need. Even though the wolf was in woods with her pack, for the first time Arya knew she'd never be alone again. And with the strength she held, the power of hundreds of wolves under her control, she knew she must be brave enough to face her mother and her past.

“Arya, you're back.” Gendry stood up by the doors, it seemed he had been standing guard.

“Yes, I am.” she walked past him, into the barn and back towards her mother's chambers. She couldn't stop or hesitate before opening the door or her courage might falter. When she entered the room looked very much the same, in the center stood her mother and Thoros.

“Mi'lady” Thoros greeted, he was concerned judging by his frown but she didn't care for it.

“Can we have a moment?” though the words were polite, in her tone there was no question.

He nodded, giving Lady Catelyn one last despairing look before leaving, a letter gripped tight in his hands. As he left she felt the temptation to follow but she turned her eyes to what was left of her mother. Many men would fear the face she rested her gaze on, women and children would scream, but if she learned anything there was nothing to fear from a persons face, only what was underneath it.

“I'm glad you came back.” she rasped. Arya took a deep breath as she stepped forward, studying the dead white skin that lined her mothers once beautiful features. “I thought you wouldn't...”
I've nowhere else left to go. But Arya couldn't bring herself to say the words. “Of course I came back.”

“Thoro's said you crossed the Narrow Sea.” Even with death lingering in her mother's pale eyes, there were questions.

“Yes...after...” she paused, not daring to speak of the night that left her an orphan. “I saw an opportunity for safety and I took it.” safety. It was hard not to scoff at her own lie.

Her mother's eyes landed to the sword on her belt, “A braavosi sword from the free cities.” she noted, hand to her throat. “They taught you to use it?”

Arya pulled Needle out, holding the pommel gently in her hands with the tip pointed at her mother. She shook her head slightly, “I didn't get this in Essos...Jon gave it to me the day he left for The Wall.” for a moment she thought her mother's eyes flashed but she stayed silent, “And I've learned how to use it.”

“I've no doubt you have.” Arya prayed her mother wouldn't say she was proud of her again, she wasn't sure she could handle it. “Does it have a name?”

“Needle.” she whispered as she placed the sword on the table gently, the only souvenir left of her past life.

Catelyn's mouth pulled into an almost disturbing smile, but Arya thought it was sincere. “Fitting.” The silence stretched on and Arya didn't know how to fill it. She couldn't imagine what her mother had been through over the years, how she’d found the will to keep living. But the answer hit her in the face as soon as it crossed her mind, the same way you have.

The hanging corpses swinging from the trees all across the Riverlands filled her eyes, the terrible stories of mother merciless. Vengeance. They'd both spent their years dreaming and taking the same things.

“Lady Brienne.” Arya blurted the name, “Why is she being executed?”

“Lady Brienne is a traitor.” her mother began pacing back and forth. “She promised me she would find you and your sister, and then she promised she would bring Jaime Lannister to justice after the crimes he committed against our family. She's disloyal and faithless.”

Arya hesitated, “And Podrick? Surely he couldn't have done anything.”

“Podrick Payne was Tyrion Lannister's squire, he's served our enemies his whole life.”

“He's hardly more than a child.”

“You truly care so much for their lives?”

“Yes.” but more for what's left of your soul. Arya wasn't sure there was anything either of them could do to cleanse their hands of the blood they'd spilled, but being in the North was making it hard to stomach any more of it.

“We'll discuss them tomorrow morning.” she agreed reluctantly and then sighed softly. Lady Catelyn stepped closer, the little candles throughout the room casting her shadow against the wall, covering Arya's own. A cold hand rested on her shoulder “Arya you've grown so strong, even when your childhood was stolen from you, and with you here...we could take back what belongs to our family, what belongs to you.”

“What do you mean?”
“Winterfell Arya, The North. You are your father's daughter, his last heir and...” Catelyn hesitated, “Unmarried?”

“Obviously.”

The living corpse grinned once more. “Of course...Arya, we have to take it back for your Father, for Robb who was butchered, your little brothers burned. Winterfell should be yours.”

Arya almost flinched from how harshly she spoke of her brother's deaths. “I...how? We can't just walk up and take it. Especially if the Bolton's still have it, and Thoros and Harwin think Jon...they think he holds Winterfell.”

“You don't believe them?”

“I...” she wanted to, more than anything she wanted to. But even as she dared to think it, she saw him on his knees with blood dripping at his feet. Too much of her dream was already true. “No.”

“Neither do I sweet child. A lie too good to be true.” Arya nodded in agreement, her throat tightening at the very thought of her brother. “We'll avenge him too my little wolf, all of them once we take back the North.”

“Mother...it'll just be another war.” even the idea of it was exhausting, Arya hadn't realized how drained she was until now. She didn't want to fight to survive anymore, she was done with running and hiding, and she was even tired of her quest for revenge. “You really want another war?”

“It's not about what I want.” The almost lifeless eyes darkened. “It's about justice for our family, you're telling me you don't want justice for them?”

“Of course I want justice.”

“I know you do...and you fought for it and took it. I don't know how you did it Arya...but House Frey is gone because of you.” Arya wanted to cringe at the memory. “Why stop now? When there's so little left to do?”

*But there's always something else to do, someone else to kill.* That was the reason that had her fleeing for her life in Braavos. “All you want is to take Winterfell from the Bolton's? That's it?”

“That's it, I promise. It's your birthright Arya, and if the war Thoros speaks of is true, with the Others...The North is going to need a Stark in Winterfell. Do you understand?”

Arya nodded.

**Thoros**

He walked in nervously, not sure what else Lady Stoneheart wanted from him. Arya had left, the girl didn't look happy but she hadn't looked much of anything but angry since he found her again, so he didn't know what to make of it. Part of him thought all the death she'd bore witness to as a child had left her numb to most emotions. “My Lady?”

Lady Stoneheart's eyes seemed to glow when they reflected the candlelight, “You still have the letter?”

“Yes, My Lady.”
“Good, there's one more thing I'd like to add.”

Sansa

Rickon walked a few steps ahead of her, as if that would save him from chastisement. “Rickon, slow down.” He stopped in the middle of the garnet hallway, turning on his feet to face her, nothing but defiance in his dark eyes.

“Why would you let him come here?”

Sansa sighed, “He's not as terrible as you think he is.”

“I heard Lady Dustin say that you and Jon were letting lions back into the North again, that they were the reason mother and father are gone.” she gritted her teeth at his words, she almost wished he wasn't getting better at the common tongue.

“Lady Dustin told you this?”

He shook his head, “People say things when they don't think I'm there.”

She scoffed, “So you're spying on people now?” that's just great.

“Is it true?”

Sansa bent down so she was level with him and looked him in the eyes. “Tyrion is a Lannister, yes.”

“The Lannisters-”

“But.” she pushed on, “he's nothing like his sister or Joffery, when I was the Lannister's prisoner he was always kind to me. If anything I was rude to him back then.”

“If he's so great why were you mean?” he didn't look like he believed her.

“The same reason you told him he wasn't welcomed here, he's a Lannister. And I still hate them as much as I did then...but Tyrion's not like that, he serves a different House now.” Rickon still seemed upset, his frame looking small in the light of the long shadows the torches projected along the walls. “Did you know he's technically my husband? That almost makes him family.”

His little eyes widened, “Really? I thought you liked Harrold?”

Sansa gaped at him a moment, “what-” but then she smiled bitterly as realization dawned on her, “who'd you hear that one from?”

“Robett said it to Maege, but she told him to shut his foul mouth.” Robett Glover. He was left as the heir since his older brother died.

“Harrold is just a good friend Rickon, that's why he helped me and Jon take back Winterfell.” she didn't like lying to her little brother, but in this case the truth would do them no good. Sweetrobin never escaped the sickness that held him his whole life, only in death did he find freedom. His death and Littlefingers, left Harrold in complete control over the Vale, and if Sansa wasn't already married to Tyrion he would have asked for her hand. He wanted to despite her previous marriage, he didn't think any wedding forced upon the bride and unconsummated should matter in the eyes of the gods. But as much as she wished it were true, she knew the Seven Kingdoms would see it differently.
“I still don't like him.” he argued. “I don't want him here.”

“We can't always get what we want” she told him while standing up. Her little brother pouted angrily before turning away, “Where are you going?”

He didn't look back, “I have lessons!” Sansa closed her eyes a moment wishing her mother were here, she'd know what to say to appease him. Rickon wasn't like Sansa, and wasn't even much like Jon really. He definitely resembled Robb, and would grow up to be just as strong, but it was Arya he reminded her of. Headless of any rules that were set, no interest in the other lords or what they thought, only in swordplay and disagreeing with her.

“He's just as sweet as I remember.” Jeyne's voice was soft, Sansa turned to see her standing in the doorway of her chambers.

“He doesn't understand what's at stake,” Sansa said and Jeyne just nodded. She wished she could push away the awkwardness, “How are you doing?” Jeyne had gotten better since she'd been here, a little anyway. The girl was still afraid of her own shadow and most everything else, but she'd gained a healthy amount of weight.

“I'm okay.” everything Jeyne said, she said quietly. “How are you doing...I mean with Lord Tyrion here...”

“I'm fine, like I told Rickon he was never the monster Westeros thought he was.”

“That's good, I'm glad he never hurt you.” Her old best friend was more of a ghost than a women, her eyes sunken into her cheeks ever so slightly.

“Thank you.”

“Lady Sansa!” Maester Wolkan stood at the end of the hall, “A letter has arrived.” She thanked the Seven silently for the excuse to leave, “excuse me.” In truth they hadn't spoken very much since Jeyne had joined them at Winterfell, her and Theon had stayed North during the battle and Jon had granted them permission to stay here around a fortnight ago. The thought of what her friend had endured left her uneasy, but even as close as they'd been when they were younger, Sansa was glad it was her here and not her sister. The thought left her sick with guilt every time she met Jeyne's haunted brown eyes.

“Who's it from?” she asked when she walked into the rookery.

“I'm not sure...” Sansa didn't like the tone of Wolkan's voice, she held her hand out and he produced the letter. The paper was brittle and yellowed, the seal made of pure black ink, a single word written across it. Bastard. Yet it wasn't the crude address that made her hands shake slightly, but the black ink direwolf sigil the letter was sealed with.

Chapter End Notes

Anachronism: something or someone that is not in its correct historical or chronological time, especially a thing or person that belongs to an earlier time. Also a great and weird song by Crywolf that helped me write this chapter.
I hope you liked Arya and Lady Stoneheart's reunion, it was a tough one to write to be honest. Sansa's POV was interesting too because I've never tried writing her character before, but wanted to add the scene.

Anyway thanks for reading kindstranger, I hope you enjoyed it, shit shall go down in the next chapter whenever I figure how I'm going to write it (ﾉｼ°) ° ＿ ＿
The look in Sansa's eyes was enough to still him for a moment, she shared that same look when she brought him the news of Stannis's death, and when they'd burned thousands of bodies outside the walls of Winterfell. “Jon, we need to talk.” she'd just walked in on the first meeting to be had with Tyrion and Lord Varys. Tormund and Davos sat around the table with him, along with a few other lords and ladies, Robett Glover, Maege and her daughter Lyanna.

Tyrion looked up from beside him, his eyes flickering between him and Sansa. Jon had no doubt he could feel the tension rippling off Sansa's stance. “Something amiss?”

“Lord Tyrion, would you mind if we spoke later?” The Lannister nodded, seeming sobered by the formal title. Jon had no idea what had Sansa's fingers tapping impatiently against the hem of her navy dress for, but he knew better than to make her wait for an audience.

“Of course, Your Grace.” Tyrion threw the title right back, though he seemed much more curious than annoyed by his dismissal.

“Sorry to interrupt.” Sansa said with all the courtesy of the Lady she was, “You can all continue this meeting later I'm sure?”

“Of course Lady Sansa, it's no trouble.” Lady Dustin's courtesy was just that, all courtesy. Sansa gave her a smile Jon knew to be a lie.

“Davos, Tormund, you two stay.” His half-sister sent him a glare for that, but his eyes were steel looking right back. Sansa didn't trust any of his advisers, but he trusted Tormund with his life and this moment would be an opportunity to see just how useful Davos could be. Once the room cleared out Sansa pulled the yellowed scroll out from her sleeve.

“What's going on?”

Sansa's watched him carefully, there was a message in her eyes he'd seen before, back when he wanted to leave Winterfell and ask the Southern Lords for an audience. *Don't do anything stupid.*

“Walder Frey is dead.” she announced bluntly.

“Dead.” he repeated, not sure how to feel. He thought he should be happy, but there was no joy to be found. “How?”

“Murdered, burned alive with all his sons.” Though the story was horrific to think about, Sansa
looked rather indifferent.

“Gods.” Davos mumbled, “all of them?”

Sansa shrugged, “That’s what she says in the letter...” She? Jon glanced at Sansa, no need to voice his questions, **who sent you the letter, and what else does it say?** “The letter was sent from...Lady Stoneheart.” the name fell oddly from her lips.

Tormund frowned, “Lady what? I haven’t heard that House name before...”

“It’s not, Lady Stoneheart is an outlaw who leads the Brotherhood without Banners, she’s been hanging and murdering anyone under the Boltons or Freys service for years.” Davos explained.

“Why is she writing telling us what’s she’s done to the Freys?” he pressed.

Sansa looked suddenly nervous, “she's not, she's writing because she wants...you, and she wants Winterfell.”

“Let me see it.”

“Just...before you read it. You remember how Ramsay said he had Arya, how he used her against you?” Jon nodded, he’d broken his vows and got murdered to save a girl that ended up being Jeyne Poole. “Lady Stoneheart is trying to claim the same thing, we shouldn't believe a word of it.”

Jon’s blood boiled at the thought, he wanted to rip this Lady Stoneheart out of hiding just for speaking his Arya’s name, how many people were going to try and use her name for power?

Finally, Sansa handed him the letter.

Dear Bastard, you’ve risen higher than you ever should have. You’ve no right to Winterfell, no right to any crown, no rights to anything before a true-born child of Eddard Stark. I’ll give you one chance to redeem yourself, and if you do what I say, you won’t end up burned alive like Walder Frey and all his sons. I’ll release your half-sister Arya Stark, and she’ll sit the thrown you’ve no rights to. Bring yourself to me with no false army at your back and no tricks. If you don’t her blood will be on your hands and you’ll never see her again.

“Who the hell does she think she is?” he spat, stomach burning with anger as he unfolded the bottom of the letter, surprised to find more words.

“She's just some mad women who wants Winterfell Jon, there's no reason to do anything about the letter.” Sansa insisted.

“Why is she even-” he stopped as his eyes flicked to the bottom passage, a single word catching his eyes, Needle.

“Jon?” his sister's voice echoed oddly from the other side of the room.

*In case you don't believe me, she still has the Needle you gave her the day you left for the Wall. It is tragic how determined she is to think you dead, but I know better. I know what you are.*

He cleared his throat, his mouth now very dry. “Did you read this last part?” he managed, Sansa was beside him instantly, picking the paper from his hands and pulling the page to show the last couple of sentences.

“No...” she seemed to be reading it more than once, but he didn’t need to. “What Needle?” Jon sat
down, his heart beating faster by the second and his stomach turning, *could it really be her?* Her little
grey eyes glowed up at him, she'd been so happy when he'd given her that sword. He closed his eyes
a moment and he could feel her jumping in his arms the day they bid each other goodbye, covering
his cheeks with innocent kisses. “Jon...” Sansa's voice was softer this time.

“The last time I saw Arya, I gave her a sword. And since she hated stitching so much...” he paused
his voice lowering. “I named it Needle.”

“She never said anything about it in Kings Landing.” His and Arya's childlike voices rang in his
head “...don't...tell...Sansa!”

“You would have told father.” Sansa sat down beside him her eyes staring blankly at the wall. She
didn't press or tell him what he had to do, there were no plans she wished to share or warnings she
wanted him to heed.

“Did anyone else know about it?” Davos asked.

Jon shrugged, “Mikken forged it.”

“Mikken's been dead for years.” Sansa said darkly.

Tormund sighed dramatically and pulled out his sword, “It sounds as if we have a princess to save
then.”

When morning finally came Arya couldn't bring herself to speak to her mother right away, instead
she took herself away from *Winter's Castle.* The snow was endless as it always seemed to be in the
north, floating down around her calm and quiet. Arya lifted the bow she'd borrowed from the barn,
(she hadn't asked who it belonged to) and took aim. The tension of the string pulling back and the
grip of her leather gloves around the arrow's shaft; brought her the kind of tranquility her sister no
doubt used to find in stitching. One breath, two, and the arrow flew. She relaxed when the small
squeal of a rabbit reached her ears.

“Good shot.” she turned, a new arrow donned from her quiver and pointed at Gendry's heart. He
didn't so much as flinch or raise his hands in defense, but watched her rather unimpressed. “Go on,
since you hate me so much.”

She held her ground for a moment, but both of them knew she wasn't going to kill him. Arya turned
back to her rabbit and away from him, “Stalking me now?”

“Thoros wanted to make sure you weren't running away.”

She laughed, “and you would have stopped me if I had?”

“No.” he didn't hesitate in his answer, “I wish you would.” His blue eyes held a melancholy haze
when she glanced back, a sadness she hadn't known him to hold before, despite how serious he
always was when they were younger. “You could go anywhere you wanted.”

“I've been anywhere Gendry, for the past four years.”

“Seeking out Jaqen wasn't just being anywhere.”

She pushed down the anger from the accusation in his tone, “For the record, I never did find him.”
“You found someone out there.”

“More like no one.” she muttered with a sigh, but Gendry wouldn't understand her play on words. “Look I'm not running anymore, I've been running since we left King's Landing.”

“You weren't running then, you were trying to get home.”

“And that went just great, as you pointed out the other night.” He stood there annoyingly silent. “What do you want Gendry? You got your Brotherhood, the family you never had. Why do you care where I go?”

His foot tapped impatiently in the snow as he searched the evergreen trees for whatever words he was having trouble finding. “She's not who you think she is.”

“My mother?”

“Lady Stoneheart.” he corrected her harshly. “You can't trust her.”

“I don't trust anyone, something you helped me learn.”

He glared at her, “why don't you just go south again, or back to Essos? There's going to be a war here Arya, and with your name you'll be stuck in the middle of it.”

“Why don't you?” she threw back, “If you hate it so much here just leave, no one is stopping you.”

“If I left they'd hunt me down and hang me for a deserter.”

“And they'd hunt me down too, you already said Thoros told you to follow me.”

He smiled then, his shaggy black hair getting caught in the icy winds. “You'd be fine.” he waved a hand at the dead rabbit, “You can take care of yourself for a start, but more importantly, like you said; you can do a lot more than defend yourself.”

She shook her head slightly, breathing in the thin snowflakes. “I'm done running Gendry.” There was nowhere left to go, her time was running out whether Gendry understood that or not. When she blinked she saw two glowing red eyes staring back at her. Jon and Robb were dead, Lady Stoneheart was real, Jaime pushed Bran from the Broken tower...there was no escaping her vision.

“Then go home.”

“That's what my mother wants, she wants to take back-”

“Everyone's saying your brother already did!” he insisted.

“Would you just stop, he's gone.”

“What would you know of it?”

“More than you!” she couldn't fathom the reason for his persistence, but she was close to hitting him over the head with her stolen bow. She approached him all the while biting back her anger. “I told you to stay out of my way,” her face was an inch from his.

He lifted his arms up wide to either side, “I'm not in your way!” his voice echoed through the empty trees. Arya stepped back, pushing down her rage and emotions as best she could. He could only be in her way if she let him, and she had stop letting him get to her so easily. “You don't owe her anything, if you don't want another battle, leave.”
"You've no idea what I want."

"No, you're right about that. But you don't have to base your decisions on the fact your name's Stark." Arya thought of Jaime, *you could change things and you know it*. "I understand if you think that."

"No offense, but I doubt that."

He shifted awkwardly, his hands coming together to fidget from nerves or maybe just the cold. "You don't know as much about me either."

"and what's that supposed to mean?" he was already on the defensive before he confessed.

"The reason the goldcloaks wanted me...my father was Robert." she blinked blankly. "Robert Baratheon." Arya stared at him, his thick black hair and dark blue eyes. Her memory of the late king was surely not as clear as it'd been five years ago but she supposed they were similar, more so if Robert hadn't been so fat.

"King Robert Baratheon." she repeated, seeing her childhood friend vaguely in the man before her. As he nodded and she finally processed his words, not a hundred years of training at the House of Black and White could stop the smile pulling at the corners of her lips. She chuckled softly, but next thing she knew she was bursting out in laughter.

"Arya it's not funny..." his voice was dipped in annoyance, but it only made it all the more hilarious. Gendry Waters, the bastard who hated the Lords and Ladies, son of a King. As like most laughs, hers was contagious and he was biting back a smile. " Seriously?" she tried to stop, bringing a hand to her mouth as if it would keep in the laughter, but as she looked at the blue eyes the fat King had, she couldn't stop. "It's really not..." he was chuckling now too.

"No, no..." she giggled, "It's not funny at all, Your Grace."

"Don't call me that."

"As his Grace commands." she shot back, and a true smile broke across his face. And the two of them struggled to breathe as they wheezed in the empty white forest, no doubt scaring away any other prey for miles around them. She laughed so hard her stomach hurt and she had to sit on the closest fallen log, and he fell down beside her. As she wiped the tears from her eyes and their breaths finally settled, so did a silence between them. One where she oddly held peace in place of the anger and betrayal she felt every other time his eyes met hers. She sighed and a cloud of white floated away. "It broke my heart when you chose the Brotherhood." she whispered softly.

It was hard to meet his stare, but she did. "It was a mistake Arya I never wanted to hurt you, I always thought...I don't know, your name made you too good to be my friend."

"You know I never cared about any of that."

"I know that now."

She smiled sadly, "You might be more high born than me, son of a King and all."

His bittersweet smile matched hers, "I'm still a bastard, and you're still a Princess."

"You're still so stubborn."

He grinned "So are you."
When the barn became visible between the pines her sense of lightness started to fade slightly. Gendry was a step behind but his presence was no longer irritating, the idea of discussing a new siege of her family home with her mother was a whole other matter. She’d told Gendry he’d no idea what she wanted, which had to be true because she’d no idea what she wanted.

The obsession with bringing a reckoning on her enemies had led her down a bloody path she could never cleanse herself of. She’d thought it was finally fair when Jaqen had granted her death wishes, she thought it was justice when she served the Many Faced-God in Essos, and it'd been retribution to burn down the hall at the twins. And even though she couldn't find any feelings of guilt for most of the blood on her hands, there were too many instances when she wasn't sure anymore.

A brutal laugh pulled her from her own mind, her attention back on the world around her. The clearing around the barn opened up, the old grey wooden building seeming bland surrounded by white. On the edge of the small expanse of snow-covered earth, before the world was lost in trees; hung the bodies. Arya stopped in her tracks, one body too small and the other two large. No. Three men were beside the large tree, and one forced upon his knees. She wasn't close enough to see but she'd didn't need to be.

“Arya...” Gendry's voice was an apology and a question all at once. I'm sorry, are you alright?

Without a word she approached, Lem and Harden stood proud, their wicked smiles making heat rise to her skin. “Go on, take a long look Kingslayer, that'll be you on the morrow.” Lem spat down on his prisoner.

Jaime was on his knees, hands chained behind his back, his clothes much too thin for the freezing weather. The bodies hung on either side of the truck, and on either side of the broken man between them.

“What have you done?” she heard herself say. Lem and Harden glanced at her, none of them noticing her before.

“Lady Stark.” Harden's greeting was made with a scowl, his hate directed at her for killing his friends was still as sharp as the night they’d met.

“It's justice little squirrel.” Lem smiled as he used her old nickname, “What your Lady mother ordered.”

“She ordered this?” her fury was being drowned by her sense of dread, and she couldn't even bring herself to scream at them, scream that Podrick was just a boy, that Brienne had done nothing to deserve this. They were innocent...a tiny voice cried in her mind. And how many innocents have you killed? A poisonous one answered.

Lem and Harden ripped Jaime back up onto his feet, the beaten lion met her eyes briefly as he was dragged back to his cell. The hate in his gaze might have made a younger her flinch. I never wanted this, she wanted to shout back, but it wouldn't do her or his grief any good. Her sight shifted to the base of the tree, unblinking, two pairs of shoes hanging in her preferential vision.

“It's wasn't your fault.” Gendry said quietly behind her.

“Not now.” she breathed, sensing her needs she heard her old friend turn back toward the barn. Her eyes stared at the base of the old oak but instead she saw the tree of corpses she’d stumbled upon in
the forest by the God's Eye. She'd been trying to rescue Gendry after his capture, looking up to see
the rotten naked bodies half eaten from her spot in the leaves. What was left of the man glared down
at her with only dark holes in place of his eyes, had her father's head looked like that after it'd been
mounted on a spike?

Arya made her eyes move up, made herself confront the atrocities committed by the thing claiming to
be her mother. Brienne's face was an ugly purple-blue, her eyes bulging and standing out against the
new color of her skin. Podrick's once young face was now swollen, his eyes fixed on nothing as his
mouth was stuck in his final gasp for breath. She swallowed the bile rising in her throat despite how
much death she'd already seen.

She felt the presence of Nymeria and as she closed her eyes and she wanted nothing more than to fall
into it, to run with the wolves and leave all this behind her. She pushed it to the back of her mind but
not so far that Nymeria could no doubt feel the turmoil under her skin. Arya placed one hand on
Needle's hilt searching for courage from anywhere she could find it. She walked toward the barn.

The windows left Lady Stoneheart's chambers washed in a pale blue light. It made her mothers skin
look even paler and lifeless than in the dark, even her eyes glowed pale with death. “Arya, where
have you been?”

“What have you done?” Arya was not a the little girl who owed her mother answers anymore. “You
told me we'd discuss it!”

Her mother almost looked bored but Arya was starting to think reading her features was a waste of
time, the half rotten skin made it impossible to know what the women was really thinking. “I told
you we'd discuss it in the morning and you weren't here.”

For half a beat guilt stole into her chest, but her rage shoved it out. “So you just went ahead and
hanged them? A boy no older than Bran!”

“You've always had a loose tongue Arya but you're too old now for such insolence.”

“Insolence?” Arya stalked around the table in the room to face her mother. “Have you just been
hanging every person ever associated with the Frey's and Lannisters?”

“They're guilty!”

“Then you should be tying a rope for the both of us, you hosted them in our castle in case you
forgot.”

“You think me some kind of monster? They butchered Robb, murdered Ned and stole my daughters
from me!”

“I know. I was there for all of it! When they threw father before the steps of Baelor. I was there.
When the Frey's paraded Robb's corpse like a prize. I was there. You don't need to remind of their
crimes! But what does killing Brienne and Podrick change?”

“Want you to come here and remind me of my sins a fortnight after burning down an entire House?
Tell me sweet daughter how many innocents died there?”

Arya felt her hands begin to shake, “And I feel worse than I did before!” tears stung her eyes. “It
doesn't fix the past mother, it doesn't bring anyone back.”
“No, but they'll lose what I've lost. I'll see to that myself.” her mother turned away from her and Arya reached for her arm. The women whipped around so fast Arya only had time to blink as hands grabbed her throat and slammed her against the wall. “I won't hear another word of it, do you understand?” Arya coughed painfully, she'd not even enough breath to speak. Lady Catelyn's dead hands pushed harder when she didn't answer, fingers so cold they felt like icy vines choking her. “I am your mother and you will listen to me.”

You're not. It was instinct to reach for Needle, instinct to pull the blade from her belt. Half a moments hesitation though gave the fingers the opportunity to tighten and she nearly dropped her weapon. With a heart of stone she drove her sword forward. Her mothers eyes widened, shock she thought, no matter how distorted her mothers features were she could read shock in the lines of the dead skin. She stumbled backward and Arya coughed in air with the fingers gone, sinking to the floor as her mother fell onto her knees.

Arya held her throat as if the icy hands were still there, shaking on the floor as her mothers eyes stared at her accusingly. “Arya...” it was hardly audible with her hands around Needle's hilt instead of the gash in her neck. The tiny sword was plunged into her mothers chest. With one last look of betrayal she fell backwards, a pool of black blood enveloping the wooden floor.

Chapter End Notes

Thank for reading kindstranger, and I promise a reunion very very soon ;) it's only been over 70 thousand words later...Debe (~ Orz)  teşekkür ederim (° Orz °)
Mercy

Chapter Notes

As per usual, sorry for the lateness kindstranger. But! (°□°) cock I've little free time these days, and even then that free time is just me procrastinating on the things that need doing lol. Also I've been juggling different ways this chapter could play out in my head since I started writing this fic...like years ago...I don't think I'll ever be fully content with any of the versions I write up or think of... but shit needs to be done and I'll stop rambling on now! Hope you enjoy!  

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It hurt to breathe but she was still alive, for now anyway. The red eyes of death that had haunted her dreams would be a welcomed escape now. If she faced them maybe she'd see her father again, or Jon, but if her mother was there too...no, the stone floor underneath her would do. Her eyes stung for she kept them open. If she closed them, she'd see all the things she wished to forget. She knew the Kingslayer had been watching her, he called her name enough times, even things that were not her name. But all she could do was stare at the ceiling of their cell wondering if Lem would kill her by finishing the beating he'd given or by hanging her with the man calling her name. Besides all the external pain, it felt as though a thick cloud was submerged in her head. She placed a hand to her temple; the other was resting softly on her sore ribs.

“You're in shock I suppose.” he was talking to her, he had to be, but it didn't feel like it. “When I killed the Mad King, the deed was done before I thought to do it. He turned around and the next thing I knew my sword was driven through his back. I don't how long I stood there over his body after he stopped chanting to burn them all...but eventually I sat down. That helped with the coming to grips with what'd done.

“I killed my honor when I killed him, at least that's the world thought. But I knew better, the blood on my sword saved more lives than it ended. Speaking of swords...I brought Joffrey's with me. If we get out of here, or if you ever look at anything other than that ugly ceiling, it's yours. Why in the world would you want Joffrey's sword? I'm glad you asked. It's your father's, mine melted his down, forged it into two swords. Brienne had the other...Oathkeeper.”

Jaime cleared his throat. “Joffrey named his Widow's Wail.” he scoffed at that. “I imagine you'll give it a better name, it's right there. Oathkeeper too, I'm surprised these bastards aren't fighting over the Valyrian Steel...but might be they just want to torment me with the sight. They seem fond of that idea.” A silence stretched on and she found she enjoyed it much more than his ramblings. “What I was trying to say before, you did the right thing, even if it doesn't feel like it right now.”

Arya turned her head to look at him for the first time since waking up on the floor. He sat with his back against the wall, his beard more unkempt than ever and his emerald eyes impossibly dark in the dim light. “I stabbed my mother in the heart.”

His eyes never left hers, “You stopped a killer from killing more people. It've been even better if you'd done it yesterday-”

“Stop talking.”
“Brienne and Podrick would be alive, but I suppose you didn't know how much she'd lost it until she hung them.”

“Shut up.”

“You really couldn't have figured that out a little sooner?” Arya’s hand reached for the first thing she found, a small stone and whipped it at Jaime's head. It flew between the bars separating them but he blocked it with his arm and looked back up with a triumph smile. “There, now you've moved an inch, why don't you try sitting up?” Ignoring his smug face, she pulled herself off the floor, a stabbing sensation piecing her ribs making her grind her teeth. Sliding back, she leaned against the opposite stone wall and faced him.

“What do you want Kingslayer?”

“You could call me Jaime for a start. I've no doubt you'd prefer Lady Stark, over say, Kinslayer? Oh, don't look at me with your murder eyes. We committed different crimes no doubt, but they carry a similar burden, wouldn't you say? No matter what, no one will understand why we had to do it.”

“It doesn't matter, we're as good as dead down here so why don't you stop tormenting me?”

“If we are as good as dead, then I won't spend my last night here staring at a wall. And I don't mean to torment you, I only want you to understand.”

“I understand what I've done, I understand every mistake I've made that led me to where I am. And I don't need you to help me justify my actions. I had my reasons.”

“We all have our reasons” he muttered back, staring at the swords. “but no one gives a damn for them My Lady because they're your reasons and not theirs.” he glanced back at her. “I want you to know that much.”

“I know.” she whispered, shivering from the cold breeze the tiny basement window offered. Arya held her knees to her chest, wishing for warmth and some sort of peace of mind.

“So, what will you name your new sword Lady Stark?”

Biting back a retort she looked up at the swords leaned against the wall. Oathkeeper was longer and wider than Joffrey’s sword, his would fit her hand nicely and with the Valyrian steel it’d be light and easy to wield. She tried to feed off Jaime’s distraction, but her mind was too cloudy. “I don't know.”

The Lannister sighed, “Nothing, no ideas? Didn't your little sword have a name?”

“My brother was the one who named Needle.”

“Robb?”

“Jon.”

“Ah, your half brother.”

“My brother.”

Jaime only chuckled in a strained throat. “Right well, that one looked like a needle I suppose.” he eyed the blades, shimmering dark red with only a single candle hanging by the door. “They look like they’re already bleeding to me...how about the red fang? Or wolf fang, that'd be fitting considering.”

“Lion’s blood.” she offered dryly.
“There's that sense of humor you Starks are known for.”

Arya closed her eyes a moment, focusing on Jaime's question and not letting anything else fill her mind. “Mercy.”

“Mercy…the world we live in could surely use some more.” He agreed.

“Just so.”

“You've no ideas on how to get us out of this?” Jaime sounded more tired suddenly.

“You're the one who had the escape plan before.”

“Yes, but you're the mysterious assassin from across the Narrow Sea, you ended an entire House by yourself.” Her heart sank at his words. “You do remember what you said? When you first saw Gendry and you both got into your little screaming match...stay out of my way or join the Freys in a pile of their own ashes. It was very dark and quite poetic.”

“I...”

“Didn't mean it?” he raised an eyebrow.

She paused, but what was the point if they were both as good as dead? “I thought it'd make me feel better.”

Jaime's laugh surprised her, he even coughed in the middle of a snort. “You thought mass murder would make you feel better?”

“After what they did to Robb and... Yes, okay? I thought their deaths would bring me some shred of peace. I was wrong.”

His smirk faded, “A lesson better learned late I supposed, Cersei never learned it. She always savored whatever pain she could bring upon those she hated.”

“But you loved her anyway.” under his gaze she could see the pain the thought of her brought him, the betrayal, regret even.

“I loved her despite it all.”

“How?”

“You love your siblings, don't you?”

“I think that was a little different.” Arya resisted a crude smirk.

“What about Sansa? From what I recall you two didn't get along all that well, you're to tell me you didn't love her?”

“There were good times too.” she said in a low voice.

“The last time you saw her, were you still in an argument?”

Arya nodded, thinking back to the last time she'd seen Sansa. Standing beside Joffrey and Cersei, her scream that had haunted her nightmares for moons filled her mind then. “I wish I could've said goodbye.”
“Goodbyes don't make losing someone any easier. Besides, get us out of here and rumor has it she's sitting a little further North of here, your half-or brother or whatever, beside her.”

“Rumor has it I married Ramsey Bolton too.”

Jaime watched for an uncomfortably long moment, “why don't you want to believe they're alive?”

Arya pondered her answer a moment. “Have you ever had a dream that came true?”

“Do wet dreams count?” He grinned at her short glare, “No, I don't think so.”

“I saw him die in my dream.” She admitted.

“That doesn’t make it true.”

“I saw you push Bran from that window.” That seemed to give him pause. “No one told me, I never heard it as a rumor or story, I saw you push him. I saw a woman with bleeding eyes and a heart made of stone too…Lady Stoneheart I suppose. Other things I didn’t understand…But I saw Jon.” She swallowed despite the tightness in her throat. “I saw him pulling a knife out of his chest.”

After a long moment he pushed on “Do you often have dreams that come to pass?” she shook her head.

“This was the only one.”

“And Sansa?”

“I never saw her.”

“Then there’s no reason to think she’s dead, now come on, find us an escape plan.”

“I don’t have a plan.”

“Some assassin you are.” he nearly rolled his eyes.

“I never said I was! And I'm not.”

Jaime didn't look very impressed as he fiddled with a piece of straw between his fingers. “Didn't you go and find a Jaqay, or Jaque? Someone must have taught you how to wield a sword, how to burn down a dining hall without getting caught.”

Arya closed her eyes a moment, pushing away her annoyance at him and herself for ever speaking Jaqen's name. “I never found him.”

“Jaycou?”

“Jaqen.” she sighed, “I didn't...I never learned as much as he did. It'd have taken a lifetime to.” her eyes scanned their cells, “Not that it matters now. Unless you can dig through these stone walls or bend those steel bars, no one is getting us out of here, not me and not a Jaqen.”

Once a silence finally settled over them Arya relaxed, and thankfully there was only darkness under the lids of her eyes. No monster or nightmares, no future ideas or haunted memories. Arya only allowed herself to breathe in the stale scent of straw and her own dried blood. The shallow breaths of Jaime as he slowly let himself be dragged into sleep filled her ears, as did the odd creaking complaint
the wood made about the cold. Rubbing her fingers over the thin sleeves of her shirt gave her mind a simple task to focus on, searching the thread for any stray strings. There were more than a few.

Sleep never reached her, even though every part of her felt as though it weighed more than the Seven Kingdoms. Even with the excessive weight of her eyelids, and her mind drawing oddly blank now, there was no true rest. She sighed into the darkness with eyes open. The candle by the door had burnt out, and Jamie she was sure was asleep. She’d no idea how late or early it was, and she’d never imagined a night could last so long…but she still had no idea how long it’d truly be.

Her head turned as the door opened slowly like a cautious wind, the dark broad shape of the person even more careful with his steps. Arya flinched at the light that burst in the room from the intruder’s candle, the flame taking shapes as stars behind her eyes. She blinked them away and Gendry leaned over with a heavy smile. “Get up.”

She got up. “Have you lost your mind? You’re going to get yourself killed!” her rage was a barely contained whisper.

“You’re the one who decided we don’t leave people behind.” He put down his sword and the keys sang softly as they were lifted from his pants pocket and chimed louder as he unlocked the space between them. An unusual bout of fear seized her and without warning, she dragged him into an embrace.

“Thank you.” She wasn’t going to weep, there was no time for it, there wasn’t even time for their hug really.

“I’m glad you two have made up, but can we get on with the escape?” Jaime stood by his own cell door.

“You can forget abou-” Gendry shut up as she stole the keys from his fingers and began working them on the lock. “Arya…”

“Leaving no one behind.” She whispered without looking up. They all knew enough not to raise their voices in argument, silently Gendry and Jaime armed themselves, and Arya picked up the shimmering sword that once belonged to Joffrey. Mercy was heavier than Needle was, and as the little sword came to mind, she wondered how she could get to it. The last she saw it was on the floor of Lady Stoneheart’s chambers, upstairs and on the other side of the barn. She went to bite her lip then and was reminded it was already broken.

“Come on.” Gendry led the way out the door and up the stone stairs. Her muscles screamed with refusal and her lungs seemed to scrape against her ribs, but she pushed onward. The stone steps would lead to the main room of the barn, and she’d no idea how many bodies would be spread out along the floor. The calculations started running through her mind.

Once the door was open there would be no chance the three of them wouldn’t draw any attention. From her memory, the barrels would be lined up along their left side and not far past them would lie the exit, a side door. No doubt there’d be someone or a few someone’s outside on watch, attempting to steal the horses wouldn’t be an option. They wouldn’t be leaving with clean swords and with every aching step she felt their inevitable deaths growing closer. Gendry glanced back as he stopped at the door and she could feel Jaime’s presence behind her. His gaze asked if they were ready. Arya closed her eyes and breathed deep, searching for a warmth she prayed was close. After a moment she nodded. We just have to get out the door.

Time slowed in the chaos. Even though Gendry didn’t just swing the door open someone glanced up from the shadows at their entrance, and halfway through his shout they were already halfway to
the door. The dark shapes that were sleeping were stirring with the sudden panic, and she could hear
the voices, “The prisoners!”, “get up!”, “Stop them!”

People tried to get in their way, but they didn’t last, the first Gendry shoved away with a strong
elbow, the second he used his sword. In a matter of bloody heartbeats, they’d made it to the door.
Bodies shifted and steel was being drawn behind them. The icy wind hit her face as the door
whipped open, but the clang of swords drew her attention back inside the barn. Jaime had just barely
blocked a blow to the head and before she could do anything about it an axe was swinging her way.
Arya moved swiftly, swiping her sword across her attacker’s face with ease and using her other hand
she grabbed the lantern still in Gendry’s.

She slammed it into the head of the man who attacked Jamie, glass and sparks flying everywhere.
Gendry was tugging on her arm, pulling her muscles and ripping her sleeve. Arya turned, A protest
on her lips that she never spoke. “Run!” She’d never seen his eyes so wide with panic before, and he
wasn’t even looking at the swarm of people in the barn, but the tiny little flames that were now
licking at the straw covering the floor.

Her old friend practically dragged her onward and somehow Jaime was following, but he stopped
short to slam the door behind them. Using Oathkeeper, he struggled to place it in the rusted hooks to
block the exit, delaying their pursuers if only for a moment. “JAIME, RUN!” Jaime was turning to
catch up to them, but Gendry wasn’t waiting, he tugged on her arm harder and Arya looked at him
confused. They had no time to spare, no doubt, but they had enough time to run…

The ground roared beneath her feet and she flew forward, the trees spinning madly past her. The
icy pile of snow filled her eyes and nose, and when she wiped it away the world around her was
bathed in pale jade light. The sky cracked as if being ripped apart by some unimaginable monster and
that was the last thing she heard. She turned her head, one hand to block out the blinding light above
her eyes, green flames licked up at the stars and moon. The ground stood still after a moment, but the
barn’s structure was breaking. It filled the air with the acidic reek of the fire’s wrath, the wind with
the breath of a demon. She’d never seen anything destroyed so quickly, so fiercely. Where once the
barn was, a burning mouth leading straight to the seven hells stood.

Gendry was struggling onto his feet and took her up with him. Yet even standing she was frozen,
looking on with horror at the turmoil before her. Arya had seen Wildfire before, in small controlled
areas, but she’d never seen it like this. Gendry’s lips were moving but there was no sound, just a high
pitch ringing. He pulled one last time and she followed.

She couldn’t recognize it as Lem at first, but the dark shadows appeared out of the madness; A
group of about a dozen men who’d been on watch, or maybe just taking a piss at the right time. They
were rushing forward, steel in their hands. Arya saw Jaime stumbling behind her, unarmed. Lem was
shouting something at her but she couldn’t hear him, she couldn’t hear anything. Despite the
pulsating deafness, all the feeling of her previous injuries faded away and she sprang into action.

She loved the feeling of Mercy in her hands, she couldn’t deny that, no matter how reluctant she
was to spill more blood. Her mind was still processing the fact that she might have just lit another
building on fire, processing all the people that had just been incinerated. The people who were dying
even now, and how thankfully if they were screaming, she was none the wiser of it. Old Hawin who
she hadn’t really hated, little Lucas in search of another life, and Needle…Needle had been inside the
barn too.

The violence was a familiar song, but she knew she was playing out of toon. Deaf and injured from
a beating, weak from a moon of being underfed and more than a day without sleep. She fought hard,
but it wasn’t enough. After a swing, she saw Lem materialize behind Gendry. Arya opened her
mouth, yelled a warning, but if he could hear her it was drowned out by something else. Even as she struggled toward him it was only in time to see the sword driven through the Smith’s back. His blue eyes glanced down wildly to the tip of the long sword sticking out of his chest, only to look up at her, some helpless plea left on his lips.

“NO!” she screamed, desperate and powerless, and somewhere, maybe only in her mind, a direwolf howled. Jaime stood, dumbfounded by her outburst, he turned his head but probably only saw the hammer meeting his face. The half-starved Lannister fell to the snow, and for a heartbeat she stood paralyzed, unmoving for the first time in years when faced with foes. Gendry fell backward as Lem tore his sword in reverse, and where some enemies might wear a sinister triumphing smile on their lips, his pulled back in rage. Gendry’s body was not the one he’d smile over, it was hers. The rage in his eyes woke her and Mercy was posed and ready somehow.

She screamed once more, running forward in a blind rage, not thinking of her odds one bit. Mercy was a flash of red and she hardly felt it when she struck the man closest to her, the one who’d attacked Jaime. Even as she turned, she’d no idea where she’d stuck him or if he was dead, only that it was Lem she wanted. Someone else stood in her way first, but she couldn’t tell a single detail about him. The only thing about the man that registered in her mind was the crash of his steal against hers, the whisper of his sword tickling her arm, and fear in his eyes as Mercy granted him her only gift.

Lem was on her instantly, and she was dimly aware of how close she was to getting her head cut off. She was blind of anything that was happening, she was faced with a sword driving toward her and her body reacted as it was trained to. All she saw was the wild look in Gendry’s eyes when he fell, Jaime’s head hitting the ground. Her mind was split down the middle, on one side she was no one, she was empty, numbed by the terrible things that had happened. The other was burning hotter than the fire behind them, scorching with all the anger she’d buried for six years. The latter was the part wielding her father’s sword.

They danced back and forth in the pale green light, for an hour or maybe only a single breath. The flaming monster behind them roared once more, bringing the barn to its knees and deafening bells smashing together once more in her ears. The ground shook in return and she tripped backward but regained her balance in a beat; half a beat too late. Mercy went flying from her grip and distantly she felt something crack, and Lem’s fist flew toward her face but she didn’t fall. His hand grabbed her and the other punched lower, but she didn’t fall. The punch to her stomach stole her breath and was much too sharp. To say she gasped would be ill-fit, Arya found herself choking on the air, choking on her sudden chilling fear. “I—” her hand gripped Lem’s arm, the other the faded yellow cloak on his shoulder, fingers clinging desperately to him, lest she fall.

“You what?” he spat in her face, no smile lighting the darkness in his eyes, only the fury from before. She was sure he was shouting but his voice was smothered by the pulsating in her head, barely a whisper. Her own eyes looked down, the steel glimmered green firelight between them, half disappearing into the far side of her stomach. She glanced back up at him lost in her attempt to comprehend what was really happening, dread creeping in and clouding her mind. His lips moved but couldn’t hear him. He shoved her backward.

Arya somehow found the balance to fall on her knees rather than her back, and she noticed it was snowing. “When the snows fall and the white winds blow…” On her knees with one hand to the hole in her stomach, she gazed up at the man before her dully. He towered over her with his sword slowly being brought to touch her throat. “Stick em’ with the pointy end!” The forest behind him was a blur of darkness flickering with the light of the fire behind them, and somewhere in the haze glowed two red eyes.

So this is it then. The thought was almost calming, her dream was true, and it was finally at an end.
Arya swallowed her fear, determined to be undaunted in the face of death. She'd bore witness to it countless times, been the reason and the cause, the instrument; if death were a song then it'd been written in her blood. Vaguely she realized her appearance of courage only infuriated him more, his sword arm rose fast, and his mouth twisted painfully. Even despite the conviction she'd felt a breath before, she closed her eyes. The darkness hung thickly, and she breathed in the snowflakes that tasted like ash in her mouth, slowly, waiting, not sure if she was dead yet. The ringing in her head faded slightly and sound sneaked back into her senses, the crackling of the wildfire snapping behind her along with echoing screams and growls...

Hesitantly the lids of her eyes opened, and the pale light washed over the scene in front of her. There were wolves everywhere, any man left standing was falling under the wave of teeth and claws. Lem laid in the snow with his eyes staring blankly at the empty sky, blood smeared all over his face, teeth, his throat missing. Above her, the red eyes glimmered back at her with a bloody muzzle and a pink drooping tongue.

“Ghost” she breathed and the direwolf nuzzled its head to her neck, near knocking her backward. Any other time she might have laughed, smiled even, but the world was still spinning on its axis and she could hardly pet him in her disorientation. The fighting around her died down and hundreds of eyes glimmered around her, lean shadows slithering in the flicking light. “Ghost” she repeated dumbly, patting his head hesitantly.

The red eyes glanced back at her, his silence doing nothing to answer her questions. Arya attempted to wipe at her face, trying to wake herself from the nightmare she felt she was stuck in, but all she did was get her own blood in her eyes. Her hands were deep crimson, and her stomach and thighs felt like they were being soaked in warm water. Though she knew it wasn't water she couldn't let herself linger on the thought, instead she stumbled to her feet. Despite the weakness in her legs, she made it to Gendry with her sword by her side again. She collapsed in the snow beside him, heart in her throat.

“Gendry.” she reached out for him, hands instantly covering the hole in his chest. “Gendry.” his eyes widened with a deep blue gaze that was unfocused until it landed on her. He opened his mouth but choked, blood bubbling from his lips. “Don't, don't talk.” she urged. And in the eternity of a moment, she took in his state. His blood nearly left a puddle at her knees, his skin paler than she had ever seen, and she could see the unwillingness of his lungs as he tried to breathe. Arya knew it didn't matter, that no matter what she did it wouldn't make a difference, she bit her lip.

“Arya...” his shaking hand reached upward, and she grabbed it, clutching it with both of hers as what was left of her hope burned faster than the wildfire.

“Gendry.” She whispered his name, “I'm so sorry.” She hadn't meant to cry, but she couldn't help it. “This is all my fault.”

He shook his head, attempted a smile, “n-no.” a wet cough. "You came...back for me...first" He choked again, unable to speak. Arya had no words for comfort, and he didn’t need nor want her apologies. Knowing she was running out of time she fought back her tears with all she had left. Gripping his hand tightly, she hummed softly the only song that came to mind. She didn’t sing the words, just the toon.

My featherbed is deep and soft, and there I'll lay you down, I'll dress you all in yellow silk, and on your head a crown.

His blues eyes closed slowly, half a smile on his lips.

For you shall be my lady love, and I shall be your lord. I'll always keep you warm and safe, and
guard you with my sword.

His fingers grip lessened, and he sucked in another ragged breath.

And how she smiled and how she laughed, the maiden of the tree. She spun away and said to him, no featherbed for me.

Gendry never exhaled.

I'll wear a gown of golden leaves, and bind my hair with grass, But you can be my forest love, and me your forest lass.

She sat in the cold bathed in the light of green flames, surrounded by smoke and carnage. The wolves howled in their victory, but she could only weep in defeat.

Please don’t be dead. Davos was never one for praying, but right now he’d take his answers from anyone who’d listen. They could see the smoke over the trees for miles away, it led them through the gray morning. The snows flurried around them lightly but the smell of burnt wood and flesh was suffocating. Val walked beside him, cautiously as she stepped around a half-burned leg, who it belonged to, he’d never know.

“Davos.” Val’s voice was calm, “Is that her?”

Before the trees devoured the earth into the darkness, there sat a small clearing beside a smoking pile of wood and ash. It was littered with bodies, and there in it sat a girl. She was on her knees. Relief flooded his heart, he’d no idea what Jon would have done if all they found were her body, but it was undercut by the scene he was looking at. The girl sat beside a corpse, not a breathing man, her hands clutching one of his, head bowed. Then there were the wolves…there were three times as many of them as there were bodies, and he’d no doubt there were more.

Her hair was dark, like Jon's, and she was the only person seen alive. It has to be her. Davos approached her cautiously, stepping over bodies and lost limbs. The wolves glanced at him apathetically, the ones that were hungry already had plenty to feast on. When he stood not three feet from her, she didn't move, not even to look up at him. He placed himself on the other side of the body, kneeling slowly to reach her height.

“Hi.” He spoke softly, “Arya?” Her eyes opened and she blinked as if waking up, she spared him a quick look before her gaze fell on the body. The boy had sharp features, and pitch black hair that seemed almost familiar. “My name's Ser Davos.” Her dull eyes met his once more.

The girl's brow wrinkled slightly, “Ser Davos.” she repeated, her voice a scratchy whisper. Her hair hung loose, falling a little past her shoulders, her face and clothes were covered in ash and stained with blood. Her head turned upward slightly and even with her eyes hovering over him, he wasn’t sure she saw him sitting there at all. But Davos knew this had to be her, those were the grey eyes identical to Jon’s. But her appearance was gut-wrenching. Her skin was too pale, half-dried blood sank down the side of her head and was smeared across her face, an angry red cut and been sliced across her left cheek, and one of her eyes were wrapped tight in a purple and blue bruise. “You were Stannis Baratheon's Hand...” her gaze fell on the body once more. “I heard your head was mounted on a spike.”
“No one's executed me yet.”

“Did you know him well...Stannis?” she asked.

Davos frowned, “I did, yes...bu-”

“Do you think he'd care to hear his nephew was dead?” the girl's eyes never met his but briefly glanced up as Val approached behind him, only to fall on the body in between them again. It occurred to him she was in some kind of daze, her eyes, though the dark grey he was looking for were glossy and her voice so low he could hardly catch her words.

He paused as his mind tried to connect what she as saying, “This is...”

“Robert's son...Gendry Waters.” she confirmed quietly before the smallest of smiles crept across her pale broken lip. “You wouldn't believe the hell he gave me for having a lord as a father...and that whole time his was a king.”

“You knew him well?” he asked gently, not wanting to push her.

“No...no we hadn't seen each other in years...” she coughed and grimaced slightly, bringing a palm to her throat and closing her eyes.

Davos studied her hands, one blood stained with a crooked finger traced the blue marks around her neck, the other still held Gendry's. “You're hurt.” he stated stupidly.

Her voice was flat when she answered. “It's my fault.” she said while looking him in the eye, possibly seeing him for the first time.

He cleared his own throat “You didn't kill him.” he was sure of that much.

Her gaze cut right through him, “I did. I might not of have wielded the sword, but I lit the match.” she looked at the lifeless hand in hers and placed it across the boy’s stomach. “I killed him...I killed all of them when I came back here...” she coughed again, more painfully.

“Arya...”

“I should have forgotten Arya Stark like they wanted...I should have just let them kill me.”

“My Lady, I can't imagine what you've been through...” The girl swayed slightly, and he reached over to grab her shoulder, but she grabbed his arm with an ice-cold grip instead.

“Don’t.” She was focusing on something he couldn't understand and then her expression changed, the softness of her sadness slipping away and hardening to iron. Her eyes flicked up to Val hovering beside him, to the men standing behind them watching the scene. Her hand reached for the sword he hadn’t noticed, and she stood, and as she did all the wolves rose with her.

Davos stumbled to his feet, dozens of glowing eyes seeing him, his swift fear left him with his hands slightly raised. Whatever cloud had covered the girl’s gaze was gone and it seemed she'd woken up from her grief. “What the hell do you want with me?” she asked with her sword pointed at his heart.

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Blood, smoke, and cold clouded the air he breathed. His steps were almost as heavy as his heart as he stepped around a body, the man’s throat torn out by some animal. Wolves. He knew it, he knew it...
a few hours ago when hundreds of them had cried into the night, making his stomach turn. The remainder of the barn was a pitiful pile of smoking ashes and blackened wood, some pieces still glowing green in the grayness of dawn. The bodies and limbs were laid all around, between trees and face down in the snow, and beside them, the eyes glowed back.

“Jon.” Tormund's voice was laced with a caution he rarely heard from a man who'd run headfirst into battle with a bloodcurdling scream. There were countless eyes, leen shapes feeding on the bodies while others sat looking bored of the massacre before them. “I know your family likes making jokes about being wolves...but I don't think they'd agree.”

He was right, Jon was sure, but he had to find her. But there was no one here, no one alive anyway, am I too late? Tormund's hand guided him gently back into the forest, “We'll go around and find Davos.” he muttered, and Jon nodded in agreement, following the Wildling numbly and as quietly as he could.

She still has the Needle you gave her. The letter echoed in his mind and his fear was cutting him apart on the inside. The thought of finding nothing but a small sword and a body was running through his mind on an endless loop.

The trees parted behind the barn to reveal a small clearing, bodies littered around, not many had been killed by the wolves, most just burned and thrown. But there was the rest of his group, there were Val and the other men standing in the snow surrounded by bodies and apathetic wolves. Jon's heart jumped to his throat when he saw the shape of her, sitting in the snow with Davos on his knees across from her, but he didn't miss the body laid between. He couldn't see her face, but he felt it was her. It must be her.

What had to be Nymeria and Ghost stood not far behind her, and he could see her still holding the hand of the boy despite how lifeless he was. He searched for movement in the clearing, but the only things that stirred were the wolves. Before he had a chance to think the girl put the boy’s dead hand down, saying something he couldn't hear. Davos reached for her, but her hand shot out and stopped him, and then she was rising to her feet, sword in hand. All the wolves stood as well, looking to her and the giant direwolf beside her for a command. Everyone but Jon took a step back, Davos lifting his own hands as if to prove he wasn't a threat. Jon didn't even realize he was walking toward them.

A blood red sword shimmered in the light of the dawn as the girl lifted it towards Davos. “What the hell do you want with me?” her voice was hoarse but dangerous, and familiar in an odd way. Always fearless. Davos's eyes shifted to Jon's, full of warning to be careful as a hundred wolves laid their eyes on them. Her wolves. Jon cleared his throat, trying to find words, anything. But she turned at the slightest noise and he froze, not a sound leaving his lips as her sword pointed at his neck.

He thought of the night Jeyne had shown up at Castle Black, how terrified and broken she’d been, and how he’d been grateful that Arya had never faced the wrath of Ramsay Bolton. But whatever had happened here he feared it'd been worse, for Arya stared at him blankly for far too long a moment. Almost as disturbing as the nothingness in her eyes was the blood; it was smeared across her face, her hands, her shirt, and her breaches. Other than the cut clearly stricken across her cheek, she could have been bleeding from anywhere and everywhere.

“Arya.” he said her name softly and she blinked, the tip of the flaming sword slowly falling toward the snow. His heart was slamming inside his chest so hard he could hardly breathe, she was here and now he was terrified if he said the wrong thing, she'd run the other way, that; or the wolves would tear them all apart. He walked forward and she took half a step back, but Jon swallowed the heartbeat. Her stonewall was crumbling and he knew there was a war in her mind by tears that filled her eyes, her dark grey irises scanned him up and down.

“Jon...” his name was hardly a breath, all he could do was nod to confirm it. He walked forward,
slowly and she didn't move away this time, but her eyes bore into him wide with fear and unshed tears. She was no doubt in shock, she didn't move but her sword dropped from her fingers as she stared at him, unblinking. *A shame she is determined to think you dead.*

“I'm right here.” he whispered bringing his hands to her shoulders, giving her any warmth he could and fighting the urge just to pull her against him. She opened her mouth as if to speak but breathed in sharply instead, the movement causing the tears to fall down her cheeks. And as quick as a breath she fell against his chest and he wrapped his arms around her. Her body shook in his arms as she cried, so hard tears of his own came crashing down his cheeks, and all he could do was hold her tighter. “I'm right here.”

His words only left her shaking more, and he couldn't say how long it took for the crying to stop but he didn't move. Sniffling he buried his face in the nook of her neck, her dark hair tickling his face. She didn't smell like forest pines or Winterfell anymore, but like blood, ash, and death. He rubbed a hand soothingly along her back, knowing she must be catching her death out in this cold, wearing nothing but her long-sleeve and breeches. Eventually, she pulled back and Jon found himself lost in the grey storm of her eyes, so much older. But the cut on her cheek distracted him, as did the broken lip, the blood, bruises...*if whoever did this still lived I-.*

“Seven Hells.” The mumble distracted them both and Jon saw one of the bodies moving. Arya stepped back and half fell to her knees when she bent beside the undead corpse, helping him sit up.

“I thought you were dead.”

“You wish Stark.” Jon blinked at the shape of Jaime Lannister and his little sister, somehow concerned for his well being. Jaime turned toward him, blood covered half the man's face from a gash on his head, he opened his mouth and hesitated a moment before speaking. “I think your brother might really be alive.” Arya breathed out what could have been a laugh as she went to stand up, but it was cut short by a gasp of pain when she fell right back to her knees. Jon was down beside her instantly.

“Are you okay?” She leaned on his shoulder for support and held the side of her stomach as she bent over, eyes closed.

“Yes...” but her words were strained.

“Lair.” Jaime accused and Jon knew he was right.

Arya brought a hand to her mouth and choked on a wet cough, wincing as she did so. After a moment her dark eyes were fixed on a crimson palm, and her bloody lips muttered softly “Fuck…”

Chapter End Notes

*Sorry Gendry fans...*
Tell Me It's Real

Chapter Summary

Just getting situated. (:

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After Arya had keeled in the snow with her own blood staining her lips, she’d quickly passed out. Jon had caught her in his arms, a crippling fear crawling over his skin and paralyzing him to the ground. It was a good thing he hadn’t been alone when he found her, or she’d probably be dead by now. The trail of blood had told him clearly enough that the heart of her injuries was her stomach, but he hadn’t a glance at the wound before Wolkan was making demands as if he himself were King and not Jon. After carrying her to the stables on the Maester’s orders, he was promptly kicked out. He had to agree, if only for his sister’s sake. Wolkan didn’t need him in his ear as he worked, but on his insistence, Val stayed inside. She was to help Wolkan with whatever he needed and if anything were to go wrong, or worse for that matter, she wouldn’t hesitate in telling Jon. He’d paced and paced outside the stables, lungs still inhaling the thickness of death and ash that hung in the air. By the time Val emerged it was past midday, she was calm but there was something off in her expression. “Wolkan’s done, she’s sleeping.”

Jon swallowed his nerves, “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing more than the obvious.” She muttered and turned back into the doorway, Jon behind her. The stables stank of hay and horse shit, but the air still tasted better than the wind outside. Wolkan and Val had made her a bed from a table, covering it and Arya in blankets. Jon approached her slowly, standing over her sleeping form. Her face was serene as she slept, apart from the odd bruise, broken lip, and thin red line etched across her left cheek. He found her hand and held it. His own hands were cold, they’d been colder for months now, but hers were still warm with life.

His eyes scanned the white bandages around her wrist and middle finger of the hand he held. “Her finger was broken.” Wolkan appeared across the table, Val at the end. “and both her wrists had rope burn, an older injury but I thought it better to have them wrapped with some ointment as well.”

“What else?” his little sister wasn’t laying here unconscious over a broken finger. Jon couldn’t see anything but her arms and head, the rest of her was wrapped in the grey wool blanket.

“There’s a deep wound on her right arm, I stitched it.” Jon closed his eyes and thought of someone aiming for her head. “Two fractured ribs on her left side.” a boot of man kicking her while she was down. “…and a stab wound to her stomach. A sword I’d guess.” If the only thing in his hand hadn’t been Arya’s own, he’d have crushed it. Memories of his own experience with knives made him shiver, but he forced his eyes open once more.

“When will she wake up?”

“It’s hard to say, Your Grace. I’ve no doubt she’s lost a lot of blood. She’s lucky it’s not more, I think it may have been hours before her wounds were treated. But she’s young, and I’ve no doubt
very resilience.” Wolkan frowned slightly, “There are also many sc-”

“Scrapes and bruises.” Val finished for him with a sharp look. “But she’ll be up and walking within a fortnight.”

Wolkan gave her a weak smile, “Yes, if she wakes, I’d expect a full recovery. With the exception of the odd new scar.”

“Thank you Wolkan.” He managed, pulling up a chair he dismissed him with a nod. Jon couldn’t look at Wolkan, not after his use of the phrase if she wakes.

“Please do send for me if there are any changes” Wolkan said as he left, and he nodded in agreement.

Val didn’t move, but stayed at the end of Arya’s wooden bed, watching his little sister’s face intently. “What is it?” he asked.

“Where do you think she’s been all this time?”

Jon shook his head, his wariness pressing down on his shoulders. “I’ve no idea…a moon ago I thought her as good as dead. I didn’t want to…but I did.”

Val nodded slowly as she walked around and up to the top of the bed, Jon watched her eyes scan Arya, but he couldn’t read what she was thinking. He could only wait for Val to say something. “She’s pretty.” Jon raised an eyebrow; whatever Val was contemplating it was beyond that. She caught his look and grinned. “I was expecting her to have red hair.”

“No, Arya and I were the only ones to take after our father. Now, what are you really thinking?”

Val shrugged off his question “Where are the wolves?”

“They left, slowly, but they left.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen so many before.” Jon nodded grimly at the memory. “I guess the old blood really does run strong in you Starks.” Val leaned against a pillar of wood that kept the stables standing. “I’ve seen wargs, strong ones in the North who’ve shared many skins, but your sister…” Val’s smile was an impressed one. “She has her own army.”

Jon stared at his little sister, but he had to admit she wasn’t so little no matter how small she seemed wrapped up in the wool blanket. Arya was a young woman now, one he couldn’t doubt after last night, had bloodied her sword at least once. To imagine her as her own battle commander with an army of teeth and claws though, that was an odd thought. A mark of blue caught his eye and he let go of Arya’s hand, pulling her blanket down slightly to see her neck. Blue and purple fingers wrapped tightly around her throat made his own tightened, the thought of someone’s hands around her was making his eyes burn.

“Just scrapes and bruises.” Val said softly and he leaned back in his chair. “They’ll all heal.”

“Scrapes and bruises.” He agreed, as if the small words could make him feel better.

Lady Stoneheart’s accusing eyes glared at her and when she lunged Arya felt Needle slid through
her soft skin without resistance. But nothing happened. The face that once held the loving eyes of her mother twisted in rage, hands found her throat. “You little monster, you think you can kill me?” as her head slammed against the wall behind her, she struggled to breathe.

Arya woke up with a gasp, one hand reaching for the fingers around her neck, but nothing was there. She closed her eyes with a shaking breath, memories and pain washing over her all at once. Her other hand found her stomach and rested over the now wrapped wound, the hate in Lem's eyes glowing in her mind. Her whole left hand ached when she moved it and she saw Gendry’s fingers wrapped desperately around her own, blood on his lips.

“Are you alright?” Arya shook off the nightmare as quickly as she could, but the memories were no easier to process. The stable walls she'd first entered only about a week ago surrounded her. She went to push herself upward but nearly fell back down with a groan. A woman with long blond hair and blue eyes came closer, and Arya recognized her. She'd been there with Davos and all the men, and Jamie, the wolves, and Jon... “You need to lay back down.”

She had no choice but to obey at the moment, her arm giving out when she tried sitting up. Arya went to run her hand over her weak arm only to find her left wrist and middle finger wrapped tightly in gauze. The memory of Mercy being knocked from her hand reminded her of the crack it’d left. Moving on, she tapped her upper arm tentatively; the skin underneath was tender and swollen at the touch.

“Twelve stitches along your arm.”

“I don’t remember that part…” Arya rose up on her left elbow with a grimace.

“Two fractured ribs, six and ten stitches on your stomach then seven and ten more on your back.”

“Those I remember.” Her head pulsed with a similar ache as the rest of her, but she couldn’t recall hitting her head. “Who are you?” she didn’t exactly have the look of a Maester, she was far too young and far too beautiful. “and where’s…” Jon...

She didn't care much for the woman's name, she just wanted to see her brother and know if this was real or if she'd finally lost her mind. “My name's Val.”

“Where's...” she could hardly get the words out, fear that this was some lie catching her words. Val’s eyes softened at her hesitation. “Where's my brother?” Arya whispered.

“I'll get him, just lay back down, and I'll get him.” She shook her head softly as Val turned away. She could not sit down if Jon was alive. And he was, she'd stared in his eyes and seen the fear in them. Val disappeared out of the stables and Arya started to move. She sucked in a sharp painful breath when trying to sit up, so she opted to slid her legs to the edge of her makeshift bed; a slate of wood with hay cushions under her. Once her feet were dangling, she let her toes touch the ground. The sound she made when her weight hit the ground was a pitiful one, and she was glad no one was there to hear it.

Standing, her good arm but bad hand was gripping a wooden pillar that held the stables together. A fire was burning in her side and in her lungs, but now that she was up, she couldn’t find the strength to get back on the bed, nor to take another step. Arya stood there for what felt like forever, her heart pounding in her ears, legs barely holding her up. She was still wearing the same breeches from before, but someone had put her in a clean tunic. And for a half a second, she wanted to call Val back. She wanted to embrace Jon he came in, but she couldn’t even move.

But then he nearly ran through the door and that thought was a hundred leagues away. Despite the
fact she knew he was coming this time she was just as frozen as before. Whatever breath she held, fell out her lips when she met his grey eyes filled with so much relief. He didn't seem to hesitate like he did when she had a sword pointed at his throat, this time he closed the distance between them, ready to pull her against him. He stopped short though, worried eyes scanning her rigid stance.

“You can’t be standing!” an older man stumbled in with a long chain playing an annoying song under his chin.

Jon seemed scared to touch her, a hand hovering over her shoulder as if he wasn’t sure his fingers would make the pain worse or not. Ignoring her bodies desire to stay as still as possible she let go of the pillar and wrapped her hands around Jon. The pain flared to a fiery hot pain behind her eyes, but she bit her tongue and buried her head in her brother’s neck.

“Milady-” the old man’s voice sounded off again, but she didn’t care for it.

“Shut up.” She got out through gritted teeth. She closed her watery eyes and breathed out the pain, inhaling her relief that this couldn’t be a dream. Jon was alive and nothing else mattered.

“Arya, I was terrified weren't going to wake up.” His voice shook and he gently wrapped his arms around her, and she found her face nearly smothered in the fur around his cloak. I'm not sure I truly have. But Arya swallowed her words and held Jon like a child would clutch their favorite doll. One breath, two, and three. Yet the moment still didn't feel quite real.

He stepped back, eyes soft with affection. “Are you alright?” his hands still rested on her shoulders. Her eyes scanned the little scars on his cheeks, one made it seem he was lucky to still have his eye. She wanted to nod and tell him she was fine, but she couldn’t, she’d fall if he wasn’t still holding her.

“Not really.”

“Because you’re going to tear all your stitches!” The Maester sounded particularly stressed as he hovered behind Jon.

“I thought you were dead.” her own voice sounded odd to her, strained and hallow.

“I'm not dead, now back in bed.”

“But...I was sure, I saw it...” she blinked and there he was on his knees again.

“You saw it?” He frowned.

“In a dream...”

“It was just a dream Arya.”

“But it wasn't.” she stared at him confused despite how very much alive he was. “The things I saw happened. It was real.” Jon looked pained. What the hell am I doing? “I'm sorry, I...” she sighed, I'm making myself look insane. Val stood behind them, her blue eyes shaded with interest as she watched them. Bringing her hands back onto the bed she slowly attempted to lift herself up, gasping once more and failing to get half a foot off the ground. “Gods...” One of Jon’s hands found her waist and the other still supported her shoulder to stop her from falling forward.

“Just take a breath and stop moving.” He sounded nervous, but all she could do was breathe tightly through clenched teeth, it hurt far too much to speak.

“How did you even get out of bed?” The Maester walked over to them, his ringing chain echoing
with her headache. “Did you not think to stop when it hurt?”

The noise she made could almost have been a growl as she fought off the pain “I just wanted to hug my brother.”

“Was this worth a hug?”

“Wolkan. Just help us get her back in bed.”

“Yes yes, Your Grace, here hold her like this, now lift gently…yes, no! slower.” An excruciating moment later and she was laying down, a hand to her stomach that felt as though it’d burst. Even with the pain, her mind was turning.

“Your Grace?” her eyes landed on Jon again, him halfway through covering her with a blanket. He paused a moment with the fabric in his hands, then continued with a stiff nod. “How?”

His smile was a sad one “That's a long story.”

“One you don't have time for, you need to rest.” Wolkan stood on her other side, a vile of milky white liquid in his hand.

She waved him off “Sansa?”

“Safe in Winterfell.” Arya blinked, a weight she didn't even know she carried lifting off her shoulders. “Rickon's there too.”

“What?” she shook her head slightly “but Theon...”

Jon smiled, “He didn't, Rickon’s been living on Skaggos all these years, Davos brought him back a few moons ago.”

She wanted to ask how the hell that had come to be, but Wolkan was hovering over her and she knew there wasn't much time until he’d try pouring the sedative down her throat.

“And Bran?”

“I don't know.”

That was at least half a lie “You know something.”

Her brother's brow creased slightly, “Rickon said he went North of the Wall to find a three-eyed crow, and don't ask me what that means.”

“Three eyes?” a cold ball of ice formed in her gut, dulling the ache in her side ever so slightly.

“Enough stories, Your Grace, please. Lady Arya needs this medicine, and now that she’s moved her wounds will be more irritated than before and…”

“Okay.” She conceded, Wolkan’s insistence was maddening. More than that the pulsating in her head and the wound on her stomach throbbing, was infuriating. Arya held out her hand and Wolkan gave her the small vile.

“We’ll speak when you wake up, I promise.” Jon’s hand gently took hers.

She nodded and drank the Milk of the Poppy back like a shot of Lemore’s whiskey, only grimacing a little at the taste. “You should add honey root to that.” She muttered as an afterthought.
Wolkan frowned, “That would help with nausea…”

Arya fell back on her pillow, Jon’s head already starting to duplicate. “It’ll taste better too.”

Wolkan’s wrinkled old face leaned over her, interest shining in his many eyes, “Who taught you that?” his voice echoed strangely off the walls.

She closed her eyes and saw the Kindly Man standing in the doorway, his piercing eyes seeing through her own. She and the Waif sat on their knees on the cold stone floor of the storeroom, dozens of plants and herbs laid out before them. “She didn’t have a name.”

After a long day of riding back towards Winterfell Jon sat his vigil as everyone else went to sleep. He sat in silence watching over her as the Milk of the Poppy kept her under; Wolkan had kept her under for nearly two days now. She looked at peace as she slept, more relaxed than he’d seen her. Jon was slouched in the chair beside her bed, eyelids heavy and mind a fog of drowsiness. Arya slept on the makeshift bed beside him, eyes closed and hands resting perfectly over her stomach as if it were her funeral. He shivered as a chill reached him, there was only a small fire in the center of their tent, casting restless shadows over them.

He had a thousand questions that needed answers, but the only people who possessed them was the girl sleeping beside him and maybe the Kingslayer. Jaime wasn’t in the best condition himself and if Jon were to guess, was avoiding him anyway. But even if Jon cared about that he wasn’t about to go bother him and leave Arya on her own. He wouldn’t have her wake up without him, not again.

Jon studied her face, the dark bruises around her eye had started to fade, but the cut on her cheek stayed. His hand opened and closed in frustration and he shut his eyes once more.

So many questions.

He could still see her, standing frozen in the snow with her sword raised in his direction. He might have thought her a statue if not for the wind snatching at her hair, her eyes wide like a deer caught in the woods, completely still as the snow blurred around her…

Jon didn’t remember falling asleep, he hardly remembered closing his eyes. Darkness was still heavy in the air and when he turned over to check on her, grey eyes met his. Hers were half closed from sleep, a soft smile pressed on her lips. “Hi.” she whispered in a scratchy voice.

He sat up, sleep fleeing from his skin faster than melting snow. She looked so tired Jon knew it had to be the Milk of the Poppy still lingering in her system. “You should be asleep.” he told her softly.

She moved too quickly and grimaced from pain, closing her eyes a moment and bitterly smiling at her mistake. “I got distracted” she confessed looking up at him.

Jon reached over and brushed a strand of hair from her face. “You should try again” he told her, trying not to let his smile match her own. “You must be in pain.”

“Noooo” she argued through a grin. “It only hurts when I move… or breathe.”

Jon frowned “Then you should definitely sleep.”

“Still so serious.” she countered with glowing eyes. Jon watched as her hand reached over, intertwining her warm fingers with his before she closed her eyes.

He was thinking she was going to try and sleep once more, but her grip tightened, and her brow
came together as if she were concentrating on something serious. “Arya?” she didn't open her eyes, her only response was her thumb running back and forth on his hand as if trying to memorize the feeling. He brought his other hand to cover hers, “hey.”

She looked up, her soft smile long gone. “What if I wake up, and this is all a dream?”

Jon pulled one of his hands away and brought it to rest on her cheek, lowering his head so he could look her directly in the eyes. “This is not a dream Arya, I promise you.” he squinted slightly “and if it were, I'd kill the man who woke me.”

The way she smiled burned the cold from his bones. “You're right, I've never had a dream like this before.” her grip tightened, and he found himself reassured. Jon leaned back in his chair, still holding her one hand, running his fingers over her calloused palm. He tilted his head and looked down, his brows knitting together. On the back of her hand glowed a pale scar in the flickering light of the room. His frown deepened as he turned her hand over and saw a matching mark, a scar from a blade that must have gone clean through her palm.

“Arya...” he didn't get the question out before she pulled her hand back to her chest, her half-closed eyes cast down. “Who did that to you?”

“Doesn’t matter now.” she whispered back, lifting her hand up to examine the scar herself. Flexing her grip and couple times, “It healed well though, considering...” she glanced at him once more, “It wasn't that bad, I-” she sighed and looked back at her scar with a glare.

“You what?” he prompted.

She sighed softly “From what I’ve learned we have bigger things to worry about than all those who’ve lifted a blade against me.” His own hand flexed at his side. What does she mean by all those? “I’ve heard all these stories of the Others, of everything North of the Wall...” even with the tiredness seeped in her gaze, it was still piercing when he met it.

Jon felt a hundred years older as he was reminded of the White Walkers. It had been easy to forget all those problems when he found her, because nothing else mattered then, nothing other than making sure she was okay. “And you believed them?”

Arya gave him an odd look. “I think I’ve seen enough to believe in anything” she glanced back at her hand with a creased brow.

“Like a girl being in command of an army of wolves?” he offered quietly, not sure how she’d react. Her eyes were distant and then she yawned “That...that all happened before I’d even known what I was doing.” She rubbed at her eye. “For so long I thought I was just dreaming.”

“It's very impressive, for just dreaming.”

“Have you seen them, the Others?” he noted her change of subject.

He nodded grimly, all he wanted to do was tell her she was safe now that he’d found her...but with winter coming there were no safe places anymore. “All the letters I’ve sent South and hardly anyone believes a word of it.”

“Southerners...” she sighed, “They haven’t seen enough of the world to know how insane it really is...maybe once Daenerys takes the Throne with those dragons, they’ll open their eyes.”

Jon paused, thinking of Tyirion waiting for him back at Winterfell to discuss terms of peace with the
Dragon Queen. “What do you know of her?” he blurted.

Arya stifled another yawn, “She has three armies, Dothraki, Unsullied, and... the Golden Company; who she plans to make a part of the royal army after the war. Oh, did anyone mention and three massive Dragons?” she turned her tired eyes back to him “And they say she's the most beautiful women in the East.”

“They said the same about Cersei and the West, horseshit if you ask me.”

Arya grinned, “Aye, probably. Why so curious about her?”

Jon shrugged, “She's one of the few who wrote back, sent her Hand to Winterfell to determine if we're telling the truth.”

Arya grew serious “Tyrion Lannister?”

He nodded, “How'd you know?”

“People talk, and he's the most wanted imp in the world.” She shook her head slightly “do you know how many bloody dwarfs have gone missing since Cersei offered a lordship for his head?”

“A lot I'd imagine.” Jon watched Arya, the small ember of anger that tinted her gaze when Cersei's name left her lips. Of all the questions Jon had for her from their years apart, he felt stupid he'd brought up Daenerys Targaryen.

There was a long pause before she spoke again, voice thick with sleep. “I suppose you'd care more about who she is...well I know her first husband died and after burning his body she hatched the dragons. I know she almost starved to cross the red waste with her people, I know she never bought the Unsullied but freed them and inspired them to fight for her.” she paused to bring a hand to her mouth to yawn again. “That she captured Meereen and broke the slave trade in Yunkai and Astapor, that even though she married into a wealthy eastern family, they say she took a sell-sword to her bed...”

As she spoke on Jon couldn’t help but feel there was something off in Arya’s voice, a hint of an accent he couldn’t place. “You sure know a lot about her...”

“Aye, but she didn’t get out of it with her hands clean.” she shook a finger as if teaching a lesson. “They say she had one hundred and sixty-three Great masters nailed to crosses as punishment for their slaves.” Arya glanced at her scarred hand once more, “Not the most merciful punishment.”

Jon blinked at the information with a turning stomach. “The last thing we need is the Mad King's daughter taking up his place in the South.”

“She hasn't any of our grandparents left to burn at least.” Arya fought her yawn this time, her eyes watering from the feat.

“What?”

Arya blinked the sleep from her hazy eyes a couple times “I guess you haven't heard that story either...when the Mad King executed Lord Rickard he burned him alive with wildfire, Uncle Brandon died trying to save him...” she looked up at the ceiling. “I get why father never spoke of them now...and wildfire…” her expression was pained. “Not the best way to go.”

Jon shook his head trying to render everything she was telling him, “How do you know all of this?” he asked bewildered.
“I told you, people talk.”

“I’ve never heard half the things that just came out of your mouth.”

“You just haven't spent enough time with traders and sailors, they love their stories brother, almost as much as fishermen's wives do. Though I suppose Kings don't often sup with sailors and the like?” Her eyes glinted with challenge Jon thought she sounded almost sad.

“Maybe I should, it seems they know more about the realm than my advisers.” His responsibilities were hovering on his shoulder. “Sometimes I still have trouble believing it, that I'm actually King.” his voice lowered at the confession.

“I didn't believe it.” she whispered darkly.

“And here I thought you were the only who believed in me.” he japed quietly, and even though she smiled, it never touched those stormy eyes.

“I would have if no one had told me you were dead.” Jon's throat tightened at the unspoken truth to her words. He didn't know how to tell her, had no words to describe what happened to him, and why. He knew he'd have to soon, no doubt she'd find out about it with all the information she'd picked up in the South about Essos and Western politics.

“I'm sorry you had to hear that.” he cleared his throat.

“Are you okay?” Jon nodded but Arya raised her eyebrows suspiciously before turning away and lying on her back, closing her eyes again. She waved him off like a drunk, and he supposed it was a similar feeling in comparison to all the Milk of the Poppy she'd had. “and it's alright, it was only completely devastating.”

Jon smiled despite himself, “You know I spent a lot of time wondering about you too. For the longest time, I thought you died in King's Landing.”

“Hmmm, what changed your mind?”

“Daenerys Targaryen.”

Arya's head turned sharply at that “The hell would she know of it?”

Jon resisted the urge to tell her to watch her tongue “One of her advisers informed her you escaped the capital, that...” his smile fell at the memory “…that one of father’s men died to protect you.” Those grey eyes grew distant at his words, so he pressed on. “Was it true?”

“Ah, yes.” she turned and gave him another soft smile, weighed down by the Milk of the Poppy and what he knew to be grief. “Not long after we arrived in Kings Landing father found the gift you gave me.”

“Needle?” He guessed and Arya nodded.

“We talked, for a while...” Jon waited for her to continue, it seemed she was still fighting sleep and trying to focus. “Anyway, the next day he found someone to teach me how to use it.”

“Really?” he shouldn't be surprised, it was just like Ned Stark.

“Syrio Forel, First Sword to the Sealord of Braavos.” she said the words proudly, “he taught me a lot, and her advisers were right, he saved me.”
“Where did you go?” he couldn’t help but ask.

“I... a lot of places...I went...” she sighed. “I should have tried harder to get to the Wall.” her words were suddenly rushed. “I'm sorry I didn't, that's where I wanted to go but after the war an-I didn't have any coin and then I got so caught up in everything and, and I heard Aunt Lysa was killed by a singer and everyone thought I married Ramsey-”

“Wait, wait.” Jon held up his hands “Slow down...who did you stay with?”

She opened her mouth to answer but stopped, seeming almost stricken by her planned answer or some memory. Her worried eyes turned away from his “Just...different people.” Jon tried not to look disappointed, but he knew she was holding back. The little sister he'd tell everything to could never look him in the eyes when she was hiding something. Despite everything between them being different, this wasn’t.

“You can tell me anything, Arya.” She still wouldn’t look at him, her sullen glare burning the roof of their tent.

A second later her grey eyes shimmered slightly and when she closed them a tear fell down the side of her head, “I’m just...really tired right now.” She whispered.

He found her hand again “You don’t have to talk about any of it until you’re ready.” She never answered him but nodded slightly and eventually pulled her hand away, turning over as if to try and sleep again. After a while, he went to his bed and tried to sleep too, but an unforgiving knot was curling through his stomach. So many questions.

Arya should have been jumping with joy at the idea that half her family had been alive and well in Winterfell these past months, but instead, she felt cold. A coldness that swept her up and kept her numb. While her family had been safe and together in their ancestral home, she'd been committing mass murder at the Twins. While she’d been planning to avenge Jon’s murder, he’d been waging war against the Boltons with Sansa. And sweet little Rickon had been...well, she didn’t really know what the hell he’d been doing on Skaggos.

Arya sat in her tent with Jon, the lovely Maester Wolkan, Jaime and Val. The room was covered with a dark navy wool tarp that stretched a few feet above her head, a table, some chairs, and a couple beds for both her and Jon; she’d no memory of them getting here. Jaime watched her with a wary expression, he stood in the corner and she was well aware they hadn’t the chance to speak about anything since the fire. Wolkan was hovering beside her, disagreeing with her insistence she was ready to stand. Why Val was here, she didn’t know, but where Jon went the woman never seemed far.

She gripped Jon’s arm as she stood “There’s one thing I don’t get.” She said through gritted teeth. “How could you know where to find me?”

Jon hesitated before answering. “We received a letter from Lady Stoneheart.” As he pulled a yellowed paper from under his cloak, the large tent felt like a suffocating nightmare. She leaned back on the table as he handed it to her, the word Bastard was written across the front and she felt her hands wanting to shake. She knew all their eyes were on her as she read, her gaze so stuck on Lady Stoneheart's words she had to say them aloud to comprehend them.
“Bring yourself to me with no false army at your back and no tricks. If you don't her blood will be on your hands and you'll never see Arya again…” The knife of betrayal was sharper than Lem's sword, cutting deeper than Valyrian steel ever could. Her eyes met Jaime's, the only other person in the room who could possibly understand what was going on inside her head; his face was grim with knowledge. She had to bite her tongue until she tasted her own blood, handing Jon the paper again instead of crumpling it to nothing. She lied. Her anger left her knuckles white “She was just using me to get to you the whole time.”

“Who was she?” Jon's grey eyes bore into her “Why did she want me dead?”

Arya went to answer but had nothing, “she ah…” she moved her gaze to the floor, not able to look him in eye, the sudden rage melted away by the shame of the truth.

“Arya?” Jon's voice was so concerned she had to close her eyes to brace herself.

“She was a madwoman obsessed with the Starks.” Her eyes darted up as Jaime spoke. “When her men found Arya, they must have seen the chance to restore the Stark name to Winterfell. She wanted me hanged too, because I’m a Lannister.”

“Jaime…” she started but he went on.

“She held us captive, and when we escaped the barn caught fire and she was inside. She's gone, and not coming back.” Arya felt tears stinging her eyes, but she blinked them away before one dared to fall.

“Is that true?” Her brother, the King in the North, searched her eyes and Arya forced herself to look back. If she didn't meet his stare, he’d never believe her.

“Yes.” Jon nodded his brow creased with thought, but when his eyes scanned her again, she wondered if he knew she was lying.

“How did the barn catch fire?” Val asked

Arya winced at the memory, but Jaime just kept talking. “That was an accident…” She thought she saw sympathy in his eyes when they met hers again.

“My accident.” She admitted, “I started the fire.”

“There was blood in your ears when we found you.” Wolkan informed her, “How close were to the explosion?”

Yet again Jaime met her eyes and she remembered them both being thrown like dolls. Jaime answered for her, “Close enough to get tossed in the air.” He rubbed the back of his head as though he’d hit it during his fall.

Her mind wandered to her dreams, the bird that constantly screeched at her to go home, her dream where Bran stood in front of her, where she’d kneeled in the snow while the red eyes of death watching her. He went to find a three-eyed crow. For a moment she wanted to tell Jon about all of it but couldn't bring herself to. She'd been wrong about half of everything after all. Jon was not dead, and neither was she and the only things that were true she didn't feel like sharing.

Arya leaned against the wooden table and placed a hand to her temple, her head ached along with almost every muscle in her body. Her legs quivered under her, but a hand placed on the table held her upward. This should be one of the happiest moments in the past six years, but the events of the past few weeks were weighing too heavy on her conscious. “Do you want to sit down again?” Jon
urged and she noticed him staring at her.

“I'll be okay, it's just a headache.”

“And a stab wound, two fractured ribs, and half a dozen cuts and bruises.”

It was no time to smile, she knew that, but it didn't stop her. “Yes, and that too.”

“Give us a moment.” Jon turned to the people left in the room. Jaime kept his concerning stare on her before moving and she wasn't sure she should thank him or scold him for the narrative he told. Val studied both her and Jon before leaving and she wasn't sure she should thank him or scold him for the narrative he told. Val studied both her and Jon before leaving and she bit back the urge to ask her brother who she was exactly. Jon stepped forward, his hand lifted slightly but went back down, as if he wanted to touch her but couldn't find an excuse to. “Where does it hurt? And be honest.”

She smiled softly at him, still simply by his sole presence. “Honestly.” she agreed “Most everything hurts right now.” The worried expression he wore almost made him seem younger. She took his hand in hers “But I'm okay.” she met his stare hoping he'd believe her, “I swear, it'll all heal, every bruise.”

Jon nodded, “I know...but I should have gotten here sooner...” his eyes darkened more than she'd ever seen. “I never should have left.”

“Don't.” She tightened her grip on his hand “don't even go there, none of us could have known.” Her brother gave her a reassuring smile but there was still darkness there and she wondered what demons haunted him now, and if they were anything like her own.

“The men gathered all the bodies before we left.” Arya tensed at the turn of discussion, all those bodies were blood on her hands. “We burned them all...the man, Gendry, I didn't know if you wanted us to bury him or not. Jaime thought you’d rather we burned his body.”

“Oh.” Arya fixed her eyes on the tarp-covered floor, desperately wishing she could wash away all the memories of the past few weeks. “That...was the right thing to do.”

“I'm sorry, you two were close?”

“We were close a long time ago, he was one of the only people I ever told the truth to.”

Jon's voice was soft “What truth?”

“My name.” her brother nodded, sad but thoughtful. “He deserved better than to die for the likes of me.” He pulled her toward him, gently, and she didn't fight it but deflated into his chest. Her grief was an echoing pain, but she preferred it to the emptiness she'd felt for so long, the void she tried to fill with alcohol, sex, and vengeance. Nothing had filled it but having Jon hold her was the closest she'd come to whole.

After a short exercise, Jon had sent Arya back to bed as if she were still a small child. But she agreed quicker than she wanted to, her short little walk around their tent had left her exhausted. She’d told Jon she was fine, but she felt weaker than she had in months. She was too thin, half-starved by the Brotherhood for weeks, and it did her no good when it came to healing. Her stomach was nothing but a tender flaming nuisance that kept her from moving. When she opened her eyes again it was dark, a small candle lit in the corner of the tent. With a groan, she managed to sit up.

“Feeling better?” she looked up to see Val sitting in a chair, sharpening an obsidian dagger.
“Everyday.” She lied. “Where’s Jon?”

“Outside.” she replied and continued to sharpen the blade.

She resisted the urge to ask her why she was even here, sitting in the tent while she slept. Holding back any more groans of pain Arya pushed herself off her bed, finding the task much easier than the first time. Once her feet hit the ground she noted fresh clothes on the table, slowly, she walked over and picked them up. She glared at the shirt, knowing she wouldn’t be able to put it on without assistance.

“If you’re wondering why I’m here, your brother is paranoid.” Val had come to stand beside the table. “I think he’s still afraid you’re going to sleep and not wake again.”

Arya studied the women once more, she really was beautiful. Long blond hair that reached her waist and sharp blue eyes, and all her furs were an exquisite white. “And miss our impending deaths by ice monsters? Not a chance.”

Val grinned “No you wouldn’t want that. So, do you want me to help with those?” she gestured to the shirt and trousers.

“I can put on my own pants.” She muttered, once again glaring at the black tunic.

“No need for modesty, I was there when Maester Wolkan removed your shirt the first time.” Arya felt her stomach turn; how easy it was for people to learn about her past simply by seeing a little skin.

“Anyone else see anything while I was bleeding my guts out?” she asked sharper than she intended.

“Jon didn’t see a thing.” Val’s dark blue eyes held steady as she watched her. “I take it you’d like to keep your scars to yourself.”

“You didn’t tell him?”

“No, and told Wolkan not to.”

Arya frowned “And why would you do that?”

Val shrugged “He’s enough to worry about, and if you want to tell him about wherever you’ve been, you can yourself.”

She studied the wildling woman before her again, she seemed genuine but there was something that didn’t feel right. A gut feeling that told her not to let this woman have any more of her secrets. “Thank you.” She managed. But perhaps her instincts were off, she’d been wrong about so much lately.

Arya changed her trousers herself and allowed Val to assist her in wearing the new tunic, thanking her again once she was finished. “You know, I can’t help but ask.” Arya glanced up. “Jon’s men are all whispering, all of them wondering where you’ve been all these years. A Lords little girl assumed dead, showing up out of nowhere surrounded by bodies and wolves.”

“What part is the question?”

Val smiled at her defensive tone. “They’re calling you the Queen of Wolves.”

She couldn’t help but scoff “Seriously?” Val nodded. “They can whisper all they want, where I’ve been is none of their business.” Arya grabbed Mercy from the side of the room and used the sword
made of the rarest steel in the world, as a walking stick.

Slowly Arya walked outside for the first time since everything, she’d been kept drugged or hidden away in a tent the past week. Jon had not come alone with his plan of rescue. There were multiple fires and tents set up around her, maybe a hundred men altogether. A guard turned his head when she walked out.

“My Lady.” He sounded concerned.

“Where’s my brother?”

With furrowed brows, the handsome guard pointed in the direction of one of the fires, a circle of men and a white direwolf that looked black in the night. Ignoring all her pain and sucking up the cold she stepped through the thick snow, Mercy taking most of her weight. It wasn’t the best walking stick. The air was numbing to her skin, and if not for the all the fires she was sure she wouldn’t be able to smell anything. As she glanced up at the night sky she hadn’t seen in what felt like forever, she was surprised to see stars. She stood there a moment, leaning on her sword and staring at the beautiful twinkling lights. The smoke from the fires clouded above her head and with a heavy heart, she was reminded of the night the Twins burned. *It doesn’t matter now, let it go.* But still, she frowned at the sky, black blood seeping in a wooden floor looked back, shock and accusation in pale dead eyes. *Arya…*

She jumped out of her memories when something pressed against her leg. Ghost stood staring up at her, his red eyes almost black in the light. “Thanks.” She muttered. Pushing on she approached the campfire, all eyes glued to her before she’d even gotten close enough to say hello.

Jon turned around and stood up instantly. “What are you doing?” he blurted.

“Walking.”

He closed the short distance between them. “I told Val to watch you.”

“I don’t need to be watched.” He frowned and she smiled “Now help me sit down so I can meet your friends.”

Jon did as she asked, helping her down on the log he’d been sitting on. Arya recognized Davos sitting across from her, his greying hair shifting in the wind like sand. Another man with red hair sat beside him, a wildling without a doubt by the looks of him, he grinned as she sat. A young pretty boy with dark curly hair sat to her left and gave her a shy smile when she looked his way. Across from him sat another man, with dark clothes who appeared too young to have greying hair.

“What do you remember meeting me, My Lady?” Davos asked.

She nodded, but she could hardly remember a word of their first conversation. “You were Lord Stannis’s Hand, I’ve heard about you.” The smile he gave her was a heavy one. “Sorry to hear about his death.” She wasn’t really, but it felt like the right thing to say.

“That’s very kind of you.”

Jon sat down beside her and gestured to the young man to her left, “Arya, this is Satin. He was my squire on the Wall.”

“An honor my My Lady.” He bowed his head a little as he spoke.

“And this Edd.” The man with the oddly greying hair raised his cup at the mention of his name.
“And lastly we have Tormund.” The ginger-haired man grinned broadly.

“Just Tormund is it?”

Jon grinned back. “Or as he likes to be called: Tormund Giantsbane, Tall-talker, Horn-blower, Tormund Thunderfist, Husband to Bears, and the Mead-king of Ruddy Hall.”

“That sounds much better to me.” Tormund agreed and Arya smiled softly.

“Husband to bears?” she had to clarify.

The wildling smirked around his cup, “Now if I’ve learned anything about you southerners, it’s that that story, is not befitting for a Lady.”

“I’m not a southerner.”

“You sure sound like one, matter o’ fact, you sound like that banker in all the robes, what’s his name?” he looked to Jon for his answer.

“Tycho Nestoris?”

“Yeah! That one, with the funny hat.”

“Because the horns you people wear on their heads aren’t funny at all.” Edd added with a flat tone.

“Those aren’t hats you crows, they’re helmets.” Tormund argued.

“Who’s Tycho?” she wondered.

Jon met her curious eyes. “He’s a banker from Braavos, I’ve invited him to Winterfell to discuss a loan from the Iron Bank.”

Arya smirked slightly “I sound like I’m from Braavos?”

He frowned “A little bit if I’m being honest.”

“I did spend a lot of time there.” She thought aloud.

“Braavos?” Jon’s eyebrows had risen “You crossed the Narrow Sea?”

She nodded and the questions continued. She never mentioned anything too important, she spoke of what Braavos had been like, of the other Free Cities she’s visited. She’d mentioned that she learned to speak Braavosi but kept the other tongues she knew a secret. Admitted she’d only come back to Westeros as of a couple of moons ago and had been heading North to learn what had happened to her family. Which wasn’t a complete lie.

“Where’d you get your fancy sword, why do you all have fancy swords?” Edd asked both her and Jon.

Arya glanced at Mercy at her side, she had no sheath to put it in and it still had the golden lion engraved in the hilt. Jon reached over and held it up, his gloved hand running over the ruby eyes the lion glared back with. “Jaime gave it to me.”

“He gave you a Valyrian steel sword?” he was in disbelief.

“It was Joffrey’s.” Her brother’s confusion grew, and she sighed, going on to explain how it was
actually their father’s sword. He glanced at the blade with new eyes.

“Have you given it a name?”

“Mercy.”

His serious eyes studied her “In Lady Stoneheart’s letter she mentioned you still had Needle.”

Her throat tightened at the name. *Arya*… She glanced back at the fire and pushed down the sickening feeling in her stomach, trying to forget the image of the tiny sword in her mother’s chest. “It was in the barn.”

“You really held onto it all these years?”

Arya glanced at him, confused by his surprise. “Of course, I kept it.”

“Are you two just adorable? Har!” Tormund’s drunken interruption tore her eyes from Jon’s. “*Pardon me, my Lady.* But we haven’t even offered you a drink.” The man said any potentially polite word as if it were some great joke.

“Do you want a drink?” Jon asked, a little uncertain.

She found she wanted nothing more. “Please.”

With the new order from Tormund, Satin poured her a cup from the barrel he had behind him. Another shy smile and he was handing her a drink of ale, she took a sip and smiled despite the taste. Satin gave her a kind smile “It’s terrible isn’t it?”

“I’ve drunken worse things in my life.”

“You act like she’s never had a cup of ale before.” Tormund teased Satin, “I’ll be honest I never did ask your age and thought we were here to rescue a little girl. You’re not so little.” He laughed. “You’ve probably had your fair of drunken nights already?”

Davos gave the Wildling a withering look. “Now that’s not a question *befitting* of a Lady.”

Tormund raised his hands in question. “I only asked her if she’s been drunk before, it’s not like I asked how many men have been in her bed.”

Arya nearly choked on her wine from laughing at the man’s boldness. “*Tormund*.” Edd growled in warning.

Tormund looked to Jon, and Arya noticed how tight his jaw had become. The wildling seemed to take Jon’s glare marginally more seriously. “*Apologies, Lord Crow.*” Yet Tormund still couldn’t help but smile. “Perhaps I’ve one too many.”

“No need to apologize.” Arya answered before Jon had the chance to. “But I do think I’ve answered enough questions tonight, despite how interesting they’re starting to become. I think I’d have to hear about your adventures with bears before you heard any of mine.” The wildling laughed again, so loudly it drew looks from other fires. The man was truly drunk.

Arya excused herself shortly after the mini interrogation, refusing Jon’s help back. She was determined not to be completely helpless. As she approached her tent someone else came up behind her. “Up and walking around now.”
Jaime Lannister smirked at her in the darkness. The side of his head was still terribly bruised, the
gash stitched by Maester Wolkan would leave a nasty scar. “What do you want?”

The Lannister almost looked offended. “And here I thought we’d become friends, after all we’ve
been through together.”

“You lied to Jon.”

“And what part was the lie, princess?”

She frowned, leaning on Mercy. He technically hadn’t lied. “Still, you left out quite a few details.”

He shrugged “And you never filled them in.”

“I wanted to.” She felt defeated, she hated lying to him but the thought of speaking the truth out loud
scared her more than anything had in years. “I don’t want to lie to him.”

“Maybe you should just tell him everything then.” Jaime offered. “You can tell him all about Lady
Stoneheart and why they really wanted you hanged, you could even tell him who you went looking
for in Braavos. I’ll be honest, I’m curious myself about that story.”

The grin he gave her sent a shiver of rage through her. “And why does it sound like you’re
threatening me?”

“It’s just a reminder. I don’t care to have a repeat of my last encounter with your family.”

“Jon’s not going to hang you.”

“Good, because I doubt you’d like him to know where the Brotherhood found you.”

Arya smacked his shoulder in her sudden anger. “And if I told him what you did to Bran, then he
would kill you!” She hissed.

“Ouch.” Jaime touched his arm with a pouting frown.

Movement from beside them had Arya turning her head. “Excuse me.” Val walked out of the tent
with a friendly smile and her heart sank. If she’d heard anything, then she’d heard too much. Arya
watched the woman leave, and as she did her gaze met Jon’s. He had his head turned, watching her
and Jaime from afar. Even from a distance, she could read the tension in his shoulders.

She glared back at Jaime. “You’ll keep your mouth shut.” It wasn’t a question, her life was finally
falling back into place and there was no way in hell she would let Jaime Lannister ruin it.

He smiled before leaving. “Your secrets are my secrets, princess.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading guys, I'm excited for them to get to Winterfell. (: Oh, and I assume everyone has seen the trailer for the new season?? What do you guys think Arya is running from? I'm thinking an undead friend, maybe Gendry lol (but if she dies I'll lose it and wait for GRRM to fix it.)
Winterfell was less than an hour away and Jon sat in the back of the wagon across from his little sister, white fluffs of snow dancing in the evening air. He knew she wasn’t thrilled about their methods of transportation but with Arya just starting to walk around the other night, there was no chance she’d be riding a horse. Their wagon was not one you’d expect to see a King riding in either, it was more the type you’d store your food and tents, but they hadn’t exactly brought a chariot along with them. Instead, they both sat in the middle of the line of soldiers, rocking in the wagon for all to see.

With every large bump in the road, he thought her breath caught a little, thought her lips twitched ever so slightly. But if Arya was in any pain, she never said a word about it. Her expression revealing nothing of her true feelings as she watched the trees. He didn’t know what she was looking for. The bruises around her face had begun to fade, even the cut on her lip was nearly healed. Only the scratch that laid horizontally across her cheek lingered like a stubborn drunk. Arya glanced down at her gloved hand, flexing her grip with the slightest of frowns.

“How’s your finger?”

“Better.”

Her blank stare went back to searching the forests and he fought back his own frown. She’d been quiet all morning, never using more than a few words to answer a question, yet he couldn’t think of any reason Arya had to be upset with him. Whenever Sansa was angry with Jon, she’d give him the cold shoulder, speaking to him with short sentences or simply ignoring him. Sansa and he didn’t fight often but when they did, he was always surprised by her fierceness. The girl he’d known from childhood had been much softer, even to those she didn’t like. Sansa…

Jon scoffed to himself and it was enough to gain Arya’s attention. “What?”

“You’re nervous.”

“Do I look nervous?”

She hadn’t. Her dark eyes were clear and no part of her fidgeted to give away her discomfort. Her expression was calm and if he didn’t understand the feeling himself, he never would have guessed.
But the twisting of his stomach that grew and grew in the days leading up to the barn, leading to the moment he thought he might see Arya again, was still fresh in his memory. “Not even a little bit.”

She nodded slowly, studying the scenery one last time before giving into conversation. “The last time I saw Sansa…” she sighed and held her eyes closed a moment longer than necessary. “The last time I spoke to Sansa, we weren’t on the best of terms.”

“I think she still feels terrible about choosing Joffrey’s side.”

“She told you about it?”

He nodded. “About what happened to Lady, and the butcher’s son you’d become friends with.”

“Mycah.” She muttered. “His name was Mycah.”

“Are you still upset with her?” He didn’t think she was the type to hold a grudge after so long, but that could have changed.

“No, I forgave her a long time ago, before I even thought to forgive myself. I was the one who hit Joffrey over the back of the head…not that he didn’t deserve it.”

He grinned slightly “I wish I’d gotten the chance to do that myself.”

Jon watched as her eyes drifted behind him and turned his head to see what had caught her eye. Jaime Lannister smiled at them, with a grin that seemed almost too sincere to be true. He gave them a mocking salute and Jon watched as Arya smiled back, a glint in her eyes he couldn’t explain. “He seems friendly.” The image of him and his little sister whispering in the dark still left Jon with bothersome questions.

“You don’t trust him.” What could have been a question was more of an observation coming from her.

“You do?” She tilted her head and eyed the Lannister again and he continued. “I know he gave you that sword but that doesn’t change who he was in the past.”

“It doesn’t.” The sadness in her gaze gave him pause. “None of us can change what we’ve done. And he might smile like he’s in on some joke but he’s still grieving for Brienne.” Jon knew who Arya was talking about, the bodies that had been hanged by the brotherhood before his arrival. His men had cut them down and burned the woman and young boy with the rest. “And if you need help not hating him, he did save my life in a way.”

“I’ll admit, that helps.” He smiled softly. “But you still didn’t say if you trusted him.”

“The only person I trust right now is you.” Arya pulled her cloak tighter around herself. “I haven’t collected as many reliable friends as you have over the years.”

Despite the chilly wind, her words warmed him, but the thought she didn’t have anyone didn’t. “You used to be friends with everyone.”

She scoffed. “Not everyone, Jeyne hated me.” Jon’s stomach sank at the name, he’d completely forgotten about her and Theon. “What’s wrong?”

He hesitated a moment, but there would be no avoiding this conversation, like so many others. Especially with Jeyne Pool and Theon Greyjoy right over the hill they were currently climbing. He launched into the explanation of who Ramsey had really married, and of the boy from their
childhood that had been kept a prisoner there. By the time he’d finished, he had no idea what Arya thought, something that was becoming consistent for him.

“Theon’s in Winterfell. Alive. After everything he’s done?” There was no guessing anymore, she was angry.

“Ramsey put him through hell Arya, there’s no point in killing someone who’s already broken.”

“Sounds like it’d be a mercy then.”

He sat back. “You don’t mean that.”

Her glare was just as fierce as her sister’s or mothers ever was, something she’d never used on him before. “And why wouldn’t I? If he’d never turned his cloak, it could have changed everything.”

“We don’t know that.”

Her smile was bitter. “You know he might not be the one who put a sword through Robb’s heart, but he still stabbed him in the back.”

Jon’s tone was firm. “Theon isn’t who he was before, and I’m not having him executed. None of us can change what we’ve done, remember?”

In his experience using someone’s own words against them often left them even angrier than before, but Arya seemed calmed by them. Her shoulders relaxed and her glare faded when she looked away. After a moment she replied, but the words seemed to take effort. “You’re right.”

Her anger wasn’t misplaced, he knew that. He’d wanted Theon dead for years before he’d seen the man again. He’d just never thought Arya had felt the same way.

And why wouldn’t she?

He had to stop thinking of her as some innocent nine-year-old girl who’d never dare to hurt a fly. Not even Rickon was that innocent anymore, and Arya had experienced years more of this ugly world than him.

He knew she wasn’t a stranger to violence, he’d seen that when he’d found her. Close to death and surrounded by it. But when Jon had thought Rickon was dead, he never had to wonder where he’d been or the things he could have seen. And for some reason in his mind, Arya had been someplace safe or dead, he hadn’t considered either of them facing the kinds of adversity he had. Never imagined Rickon killing a man as a child or being raised by foreign savages. Now as he sat across from the sister he hadn’t seen in more than half a decade, he yearned to know the demons she faced, the ones that seemed to keep her up at night. Arya never spoke of her nightmares, but the shadows under her eyes said enough. Is it the night I found her that haunts her dreams, or some other horror?

Arya seemed impatient when she glanced back at him; he’d been staring. “Look I’ll try and forgive him okay? But it won’t be overnight.”

“I don’t expect you to forgive him.”

“I’ll try anyway.” She wrung her gloved hands “Tell me about Val.”

“Val?” she nodded “Why?”

“Because I’m nervous like you said and wouldn’t mind a distraction.” She shrugged. “She’s a Wildling, but I doubt you brought her to fight for my freedom because she doesn’t even have a sword. She helped Woklan, but she doesn’t have any notable knowledge of medicine. Is she an advisor?”
Jon took a moment to think. “Val was the sister of Dalla, Mance Rayder’s wife who died in childbirth. Then she was Stannis’s prisoner until he died…after everything none of the Wildlings were going to my prisoners. Most everyone thinks she should be married off to strengthen relations between the North and the Wildlings, but Val’s not having any of it and I doubt anyone could make her if they tried. She offered to come with me and if I didn’t find you or found…something worse. I could use all the support I could get.”

Arya smiled softly. “You brought her for support.” He frowned at her smile thinking she was making the same assumption that Sansa had made. They have more in common than they used to, seeing things that aren’t there. She looked thoughtful “So she doesn’t want to marry.”

Jon didn’t feel like explaining the Wildlings tendencies towards rape and stealing of their paramours. Wildling culture…is different than ours.

She nodded. “I was thinking of what Tormund said the other night when he was drunk.” His skin crawled at the memory, he’d been unexplainably angry with his friend for bringing up the idea of Arya having someone else in her bed. Jon sat up, his skin raising in temperature despite the cold. Why is she bringing this up? He thought she might have caught on to his sudden discomfort for she rushed on “It just made me think of marriage is all.”

Her explanation didn’t put him at ease at all. “Do you…want to marry?”

Her frown seemed to match his own, “I never considered it. I…when we were young, being married off was my greatest fear.” she smiled a little as if amused by the thought, but it faded quickly. “But after everything…, I’d completely dismissed the idea. I didn’t think… I’d ever live that kind of life. And everything’s different but being in the positions we’re in, there’re expectations.”

“If you think I’d make you marry some stranger over expectations, I’m offended that you’ve completely forgotten who I am.” He couldn’t help but grin at the absurdity of it.

She gave him another soft smile before looking at her hands. “It’s just been so long. People change.”

Jon watched her stare at her own hands, the dark leather gloves sliding back and forth, and his heart tightened. He reached over and took one of her hands in his own, being sure to take the one without the broken finger. She glanced up with serious dark eyes. “I haven’t changed that much, I swear.”

Arya studied his hand in hers “and what of how much I’ve changed?”

“Of course you’ve changed, Arya, the last time I saw you, you were a child.”

With what might have been a forced smiled she pulled her hand back. “There’re things I need to tell you.” He nodded seriously, thinking of how she’d yet to tell him of anyone she’d lived with over the years. “Lady Stoneheart didn’t die in the fire.”

He wasn’t expecting that. “Jaime said she did.”

“He implied she did yes, but…” her gaze stared at the space beside him. “I killed her.” Jon watched as her eyes flicked to his as if weighing his reaction. “That’s why the Brotherhood held me prisoner, not for my name, but for what I’d done. It’s why Lem beat me and why they were going have me hanged.”

Arya had killed Lady Stoneheart. Jon’s head spun at the thought. The woman who wanted him dead, who’d claimed to have organized the murder of House Frey, who seemed to want House Stark to rise again. Everything he knew or learned about this Lady Stoneheart made no sense at all. “Why?”
“Because of what she did to Brienne and Pod…she’d become a monster…” her voice was a whisper as one of her hands touched the faded yellowish marks around her neck briefly. “and when she grabbed me I thought…I thought she was going to kill me.”

“It’s okay, I understand.” It seemed Arya had wanted Theon dead but bringing up the killing of someone had left her eyes haunted. “You have no reason to feel guilty about defending yourself.”

“There’s more.” She whispered but didn’t rush to tell him what it was, so he thought he might be able to find the courage to tell her his own secret.

“There’s something I need to tell you too, before someone else does it for me.” He cleared his throat, his mouth suddenly dry. *I died once*... but just as he thought to say something, they reached the top of the hill, the shadows of Winterfell’s towers standing black against the setting sun.

It still hurt to breath, and it still hurt to walk. But Arya would not be carried back into Winterfell. The snow had begun to rescind, and the air tasted like a breath of ice, like home. Jon walked beside her, and instead of using her new and improved walking stick; an actual stick this time with a rounded end that fit well in her hand. She held onto Jon’s arm, all the while wondering what he thought of her now. Telling him that she’d been the one to kill Lady Stoneheart was a weight off her shoulders, but there was still so much he didn’t know. So much she wasn’t sure she had the heart to tell him.

As the heavy gate was pulled open, her stomach was more than hurting. The moment held a blurry cloud around it, resembling a dream so much her head spun. Blinking the feeling away she let Jon led her, leaning on him as they walked. The wildlings and soldiers were pressed in around them as they moved, and then they cleared, giving her a better view of the courtyard.

Sansa Stark stood in the center; gloved hands held together with twiddling thumbs. Her navy-blue dress covered whatever shoes she wore, and a dark speckled grey fur hung over her shoulders. Her lovely face held an uncertainty Arya felt twisting in her stomach, one that didn’t leave when her sister’s blue eyes met hers. Sansa really did have the eyes of their mother, not Lady Stonehearts but Catylen’s. Stoneheart’s eyes had been tainted with a grey shade of death, where Sansa’s were bright with life and emotion.

“It’s really you.” She said softly, blue eyes staring like she never thought she’d see her sister again.

“Expecting someone else?” Arya asked almost timidly. She wasn’t used to feeling nervous so often, to feeling so much so often. But the family she’d felt safe with once were now strangers, strangers who she knew couldn’t anticipate the person she’d become.

“What happened to you?” Her sister looked her up and down.

Arya ignored her question and hugged her instead. Sansa’s hands were firm but gentle, and she noted that she hadn’t even asked Jon where it was her their sister had been. Sansa had escaped the Lannisters, possibly killed Joffrey, and somehow had helped Jon take back the Winterfell. It was a story she wanted to hear.

When Arya stepped back the boy standing behind her sister caught her eye. “Rickon.” She blurted. He looked nothing like how she remembered. His dark eyes were stuck somewhere between a grey or blue, his mop of messy hair a dark auburn.

His gaze searched her up and down, suspicious and unsatisfied. “I don’t recognize you.”

“Rickon.” Sansa hissed disapprovingly but Arya only smiled at his honesty.
“That's okay, I remember you.” the boy still didn't smile or look comforted.

“For true? You're not lying?” he was only a head shorter than she was.

“For true. Bran and I would take you with us when we snuck out of our rooms, mo-” she paused as Lady Stoneheart's face came to mind in place of the memory of her mother, clearing her throat again she went on. “Lady Catelyn would be furious with us.” she finished quietly and smiled despite the bile that crept up her throat, the sound of Lady Stoneheart's last dying gasp echoing in her ears. *Arya...*

“I remember Bran, he sent me away.” Rickon made himself sound angry but Arya could see he just felt betrayed, abandoned.

“Rickon we've told you Bran was trying to protect you.” Sansa tried to comfort him, her voice smoother than silk.

“He left! You all left! So why can't you just let me leave? I don't like it here!” his next string of angry words was in a tongue that Arya didn't understand, it was a harsh sound that reminded her of Dothraki. “and leave me be!” with his last words in the common tongue he stormed off. Somewhere outside the castle, a direwolf howled.

Arya stared at the footprints her younger brother left in his wake, stunned and at a loss for words. She felt Jon place a hand on her shoulder as Sansa tried to explain. “Don't take it personally, he's been this way since he got back. He thinks we all meant to leave him.”

A bitter memory of a stubborn bull-headed boy came to her mind. “Whether we meant to or not, we still left.”

Wolkan had insisted on another checkup as soon as Rickon had run off. Arya found herself sitting on a chair in a room that once belonged to Measter Luwin. The grey walls were familiar friends, but the tables and beds had been rearranged like strangers. She waited as Wolkan went through his shelves of vials and assorted leaves, berries, and roots. “I’m just looking for something to help with your pain, My Lady.”

Arya tapped her fingers on her seat arm impatiently, “I don't need anything for the pain.” She chewed her lip a moment, not wanting to rely on medication for anything…but her heavy eyes yearned for a peaceful rest. “Do you have anything to help me sleep?”

“Does the pain keep you up?” He turned to face her, maesters chain ringing with his every movement.

“Not really.”

Wolkan’s blue eyes softened. “When I was taught at the Citadel there were many maesters only interested in the ways to bind wounds, the antidote to every poison, the symptoms of every flue. But there was one of my professors whose interest solely focused on injuries of the mind.”

“There’s nothing wrong with my mind.”

“I’ve treated many soldiers and knights in my lifetime.” The old man closed the distance between them, stopping a few feet away. “Oftentimes men who’ve survived battles, keeping fighting them long after they’ve ended. Repeatedly, in their dreams. I’d hate to see that happen to you, My Lady.”
Arya stood, and made her way to the door. “I’m not a soldier.”

“Perhaps not.” Her hand hesitated over the doorknob as he spoke. “Perhaps you’ve faced worse monsters than the ones found on a battlefield.”

She gave him one last look. “I can’t say I’ve heard of a medicine that prevents bad dreams.”

“I don’t have one.” He smiled sadly. “I’m still uncertain if the Wilding girl had the right of it when she told me not to say anything…of your past wounds.” his eyes grew distant from her. “My professor always said you could never move past a thing you couldn’t speak of.” His blue eyes pinned her for a moment. “Might be if you faced whatever it is that haunts you in the day, it’ll leave you be at night.”

Jon was waiting on the other side of the door, “What’d he say?”

“I’ll be good as new soon.” She forced a comforting smile. Wolkan wanted her to face her demons, but she already had. She’d already confronted Lady Stoneheart, and it was that memory that ripped her from her sleep each night.

Jon’s head tilted with concern. “You look tired, come on.” She took his arm again without argument, wanting to be away from Wolkan and his pitiful blue eyes. Their steps echoed down the empty hallway; shadows intertwined behind them.

“Rickon, was that the Old Tongue he was speaking?” she asked, leaning on him more than she needed to.

“It was.”

“You know it.”

“I can speak it, passably.”

“Did you understand what he said before he left?”

Jon’s frown twitched. “It's really not worth repeating.”

“Few things are.” When he didn't answer her right away, she placed a hand on his shoulder ever so gently. “I'm sure I can handle it.”

Jon sighed. “He said something along the lines of not wanting to stay here, to see us all leave him again.” he watched her as he said it.

“That's not going to happen.” Arya spoke with more conviction than she felt. Her family was about to be at the front of a war, again.

“No, it's not, he'll be safe here. It's his home.” They had begun to walk down the hallway that led to Arya's room, the lanterns hanging off the stone walls were recently lit, and she could see a handmaiden slipping through her bedroom door. They both paused at the hall, a hundred memories flashing over the grey stone and flickering lanterns.

“Jon, is something wrong?”

“No, no everything's fine.”

Arya didn't believe him but didn't press either, she only changed the subject. “How's my room? Is it the same?” She didn’t want it to be the same.
“Honestly, I don't know. I haven't been down here yet, not since before.”

Ghosts that haunted her dreams seemed to pass over his face, eyes dark. She tugged on his arm, ready to face whatever daemons were lurking under her sheets. *I’m not hiding from my past, Wolkan. “Together then.”*

When they reached her room, they saw the grey walls were bare and the furniture scarce. There was a bed great enough for two with a soft blue comforter, two shelves on either side, the one by the window being bare and the other stocked with a jumble of clothes. There was a tall looking glass in the far corner, and a freshly made bath at the end of the bed beside a hearth. Inside stood two handmaidens, one with a larger shape and dark hair, and the other a skinny blond girl.

The blond one by the bath noticed them first. “Your Grace, My Lady of Stark” she curtsied, and the bigger girl followed the others lead. Jon smiled at them in acknowledgment but kept his eyes on Arya. The only welcoming part was the fire and the bed, with what looked to have a feather blanket and pillows. *It’s just four walls and a ceiling.* Her father might have once read her bedtime stories here, and her mother had woken her up in the mornings with loving blue eyes. But it was just a room.

The young dark-haired maid filled the silence. “I hope it's to your liking My Lady, we focused on the bed for there wasn't much time.” The girl nervously fidgeted with her hands. “and we brought clothes on Lady Sansa's command, dresses, nightgowns, breaches, and other shirts, whichever you'd prefer.”

“Thank you.” Arya could hear the distance in her own voice as she walked to peer out her window, pushing the stained glass open. The musty air in the room tickled her nose. It felt more haunted than most of the other halls had, it was once a child's bedroom after all.

“And we had a bath drawn for you, but if you're not in the mood we can take it away...”

“No that's okay, I could use one.” she turned remembering herself and gave the girls a smile. “I won't be needing anything else tonight. You can um...you can go.” A couple of courtesies later and both the girls were gone leaving them alone again.

Appearing slightly more comfortable Jon took a few steps deeper in the room and stopped by the steaming bath. Arya stood before the looking glass that reached above her head. She didn’t like what she saw. Her fingers traced the slice on her cheek and then her healing lip. There were still shadows of Lady Stoneheart’s fingers lingering on her neck. She began to pull at the bandages around her wrists, tearing them off.

“Maybe you should leave those where they are.” Jon suggested tentatively, but she continued none the less. It took him a few moments to notice the urgency and her shaking hands. He marched over and gently took her arms, “Hey, you’re okay.”

“I look terrible.” She argued, her wrists were covered in scabs and rope burn. The Brotherhood had made a mess of her, leaving her thin, weak, and scarred.

“You don’t.” but she hardly heard him, her eyes on her own hands. Hands that put an end to her mother. *Not your mother, Lady Stoneheart. Gendry had told it true.* Arya closed her eyes and saw him standing in a snowy forest.

“No, no...” she giggled, “It's not funny at all, Your Grace.”

“Don't call me that.”
Hands that had failed to cover the hole in Gendry’s chest glared back up at her.

"You came...back for me...first"

Unbidden tears had formed in her eyes, blurring the view of the world. Jon’s hands cupped her cheeks, forcing her to look at him, his thumb brushing away a tear from her cheek. “You’re okay, I’m here.” He seemed like he desperately wanted to find the right thing to say, the thing that would make her pain stop. It just made her feel more guilty.

Jon moved forward and wrapped his arms about her. Arya closed her eyes and took a deep, shaky breath, attempting to steadying herself. “I think, I think I just need that bath is all.” she cursed herself inwardly for how strained her voice was.

He responded softly. “Words I never thought I’d hear from you.” She scoffed lightly into his cloak, leaning away and wiping her face once more. The burning in her eyes starting to fade.

“Yes, well you learn to appreciate the things that aren't always there.”

“I'm not leaving Arya, not again, not ever.” His dark gaze held more conviction than she’d seen in anybody’s eyes before.

She nodded fast, blinking away the tears again. “I know. I just…” Arya lost the words she wanted to say. How could she possibly tell him everything?

“Arya?” he whispered hoping to get an answer.

Silence clung to the walls but broke when the bedroom door opened, a young girl of only about four and ten stood there, red-faced. “Pa-pardon me, I didn't know anyone was in here.” she placed a few towels on the bed and nearly ran from the room, sensing the seriousness of their conversation.

Arya swallowed and cleared her throat, grimacing as she coughed. “Are you okay?”

She nodded rubbing a hand across her neck, “Yes.” she walked away and picked up a white towel off the bed. The fabric soft and fluffy, and almost unnecessarily so.

Jon lingered. “I don't want to leave you like this.”

“You said you weren't leaving remember?” her mouth pulled in a sad smile but then she saw the redness rise to his cheeks. “The castle Jon, I meant the castle.”

He cleared his throat “Right.” He walked past her and stopped by the door. “There will be a guard at the end of the hall if you need anything, and the handmaidens are a few rooms down. And I'll be in um, in the master chambers…Sansa insists that's where the King should sleep.”

“She's right.”

“Yes well, I'll let you take your bath and get some sleep.” but even as he said the words, he stood as though his feet were nailed to the ground.

“I'm not going anywhere either you know.” Jon nodded and left Arya standing in the same place he had six years ago when they'd last bid each other goodbye.

A bath was all she needed, at least that's what she told herself. Arya could still hear Jon's steps fading down the hall, they were slow and hesitant. But even as she began undressing, she was stuck on the
memory of Lady Stoneheart, convincing her to fight for Winterfell. It was never just Jaime and Brienne and all the Frey’s she had wanted dead; it’d been Jon too.

“Arya...”

She took her head in her hands and bit her lip, tasting blood. *Shut up, shut up.* She stepped into the bath quickly and sank into the tub until her head was under the water. Until she couldn't see her mother's distorted face, only the darkness. The water was still steaming, and it hurt, but she embraced the burn and focused on the sting in her arm, stomach, cheek, and around her wrists. She wanted to yell but held it in, shoving it back into her chest to the place where her lungs screamed instead.

It had been more than a month since she'd had a bath, she’d never been so grateful to wash before. Riding herself of all the blood she’d spilled since leaving Saltpans. If she thought about it too long, she could hear the Frey’s screams of pain, so instead, she just scrubbed herself clean. She spent the most time on washing her hands. When she was done the steel, tub appeared as though she'd murdered someone in it.

Dripping wet she wrapped herself in a white towel and looked at the jumble of clothing Sansa had the maid leave her. There was a couple of dresses, and a nightgown she should probably put on and go to sleep in. But that wasn't going to happen yet, so she picked up a red faded long-sleeved and black breaches. There was a small chest with jewelry, but Arya ignored it.

Picking up a second towel she dried her hair and brushed it, and when she went to the mirror it was a much less horrific sight than before. Her hair was still messy, but half dried it wasn’t so terrible and her face was clean, but still bruised. She felt shame for losing it before, but maybe now that she wasn't wearing Lady Stoneheart's blood she could think straighter. Arya picked up a cloak hanging off the shelf, it was black and lined with unstained soft white fur that made her think of her robe at The House of Black and White. *I'm not no one anymore.* The clasp on her cloak was a silver direwolf. *Not no one at all.*

It didn't take her too long to get past the guards who were either too preoccupied with sleeping or chatting to notice her. Once she did, she found herself atop the North gate tasting the cold on her tongue, embracing the silence. Trying to anyway. Arya's mind still wouldn't rest, and every time the turmoil of thoughts threatened to take over, she found herself reaching for Nymeria.

The great wolf still prowled with her pack. Nymeria hadn't gone too far yet, but she was further south now, searching for food. A castle wasn't the place for her, she needed to be with her family as Arya did. Even if it meant they were separated. *I'm not alone I'm with my pack too now. What’s left of it anyway.* Arya’s gaze scanned the darkness to the North, knowing beyond the forests stood the Wall. *Where are you, Bran?*

Her not so peaceful silence was disturbed by the building sound of someone's footsteps. *A guard maybe...* Arya kept listening. *A very short guard?* Looking up she saw the unmistakable shape of Tyrion Lannister, his shadow the same as it had been on the ship. *Great.* The whole castle seemed to be asleep now, including half the guards, but of course, there was still a lion prowling about.

The last person he thought he'd run into on his nightly walk was Arya Stark. Tyrion had assumed Jon Snow would have her locked in her chambers or the maester would want to watch her over the night because of the girl’s rumoured injuries. Yet here she was, standing still as stone above the North gate seemingly unharmed. She wore a thick black cloak lined with white fur, her hair was
down and wet, making it look almost as black as her cloak, and the fair cheek facing him had a thin red cut on it, proving some rumours.

He could still remember expecting the Stark's to all share the northern look that Eddard Stark had, but when he'd arrived there had been so much red and blue it seemed the only person who shared the Lord Stark's features was his bastard son. Tyrion had been wrong though. Lady Arya was everything Stark that her sister and trueborn brothers lacked, in looks anyway. He then understood why it might have been that Sansa insisted her sister never fit when they were young, not really resembling any of her siblings. At least Arya didn't have to grow up with twins.

“Lady Arya, I didn't expect to see you out so late.” Tyrion said cradling his glass of wine.

Lady Arya didn't even spare him a glance. “Better not to have expectations then.”

He nodded his head and took a sip of his wine before answering, “It's a fair assumption that you should hate me I suppose, I'm a Lannister. Far from the worst they tell me, but a Lannister none the less.” he sighed. This will be harder than I thought. “I was just talking to your sister not more than an hour ago.” her head never turned, and her gaze continued looking North.

“Well she is your wife.” she stated dryly.

“Yes...and she's concerned for you.” He thought honesty might be the best approach with her, Sansa had said she had always seen people for who they were. If she had the sense at nine to hate Cersei as soon as she met her, might be she'll have the sense to see I'm here to help.

“Then comfort her.” she still wasn't looking at him.

“Lady Arya I'd hate for there to be any hostility between us, maybe your brother told you about why I'm-?”

“We didn't talk about you.” she interrupted. “and for why you're here it seems pretty obvious.”

Tyrion found himself intrigued and smiling a little “By all means tell me why I'm freezing my ass off on the gates of this frozen hell.” He waved an inviting hand.

“Daenerys Targaryen.” she answered simply. Essentially, yes.

“You've heard of her then.” he decided, that finally got a look from her.

She raised an eyebrow and shook her head slightly, “Who hasn't heard of her? She has to be the most famous living person in all of Esso's by now, and likely soon in Westeros after she takes the Iron Throne.” Now that she faced him, he could see the bruise around her other eye, and the broken lip, even faded marks on the girl’s neck. A wave of similar anger burned through him, as it had when he’d seen what the Brotherhood had done to Jaime’s face. But Tyrion still hadn’t brought himself to speak to his brother yet. “And when the great Tywin Lannister's own son murderers him and flees to Westeros to stand by the side of the Mother of Dragons...well word gets around.” Tyrion felt his stomach drop at the mention of his father; Lady Arya clearly shared none of the subtle grace of her sister. “I didn't mean to offend you, just being honest.”

“Maybe you don’t like me for being a Lannister but a Kinslayer, My Lady? I know how your family can be with your honor.” His sharpness came from the reminder of his father.

“I don’t like you, nor do I dislike you, and honor?” a small humf form her nose told him how she felt before she said it. “My father lost his head for his honor, and my brother lost his when he broke a single vow. There is a time and place for it. As for being a Kinslayer...” she hesitated, her voice
becoming quiet as she looked away. “I wouldn't judge you for that.”

“So, do you like, or dislike my brother?” Arya didn’t answer. “I haven’t gotten the chance to ask him about your meeting yet.”

“Probably because you’ve avoided him.”

“I haven’t-”

“I met him in a cage.” She interrupted his denial. “And my first instinct was to kill him. But like an ugly formed wart, he’s grown on me.”

Tyrion snorted. “That’s a fine way to put it, My Lady.”

“I still wouldn’t say I like him.” She eyed him a moment, and he wondered what opinion she was coming to. “Why haven’t you two spoken yet?”

It was his turn to look away, searching the darkness for answers. “You could say…the last time we spoke wasn’t on the best of terms.”

“Now you have time to make up for it.”

“I suppose I should thank you for not killing him then.”

“I really did want him dead.” She muttered, almost half to herself.

Tyrion smiled at her bluntness. “Most people do.” he stepped forward a little. “You seem like the kind of person who doesn't care much for pleasantries, My Lady. You know why I’m here, on behalf of Daenerys. If your brother is to be believed, the North is going to need her and her army if it's going to survive this winter.”

“We may need her dragons” Arya agreed mildly. “But if she chooses to ignore us then from what I've heard; there won’t be a kingdom for her to rule.” There was a pause before she continued. “She wants Jon to bend the knee first.”

It wasn't really a question. “Yes, once she takes the throne, it's not a lot to ask considering. Once she comes into power my dear sister will be put to death, its own kind vengeance for the crimes committed against your family…and the rest of her crimes.” His face itched where his nose once was. I should be there.

“I don’t want vengeance.” Arya’s voice became oddly void of emotion.

“No? I was under the impression you hated my sister nearly as much as I do.” he shrugged taking another sip of his wine. If not vengeance, what does she want?

“Cersei has lost her father, her brother...lover?” she scoffed lightly. “...and all three of her children. Tell me what could I do to her that hasn't already been done? Kill her? No, that would only bring her peace, something she doesn’t deserve.” Tyrion took a moment to mull over her words but couldn’t agree with them. No, there's still plenty of ways for Cersei to suffer. “You disagree.” she stated and lifted her head slightly, “Someone's coming” Tyrion looked around, but he couldn’t see anyone nor could he hear anything but the wind.

“I don’t...” he then heard the sounds of footsteps coming up the stairs of the gate tower, “You have fine hearing, My Lady” he gave her a curious look. Lady Arya didn’t answer him though but patiently waited for the person to make their way to the top of the stairs. A moment later Jon Snow
appeared with his direwolf behind him.

“There you are! I've been looking everywhere for you...Tyrion, hey.”

“Your Grace.” he lifted his cup of wine.

“I was just getting some air; Lord Tyrion was too apparently.”

“You weren't in your room and the guards didn't know where you were...” Jon seemed to be gathering his barrings.

“Thought I ran away already?”

Jon sighed and smiled, “you did say you weren't going anywhere.”

She shook her head at him “Once more, I meant the castle.”

Jon smiled again and looked as though he was about to say something before, he paused, “How'd you get past the guards?”

“I'm light on my feet” she shrugged the comment off, “but it is about time I do try and get some sleep.”

“I'll walk you back.” Jon nodded at Tyrion and made his way back to the steps with his white wolf following right behind.

Arya took a few steps to follow before stopping and turning back to him, she spoke quietly so Jon couldn't hear. “Just for the record Lannister. I may have lost my taste for vengeance, but if anything were to happen to Sansa or my brothers...well you'll wish you had nothing to do with it.” and with that, she was gone. Tyrion felt a shiver run down his spine from the coldness in her eyes and the promise in her words, She just threatened me. Tyrion couldn't help but be reminded of Catelyn Stark. She may have her father's look, but she's her mother's daughter.

“I'll have a talk with the guards later, you shouldn't be able to get past them so easily.” Jon told her as they made their way back through the courtyard. How did she get past them?

“You definitely need better guards.” Arya said taking his arm. “In their defense, I can quite sneaky when I put my mind to it.”

Jon shook his head, “They had one job; to keep watch. Yet a girl of six and ten got past all of them?”

Arya's eyes darted up and when Jon followed them, his heart skipped a beat at the redness of Melisandre's robes.

“Your Grace.” The Red Women smiled widely as she walked up to them “This must be your sister; I've heard much about you, my lady.” Mel did the motion of a small curtsey.

“I'm afraid I can't say the same...?”

“Melisandre” she finished for her, “Of Asshai, I'm sure you two have a lot of catching up to do. Of course, I wouldn't be of any urgent conversation.” she gave Jon a meaningful look.

“Asshai? You're far from home.” Arya stated rather coldly, causing Jon to give her a questioning glance.
Melisandre only grinned more. “You've met a red priestess before I take it?”

“A few too many.” Arya agreed.

“Hopefully I can help change your opinion on us, and the one true God R’hllor. My Lady.”

“I think I’ve heard and seen enough for a lifetime, My Lady.” Arya’s tone was so different from the nine-year-old girl he knew. Whenever Arya had been upset with someone as a child she lashed out, but now her temper was controlled, calculated.

“Well, we were just on own way back to her chambers” Jon concluded, wanting desperately to get out the conversation.

“Of course, but maybe once Jon helps you understand the powers of the one true God R’hllor, we can have a more ample discussion” Mel looked to Jon once more.

Arya squinted her eyes at Mel “I'm fully aware of the powers a priest can possess, and no matter the theatrics they put on he's not my god.”

“And who is yours?” Melisandre asked sweetly.

Arya paused before answering “I'm afraid you wouldn't know the name.”

“R’hllor is the only god, but I assure you, my lady, I've heard of many and more then you I'm sure.”

“Maybe, you have been around much longer than I have after all.” Arya tilted her head and her grey eyes went to Melisandre’s necklace, “That's a beautiful ruby around your neck...” Arya’s smile was something of a wolves. “It almost seems to make you appear younger.”

Melisandre’s hand went to the ruby, her smile gone but her eyes sparking with something. Wonder? “You have a fine eye for jewelry.” At that moment Jon Snow knew he was missing something; he was lost but at least he knew it.

“Among other things.”

Melisandre found her smile once more. “Yes, be careful My Lady, Your Grace. The night is dark-”

“And full of terrors.” Arya finished for her, and for a moment Jon saw the girl who used to lose her composure, but she was replaced with someone much more disciplined only a second later. “There are terrors everywhere, being able to see them doesn't change that.”

“Of course, My Lady.” Melisandre’s voice was gentle as she rested a hand on Arya’s arm before pulling it away a little too quickly. Jon felt sick watching them, he still hadn't explained to Arya that he died. He had no idea how she was going to react and judging by the glare she was giving Melisandre right then Jon wanted to avoid the conversation for as long as possible. Forever if the Old Gods were kind.

As for Melisandre, her eyes were awfully wide, she swallowed almost nervously. “Excuse me Your grace, My Lady” her eyes never left Arya as she left.

When she was out of earshot Jon turned to Arya. “What the hell was that?”

“I could ask you the same! You're following a different religion now?”

“No, no Melisandre was one of Stannis's closest confidants...she helped him, and me.” Jon paused before they continued into the castle. “I owe her, and she did try and help me rescue you.”
Arya for once seemed confused “Rescue me?”

“When I thought that you were married to Ramsey Bolton” he explained. Jon still remembered the day he'd received the letter and all the mixed feelings that came with it. The rage, and the fear.

“Oh, I’m sorry”

“It's not your fault, the Bolton's had almost everyone fooled.”

“If I'd been here then no one could have pretended to be me.” Jon felt himself give her an odd look but decided not to question her.

“Where were you?”

“Someone had taken the bath away while they were gone. Jon's heart had stopped in his chest when the handmaiden had told him that Arya wasn't in her room any longer, he'd only been gone an hour. For an insane second, he had thought she'd jumped out her window. She'd been so sad when he left her before.

“I suppose you expect me to actually go to sleep this time.” she smiled lightly, every time she smiled Jon thought a piece of his soul was being returned.

“It would be a relief, this time no more wandering walks in the snow, okay?”

“Okay” she whispered, dark eyes scanning the blanket doubtfully. Jon found himself at the door again ready to leave but wishing he could stay.

“I'm not a child anymore. Jon.” she said his name quietly, “do you think...could you stay? I know people tal.”

“Yes,” he said it a little too quickly and realised it a little too late. She smirked at him, but Jon couldn't hide his relief and he was pretty sure she saw it too. “Yes, I'll stay.”

“Okay I'm just gonna...” she looked around for a moment, “Turn around and I'll change.” she lifted a white gown from the pile of folded clothes. He turned and stared at the wooden door to her room, it wasn't often he'd stay in here when they were young. Arya had always been the one that came to his chambers, when she was upset, hiding from her mother and Septa Mordane, or trying to escape a nightmare.

Jon shifted his feet as he heard clothing falling to the floor and the realization that she might be naked made a flush reach his cheeks. It was stupid he knew; he'd seen her without clothes when they were younger, they'd swam together in the hot springs in the Godswood. We're not children anymore. He reminded himself yet again, closing his eyes he pushed the queer feeling away.

“I'm done.” she said, and he turned back around. The white gown reached right above her knees and her hair was all pushed to one side of her shoulder, a little messy. Arya was busy picking up the old clothes she had on and shoving them back on the shelf and was oblivious of how beautiful she was. Jon pushed that thought away too. “Are you going to sleep in that?” she asked.

“No, I guess not.” he unpinned his cloak and hung it up next to hers and took off the rest of his layers until he was wearing only breaches and a loose undershirt. Arya joined him on the bed, sitting slowly, one hand over her stomach. “You okay?”
Ignoring his question, she pulled up the blanket and laid her head on his chest, sighing from the effort. Jon thought he was dreaming then. He was sharing a bed with Arya. The girl he'd feared was dead every day for the past five years. The girl he'd tried to grieve for, after thinking she died in Kings Landing. As she breathed a sigh of contentment Jon wasn't sure there had ever been a sweeter sound, “Perfect.” She finally said.

Now that she was curled up next to him, he placed an arm around her, brushing his thumb gently up and down her arm. “Are you tired?” he whispered, not wanting to disturb the peace.

“A little.” Her fingers tapped against his chest. “Tell me a story.”

He could hear the smile on her lips; he’d told her bedtime stories when they were children. With a chuckle, he launched into a story of his first days at the Wall. She’d mumbled back an answer or two at first, a or hmmm, but within two minutes they stopped. “Arya?” he whispered. No answer. He had to stop himself from laughing, fearful he’d wake her. Only a little tired she says.

He kissed the top of the head. “Goodnight, Arya.”

Chapter End Notes

Leave Out All The Rest is getting an update next and that's a promise. (ᵔᴥᵔ)

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