Exhale

by elleisforlovee

Summary

The Battle at King’s Landing is over and a new ruler sits on the Iron Throne. Despite leaving their relationship on uncertain terms, Gendry attempts to reunite with Arya. Together the two will work to make sense of the new world they live in and to hopefully heal some old wounds along the way.

Notes

This is the third part of a series - everyone was so incredibly supportive of my last two works (THANK YOU!) so I had to continue. Originally I made reading the previous parts optional but after writing this chapter I decided it really is best to read the others ( “Maybe” and “Trial by Fire”) first.

A few things to note:
1. I’m intentionally leaving some plot points vague. If they don’t involve Arya and Gendry directly, I’m not paying them much attention. One, I’m open to seeing how the series ends. Two, it really shouldn’t matter who’s King or Queen. These two are going to make it work either way...eventually. At least in this story (and hopefully in canon too!)
2. As you’ll see in the first two parts of this series, I did keep many things from the show as canon with the exception being Gendry’s proposal. *Gendry has not proposed to Arya in my story.*
“She’s not taking any visitors.”

The statement rang like a deafening bell in Gendry’s ears; an echo with a numbing effect. He blinked, unsure of the accuracy in his perception. He’d spent nearly two fortnights on the King’s Road and it was not the answer he’d expected to hear when he arrived to Dragonstone and inquired about Arya. It was especially difficult to understand when put into the context of his own travels: if he understood correctly it had been three weeks since the Battle at King’s Landing and Arya still had yet to leave her chambers.

Ser Davos did not waiver, offering no other explanation as he sized the newly administered Lord up one last time before heading further into camp, knowing the boy would follow. Gendry was predictable at best, and although Ser Davos had often credited him for being quite clever, his involvement with Arya was rather simple-minded. Though, Davos rationalized, most matters of the heart were.

“I don’t...has anyone tried?” Gendry managed.

Davos turned, giving him a narrowed gaze that almost seemed stern. “Are you asking me if anyone has tried to get Princess Arya from her room? Yes, of course they have.”

Gendry blinked. “Princess?”

“Aye. Things are changing around here...have changed. It’s time you catch up.”

“Lord—”

“You mean the King? Only emerged from his own chambers last week. We sent a raven to Winterfell going over all of this, though I suppose you missed it if you were traveling here.”

“You did write me.”

“And I didn’t expect you to move so quickly. I just thought you’d want to know. I know you care
for the lass so I figured—"

“You figured right,” Gendry assured, now with eyes that took in the castle before him.

Beyond the bridge they stood on, various huts and makeshift encampments were set up upon the perimeter of the intimidating castle. Soldiers, all of them still wounded and tired, moved slowly, most of them sitting around as if still waiting for orders from their Queen. Like ghosts they were, considering she was gone now.

Sansa was right; they shouldn’t have ascended upon King’s Landing so soon after their fight with the wights. Now Gendry wondered how they’d ever move past where they were currently. It seemed all of Westeros was perched on this small island, the weight of which already seemed to be sinking back into the earth from centuries of battering waves and winds.

An entire lifetime had played itself out in Gendry’s absence and selfishly he was thankful for Jon’s insistence that he stay in Winterfell. If he had accompanied these men he’d be dead now; if he accompanied these men the most recent night he spent with Arya would have been their last.

“How can I see her then?”

Davos turned to him once more. “You can’t. Not right now. I’ve got enough to take care of without sneaking you into the castle.”

“I never said anything about sneaking.”

“I know,” Davos called over his shoulder. “I did. It’s not proper for you to be visiting a Princess in her chambers. Even if she had called upon you, it’d be hard for me to do anything without King Jon —”

“But you’re a smuggler.”

“Actually, I’m currently the Hand of the King.”

With wide eyes, Gendry swallowed. “What?”
“I know. Now go and make yourself useful.”

“Where—”

“Where have you ever been useful, Gendry?”

“I’m plenty useful!”

“Well you’re particularly useful in the smithy.”

“No. I want to speak with Jon,” Gendry gave strongly, now with eyes affixed to the top of the castle as if he knew where the newly appointed King existed.

“It’s His Grace now.”

“Right,” Gendry nodded swiftly. “Of course. I want to speak to His Grace.”

“It seems we’re all getting used to our new titles, Lord Gendry.”

Gendry scoffed. “Hardly.”

Davos sighed. “What do you need to speak to the King about?”

“I want to ask him what he needs assistance with. Winterfell was kind to me because of our friendship. I owe it to him to return the favor...if an interruption would be welcomed, of course,” he corrected swiftly.

“Of course,” Davos returned flatly. “Why don’t you go wash up and help yourself to something to eat? They’ve got rations and fresh bread just beyond the barbican. If you don’t mind eating with the common folk then I’m sure they’ll be plenty for you.”
Gendry eventually made his way to the smithy where a few men had done very little work, concentrating instead on repairing the forge. The space hadn’t been used in many years and the salt in the air had toughened the forgotten tools into uselessness.

“Lord Gendry!” one of the men called out, causing Gendry to turn toward the voice and smile, comforted by the mere thought that he’d know someone on the island. When he caught sight of the lad his smile remained. Umfrey, a boy from White Harbor, nearly barreled him down with a hug. A gruff “oof!” escaped Gendry as the teenager let go. He couldn’t have been more than sixteen but he looked far older than Gendry last remembered. Thankfully he appeared to be unharmed.

Gendry had never been particularly close with Umfrey and he certainly didn’t find him to be a good smith but the Northerner was motivated. His time spent in the forge at Winterfell was useful if not for the boy’s positive outlook. Looking back on it, the only time Gendry had a distaste for his presence was when the boy made a passing comment about Arya’s smile.

“Enough with the titles,” Gendry insisted, now with his hands on his hips. The stance pushed out his already broad chest, establishing the same power he had only just failed to accept. If they hadn’t before, the other men in the smithy were definitely noticing Gendry now. Nearly all of them had stopped to stare at Gendry and watch this apparent Lord’s interaction with the peasant boy.

“Did they send for you? We’re a useless lot! And this forge is—”

Gendry had already been looking around. “In rough shape. I see that.”

“You’re here to help?”

Gendry paused for a moment. “Aye,” he lied, though his response felt like a proper one. “This...this might take us days.”

“Good thing we have time,” one of the other men muttered, chiming in.

Gendry looked to him. “What’s the plan?” he questioned casually.
“The plan? With what?”

“With everyone. The war’s been won. No one has any reason to fear the King...to not be loyal to
him. What do we do now?”

With an innocent shrug, another boy answered: “We wait.”

They all began to stand around Gendry and for a moment Gendry wondered if this was what
lorddom felt like. If the King wasn’t handing down orders, did the task fall onto his shoulders?
“What have you been instructed to do?”

“No much, really,” Umfrey explained, clearly upset at the thought as if it had only just occurred to
him. “Ser Davos suggested working on some nails but we don’t have enough tools and we can’t
make any if we can’t make steel and we can’t start making steel—”

“Without tools. Right.” Gendry leaned back, taking stock of the items near the hearth. “You have a
hammer. It’s enough.”

Umfrey’s eyes widened and he looked to the rest of the makeshift crew with hope and, in Gendry’s
opinion, the right amount of ignorance. Everyone craved blind faith and the sad crew of blacksmiths
was no exception.

~!~

It was well past nightfall when Gendry found Davos again. He had skipped dinner, taking advantage
of the empty smithy to complete his best work. By the time the rest of the men returned, a full set of
tools was laid out on the nearby workstation, wet from their recent time in the slack tub but drying
quickly due to their proximity to the roaring fire.

Gendry rubbed his hands on his makeshift apron - an uneven piece of leather he’d found amongst all
the broken armor. It was a task for tomorrow, Gendry concluded. His body ached, both from the ride
and sail to town and now his more recent duty of running the forge.

“See,” Davos hummed. “Useful.”
Gendry rolled his eyes and began to walk with the older man, noticing still how eyes seemed to be on him. He was unsure of the reason: whether it was because he was with the Hand of the King or because he was a new face. Everyone seemed to be exiting Dragonstone lately, most of them off to find a new life or to even perhaps return to their old one. Gendry’s arrival was a rarity, especially now as he followed Davos through the Bailey and toward the Keep. His assumption that Jon was hidden away from everyone in the highest tower seemed to be a correct one.

“The King may be short with you. If he wants to see you at all,” Davos explained as the pair began ascending the twisting stone staircase.

Even inside the air smelled of salt but it was warmer here, perhaps falsely so. As they walked by various closed doors Gendry couldn’t help but to wonder if Arya existed behind any of them. He imagined Jon wouldn’t have allowed her to be too far from him. He knew the affection the King had for his youngest sister, the fact of which made his current journey up the steps far more treacherous than his ride from Winterfell.

“You didn’t tell him I was coming?”

“No, I did. I told him you requested his attention and he actually sounded relieved to hear you were here. Then, as he often has, he nodded and moved on. Lord Tyrion has been—”

“We’re still trusting him?”

“We have no reason not to. He’s loyal to Sansa, you know. He’d never do anything to betray that friendship. Helping the King only makes sense. You’ll be comforted to know that Tyrion cares about the people almost as much as His Grace does.”

“Not possible.”

“After what Jon’s seen…” They were standing outside a closed door, the only one in this particular hallway. Four knights stood on guard, and Gendry was so stunned by all the information Davos was stowing upon him that he nearly missed their appearance.

Davos sighed. “Just be smart. If His Grace wants you gone you bow and exit.”
Gendry did not move to nod or give any gesture to show his compliance. Only when Davos pushed open the door did he move, shuffling behind him to enter the room. A large table stood in the center of the circular room, that of which was flanked by several arched windows, none of them covered with glass or shutters, causing quite a draft. Actually, it seemed as if there was more window than wall as Gendry could look past where King Jon and Lord Tyrion sat to the angry ocean far beyond. The men looked to the door. Lord Tyrion stood, nodding toward Gendry in a way that made him uncomfortable.

The imp headed for the door but Gendry turned to stop him. “You don’t have to go, mi’lord. I’ll only be a moment.”

It often looked as if Lord Tyrion knew a secret but the way he smirked at Gendry had the bastard believing perhaps he knew his secret. “Don’t flatter yourself, Lord Gendry. I simply need to take a piss and this seems like an opportune time.”

The door shut behind him, leaving Davos standing furthest from the door, another knight beside him. Even Queen Daenerys hadn’t had this much protection, causing Gendry to awkwardly look around and silently begin planning his escape. The windows and the parapet beyond them made much more sense now.

“Lord Gendry, how was your trip?” King Jon stood but did not advance toward the blacksmith. He looked smaller in stature without his usual furs and his eyes, Gendry saw, were red and his cheeks pale. Whether it was exhaustion or sorrow that caused the sallowness in his cheeks, Gendry was unsure.

Gendry looked up, almost shocked to be called upon. “I...am I really a Lord, Your Grace? The—”

“My rule does not negate all the laws set out by my predecessors. Especially those laws that are worth keeping.”

“Even if I don’t want the title?” Gendry challenged, instantly regretting his choice to do so. He even winced at the sound but was soon comforted by the King’s answer.

“They still call me King Jon, so yes, the title of Lord is yours to have and yours to keep. Actually,” Jon began, taking a step back toward his makeshift desk, “that’s what I wanted to talk to you about.”

“Oh?” He looked to Davos, wondering now if the Knight had lied to him and if Gendry had only
been granted access to the King because the King had plans of his own.

“We need your help here in the smithy. Ser Davos explained to me that you’ve already worked to set those men in the right direction. I don’t mean to make you work but the effort is greatly appreciated.”

“Of course, Your Grace.”

“Once things have settled down here, I’d request that you head to Storm’s End. From my understanding, that castle also needs work but I doubt it’s something you can’t handle. I have a few of your uncle’s men who once called that place home. Others wish to stay near the capital but don’t wish to return to King’s Landing. I figure it wouldn’t hurt to have some women and children accompany the men, so you’ll be taking them as well. If you wish to have time before their arrival that can be arranged though—”


“Of course. Ser Davos and I will see to it that your departure is well prepared for. It’ll be of great importance that I have an ally so close. We need to start planning for a calmer, more peaceful future. The people of Westeros have seen far too much destruction and I can hardly take them all back to Winterfell.”

“Winterfell, Your Grace?”

“Temporarily. This island can hardly sustain a large family, much less all of King’s Landing.”

“The city is completely cleared out then?”

“Mostly. A few citizens have chosen to stay, though I worry for their survival, mostly because any supplies - food or otherwise - were lost to the fires.”

Gendry decided it was a rather tame way to refer to the Dragon-imposed genocide: 

fires — as if they were natural, wild, and free. “That’s admirable, Your Grace. Do you suspect their loyalties lie elsewhere?”
Before Ser Davos could intervene, Jon let out a hearty laugh. “Certainly not with their old queen or her usurper. I don’t suspect, I know that their loyalties lie with no one. They’re finding it hard to trust one another, let alone a ruler they barely know. As far as they’re concerned, I’m still a bastard.”

“Me too.” This time it was just Davos’ eyes that warned the Baratheon boy of his standing. “Your Grace,” he added once more, now with irritation in his voice, clearly aimed at the man that was meant to be his friend.

At one point, Gendry looked to Jon as a friend too. The world had changed since then and while Jon was thrust into his role as King, Gendry still found himself wanting to run from his title.

“Actually, Your Grace, if I may…”

“Yes, what is it? Ser Davos had mentioned you wanted to speak with me. Have a seat. Have you eaten?”

Gendry’s eyes narrowed. “No, Your Grace, thank you. I’ll be short. I know you have things to do and—”

“Nonsense, sit.”

“I...well I suppose I don’t have time because I have things to do.”

“Gendry?”

“Your sister—”

“Lady Sansa?”

“No, Your Grace. Arya. Ser Davos tells me she’s against having company.”

Jon looked away. “It’s true.”
“I was wondering, if I may, Your Grace, go see her perhaps?”

“Go see...Arya?” Jon finished, as if learning a simple phrase in a foreign language. “Whatever for?”

“We’re...she likely didn’t mention it to you but we were friends once.”

“No, she didn’t mention it to me.”

“She’s private, you know,” Gendry tried in an attempt to be supportive of the absent girl. “It doesn’t matter much but she helped me and I just wonder if...maybe she needs a friend right now.”

“What are you requesting, Gendry?”

“Just the ability to knock on her door. Maybe she’ll let me in.” His voice effortlessly changed tone. “I’m sure that sounds crazy,” Gendry began quickly, fumbling through the words with urgency. “I just have this feeling…”

“It does. Sound crazy,” Jon clarified. “And altogether inappropriate.”

“It’s not like that,” Gendry managed all too quickly. The lie fell from his lips with such finesse that even Ser Davos took note, clearly just as shocked as he was impressed.

“That still doesn’t mean it’s appropriate,” Jon sustained. “With all due respect, Gendry, if my begging can’t beckon my stubborn sister out of her chambers I don’t know what else will.”

“She is stubborn, Your Grace. I know that more than anyone. I just feel...it would mean a lot to me if you allowed it. I just need to talk to her for a moment. I think it’ll help her. At least I hope it will.”

Jon looked to the ocean then back again. “If Ser Davos does not mind accompanying you, I will allow you to knock on her door,” he emphasized. “But let it be known that I’m allowing it with the knowledge that she simply won’t open it for you. She must do this on her own terms. The things she’s seen and gone through—”
“Yes, Your Grace, and I wish to hear about those things... from her. ”

Jon almost laughed again - perhaps he had, but he turned away, back to the ocean before Gendry could bare witness. “It seems you share in my sister’s stubborn nature.”

“She’d agree with you, Your Grace.”

This time Jon did breathe out a chuckle. “Ser Davos, do you agree to accompany Gendry to Arya’s room?” It was refreshing, Gendry decided, to hear the King drop pretenses when it came to his own family. It was what Arya would want, and what she’d request had she been here.

“If that is what you wish, Your Grace.”

“I’ll allow it,” Jon said, almost in jest. “Afterward, I believe there’s an empty chamber down on the lower level. Ask a handmaid to prepare it for Lord Gendry.”

“Oh, Your Grace, I couldn’t. I’ll sleep out in the smithy.”

“Nonsense. It’s not proper.”

“But, Your Grace—”

“Listen, Gendry, all of these titles and rules mean little to me as well but I am playing along because believe it or not, the people crave stability and if a hierarchy provides that stability then it is my duty as their King, begrudgingly or not, to provide that for them.” He inhaled sharply. “If I am a King then you are a Lord and it’s not acceptable for a Lord to sleep outside with his help.”

“My help? Your Grace, I—”

“You wanted to knock on my sister’s door, did you not?” Jon offered, gesturing to the door. “Ser Davos...”
It was an invitation to leave so Gendry followed. Outside, Lord Tyrion rested against the wall taking a long swig from a wine bag.

“How was your piss?” Gendry joked.

Tyrion grinned in response. “By the look on your face it went far better than your meeting with the King.”

Gendry couldn’t respond. Already Davos was heading back down the steps. His silence was unnerving and the longer it continued the more restless Gendry became.

“That was foolish,” Ser Davos finally let out when they were far enough away from the King’s solar.

“Which part of it?”

“All of it,” he tossed back quickly. “If I had known that was what your request truly was, I wouldn’t have allowed it.”

“If you were that concerned, you should have asked.”

“I didn’t think you’d be so stupid,” Davos finally stated, turning quickly to face Gendry so the boy fumbled and struggled to regain his balance.

“If you all think I’m so stupid then none of this should worry you. I’ll knock on Arya’s door—”

“Princess Arya.”

“No. That’s one I won’t compromise on. Jon didn’t—”

“His Grace,” Davos insisted, annoyed he still had to.
Gendry exhaled. “I’ll knock on Arya’s door and nothing will come of it.”

Davos took a step back, revealing a rather simple door, one that looked much like the others. Their walk away from the King’s meeting room seemed far longer than it actually was. They had only gone down one level and turned. Only two knights stood outside the door. They looked confident but Gendry still outranked them in size. If he was truly a Lord now, he outranked them in other ways too. None of it mattered though; Arya didn’t need anyone’s protection.

With skeptical looks, some of them downright amused, each knight watched Gendry approach the door. He had a rucksack slung over his shoulder as if making a delivery or, much more boldly, planning to stay. Gendry looked back to the men as if to ask for more space. When they did not move he turned to the door and raised a clenched fist.

Then he knocked.

“Arya?”
Heeeeyyyy! Thanks so much to everyone who read/kudos/reviewed the last chapter. The support was awesome and I really appreciate it.

**Note: I’ve imagined how the series was going to end for awhile but I really liked what they did with Arya’s storyline last episode (8x05) when it came to her trying to save the same city that essentially broke her heart and essentially made her who she is. So ANYWAY, what I’m saying is I have no idea what’s going to happen tonight (8x06) but this is written without that knowledge so I’ve clearly written what I believe to be a reasonable conclusion BUT I’ve taken complete liberties to make the plot work with this story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There’s nothing; not a single sound on the other side of the door and for a moment the waves and the wind outside both ceased to exist as if to confirm Arya’s absence.

Gendry waited, feeling the glares of the men behind him sinking into his back. They wanted to see him fail as if Arya remaining in her room was a game they had all played and lost at. But they didn’t know Arya the way he did. If Gendry had to guess, they didn’t know Arya at all.

With one last breath of hope, Gendry moved his hand up again, ready to rap at the weathered wood with his knuckles. He didn’t need to. Arya was on the other side of the door, displayed only by a shadow when the sound of her movements failed them.

“Arya? Open up.” Gendry didn’t hear her exhale but he felt it.

“Gendry?”

He paused, a grin that was both satisfied and amused tugging at his lips. “Uh, yeah.”

“How do I know it’s you?”

He narrowed his eyes. “What do you mean ‘how do you know’ it’s me?”
Gendry imagined her on the other side of the door, calculating. “What was the last thing we did before I left?”

“What?” he squawked. “I’m not…” He turned to Davos, then back to the door. “I’m not alone. Pick another question.”

“What did you say to me that night?”

“I said a lot to you that night...nothing I want anyone else to hear.” Gendry was thankful then that Jon was absent. His aversion to her questions told more than his answers ever would.

It was clear to him then that Arya knew exactly what she was doing; it seemed this was a game to her as well. Gendry wasn’t yet aware but he had made it farther than the rest of them had. Usually Arya said nothing when called upon leading everyone to ponder if that day was the day she had finally climbed out her window and ran away.

“When’s the last time you saw me in a dress?” Arya asked finally.

“Acorn hall.” Gendry stated without hesitation. “You looked like a tree. An oak tree.” The door unlatched at once and he saw her, her eyes wide and her hair somewhat a mess, all of that overshadowed by a soft smile: relief. “But a nice oak tree,” he followed, likely unaware that he had even spoke. He was relieved too and his breath caught in his throat in quiet celebration.

Arya immediately grabbed for his tunic and pulled him inside. Gendry stumbled in, left only to watch as the room and its warmth swept over him in a single beat. Arya was dressed only in a smock, her silhouette effortlessly apparent even as she kept her body flat against the now latched door. Such a sight was equally painful when pressed up against him. Gendry could feel her nakedness, could smell her hair and her skin as she enveloped him in a crushing hug. All of her melted into him, her frigid form somehow using his broad frame to keep her up. It felt good to have her close and he wrapped his arms around her waist in appreciation. It had been a month since he’d seen her, let alone touched her, and despite what he’d heard she had been through she looked much the same. The only difference was the bandages on her arms and the way her hair was wild around her face, falling out of its plait and framing a few stray cuts along her jaw and forehead. Ironically, she looked as feminine as ever. The only time she looked more like a woman was when she had been laying above him in the stores, naked and painted in moonlight.

“I can’t believe you’re here,” Arya whispered into his chest. She could feel him too, the familiar
strength in his chest and how his presence made her feel safe.

“I can’t believe you let me in,” Gendry chuckled with a hand now cradling her neck.

He was smiling but then he felt Arya’s breath quicken and her chest tighten. It was possible he knew she was crying before she did. If the tears that soaked through his linen shirt or the tightened grip she now had around his abdomen wasn’t clue enough, Gendry actually felt Arya shake against him. Her sadness was so profound it was silent, making him wonder how long she’d been holding it all back.

“Hey, hey...it's okay.”

“I’m fine,” she mumbled, still using him to hide behind.

“Arya, I...”

“Just be quiet, alright?” She picked up her head only so she could look the other way, listening to his heartbeat from a different angle.

Gendry looked over her shoulder out the window where beyond the bustling bailey and the island it sat upon stood a vast expanse of ocean. “Yeah. Of course.” Finally he rubbed a hand down her back in an attempt to soothe her. “It’s okay,” he promised again. “It will be.”

“It’s not. It’s not okay.”

“Arya...”

Arya didn’t say anything but she had stopped crying. She was tender in his arms again, constantly strengthened by a resolve Gendry could never quite understand. But her list was complete now — he knew that much — and although she hadn’t been the one to finish it Gendry assumed there should have been some solace to accompany that truth.

All at once she pushed him away. She turned away to wipe at her eyes as if she could conceal or at least banish the grief he had just witnessed. Seeing it had Gendry wanting to pull her in again. The simple fact of seeing her again had her looking beautiful, leaving him speechless.
“Why are you here?” she tried calmly.

“I don’t...I just felt like I should come.”

“You should have stayed in Winterfell.”

Gendry furrowed a brow. “Why?”

“I’m not good company these days.”

“You seem like fine company to me.”

Arya padded over to her bed and sat down upon it. With one leg bent beneath her and the other swinging down off the mattress toward the floor, she certainly didn’t look like a lady. “You talked to Jon then?”

“And was corrected on his title many times, yes. I guess I can’t call you m’lady. What does one call a princess?”

“You call her Arya.” Her voice was startlingly dry.

Gendry was fond of it just the same. “Why are you staying in here? They’re worried.”

“I have nothing to say to anyone and I don’t want to force conversation.”

“Is this forcing conversation?”

Arya smirked. “Don’t push it. I’ll kick you out. I mean it.” When he said nothing she shifted, leaning back so she was propped up against her feather pillows. “Sit,” she insisted with a tap to the empty space she’d just created.
“I don’t…”

“No one else is here. I just…it’s nice to see you.”

“You too.” Seeing her arms and how the bandages upon them were tattered and tight, Gendry used the acknowledgement as an excuse to sit down. “Have you had anyone look at those?” he pointed, resisting the urge he had to reach out and touch her again. Selfishly he almost wished she were crying again; she needed his strength and he was all too happy to provide it. Seeing her in this state had him wondering if he’d ever experience the old her again; the one that embraced him because she was happy or excited or anything but sad, really.

“I don’t want visitors.”

“Then we need—”

“I’m not letting them see me. I’m fine. I’ve healed myself before and I’ll do it again.”

“Alright. But why…you don’t even want to see Jon?”

“Honestly, no. I barely know who he is anymore. He’s full of shit. His heart is broken and he’s acting like everything’s fine. Why? Because he’s King? Fuck the Iron Throne. None of this is okay.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Not now. Not yet.”

“Oh—”

“I don’t know what there is to talk about,” she sputtered out. “I can’t…it doesn’t make sense.”

“What doesn’t make sense?”
“That I’m here. After everything. And why? For what?”

“Why? For what ...what?” There was an urgency in Gendry’s voice.

Arya looked to him with heavy eyes. “You think I’m crazy,” she accused.

“I don’t think anything. I don’t know much of what’s going on.”

“They all think I’m crazy.”

“I don’t know if that’s true either. They’re concerned.”

“They shouldn’t be.”

“Well if you haven’t seen anyone since the siege...”

“I didn’t want to come here. I didn’t have a choice.”

“Where would you have gone?”

“I don’t know. Away?”

“Would I have ever seen you again?”

“Maybe. I’d hope so.”

“Well I’m here. To see you. To...help,” he felt he needed to add though he’s not sure if she understands he’s talking about helping her and not the cause. “What can I—”
“I told you I’m fine...have been fine.”

“Someone needs to look at you, Arya.”

“If you’re here to lecture me—”

Gendry raised his hands in surrender. “I’m not. I just—”

“Good. Or I’ll kick you out and not let you back in. I’m serious.”

“Why did you let me in then?”

“I missed you.” She may have missed him but she didn’t miss a beat. Maybe one had caused the other. “I didn’t know if I’d see you again.”

“Whose fault is that?”

“Don’t,” Arya warned.

“You’re right. Your chambers, your rules. That’s fair.”

“Where have they put you?”

“Hmm?”

“Sleeping. Have they found space for you? This bloody island is so damn crowded I don’t know how we haven’t sunk into the ocean yet.”

Gendry had to chuckle. “I offered to stay down in the smithy but your brother insisted I take a bed
“In the keep?”

“I suppose so. Is it rude if I decline?”

“Definitely. But you could do it anyway. If that’s what you wanted.” She couldn’t tell what he wanted but she knew what she wanted and was confused to even consider it might not be the same thing.

“I don’t...this is all a bit crazy.”

“Tell me about it. I’m...I’m terrified.”

Gendry’s brow furrowed. “Why? You’re the strongest person I know.”

Arya looked away. She swallowed down the lump in her throat that told her that she was close to tears again. Her vision was warm too. She didn’t know how she had anything left in her but some days the sobs didn’t stop. Today, however, with him sitting beside her, she was able to compose herself. “I’m not. I’m...I’m tired. I mean it. I just want to live my life and not have anyone expect anything of me—”

“I didn’t—”

Arya nodded, smiling. “I know. It’s not you. It’s them. The world. Everyone down in the bailey and beyond. And if I go back to Winterfell it’s not going to change.”

“Things are...uncertain now but they won’t always be this way. It’ll get easier. It has to.”

“You’ve always been stupidly optimistic.” Her criticism sounded like a compliment.

“Thanks?” He almost questioned causing them both to smirk.
“I missed you, you know,” she said plainly and without pretense. There was no room for apology in her tone beyond all the honesty.

“You said that.”

“And I meant it. Mean it,” Arya corrected, still grinning but looking down to where she fidgeted.

“It’s only been a few weeks.”

She looked back to him. “Feels like longer. It feels like I’ve lived a lifetime since then.”

~!~

Unlike Arya, Jon spent his days as King completing as many tasks as possible. He surrounded himself with an unnecessary amount of people: his hand and advisors, soldiers and knights alike. The company, even in their deference, was deafening. If he wasn’t alone he couldn’t hear the sounds of dragonfire and the screams for help. He couldn’t see the destruction and how the woman he loved craved power so much she let it consume her like a disease. His love, he was finding, never seemed to be enough. It killed Ygritte and it lead him to assume the Iron Throne mere hours after Dany took her own life. He’d rule alone, he assumed. He’d love his people just as he’d always loved his family and those in the North but he’d wear his crown like a mask to conceal all the pain that came along with his ascension to power.

It also didn’t help that Arya, the sister he had always held in such high regard, had deemed herself a recluse and was refusing to take company, even his own. He’d written to Sansa often asking for advice, but she always wrote back suggesting that Arya needed time. Two fortnights, Jon assumed, was more than enough time.

In between public meals and his walks through the city, Jon held council. There was still so much to figure out. With King’s Landing beyond recognition it was almost as if he was tasked with rebuilding all of Westeros. Today, however, he was too distracted. It was the first day in many that the thought he’d been doing his best to avoid bubbled to the surface and demanded his attention. It was a reminder that he was human and that the world around him and the life he was leading — whether he wanted it or not — was very, very real.

Afterward, Jon dismissed everyone. The armored men that typically stood on guard beside him were
asked to leave as well. Only Ser Davos and Tyrion remained and the two men awkwardly passed around the pitcher of wine while they waited for the King to speak. Finally, Jon set down the parchment he was looking at and voiced his thoughts.

“Did either of you know about Gendry and Arya?” It seemed all pretenses were dropped in private moments, pretenses owned by the same people that never asked for them and were playing along as if they owed it to the world.

Tyrion shrugged as if to give the smuggler the floor to share his opinions. Davos sighed. “Well—”

“When did he and Arya meet? I mean, how could—”

“It’s complicated.” Davos interjected. “That’s all he has ever told me. I know they were both young. Trauma, as you know, encourages bonding.”

“What kind of bonding?” The King’s voice was skeptical.

“As he said...they were young.”

“I was young once too,” Jon grumbled.

Tyrion sat forward and took the opportunity to refill his chalice. “He’s a good enough lad though, isn’t he? A little simple but a decent man. He’s done a lot for us.”

“Exactly. Don’t let his demeanor fool you. There’s a lot going on in that hot head of his. Gendry Waters is hardly simple,” Davos warned.

“Gendry Baratheon now,” Jon reminded, almost for the purpose of gauging their reactions.

Davos didn’t hesitate; he was pleased to be able to speak his mind. “He doesn’t want the title.”

“He made that clear but he has no option. I won’t rule by fire but I need him.”
“It seems Arya needs him too,” Tyrion smirked, sipping at his wine.

“I beg your pardon?”

Tyrion looked to Davos and raised his brows in challenge. The smuggler rolled his eyes and with arms crossed over his chest, he huffed. “She let him in. To her room. I was going to tell you but—”

“You’re lying.”

“I’m not.”

“She opened her door? For him?”

“She did. Rather effortlessly too. Asked him a question or two to confirm it was him but...she knew his voice through the door. She sounded happy...relieved.”

“That doesn’t make sense.”

“Little of Arya’s behavior has made sense since we brought her back,” Tyrion reminded.

“Well she can’t live in that room. She can’t hide from the world forever.”

“I don’t think...”

“And what frustrates me is that when she’s ready to leave she won’t say goodbye either. She’ll just vanish. It’s what she did last time. It’s just what she...does.”

“Won’t that require her to leave her room first?”
“I don’t know what happened to her but she’s not the sister I once had. I’m concerned. I’m confused. I don’t know what else to do.”

“Jon, the things she saw. A girl has a breaking point, doesn’t she?”

“The rest of us—”

“She’s been through enough. As a child...when does she get to breathe?”

Jon said nothing. Finally he scoffed: “She’s hardly a child.”

“With all due respect, I just think you need to be patient. Besides, she’s perfectly safe here. The girl can protect herself and it frees you up to continue reestablishing the kingdom.”

“I suppose.” A defeated expel of breath followed. “So what’ll she do? Continue collecting her meals? Not coming to dinner or breakfast or any of the gatherings? We just wait?”

“Yes, I suppose we do.”

“Do you think Gendry will be able to assist? Maybe he’s right. Maybe seeing an old friend—”

“Perhaps.”

“This is good then. You’ve set him up in one of the smaller quarters downstairs?”

“Aye. I have.”

“Great. Instruct him to take meals with us. Maybe he can convince her to join us.”

“He appreciated your offer and has requested to run the forge, just as he had at Winterfell and to be honest we need him.”
“Yes, he can spend his days doing that,” Jon acknowledged. “After lunch he will join us for council. It will be a good opportunity for him to see what my plans are and maybe figure out how he fits into all of it. Currently, aside from Sansa, he’s my only guaranteed ally. We’ll start tomorrow.”

Davos looked to Tyrion. “Tomorrow then.”

~!~

Eventually Davos and Tyrion were dismissed too, the pair hesitant to leave the King alone for they feared where his mind ran to when not accompanied. Sometimes they saw signs of a possible Mad King, proof that everyone could be driven to a certain level of insanity if tested enough. In all honesty neither man envied Jon’s new position, especially Tyrion who now realized there were other problems for the King to tend to - problems Ser Davos knew far more about than he was letting on.

This truth had Tyrion stopping on the steps, sending Davos lurching forward as he tripped over his own feet. “You,” the Lannister emphasized, “are a terrible liar.”

Davos pushed past Tyrion and continued his path down the steps. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“His Grace will learn eventually. Whatever is going on between the Smith and the Princess…”

“I don’t know what’s going on,” Davos insisted with his hands stuffed in his pockets. “I only know that he...they are close but they’re private,” he managed, pleased to be relieved of the information. “Gendry sent a raven after the battle asking about Arya so I wrote back something simple saying she was alive. Now he’s here.”

“I’m to believe that’s a coincidence?”

Davos looked over his shoulder. “You’re to keep your mouth shut.”

“You know,” Tyrion entertained, “typically hiding things from the King does not make you a good Hand.”
“This is hardly something he needs to know about. It’s innocent, I’m sure.”

The pair made it to a landing below, where just beyond several quarters were marked by small entryways. Tyrion made a show of his path, one that led him to stand with his hands behind his back just outside one of the rooms. It was the only one with its door open and inside the night sky peeked through the small window and draped the room in a deep blue. The hammer by the door and the leather apron hanging by the fire was telling. It was Gendry’s room and it was untouched.

Tyrion gave a smug smirk. He even gestured toward the room. “Is it though?”

Davos walked past, paying the empty room and its contents no mind. “Nonsense. The boy knows better than to push it. Friends or not he knows it’s not appropriate to spend this much time with her in private. He’s lucky we’re allowing it at all.”

“ We didn’t allow much. Arya let him in. And from the looks of it he would have knocked on the door regardless he was just trying to be polite.”

Davos turned around, causing Tyrion to sputter to a halt at the top of the last set of steps. It was like this with them often: a give and take of different energies. Combined they were every good and bad though a man — a king — could ever have, their roles as either constantly changing.

“Gendry’s smart. He clearly cares for the girl. That much is clear. He won’t do anything to risk that.”

Chapter End Notes

Reviews help me to write. Let me know what you think!

And best of luck for tonight’s series finale. For a realist I’m oddly optimistic? (Cue my heart breaking)

Thanks for reading!!
I can now happily announce that this fic is completely AU. I’m ignoring 8x06 altogether...for obvious reasons. One of my main gripes with it is the same thing that pushed me to write this story: Arya seeing the charred bodies of innocent people reminded her of her humanity. Also, even for an assassin, it’s traumatic. She had always killed guilty men and had done so without remorse. With the same energy she protected those who could not protect themselves. The Mad Queen’s attack, however, was one even she was powerless against and I think for someone like Arya who has really tried to take control of her own life and make it what she needs it to be for survival that would have her feeling very mentally unstable. Why am I explaining this? (Aside from my need to vent about that finale BECAUSE C’MON!?) If Arya seems a bit OOC it's intentional. As Davos said last chapter. “A girl has a breaking point.”

So with that, let’s continue...

Gendry’s outstretched arm tingled in search of feeling as he blinked himself awake. He was unsure if it was the bright sun and waves outside or the numbness in his left side that had him stirring but both suddenly seemed persistent. The cause of his discomfort, a rather peaceful looking Arya Stark curled up into his side, had Gendry pausing to both enjoy the moment and calculate his inevitable exit. He didn’t remember falling asleep last night and he certainly didn’t remember falling asleep with her. The last time they’d done this it had been a loud horn that stirred them, signaling the arrival of the Undead. It was nothing like this was now: quiet and perfectly warm and safe.

Arya’s lips were mere seconds from his skin, her mouth tucked in between Gendry’s ear and the slope of his broad shoulders. One hand gripped at his chest while the other lay claim to his bicep, curving her palm around his arm as if it were the perfect pillow. Her chemise had ridden up and Gendry could see the outline of her hips beneath. Arya never wore smallclothes. She had told him once how it made riding a horse inconvenient and when Gendry was bold enough to ask why she didn’t just ride side-saddle like a proper Lady she rolled her eyes and stomped away. He couldn’t imagine such a sight either but it was always amusing to rile her up, even if it often pushed her away — mostly because it also enticed her into coming back.

The current vision and feel of her sleeping next to him was innocent. Arya clung to Gendry like a child scared.

Before he could shift and even attempt to introduce blood back into his limp left side, there was a rather loud knocking at the door.
“Arya,” Gendry whispered in an attempt to rouse her. But the girl slept soundly. “Arya!” He hissed once more. She was never a sound sleeper but she clearly wasn’t lying when she had told him how exhausted she was. Apparently the danger of being caught in bed with a man that was not her husband or even her betrothed was not akin to the constant uncertainty of the Brotherhood or any of their shared nights at Harrenhal. Actually, curled into his side she looked content - a rarity considering needle was on the chest at the foot of the bed and not attached at her hip as it once had been.

Gendry would have laid here in bed with her forever if he could but it seemed there was always an inconvenient interruption — as if an interruption of any kind could ever be convenient. Though, it was worth noting, waking up in Arya Stark’s bed had Gendry fearing any man in the castle just as much as he once feared the Night King. The knock of the fist on the door was far more ominous than the horns that sounded at Winterfell. He’d tell Arya and she’d roll her eyes, if only she’d wake up.

“Arya,” he kicked finally.

Arya grumbled and turned away from him. “He does this every morning,” she mumbled sleepily. “If you ignore it he goes away.”

Gendry lifted up onto his forearms and looked to her incredulously. “He?”

“Jon.”

“The King? You ignore the King?”

“He’s not the King, he’s my foolish brother,” she scoffed. Her tone lacked more and more sleep with each passing word. “He can eat rocks.”

Gendry snorted out a laugh and Arya, her eyes still closed, was made to smile. The moment, however, was short lived.

“Arya?” The voice on the other side of the door came, now unmistakably belonging to Jon. Arya burrowed further into her pillow as if she were invincible. “I swear, Arya,” he continued, “these games aren’t funny. They can’t be played forever—”

All at once Arya pulled herself to her feet. She was a ball of fire when she moved like this —
incensed and motivated by a rage he didn’t think was possible to contain in such a small frame. Gendry watched as she wrapped a blanket around her shoulders, concealing the parts of herself she had once showed him so willingly. Similarly he looked down to his own attire. He didn’t remember when but he had shed his shirt in the night and was only in his linen smallclothes. His breeches were folded and hanging on the footboard at the end of the bed.

Though this was likely his cue to hide or at least begin dressing, Gendry was too mesmerized to move. Any other man would have cowered at the mere thought of a woman protecting him but Gendry was mostly entertained by it. This was Arya and this had always been Arya and though she currently existed in this altered state, the real her was clearly treading water just beneath the surface, waiting for a safe moment to come up for air.

“What?” Arya snapped as she yanked the door open. Jon immediately attempted to push inside but she was quicker. Her reflexes were like none Gendry had ever seen. That first night when he’d reached out to touch her, to feel the softness of her hips and the rest of her curves beneath his fingertips Arya grabbed his hands and held them upward, pushing them into the bags of grain they laid upon. She had kissed him for all he was worth then, turning him breathless - igniting him. She was in control and he didn’t mind. It didn’t matter when they wanted all the same things.

“Absolutely not,” Arya balked, causing Gendry to surge back to the present.

“Arya—”

“It’s not appropriate! I’m not dressed!”

“You’re my sister!”

“And we’re not Lannisters.”

Gendry snickered into his shoulder while the King took a clear beat to breathe out. “Don’t be disgusting,” Jon said simply.

“Please have them bring me up a plate,” Arya returned just as softly.

“No.”
“What?”

“No,” he repeated. “If you don’t come downstairs you don’t eat.”

“You can’t do that!”

“I can and I will.”

“Jon!”

Arya smacked on the door and watched as he walked away. She whined, even stomping her feet. “Ohhhgghhh?!” She groaned in dismissal as she trudged loudly back to the bed. “He can’t do that!”

“He’s the King. He can do what he wants,” Gendry reminded, still not moving. “Like kill me if he knows I was here last night. How did we…”

“I don’t remember.”

“How do I get out of here?”

Still wearing her blanket she pointed toward the door with a fist covered by the frayed wool edges. “You use the door.”

“There are knights outside that door.”

“I’ve threatened them on more than one occasion. They’re loyal to me.”

“More loyal than the are to the King?”
“Yes.” Arya didn’t even blink. "They've met needle."

“We...”

Arya stood. She reached across him to grab for his shirt which she soon tossed his way. The linen hit his face and fell down to his chest. “Off you go.”

Gendry smirked and rolled out of bed. “As m’lady commands,” he gestured, causing Arya to narrow her eyes in disgust.

His breeches were next. She hit him in the face with those too then as he stood to put them on she sat, watching. “You’ll come visit me later?”

“What?” Gendry looked up from tying the laces at his hips.

“What else do you have to do?”

“Work.”

“Work?”

“Such a rich girl,” he chided. “Yes, work.”

“Is that why you came here? To work?”

Gendry paused. “I think you know the answer to that.”

“Do I?”

Gendry tossed on his jerkin. He wasn’t sure if Arya’s sour face was due to his hesitance in answering her or his newly concealed skin. “I’ll come by later,” he promised.
“Because you feel obligated?”


When he took a step toward the door Arya stood, as if not wanting to lose the current distance that separated them. Her arms were over her chest but she leaned back, playing coy. “Later then?”

Gendry nodded and shook his head, releasing another chuckle. “Later.”

~!~

Sleeping in Arya’s chambers meant Gendry didn’t have the chance to admire his own. There was a single window that looked out onto the bailey and a chair beneath it to fill the empty space there. Gendry had never really had a room of his own and before now he didn’t seem to mind. He clearly didn’t know what had been kept from him his whole life and now he wondered how he’d walk away from it, if that was what Arya truly wanted to do. He hadn’t yet told her the news of his legitimization and subsequent acquisition as the new Lord of Storm’s End. Maybe he wouldn’t have to now.

Even the small bed pushed against the wall had a sturdier frame and a softer mattress than he was used to. The linens on the bed were far from being as nice as Arya’s but they were still more inviting than his usual burlap. He didn’t feel as if he belonged in this room yet he’d felt somewhat at home in with Arya. Gendry assumed the presence of the girl that drove him mad was his opinion’s main influence.

On the seat beneath the window laid a large bowl of water - clear water and a similarly clean cloth draped over the chair back in a way that was inviting. It felt silly to wash up before going out to the smithy but Gendry did it anyway. It was almost rude to reject the clear effort someone had made to make him comfortable.

This was why when he arrived down to the smithy the men that were already working turned to him and gave a scoff of disapproval.

“Bloody bastard gets the Keep,” one of them said, pointing at Gendry with the iron tongs he clutched.
“I was invited. I couldn’t say no,” Gendry reminded as he tied his leather apron around his waist.

“How are the beds? Soft?” Umfrey added, daydreaming while the other men continued on in disdain.

Gendry immediately thought of Arya, then cursed himself for doing so. “They’re fine.”

“Just fine? We can switch tonight if you wanted to remember how fine our beds are down here,” another man said. A loud cloud of belly laughter sounded from inside the smithy as the castle around them continued to come alive.

Gendry quickly got to work, focusing on all of the nails that still needed to be crafted. He actually missed dragonglass. He felt he had a purpose in Winterfell and there was an urgency that existed like an energy he’d never quite felt before. The cold helped, of course, as did Arya’s sporadic visits. But she wouldn’t be stopping by now and the men he worked with were right: he absolutely would have preferred to be back in the bed he’d shared with her last night.

“Gendry!”

He tossed his head upward as steel splinters fell to the ground below. Davos stood just outside the smithy, watching the newly appointed Lord toiling at the forge. It seemed they had ended up here again: with Gendry at work while Davos looked on, waiting for the perfect time to proposition the blacksmith.


Gendry tossed down his hammer and walked over to Davos. His men, as they always did, looked on in amazement. They may have made fun of him but Gendry’s peculiar placement in this world — his status in the in-between — was fascinating.

“Let’s take a walk,” Davos suggested. The Hand didn’t wait for Gendry’s response. It was an order, not a suggestion.

Gendry paused all the same. He tossed a thumb over his shoulder. “I need to—”
“Tomas,” Davos was calling out already. “Come finish this for Lord Gendry, would you?”

A heavy sigh fell from Gendry’s mouth rather easily as he wiped off his hands and began to follow Davos out of the smithy and toward the rest of the island where other trades stood in their own makeshift spaces, attempting to perform similar tasks in aid of their ash-ridden city. As they walked, Davos looked around. His hands stuffed in his pockets or holding his sword and belt comfortably at his waist, he didn’t even bother to look to Gendry as he spoke. Gendry wondered if he’d learned to be this casual from his days at sea. The best hiding spot was amongst the enemy, he’d once told him. These people were hardly the enemy but if Davos’ posture was any indication, Gendry didn’t need them hearing what the older man had to say.

“Where were you last night?”

Gendry shook his head and rolled his lips inward as if to tighten their seal. “Don’t know what you mean.”

“Because I shut your door before the moon came up. I shut it because you weren’t there and I didn’t want anyone to know.”

“I...”

“Was with the princess, I assume,” Davos offered in feigned assistance.

“We’re—”

“Lying, clearly.”

Gendry’s shoulders slumped. “What do you want me to say?”

Davos turned, causing Gendry to stop walking as well. They stood facing one another, Gendry’s broad shoulders and height still no match for Davos’ authority. “That you won’t be that stupid again,” he ordered simply. “Do you know what they can do to you?”
“I came here for her. I won’t stop seeing her. She opened the door for me,” he reminded with an irritated whine. “Doesn’t that count for something?”

“It does actually. And His Grace will discuss that with you.”

“Discuss it?”

“We’ll be meeting after lunch. Wash up and be prompt. I set you out some clean clothing.”

Gendry smirked. “I’m not playing Lord. Even if it pleases the King. I’m not—”

“If you want to see the princess I suggest you do.” Davos moved to shuffle away in a way that essentially dismissed Gendry.

Before he could, Gendry called him back. His volume revealed that he clearly forgot Davos’ clear plan to avoid suspicion. That, or he didn’t care; he was the very thing the man was accusing him of — careless.

“Why are you doing this? Why are you covering for me?”

“I’m not doing it just for you. That girl has been through enough,” Davos hushed as he took a step back in. “If you make her smile you may be the only thing that does. I think I can do my best to turn a blind eye for that.”

~!~

“Uh, thank you,” Gendry managed. The smile he shared with the servant girl was returned for just a little too long, adding to how uncomfortable he already felt being in this room. Fruits and cheeses and wine were spread out before them like treasure and Gendry watched nervously as each man talked to one another or looked down at papers he couldn’t decipher, eating all the while. It didn’t help that it was now a full day and it was likely Arya had made it through the hours without eating. Her stubbornness, Gendry resolved, would keep her satisfied until morning.
The conclusion had Gendry looking to Jon. He hid behind the cup he held to his lips, wearing the silver like a mask while he took stock of everyone in the room, trying to predict how all of this was going to go. Inevitably he looked to the King, wondering if Jon really did not know that he had slept in Arya’s bed the night before. That thought was enough to terrify him so much that he didn’t consider the other things the King didn’t know: that first night in the stores with Arya and then the one that followed, the last one in her chambers where for only a moment things seemed so perfect.

“Lord Gendry?”

The Baratheon boy looked up, disrupting the drowning gaze he held with his still full chalice. “I’m sorry, Your Grace.”

“I was wondering if you had considered a timeline. For your departure.”

“I...no, Your Grace, I haven’t. My apologies I...there’s a lot to be done. I’ve only just started on the portcullis.”

“What?”

“Lord Gendry has taken it upon himself to reinforce Dragonstone's crumbling infrastructure,” Tyrion offered, forcing Gendry to remember that he and Jon were not alone.

“The portcullis, it’s...it’s failing. I’m sorry I thought you knew. Did I misunderstand? Are we not fixing Dragonstone?” Gendry inquired, looking around for assistance. One of them had approved his offer, though he couldn’t remember who.

“No, we are,” the King assured. “I just haven’t figured who it will be going to.” Jon sat back and sighed, taking the moment to rub at his face in frustration.

Gendry persisted. “Wouldn’t it be wise to keep it for the Kingdom?”

“How so?”

“In case King’s Landing is ever under attack again.”
“Perhaps. I suppose then that is wise.”

“I can start on King’s Landing if you prefer,” Gendry offered. “Though that’d require a trip and—“

“You needn’t concern yourself with all of that,” Jon insisted.

“Your Grace, I...if that’s what you want.”

Gendry sank back into his chair, fading into the background of a meeting that actually grew to be quite tense. He paid attention and made note of everyone’s differing standpoints but he only interjected when he was called upon. If this life was thrust upon him and he had no choice but to embrace it at least he’d be informed but a strong ruler, he was not. And if Davos was Hand of the King, who would advise him?

Arya...

“Lord Gendry, stay would you?” he looked up again, unsure of how he’d lost his senses once more. He had slept soundly last night. In fact it was the most sleep he could ever remember getting. Gendry assumed now that that was the problem; though he’d left Arya’s bed many hours before there was still a large part of him that was left behind.

“Alone...” Jon added to his request when he saw Tyrion and Davos trailing slowly behind the guards. They left the room with a pronounced slam of the door, something Tyrion would no doubt blame on the shift of the wind in and out of the castle. Davos heard it for what it was: a warning given in jest.

“Yes, Your Grace?”

“Can we drop the titles? Is that okay with you?”

“Yes...Your Grace,” Gendry finished awkwardly.
Jon smiled and sat back. He latched his hands over his abdomen and stretched his feet out in front of him beneath the table. “I’ve been told that Arya opened her door for you.”

“She did.”

“That’s interesting.” Gendry didn’t know what to say so he sat silent and waited for what he believed to be an inevitable elaboration. “What did she say?”

“We...I don’t know. We didn’t really talk.”

“You didn’t talk?”

Panic flashed across Gendry’s features and he swallowed in an attempt to regain any and all lost composure. “She asked about my journey, I guess.”

“Is she okay?”

“Seemed to be. I’m sure she’d be better if she was given food.”

“If she went down to the kitchen she could—”

“Arya doesn’t like attention,” Gendry gave plainly. “Surely you know this.”

Jon dropped his head back and laughed. "Aye, I do. But it wasn't always like this, you know. When we were little she didn’t mind. She did anything to have her mother and father’s attention. Her mother usually looked on in shame...embarrassment at the girl she was...or the girl her mother wishes she was. Our father...there was always a bit of pride there. Arya was always his favorite. She loved getting his attention.”

“She’s a woman now. A lot has happened since then.”

“Clearly more you know about than I do.” Gendry sighed so Jon waited. “If you know something, Gendry, please speak freely. Our fathers were once friends and I certainly looked at you as a friend
before all of this. I hope my new title doesn’t ruin that - I’d hope it wouldn’t. Believe it or not but like Arya, I don’t like attention either. I don’t particularly like playing the hero. I’d honestly prefer to be back in Winterfell but that’s between you and me. I have a duty.”

Gendry couldn’t help himself. He sat forward and quirked a brow in question. “Arya has no duty. She owes nothing to anyone.”

Jon contemplated. “You’re right. But she’s a Stark and this is still King’s Landing. Starks don’t last long in King’s Landing so if she just aims to leave, I can respect that. I’ll even help her to go. But disappearing like this...people talk and when I’m trying to keep the peace it doesn’t help that on top of all they say about me they’re also saying nonsense things about her.”

“Well with all due respect, they can fuck right off.”

Jon snorted. “I’d agree with you there...though I can’t say that. If you’d like to...well, actually, I wouldn’t recommend that either.”

The two men shared a laugh in a way that suggested they were still bastards and existed in a much simpler life somewhere else completely. When it quieted down, Gendry nodded. “I know only what Arya has told me. It’s why I wouldn’t feel right telling you anything. Anything you want to know should come from Arya. You are a friend. I mean that. But Arya was in my life first. I wouldn’t disrespect her like that.”

Jon paused. “I guess I can respect that too.”

Hesitantly, he nodded. “Right. Good.”

“I trust you, Gendry. And I wanted to let you know that I appreciated what you did for us in Winterfell and I’m sure you’ll be of great service here as well. I’m glad the Dragon Queen did what she did and I hope you’ll understand your own duty and what it means to the Seven Kingdoms. You’ll be a wonderful Lord of Storm’s End and your alliance could really help me. And,” Jon started in a less serious tone, “if you can get my sister to come out of her chambers that’d be nice too.”

Without being dismissed, Gendry stood. Jon’s light demeanor had him feeling more confident than he should have. The declaration that followed held a similar theme. “I can’t force your sister to do anything. No one can.”
As he walked out of John’s solar only moments later Gendry couldn’t remember if Jon had responded to his statement. It didn’t matter, a fact that was emphasized by the lack of light filtering out from beneath Arya’s door. He paused but ultimately kept walking, toward the steps then down to the chambers he had been admiring only that morning — hours that seemed so far away now. As he laid alone in bed that night Gendry wondered if it was the darkness or the lies he’d told the King that kept him from knocking.
Honey

Chapter Notes

This is ROUGH. Reviews dropped last chapter and work has been insane so my confidence in my writing and my motivation to share it has been shit, to say the least. You’ve been warned?

(But also a big thank you to those of you who did read/review/kudos...this mess of a chapter is for you lovely humans!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Arya felt she was being punished. She could only remember one time at Winterfell when it had been like this: her mother had scolded her for dirtying a brand new frock and she was locked away in her room, told she couldn’t attend the same party she’d hoped to avoid in the first place. She’d escaped that night, climbed down a wall similar to the one Bran had been pushed from - her heeled boots slick against the icy stone maneuvering easily with the help of several carefully placed windows. Things were easier, she had found, when you were in control. Sneaking out was something characteristic and almost cute for a young girl to do. She was constantly breaking her mother’s rules, causing arguments between her parents over what her role as a lady should be, even so young. Her life had been planned out for her and she had a surname that granted her the privilege to make those choices. A lady could choose not to be a lady; a common girl wouldn’t even consider that her station in life was an option, one she was capable of changing.

Those same commoners, like the mother and daughter Arya had attempted to help in King’s Landing, were merely victims of their circumstances. Who was to say if their fates would have played out differently once the Mad Queen ascended the throne? Arya found all rulers to be mad and hoped her brother would rid himself of the title quickly. It did not matter that the throne was rightfully his or that it looked as if he was actually capable of bringing peace and prosperity to Westeros. If the dragonfire in King’s Landing had taught her anything it was this: Monarchies were a farce. People were not meant to rule or be ruled.

Looking back on that day, one she pondered on just as much as she winced at each flash of passing memory, Arya battled with her escape. Like her title, an opportunity had been presented to her in the form of a white horse and she willingly took it, riding out of the city in a way that was surreal and almost dreamlike. Time sharpened the moment into focus, convincing Arya of what it truly was: she was not escaping, she was a little girl running scared. Arya had made herself so numb to fear she’d almost forgotten what it felt like. She added terror to the heap with all her other recently awoken feelings: love, lust, respect, longing …

Terror was banished the night before the Undead arrived and again just a few days ago when she’d heard his voice on the other side of her door; Gendry was every remaining fibre of human in her being and as he always had, Arya was currently infuriated with him. When he didn’t visit her as he
promised, Arya fell asleep, thankful for her relentless exhaustion for overshadowing her fury. It also didn’t help that beyond his company she was craving the food she knew he’d bring, food that was eventually left at her door by an apologetic Ser Davos. The porridge turned cold and began to thicken, cementing the wooden spoon to the base of the bowl. Arya only managed to grab for the pitcher of water before locking herself back in her room. Every day was a reminder that she needed to be elsewhere, a thought that up until now had her envisioning herself seeking Gendry out, wherever he was. But she knew where he was. As she sipped at her water she watched him down in the smithy.

That seemed like hours ago. Arya’s sleep was fitful at best, leading her to drift in and out of sleep while she sat by the fire, rolling Needle’s intricate handle between her palms in an attempt to keep herself busy. It was a groan of her aching stomach that had Arya blinking herself awake. Her hands and feet were cold and the room was almost dark as the fire meant to warm her was mere ash now. Arya stood, ready to tend to it when she heard a knock at the door.

“Arya,” it came gently, so gently she believed for a moment that she may have still been sleeping and was simply lost in a dream. Then: “Arya!” It was confirmation that she was very much awake as she now pictured Gendry with his fist to the wood, insisting upon entry. She huffed and turned away from the door, deciding her need for a fire was currently stronger than her hunger.

“Open up, ‘Arry,” Gendry finally joked from the other side of the door, causing a newly-warmed Arya to stiffen and look to the entrance once more.

“A little late, don’t you think?” she called out.

“Well better late than never...which is what it’s going to be if someone sees me standing outside your door for much longer…”

She tightened the wrap around her shoulders and shuffled silently toward the door. “Are you alone?”

“Aye,” his Flea Bottom drawl confirmed in an almost sultry way. “And I have food.”

She didn’t know if the pain in her stomach was starvation or the yearning of a different kind, both of which could be cured by the man in the hallway. Either way she opened the door for Gendry and couldn’t help but to smile as she took in the sight of him carrying a servant’s tray full of goods. Arya was so distracted she didn’t notice that it was him pushing her back into the room so he could latch and lock the door. Her senses were practically nonexistent with her in this state: hungry and embarrassingly so. Arya moved to grab for the tray but was stopped when she witnessed Gendry lift it up out of her reach.
“Hey!”

“Promise me,” Gendry began, still holding the tray up high as if it were of no consequence to him.

“Promise you what?”

“I bring this with conditions.”

“Men and their conditions,” Arya grumbled.

Gendry found the comment to be off putting but he shrugged it off in pursuit of the larger goal: “I want to look at your burns.”

She scoffed out a laugh and padded back toward the bed. “No.”

“Then you starve.”

“Gendry!” Arya stomped.

“It’s me!”

“Exactly!”

His forehead creased as he took her in. “What does that mean?”

They were family, weren’t they? He had seen all she had to offer the world and the parts she kept hidden. They once shared secrets but that was years ago. Too much had happened since then but Gendry assumed that what he did know could be explored; he only lacked the knowledge because of the time and distance that previously separated them. They had forever to get reacquainted. Wasn’t that what this — her survival and his — all was for?
“It means...they’re ugly and they’re healing and they’re fine.”

“They don’t look fine. At all. And they don’t look like they’re healing. In fact they look—”

Arya groaned. She pushed at his shoulders then stomped away, repositioning her shawl as she did so. “Fine, you big bull...bullying me.”

“Bullying you?” Gendry chuckled. “I brought you supper and medical care. I’m practically a knight.”

“I don’t need a knight.”

“A friend then?” Gendry rolled his eyes and handed her the tray of food. He watched as she started to eat. “What do you do all day?”


He perked up. “I need help with that actually.”

“Taking a bath?”

“No,” he laughed. “Reading.”

“Oh.”

He waited before trying again. “Will you help me?”

Arya seemed hesitant too. “You want me to...teach you...to read?”
“Yes. Why? Who else?”

“I don’t...I’ve never really taught anyone anything before. I don’t know if I’d be good at it.”

“Well I can’t read for shit so...”

Arya laughed but continued to eat. She had returned her attention to the dwindling fire and even walked toward the barely-there flame when she felt as if she’d finally had enough to eat, or at least enough to hold her over until she could manage another meal. Her appetite had not yet returned but at least she was not rejecting everything she ate as she originally did when she was brought back to Dragonstone.

Those days felt like a lifetime ago. Arya padded toward the fireplace and tossed in the last of the remaining wood. The scraps crackled before igniting, creating temporary heat and fleeting light.

“It’s habit but I don’t know why I do it,” she thought, aloud. “This room is wickedly hot.” It was, she figured, though it hadn’t been before he arrived. It was as if Gendry had brought the forge to her, warming every part of her that previously felt so cold in his absence.

“It’s not Winterfell,” he reminded simply.

“That’s painfully clear.”

“I can take you back.”

“I don’t need company.”

Gendry sighed. “I’m not here to save you, Arya. I’m here to...let me in, alright? As a friend.”

Arya sipped at her ale. “Well I don’t know if I’m ready to go back.”

“So you’ll stay here...locked away?”
“I’m working on it.”

“What? Your escape?”

“No. A plan. One that makes sense...can we get this over with?” she stammered, looking over her shoulder with an impatient glare he imagined she had learned for Sansa or even her own mother.

“Oh. Yeah. Sure,” he managed quickly.

He reached past her and she watched as he grabbed for the single jar on her tray. He didn’t uncap the jar but instead set the glass down upon the bed. The contents inside did not move even as Arya repositioned herself in front of him, moving so more of her weight was atop the feather mattress and closer to him.

“Take those off,” Gendry instructed, pointing to the thick muslin bandages that covered Arya’s arms.

“Bossy,” she quipped, all the while complying.

Gendry smirked. “I’m sorry Princess Arya. Please take your bandages off, your highness.”

Arya couldn’t help but to laugh and she did so in a way that contradicted all other forms of propriety she had attempted to impose before now. It was a laugh Gendry remembered hearing from when they were younger — a laugh she only let slip when she was feeling the most relaxed and the most comfortable. In all her calm, Arya gave in simply and began to unravel the cloth surrounding her forearms. She stopped though and looked back to him. “They’re ugly,” she warned.

“So?”

“I’m fine. I mean it,” Arya insisted.

“Good. Let’s see them then.”
It was a slow unveiling but as more and more skin came into view even Gendry, a man well acquainted with heat and flame, found each burn to be more blistered and angry-looking than the last. Some of the skin had already begun to scab but Arya didn’t flinch. She stood by her burns as if she was proud of them. If she weren’t (and Gendry knew she wasn’t) she at least would not apologize for them. It was Stark pride written across her features as she sat stoic and pretended as if the night air now kissing her skin was not introducing an additional level of discomfort she clearly hadn’t experienced in days.

“Do they hurt?”

“What do you think?”

“These should be more healed by now,” he said, predicting the eye-roll Arya gave immediately thereafter.

“I know.”

Even so, his calloused fingers skidded gently across her skin, applying only the smallest of pressure to certain areas to test Arya’s sensitivity. A small wince or a prolonged blink was all he could manage from her. Otherwise she was silent and unmoving, as if her healing was an inconvenience allowed for Gendry’s benefit.

“You should have let someone take a look at you, Arya—”

“Don’t lecture me.”

“Right.”

Arya was in too much pain to turn to him fully. She sat facing the window and Gendry sat directly behind her. If he leaned forward he could embrace her in his arms or donate a path of soft kisses to the curve of her mostly unscathed neck. These were the things she focused on, just as she had in the weeks prior to his arrival, that made all of this more bearable. Things were better once, Arya reminded herself, and with him so close even when she was in pain she had the foolishness to believe that maybe someday they’d be good again.

“What in the bloody hells is that?” she finally squawked as the concoction contained in Gendry’s jar
was on his fingers then on her tender skin. The substance’s temperature sent shivers down her back
and she twisted toward him in a shock-fueled rage.

“Honey.”

“Excuse me?”

“Are you really questioning my methods? The man that works with fire everyday and has for most of
his life? Don’t you think if anyone knows how to fix a burn it’s me?”

She blinked, feeling rather stupid. “Will it hurt?”

“It shouldn’t,” Gendry gave, shaking his head. Effortlessly he returned to his task and like Arya’s
father had once done, he began talking to her as he treated her wounds in an attempt to distract her
from the spike in pain that always occurred right before the healing. “Might sting a bit but it’ll take
away the heat and soften the skin.”

“Alright,” she nodded resolutely. “Go on then.”

He had already continued and was now moving on to her second arm. Arya’s fingers were as clean
as he’d ever seen them and sitting before him in just a nightgown Gendry struggled to focus on the
inflamed skin he was meant to be tending to. He could smell her too, somewhere above the sweet
scent of honey in the air was the faintest note of lavender and fig. The mere acknowledgement of
such a scent had him transported back to their night in the grain stores.

“Give it a bit,” Gendry finally said as he broke from his recent reverie. “It’ll start to settle in.”

Arya looked to where he was pushing the cork back into the small pot of honey as if dismissing it
from its task. “To my skin?” Her voice sounded offended, causing Gendry to chuckle.

“Where else?” he joked.

“Wait—”
“What?”

“What’s a...I don’t know if it’s a burn but...on my shoulder...”

Gendry paused. “Can I see?”

“Hand me your shirt.”

“What? I’ve seen—”

“Hand me your shirt,” Arya stated just as strongly.

He complied and while the rough linen was pulled over his head Arya took the opportunity to observe him: the same muscles she’d watched grow flexing to provide her comfort - the same muscles that had only moments ago prompted a touch that was as gentle as she could imagine. The item being handed to her had Arya’s eyes traveling from the patch of hair below Gendry’s navel back up to his eyes.

Arya swallowed as she turned away again. The honey on her arms was sticky but the cool air coming in off the ocean provided for a calming contrast and as the salve began to dry Arya found it easier to move, first untying the lace that kept her shift secure upon her chest. With the garment loosened it fell down off her shoulders but before Gendry could notice the injury covering most of her back, he saw the swell of her breasts disappearing beneath a shirt — his shirt. He swallowed and suddenly he felt like a teenager, like the same teenage boy that once lusted for her at Harrenhal when he had far more to be concerning himself with, the most important being their survival beyond the cursed castle.

“Well?”

Gendry looked down and found that if it weren’t for the width of Arya’s hips the chemise would have fallen away completely, even in her seated state. He cleared his throat before returning his attention to the area in question. A large gash spread from the middle of her back, up toward her right shoulder. It was mostly scarlet, with vermillion veins spreading unevenly between purple blotches that stained her normally milky complexion into somewhat of a constellation. Whirls of intermingling bruising and blisters all fought against one another to heal. Around the wound was a darker ring of almost black skin. Patches nearby were raw while others were dry and peeling. It was the ugliest of
masterpieces and the sight of it applied a prick of pain to Gendry’s eyes. He cleared his throat and sat up, willing himself not to cry.

“It’s not... I don’t know if... some of it’s a burn but some of it’s a gash... like blood under the skin,” he explained. “What happened?”

“I don’t even remember. There was this wall but... I woke up and everything was dark. There was... I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Then we won’t talk about it,” he agreed, almost in relief. Quickly he was uncorking the jar and with the same faint touch he painted her back with soft swirls of honey. Then, when Arya thought he was done, he leaned forward, not to re-cork the bottle but to blow on the raw skin. She felt all of him close — too close — as he breathed out upon her bruises and scars, willing them to disappear. It was her turn to cry but instead she looked away.

Still holding Gendry’s shirt to her chest, Arya sniffled and wiped at her nose as she began to clutch the linen to her stomach in an attempt to bury the sob that escaped from her throat.

“Arya...” Gendry tried to mollify, his voice in a panic. “It’s okay...”

“I was so scared.”

He leaned forward but did not touch her. “Arya, you’re okay. It’s... it’s over with.”

Arya redistributed her weight and moved so she was facing Gendry again. Her bent knee was practically in his lap and if she shifted, all of her mass would have fallen to him. She remained upright but only barely. “I just keep seeing them. Everyone. These poor people that didn’t care about kings or queens. They just wanted to live their lives in peace. They wanted to take care of their families. They just wanted to be left alone.”

“Alright, love...”

Arya wept at his softness. “I don’t remember ever crying this much. Why can’t I stop?” she whined as she wiped at the tears that fell with a frustrated palm.
“It doesn’t make you weak. You’ve been strong for so long. It’s okay to...it really is.”

Soon she was quiet. His voice and the innocent touch he shared with her had a calming effect. For the first time in weeks, despite the injuries and her pain, Arya felt safe and things felt right. This was the only kind of alone she wanted — alone with him.

She picked her head up from his chest and with doe-eyes resisted the urge to reach out and touch his cheek. “You’ll stay?”

“Hmm?”

“With me. Tonight.” For a brief moment her eyes gestured toward the bed.

“Oh, I...”

Her brows furrowed. “Or not.” She leaned back, returning to her upright position beside him.

“Your brother knows I—”

“Knows you’re here right now?”

“No. Not at all. Hopefully not.”

“Hopefully not?”

“I shouldn’t be here, Arya. I promised him...I told him that—”

“What did you tell him?”

“I can’t stay in here.” Then: “I don’t want to push it.”
“Okay.” Her tone was bitter and biting, causing Arya to stand and go to the fire. If she hadn’t burned through them she would have tossed in a log and reveled in the sparks that flew up. She was doing her best to get reacquainted with the heat and smell and sight of flame. Once upon a time it had brought her great comfort; some of her best moments happened before fires, the most recent being their reunion in the forge at Winterfell. But Dragonstone was not Winterfell and it was positively too warm in this room. Be it the temperature or something else, it was difficult to breathe.

“Arya don’t be mad at me.”

“I’m not,” she confirmed. She was back to the featherbed now. Without warning she tossed his shirt at him and quickly worked to re-tie her nightgown into place. Any nakedness was concealed by her clear hurt and Gendry was speechless, unsure of how to proceed. All the while her scent lingered on his shirt which he was hesitant to put back on. Stains of honey and even some faint traces of blood marked the cotton. It didn’t feel like the fabric was his anymore, especially as Arya looked foreign in her nightdress. Suddenly he missed her breeches and jerkins. He missed seeing a sword at her hip.

Gendry stood and sighed. Despite his reluctance he did toss his shirt back over his head. He even tucked it in to his breeches. Arya, he reminded himself, didn’t truly know the world outside her chambers and how his mere existence beside her was a threat to both of them. Then again she was always blind to social etiquette. It was one of the many reasons he...

“I’ll see you in the morning?” Gendry asked, now with a hand to the door’s latch.

“Will you?” Her arms were crossed over her chest in a way that banished all the progress they’d made together, applying honey to her broken skin and waiting for it to dry.

“Arya, please...”

Gendry didn’t know when it had happened but she was standing in front of him now, using the same curled metal his hand rested upon to tug the heavy wooden door open. She did so without regard for their state, as if the knights outside don’t exist anymore. Gendry stood corrected: this room was its own little world. And Arya knew the world outside quite well; she just didn’t care.

“Goodnight, Gendry.”

He didn’t know what his response was or even if he had responded at all. Soon he was standing
back in the hall with nothing but the sound of the door slamming behind him as company. The corridor was vacant and Arya’s knights were gone.

~!~

Gendry’s journey back to his room was a slow but deliberate one. He had lied to Jon upon arriving and did so without a second thought in the hopes that it would aid Arya in her recovery. Now he had pushed away the same girl he wanted to help, and all for the King he had lied to.

Getting back into his room his own body felt sore and his feet felt heavy. He tossed off the dirty shirt and made no motion to set it upon the nearby chair as he had the previous nights. It remained in a mass on the floor as he headed for bed, his face freshly washed and one last image in his mind of the waves crashing on the shore in the distance, beyond the walls of the castle.

He peeled back his sheet, ready to collapse when a knock sounded at the door. It was hollow and faint but it had him stiffening. The candle beside his bed flickered as a gust of wind invaded the tiny space. Compared to Arya’s chambers this was almost a jail cell. Compared to what he was used to it was lavish and he was grateful.

Gendry rolled his shoulders then slowly released the heavy door from its frame, causing it to creak open. Arya stood outside, her shift covering her body and a cloak wrapped around her shoulders. Gendry stepped aside, not thinking once about the sense that had put them in this situation, only concerning himself with her presence right outside his bedroom door. He could only be so smart around her before his feelings overshadowed his grip on reality. The roles were reversed now; she had kicked him out and now demanded to be let in.

He latched the door and turned around. All he saw was her blanket on the ground, in a perfect halo beside the same stained shirt that previously concealed her. Without an explanation or an apology, she was getting into his bed.

“Arya...”

Already she was on her side, her nose only inches from the stone wall as she showed him nothing but her back. Her shift fell off her shoulder, revealing the same skin he had tried to heal. “I didn’t have nightmares the first night you came,” she whispered, almost breathlessly. “For the first time since...everything.”
“I—”

“Don’t touch me. I just need to...it was nice and I want that again so I’m staying here and I’d like you to be okay with that.”

Although she couldn’t see him, Gendry nodded. “Yeah. Of course.”

Arya pulled up the scratchy wool blanket that laid atop the sheet she rested beneath. The same air he’d used to soothe her wounds was given to the nearby candle, cloaking the room in darkness with nothing but the light of the moon to guide him toward the bed. There was no option with his broad frame and the already too-small bed, for Gendry not to be pressed into her. Sleeping on his side made sense but he couldn’t touch her; she had insisted he didn’t. She was also already asleep and when he woke the next morning she was gone, just as quick as she’d come. It felt like a dream, the worst kind that had him wishing he’d never fallen asleep in the first place.

Chapter End Notes

So I’m the worst and I’ve been obsessing over this modern Gendrya story I have in my head. I really want to write it *but* I told myself I needed to finish this first AND I’m only going to post it if people care? So basically you should review so I can finish this current Gendrya story that I believe in and love and then can start a new story that I also believe in and love. That totally makes sense, right?

Thanks for reading!!! xx
OH. MY. GOD!!! Seven ACTUAL Hells! The last chapter received the most reviews I’ve ever gotten on a single chapter in all my fic-writing career. Holy moly. I’m still so amazed AND HONORED. And did I mention they were THE BEST reviews that I will totally respond to (whether you like it or not.)?

I’m a girl of my word and support absolutely motivates me to crank out quality chapters as quickly as possible so here we are! I’m hoping this trend continues! I spend my weekends out of the city/up at the lake so writing is sometimes difficult but reviews will be lovely encouragement to brainstorm and come back on Monday, ready to post again.

Ya’ll are FIRE and I appreciate it so, so much!

x. Elle

Her body was gone but Gendry could smell Arya in his sheets. When he rolled over and groaned to curse the empty space beside him, every part of her flooded his senses. He didn’t know when she’d left but he surmised it had to have been well into the middle of the night. The fire in his room had turned grey and cold and the moon above the Keep was still high over the shoreline which the high-tide had pushed farther up the sea wall than it had been only hours before.

Gendry hadn’t fallen asleep right away. For one, Arya’s proximity limited his space and with her asking him not to touch her he did his best to keep a considerable distance between the two of them. This meant that his back ached as he sat up in bed from the way his spine supported all of his weight while he spent the night leaning away from her. Ironically enough though, when Gendry had stirred, maybe an hour and several more later, Arya had her hand pressed to his chest and her face buried in his shoulder. He was sweating but she didn’t seem to mind and he certainly wasn’t going to move her. She wanted to be here, he reminded himself and he had come to this very castle to be a steady presence for her. Even in their strife they were just what the other needed. Even in the silence, Arya knew how much Gendry cared for her and he, similarly, had a heart that broke at the mere consideration that Arya could even dare to think him leaving her room had anything to do with her.

Gendry washed up as best he could before taking a freshly laundered set of breeches and a rather soft tunic out into the hallway with him. He paused, wondering if he could make it up to Arya’s chambers without incident. The knight that stood outside his door last night (Gendry had seen the shadows) was clearly back at his post with his counterpart. Gendry did not travel up the steps but at a certain point descending them he caught a glimpse of light filtering out from beneath Arya’s door. He almost wished it had been dark. He knew now she hadn’t been sleeping and that was all he wanted for her on most days: rest and calm and safety.
“Lord Gendry!”

It was still so foreign to be called upon and now to be called upon with a title Gendry didn’t feel he deserved. Even so he looked toward the voice to find a teenage girl walking his way, her hips swaying in the same way her voice almost sang as she offered him a cup of coffee.

“Oh, no, I—” Gendry stammered as he raised his hand to show his hesitance.

“Don’t be offensive now, lad,” the maid drawled as she leaned in. “You’re a Lord. This is what Lords do.”

“Drink coffee?”

“Yes. In the mornings. And other expensive spirits in the afternoon.”

“Just because I can do something doesn’t mean I care to,” Gendry asserted, already beginning to walk around the woman. She slumped as her eyes and body twirled to follow. Her usual charms had failed her and her mind spun as she tried to remember the last time she’d been rejected.

“Will you come to the feast tonight?” she called out.

Gendry was already to the gatehouse, ready to descend the steps and ultimately disappear. “Probably not,” he called back. The last feast he’d attended had resulted in his legitimization. That same night also ended with a naked Arya pressed to his side. Could he maybe have one without the other this time?

The maid with the coffee was easily forgotten as he toddled down the steps of the ramparts before disappearing onto the beach completely. It was effortless from there for him to hide away in one of the island’s caves where the night’s rain and wind created pools of rather warm ocean water. Gendry stripped and began to bathe, doing as he’d often done when he still lived in Flea Bottom, sneaking to the beaches of King’s Landing almost every night to rid himself of the grime and oil that stained his skin in the forge. This was different though; he had cleaned up after the previous day’s work. Gendry did not want coffee or a feast, he only wanted solitude and silence. If Arya wasn’t by his side he didn’t care much for attention or for being surrounded by crowds at all. Surely that was a requirement for a Lord, to enjoy being greeted by those loyal to you. He wasn’t cut out for that life, the reality of which weighed down on him with more intensity each passing day.
Cool, fresh skin was covered by the breeches he’d brought where he then tucked in his tunic despite the beads of water still coating his skin. It felt almost foolish to be so clean as he walked back toward the forge but his mind seemed to have cleared. He didn’t think of the maiden with the coffee or the breakfast he forfeited on his way out of the Keep. He thought only of Arya and how he’d focus on his work in an attempt to speed up the day, bringing him that much closer to seeing her. If only she had let him touch her last night, things would feel more secure now. He wanted to see her but perhaps she was officially done with him. She was the strongest person he knew; he wouldn’t have been surprised if last night was a goodbye and today Arya was resolving to face the world with a new face as if their reunion never happened at all.

He pounded at a single sheet of iron coated wood, preparing the softened metal for its addition to the grille. The portcullis he had started only two days ago was nearly complete now and despite its weight, Gendry could somehow lift it on his own, bringing it from one end of the smithy to the other as its needs changed. He had ordered some of the men to sand down the pointy ends while others installed rivets to reinforce each iron strip. Gendry had made many of these so all of this was second nature. When their work seemed shoddy or the men insisted on taking a break, Gendry easily stepped in to take over. This was where he was currently, hammering a bit of iron so he could grind it down to the proper angle.

Behind him, the men passed around a loaf of bread and a single bowl of lukewarm stew. Between them they managed to acquire a single pitcher of wine. It was hardly a desirable lunch but it was well deserved all the same. If Gendry had wanted to go back to the castle for a meal, he could have but he didn’t feel as if he fit in either place. Besides, he was bringing Arya food later and he assumed he’d just eat with her then.

“Hey Gendry!”

“Lord Gendry,” Umfrey corrected the smith.

“Right, Lord Gendry,” the teenage boy returned simply. “Have you seen the Princess? She’s still here, right?”

Gendry didn’t bother to turn to the boy and address his nonsensical question. He pretended not to hear him over the pounding of metal, a likely story considering his hammering had increased in speed and volume.

“Sad what’s happened to her,” Umfrey added in subtle support of the North.

“Pretty girl too,” another older man chimed in.
“The crazy ones usually are.”

“You think she’s pretty?” The instigator asked, seeming genuine in his question as he waited for an answer. “Because I thought she was kind of weird looking but maybe it was all that ash.”

The older man laughed. “From what I remember she is a pretty girl. They say she’s mouthy though.”

“I could shut her up,” the sly boy commented, causing Gendry to still his hammer and begin listening again, this time without interruption.

“Oh, piss off!” Umfrey called out, pushing the boy away.

The teenager only laughed. “I could. I would if given the chance.”

“You’re full of shit!”

Gendry threw down his hammer, causing the steel shavings all around them to splinter off in an attempt to escape. “Why am I the only one working?” he bellowed, taking in the group.

“We...sorry. We were just—”

“Don’t!” Gendry insisted with a hand raised. “And keep your mouth shut about the Princess. It’s none of anyone’s business what she does or what happens in that family. They’ve gone through enough.”

“We all have,” the older many reminded.

Gendry nodded. “You’re right. So have some respect.”

Umfrey looked down and began swinging his feet off the bench as if to display an innocence. “Sorry.”
“Good. Get back to work.” He reached down to pick up his hammer. His earlier work, lifting the iron grille from surface to surface had him almost looking comical, carrying an object that seemed to light in comparison. It was a harrowing view: Lord Gendry trudging toward the castle, his face red and bothered and his war hammer in his hand. For the people of King’s Landing that knew his father, the similarities between the young man and the King were endless. Before he had let the world turn him fat and bitter and rude, Robert was once a strong-willed Baratheon boy that wanted nothing more than to win the heart of the tomboyish Stark girl.

That same Stark girl watched the display and had been for many minutes now. She’d gotten out of her own bath and with nothing but a flannel to dry herself off she stood close to the fire and allowed gravity and heat to aid in the process. She was nearly dry by the time Gendry passed directly below her, several floors down where he disappeared into the Keep and no doubt began to head for his room. If she weren’t naked, and still slightly hurt, she would have joined him there.

_Later_, she thought, her mind hopeful despite his once broken promise.

A knock sounded at the door and Arya nearly jumped. Looking down to her towel she realized that her skin was no longer marked by water droplets. She wondered how long she’d been standing there, no longer looking out onto the smithy as her mind drifted to the conjured images of Gendry undressing. If anything, it was a good sign. She didn’t hate him so much that she didn’t find him attractive; she was almost wholly convinced that would never be possible. It was also comforting to have such a craving. So much of her feelings recently were plagued with nothing but self-loathing and regret and guilt. He was her one happy thought.

“Arya?”

It was him.

“Hold on!” she called back, now scrambling to grab for a tunic and breeches. “Come in!”

Her voice was chipper. Gendry let himself in and backed his frame into the door to shut and latch it. He turned around to place the tray he held on the nearby chest. When he turned back he saw nothing but Arya’s naked backside, then even more of her as she leaned over to step into her breeches.

“Arya…”
“I couldn’t exactly have you standing in the hallway,” she said simply and with a shrug as she tightened the buckle at her waist.

“I’ll turn around.”

Arya snickered. “Why on earth would you do that?” Another question swam in her mind and nearly bubbled out of her throat when she felt the way his eyes couldn’t help but to burn a hole into the space below her breasts where long scars marked her complexion. Why hadn’t he approached her? Why hadn’t he backed her into the wall and taken her right there? Arya needed his bravery now. Then maybe she could be brave too.

“Right, uh, peace offering?” he mumbled, gesturing to the tray of freshly cut chicken and carrots. A stem full of grapes rested off the plate and nearby a slice of dark loaf bread with a thick pad of butter.

Arya was wearing her tunic now and she tucked the salmon colored cotton into her breeches as she walked back to him. “I was naked. You brought food,” she purred, nearly in his face. “I’d say it’s a peace offering.”

Gendry had no other option but to watch. In the stillness, Arya grabbed for the tray. She set it down on the edge of her bed so she could grab a thick fur from the trunk at the end of the bed’s frame. “We used to do picnics indoors...my mother and Sansa and me. The winters were sometimes so frigid we couldn’t go outside for weeks. Everything was frozen over. Father joked that it made breathing hard because everything around Winterfell was dead. Mother reminded him that all of the forest was just sleeping. So the forest slept and we pretended to have small feasts on the floor in my mother and father’s solar.”

She sat down and grabbed for the tray, ready to dig in. When Gendry remained standing, shadowing her, Arya looked to him. “Aren’t you going to join me?”

“We don’t have to,” he insisted nervously. “I just came to bring you food. Jon is stubborn and I don’t want...I’m just glad you’re eating.”

Arya swallowed the carrot she’d consumed. “Which one is that?” she asked, pointing to the book he had in his hands.

Gendry blinked, waiting for her to understand. She must have because she giggled and reached forward to grab for the bound pages out of his hand. “The Divine Comedy,” she read, because he
could not.

Gendry gave in, sitting down but keeping a fair distance between them. He was still caught on the sight of Arya, naked and proud. Just last night she had told him not to touch her and now her actions almost begged the opposite. That was what she wanted, wasn’t it? Or maybe she was teasing him. If that was the case, it was working and it was calculated and cruel as the world had taught Arya to be. She was brilliant and he was terrified.

“What’s it about?” Gendry finally stammered, pointing to the book’s cover.

“I don’t know,” Arya shrugged. She took the tray from her lap and moved it to his. She then snatched the book from his grip and began to flip through the pages. “We’ll find out together.”

~!~

Time passed. Hours, minutes, days — neither Arya or Gendry were aware when the time they shared was so intimate. Laughter surrounded them as Gendry fumbled through basic words but Arya’s patience and sometimes comical encouragement had them getting through most of the poem’s first section. He had a much more basic grasp on reading than he had let on. Arya found his motivation to read, whatever it was, to be rather endearing.

“This is embarrassing,” Gendry finally groaned. He rubbed at his face, causing the book in his lap to shut.

Arya didn’t seem to mind. She grabbed for it and held it in her hands, not bothering to find where they’d left off. “It’s not. You picked a really difficult one.”

“I didn’t really pick. It was the only thing I could find. Only book or paper in this whole castle.”

Arya smirked. Her lips were upturned and her eyes turned soft as she began to study his features. He was stunned by the look she was giving him and he swallowed, causing Arya’s eyes to avert themselves. When her gaze returned she breathed out, then simply asked: “Do you think I’m crazy?”

It was almost as if she’d heard his conversation with the other smiths. But that was impossible. Especially because he hadn’t even known she’d been watching.
Gendry cleared his throat and shifted to straighten his posture so he could lean into her. His stance was casual even if his voice was not. “What? No. Of course not.”

“You haven’t…” Her voice faded to nothingness. Her eyes were also cast down like a child who’d been caught in a lie. Finally though, she looked up. “Why haven’t you tried to kiss me?”

Gendry’s brow furrowed. “What?”

She sighed and tried again. “Why—“

“Because you’re...I don’t know,” he stated strongly. “I didn’t think you wanted that right now. It just didn’t feel right.”

Arya leaned back and stared at the fireplace. “Okay,” she nodded.

Gendry only moved closer, his hands on her knee threatening to take her hands in his so he could soothe her tired skin. “I need you to talk to me, Arya. I want to help but—”

“Nothing felt right before you got here…” There it was, bubbling out, the truth and so much pain Arya had hid from the rest of the world. “I wanted to die. Then you show up and I feel like I can finally breathe. I meant what I said last night. I feel safe and calm when you’re here. Things make sense. Do you know how terrifying that is? That one person can influence my happiness?”

“Arya…”

“It just feels like you don’t want me.”

Gendry smirked. “I promise you that’s not the problem. I was trying to be respectful. I figured I’d let you decide where we are.”

She nodded and once again turned to glare at the wall. Her features were altogether emotionless. Then, without warning, she moved, turning around as if she was ready to push off the ground and
stand. Instead she kneeled before him and then, with as much confidence as he’d seen since arriving to Dragonstone, she draped one knee over his lap so all of her was straddling all of him. The last time they’d been like this he had been inside of her. Now it was nothing but heat as she cupped his cheeks and waited, admiring his strong features. His hands were immediately to her back, keeping her close but waiting.

“Is this okay? If this is where I want to be?” she explained.

Gendry nodded. He was cut off before he could say anything. Her mouth was warm and wanting, instantly upon his with an urgent hunger. She wanted his lips to banish her sadness and when Gendry tasted the salt of a single tear that cascaded down Arya’s cheek, he dedicated himself to that very task.

Together there was a rhythm — a push and a pull as they both tried to give as much as they craved to take. Gendry bucked up into Arya, attempting to stunt the way he wished to turn her to her back and take her right there on the floor of her chambers. She must have had a similar idea because she rolled off of him onto her back. Her hands on his neck brought him curling into her, covering her petite form with his broad frame as the pair shared another passionate kiss. It was all tongues and hands and fire. Arya didn’t want it to end but she was breathless beneath him and overflowing with too many things she wanted to say to him but still never could. At least not tonight.

“I missed you,” she said instead. “Missed this.”

“No. Me too. So much,” he nodded with one last kiss to her swollen lips.

“I thought you didn’t want me.”

“I always want you, Arya. Things are just...complicated.”

Her fingernails raking at his scalp and her feeling safer than she knew was possible, Arya nodded. “I know.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading! It means a lot to me! xx
(So the rating might be bumped to M at some point in the very near future. Go off, I guess...)

Forgiving You

Chapter Notes

A rainy weekend means I was back to the city earlier than I expected and could therefore write/post earlier than I expected. Thanks to all for the overwhelming show of support last chapter. Enjoy this one! xx

**Note: This chapter contains a few subtle book references. I don't think it's even necessary to point out because they're so minor but just in case...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They had many afternoon picnics - and morning and evening picnics too. Gendry escaped the smithy as much as he could, dodging questions and stares from men who had long ago written him off. They knew now, or they had guessed, the extent to which he visited the Princess. He was far too happy to just be attending meetings and taking meals and naps in the Keep. Even Umfrey thought better of inquiring. In a way it was all a bit unbelievable; a bastard blacksmith and Arya Stark — the girl who killed the Night King and saved the Seven Kingdoms. If Umfrey had inquired, Gendry would have agreed with him. Even these stolen moments in Arya’s chambers felt surreal. He wondered if he met his death on the journey southward and instead of being sent to bare witness before the Gods he was stuck in purgatory with Arya, shut up in a too-hot room where kisses were shared in an effort to cover up all they still could not say to one another and to the rest of the world.

But sometimes Arya laughed and it was such a beautiful sound, Gendry forgot about all the pain outside the door that shielded them. Somehow her presence at his side made it so that all the rest of the world melted away. He knew what he should want, not only for himself but for them, but the risk of losing moments like this in search of it had his chest feeling tight and his eyes pricked with tears. He was learning not to want for much; they were alive — she was alive — and that was all that mattered.

The food they always shared helped, and today the wine helped too. Their usually raucous banter was thankfully covered up by a steady beat of rain on the stone walls outside. The fire had long ago died and it was nothing but Arya and Gendry sitting on the cool floor, their backs perched up against the large metal chest at the foot of Arya’s bed and their feet bare as they passed a mostly-empty canteen of wine back and forth.

“Do you remember...the time...” Arya managed, mostly stunted by her need for oxygen and not the actual laughter spilling off her lips, “when Hot Pie fell down toward that stream?”

“Yes!” Gendry agreed, just as animated as he wiped at his mouth with the back of his hand. “And you just stared at him, waiting for him to get up!”
“He was being annoying! We had been walking for quite some time!” she reminded, all before hiccuping. In horror she clapped a hand over her traitorous mouth as her eyes went wide.

Gendry placed a hand to his belly as if to calm the pain that existed there from laughing so much. “You gave me this look of disgust...like a warning—”

“I did! If you helped him, it would have been your arse down in that creek.”

Gendry took another swig of the wine before passing it back to her. “I don’t doubt that for a second.”

Arya let out an uneven breath then took a long sip of the wine. The canteen was light now, signaling carelessness and a profound loss of time. “Feels like that was forever ago.”

Gendry looked to her, nodding. “Yeah. It does, doesn’t it?” He grabbed for the canteen she handed back to him but he did not move to drink it. “Can I...can I ask a question?”

“You can. I can’t promise an answer.”

“Of course not.”

“Well then…” she gestured, as if inviting him to speak.

Gendry leaned his head back against the chest. “I worried about you, you know. After I left.”

“I worried about you too.”

“No, I worried about you the way a man worries about a woman. You can’t worry about me this way.”

Arya blinked. Without the canteen she shifted easily, altering her weight so she was closer and her body was more relaxed as it leaned into his. All the while worry defined her features, shown most
significantly in the severe kink in her forehead as one eyebrow quirked in steady retreat of the other. “What are you saying?”

“Girls are…”


“Good.”

“Would you have me if I was?”

Gendry looked to her, his vision narrowed in an almost pained way. “What? Of course I would.”

Arya shrugged and took a swig of the alcohol. “It’s a valid question.”

“It’s not. It’s...not.”

“I can take care of myself, you know.”

“What men do to women has nothing to do with...never mind.”

Arya straightened out her posture but looked to where her hand held her weight off the floor. “No, you’re right. You are. Sansa...”

“I heard.”

“Of course.”

“It was nothing compared to that. I mean, I can’t imagine and I won’t imagine but that thing...with the Red Woman...that wasn’t—”
“No?”

“No. I was stupid enough to think that it was. I learned quickly that it was not. It’s my fault. A pretty lass and good wine…”

Arya hid a smirk in her shoulder. Gendry paused but joined her, appreciating her ability to see past the uncomfortable when humor or hope was needed most. “I’m sorry,” she managed anyway, pushing an inconvenient giggle down.

“I’m not just saying that. I told you there were three before you and there were and she doesn’t count. What she did… it wasn’t okay.”

Things were serious again and Arya nodded. “I know.”

“I was humiliated. I survived but I didn’t know—”

“I didn’t either. I’m sorry…” She reached out to touch his hand but before she could Gendry was grabbing for the canteen to take a sip. How any wine existed in the leather bag was beyond comprehension but both seemed to be thankful for the alcohol. It was a welcomed companion when navigating the difficult.

“What about you and Edric?”


“He fancied you.”

Arya shrugged. Then she scoffed. “Good for him.”

“I thought you liked him.”
“I didn’t. I don’t. If I did...I don’t,” she settled, mostly annoyed. “Who were the three?”

“Whores.”

“Great.”

“You asked.”

“I know I did,” she laughed and grabbed for the bottle back. Putting her mouth to the glass she drank, draining the remaining contents into her mouth. She swallowed, then spoke, leaving her words to sound hurried and breathless. "I'm glad too."

"That you asked?"

"That they were whores."

Gendry snorted. "Oh yeah?"

"Easy competition."

"Yeah, your bed is nicer. Beds, really," he said, eyes rolled back as if to point to the featherbed only steps away. "This one's not bad either..." he explained.

Arya hit him with her shoulder and the two swayed in search of their previous equilibrium. Then she leaned in and they were kissing: slow and long, then fast, until their minds were dizzy from the contact. If a knock hadn’t sounded at the door, Arya would have straddled Gendry just as she had that night over a week ago. It was one of their favorite positions: his weight supporting her while he donated his strength to her in a fierce swirl of tongues and tentative hands. But they were always interrupted, lately by Gendry’s own sensibility. Tonight, however, it was not his reassuring hands pushing her away. Tonight Gendry looked just as irritated as Arya did to find their mingling would be cut short.

Both were slow to look to the door but when another knock pounded, Arya jumped up and moved toward the room’s entrance. All the hesitance she had honed, protecting herself in the days and
weeks prior to Gendry’s arrival, was long gone, banished with the nightmares she hadn’t had since he began sleeping by her side. It also helped that the knock was familiar, or rather, it existed rarely and was therefore immediately identifiable. Only two people would dare knock on Arya’s door and one of them was already inside, watching now as Arya tiptoed to the door to release it from its jamb.

"Yes?"

Jon blinked. "Seven Hells…"

"What? You knocked."

"I...I did. You're...dressed."

Arya looked down then back up before giving in to a casual shrug. "I get dressed sometimes." Her cheeks rouged as she remembered just how undressed she’d been the day prior when her and Gendry fought over an apple and their scuffle ended with exposed skin, sticky with the juicy sweetness of the fruit.

"Did you hear what I said?"

Arya blinked. Clearly she had not but she looked up to Jon as if to feign interest. "Hmm? Sorry?"

"I want you to come to dinner."

"Absolutely not."

"Will you let me finish?"

Arya sighed out through her nose. "You breathed. You finished."

"Dinner in my solar," Jon clarified.
"Who will attend?"

"You," Jon's voice was strong. "Just you and me."

Arya thought for a moment. "Alright."

"We need to talk."

This had her inhaling, sharply, and almost regrettably. "Alright."

"Great."

Arya paused a beat and nodded. "Great."


Arya did not respond, she just shut the door, dismissing Jon and their awkward interaction as if he was not the King and she was not, by default, a Princess. If either had it their way, that was how things would be. In another world they’d be back in Winterfell. In another world, they would have never left in the first place.

Gendry immediately stood and walked toward where he had kicked off his boots earlier. Arya watched, almost saddened at the sight. "Where are you going?"

"To eat dinner in the smithy, apparently."

"Why? We just had—"

"Wine. We had wine. And we reek with it. You should wash up."

Arya quirked a brow in contention. "Oh. Wow. You’re...you're scared of him. You’re scared of
"I'm not scared of him."

"No, you are. You're absolutely scared of Jon!"

"Arya, be sensible! I'm not scared of Jon. I'm scared of the King. I can take Jon. Easily. I don't know if I'd be as lucky against all his men."

"I'll have you remember that they'd have to get through me so—"

Gendry stood up, his hands on his hips. "You'd play knight, then?"

Arya smirked. "If I had to."

"I'll not have you defend my honor."

"Good. Then it's settled. No one needs to defend anyone's honor."

"Good. Then I'll get going."

He grabbed for his jerkin and slid into it effortlessly. Arya found she enjoyed watching Gendry get dressed just as much as she enjoyed undressing him, even if the end result wasn't as satisfying.

Before he could escape, Arya grabbed for his wrist to still him. Gendry looked down to where her hand curled around his pulsepoint. Then, his eyes looked back to her, waiting. "An hour is an awfully long time," she tried, her voice quiet and low.

"You need it. You're drunk."

"I'm not." Arya shook her head slowly, her lips tacky with the taste of wine nearly sticking to his
own as she moved dangerously close to his mouth. She blinked, featherlight, from Gendry’s eyes down to his lips. Slowly she was claiming his mouth and he was yielding. His weight came back to lean on one of the large posts of Arya’s bed and his broad frame was like a cradle, casually keeping her upright in the softest way while Arya’s tiny fists squeezed at his tunic to keep him close.

When Arya finally pulled away her eyes were wide. Gendry’s breath caught in his throat. He could still taste her on his tongue and she looked so beautiful like this, her heart afire and her hair a mess. "I'm finally going to tell him what I think of his Dragon Queen."

Gendry’s vision blurred. "What?"

"The Queen—"

"But she's not a queen anymore. She's...dead."

"So?"

"And he killed her. Because of what she did."

Arya took a step back. "Why are you so defensive?"

"Because I don't know if it's fair—"

"Choose those next words wisely, Gendry."

"Gladly," he tossed back as if predicting her ironic encouragement. “Though we’ve never been good at—"

Arya tossed her arms heavenward. "Here we go!"

"What good will it be to tell Jon now, Arya? He knows. He knows because it was his dagger that took her down. Do you think that was an easy decision?"
"I didn't say that!"

"He's... just forget it. I'm glad you're going to dinner with him." Gendry repositioned his vest and moved around her once more.

Arya’s gaze and stance followed him. "Are you jealous?"

"Don't be ridiculous! I'm being honest. I wanted you out of this bloody room and it seems I've been successful."

"You wanted? Was this a plan?"

"Yes. A very simple one that I obsessed over on the endless journey down here. Alone. Make sure Arya is okay. That’s it."

"Me leaving my room means I'm okay?"

"Before I came you wouldn't open your door. That first morning... that was the first time Jon had seen you since they found you bloody outside the capital walls. I don't want credit, Arya. I couldn't give a single fuck what this means to anyone else. But yes, I very selfishly needed you okay and you're okay and I'm glad that you have a brother who wants that for you too. All I'm saying is that Jon's had his heart broken too and he hasn't had the opportunity to lock himself away in a room. He hasn't even had the opportunity to talk it over with family because you wouldn't take visitors. Maybe hear what he has to say before insulting him?"

Slowly, Arya smiled. She nodded too, then took a step and kissed Gendry's lips. Afterward, her grin remained. "No," she said with conviction, the same sweet smile unwavering.

Gendry looked to her lips then shook his head. "You're nuts."

"He's my brother."
"I don't have one of those. Don't have a sister either."

Arya pointed to the door. "Do you want me to see if I can get you an invite?"

"No, I want you to stop being such a pain in my ass."

"Unlikely odds."

"Yes. For the rest of my life, I know," Gendry huffed. He was too annoyed to see the smirk Arya wore at hearing the length of time he wished he keep her around. The thought was so lovely it distracted her. The next thing she knew, he was gripping her arms and kissing her forehead. "I don't have a family but you do and I want that for you. That's all I'm saying." He forced a smile before pushing past her. The hour she spoke of was surely almost up now. Then again, the two were never talented when it came to tracking time. Gendry was still unsure of how many hours they’d spent in her room this afternoon. The days were beginning to blur together.

"Don't be rude, Gendry Waters," Arya called out in one last attempt to keep him close. "You have a family. I'm your family, just as you are mine."

Gendry shrugged. "Perhaps." He breathed out before opening the door. "Enjoy your dinner, m'lady."

"Piss off." She had nothing to throw at him so she kicked at the floor instead, cursing his name as he left her in the silence she despised so strongly before his return. Their empty canteen remained uncorked on the floor when Arya finally left for Jon’s solar.

~!~

Arya was different. Jon could sense it in her presence and the proof went far beyond her willing existence in his solar, joining him for a dinner he’d barely given her time to prepare for. He hadn’t expected her to say yes but he also hadn’t expected her to open the door. Things were different for Arya and Jon appreciated her initial insistence on silence as it gave him time to asses her behavior. He smelled it on her when she walked in - the characteristic smell of grape and summer rain. She’d likely been sitting in her room, the window open to invite the rain inside as she sipped at a bottle of wine she’d undoubtedly bribed a knight to acquire for her. They did what she wanted, despite it being against Jon’s wished. He couldn’t punish them either. If he hadn’t been told that someone else was bringing Arya food, he eventually would have sent a plate up.
Pretending to finish up a letter, Jon watched the way Arya stood at the long table near the window, sheathing and unsheathing all of the various swords that were laid out, as if meant for her. She hadn’t asked, didn’t inquire about their ownership or purpose, but instead took the first in her hands and began to inspect it so she could then do the same with all that followed.

Her chest wasn’t bound. In an almost odd way, it was one of the first things Jon noted. He did so because there was finally something to note. Yes, his baby sister was finally a woman and likely had been for many years now. She had hidden so much of her identity away it only made sense now that she was lost, trying to get it all back. The chemise he had caught minor glimpses of when she peeked out at him through her bedroom door was replaced now by loose breeches and a soft tunic. She wore no jerkin or coat and her hair was pulled off her face in a plait that was already beginning to piece itself apart.

"Gendry made these?"

Jon set down his quill and looked over. “Who else?”

"He's the best."

"Yes, you'll have to tell me how you two know one another."

Arya looked to Jon and smirked. "He's an old friend."

"He's been bringing you food."

"Because you haven't," she countered plainly. Her fingers ran against the strong sharp blade of one of the smaller swords.

"He cares about you."

Arya shrugged, her fingers nearly at the sword’s tip. She applied pressure and pulled, feeling the smooth steel slide against her finger in agreement. "Perhaps."

"He got you to take dinner with me."
The sizzle of steel on steel as Arya sheathed the sword back in its holster cut into the tension between them. "He didn't get me to do anything. He doesn't even know I'm here."

"Why so defensive? I only mean that you've been better since he came around."

"Yes, well some time has also passed since then."

Jon sighed and moved to take a seat at the table. "Sit before things get cold."

Arya joined him. She pulled at her chair while she sat in it, causing the legs to scrape boldly at the floor below. "It's so bloody hot on this island I don't know if that's possible," she complained as she moved to awkwardly grab for the nearby pitcher of ale.

"Well I knew you wouldn't want additional company so I dismissed the help meaning we're left to serve ourselves."

Arya leaned forward to spoon some meat on her plate. "Do you think we can manage it?"

Jon rolled his eyes. "I hope so."

Things were quiet at first, with the pair talking about the weather as if they were strangers and not favorite siblings. When conversation flowed into a gradual mumur, Jon and Arya allowed the sound of metal on porcelain to fill the silence. It was welcomed by both, and all for different reasons.

"They talk about me?"

Jon sat up. He tapped at his lips with his linen napkin before placing it back down to the table. "Hmm?"

"Them. The people," Arya pointed toward the window with her fork. "They talk about me. I know they do."
"Did Gendry tell you that?"

"He didn't need to. I can feel it. Even from up here."

Jon shrugged. "They talk about me too. It comes with the title."

"I wear no title. I wear no crown."

"Maybe I won't forever." He shrugged again, this time accompanying his clear nerves with a strong swig of wine - wine Arya seemed to want nothing to do with. He concluded now that beyond her fascination with the artistry of weaponry, her show with the swords at the window was likely an attempt to gain sobriety. Even now she nervously chewed on the inside of her cheek instead of sipping at the ale in her chalice.

"Maybe? Are you teasing or…"

"Kings are usually removed from their thrones by death - natural or otherwise. What if it doesn't have to be that way?"

"What will you do?" Arya scoffed. "Just leave?"

"I'd like to think it would involve some planning. But perhaps. Most days I don't like it here anymore than you do."

"Would you like it if she were by your side? If she were in power?"

Jon did not concede. "I think things would be different if things had been different."

Arya played with her food. "Aye."

"I guess that's why I invited you. Beyond wanting to see you and see how you are...before I make plans I need to make sure that the people around me will be taken care of."
"You make it sound like you're dying."

"Some of the people will see it that way. They have hope now that the North reigns. They may see this as a betrayal. I have to prepare for this from all sides."

"You're putting yourself in danger." It was more of an assessment than a criticism and Arya’s mouth fell open at the thought.

"No more danger than I am in currently."

"That's comforting," Arya deadpanned into a deafening pause. "I don't need to be taken care of. Don't make any decisions based on me, Jon. Do what you think is best."

"I don't know what's best, Arya. I'm asking for some advice so if you could withhold the snark, I'd very much appreciate it."

His request had her grinning from out behind her cup. "Isn't that what you have advisors for?"

"Sure. But the opinion of my family has always meant more and you know that."

"I don't...I don't know what you should do," she admitted as she sat back, now with a foot on her chair as if to challenge her brother’s insistence on things being familial. He could be a King but she would never be a Princess. "I think the throne should be burned. I think we should do away with titles and lands. This idea that who we are is defined before we're even born...I have no use for it."

"Let's think about that then."

Arya groaned. "You sound like father."

"Well, I agree with you. But I don't think it's as easy as all of that. There has to be some form of order."
"Then allow each kingdom to self-rule."

"They already do. That is the job of a lord and lady."

"It should be the job of a group. Not a group of the wealthiest men but a group that is voted upon by the people of each kingdom."

"Votes are typically encouraged by wealth."

"I'm not saying it'd be easy. I'm just saying that's how it should be."

"Would you rule then?"

Arya’s throat went dry. "Why would I do that?"

"Because you're capable. It seems you have a lot to say and I think everyone would benefit if I wasn't the only one hearing about it."

"I want no ruler and I certainly don't want to rule. I don't want to advise. I don't know what I want to do."

Jon sat back and crossed his hands over his stomach. "I'm sending Bran up."

"Bran? Our brother?"

"Of course."

“What do you mean sending?"

“I've called for him.”
"For what purpose?"

"To take the throne after I abdicate."

Arya choked. "You were serious?"

"As ever."

"What does Bran...does he want it?"

"He believes in its necessity. He has the temperament to respect the throne and rule the people for their benefit, not his."

"Does he have the mental clarity?"

"He has too much mental clarity. I think the task would be a nice distraction."

"You think being King of the Seven Kingdoms is a distraction?"

"For someone as brilliant as Bran, yes. He's what Westeros needs."

"And the North?"

"I'm working on that too."

"Have Tyrion and Davos approved of all of this?"

"They've been supportive."
"What's the timeline?"

"I don't...it's going to take over a month for Bran to travel. I need to start securing land and homes for everyone who was displaced. It's going to be a long process."

"What's my timeline?"

Jon blinked. "Your timeline?"

"You want me taken care of so I intend to care for myself. When do I need to leave?"

"You don't need to leave. I'd never ask that of you. You can stay in Dragonstone for as long as you'd like. Once everything is settled, you can have the bloody place for all I care."

"No. I want to leave. I need to leave. I just...I'm not ready."

"I know. None of us are. It could take a year, Arya. There's no rush. With the way I see it, knowing you...you'll be gone before anything is finalized. I know how you work."

"You're right. I survive."

"You do. You're exceptionally good at it. I only hope that maybe it doesn't have to be like this forever. Selfishly I've liked having you locked away in your room for these past two months. At least I knew where you were. I knew you were safe. Are safe."

Arya shook her head. The pressure on her jaw and the hand she now had curled near her mouth told Jon that she was closer to tears than she even realized. "You shouldn't have told me. You're right. I would have left eventually."

"Well then I'm glad I told you. I'd like a goodbye this time. Whenever that is. Wherever you go."
"I don't know where I'll go. I said that. I meant it."

"Think on it. An opportunity may present itself. Don't you want to be in one place for awhile?"

 Arya blinked. She nodded, though for what she was unsure. "I have been. I don't know how I feel about it. But you're right."

"I'll do what I can to help, Arya. You know you mean the world to me. I'll keep this title if you want. If that's what you need until—"

"No!"

Jon grinned. His demeanor was slight and his presence soft. He was every bit the man who raised him, every bit the man Arya missed everyday. "You want things for me. Can't I want things for you?"

"Not until I know what I want." She was crying now and she did little to hide it. Even as she swiped her thumb beneath her eyelid she did not look to the tears on her skin in anger. "I wasn't supposed to make it, you know."

"Wh...what?"

"We were all supposed to die. With the Army of the Undead. Or by dragonfire. How did any of us survive this? Why?"

"Arya...don't...don't say that."

"It's true, isn't it?"

"It's not. And if anyone deserves to live it's you. You and Sansa and Bran. The world has taken so much from you. This is all...good. These are good things. Things are finally changing."

"Yes, well they were changing. They could have changed if you never bent the knee."
Jon’s breath caught in his throat at the realization that Arya’s vulnerability had been banished, replaced now with anger: anger at allowing herself to show emotion and anger at those emotions now being so crippling.

“I did what I did to save Winterfell!”

“You're right. You did. And maybe we wouldn't have made it out if you hadn't but that crazy cunt also wouldn't have burned this city to the ground either. I don't know which I would have preferred.”

"Would have? This one, Arya! It's the real one. And I'm sorry. I told you that. I would have told you more if you came out of your damn room!"

"I'm out now and now you've said it. You don't need to say it again. Am I dismissed?"

"You have no ruler. You can come and go as you please. You said it yourself. You will anyway."

Arya slammed her chair in with a force that had it teetering, threatening to topple over as she headed for the door. Jon inhaled sharply, searching for the courage needed to make one last attempt: "Will you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" Arya nearly laughed. "For what?"

“For bending the knee. For falling for the Queen. For doing anything else I did that—”

“You didn’t do anything,” Arya insisted, now offended that she had to. “We told you we didn’t trust her. You knew that. But we followed you because it is what you asked. What other choice did we have?”

“None. Neither did I. None of us did.”

“You’re wrong, you know. I do want things for you. I want things for all of you...you, Sansa, Bran.”
“Good.”

“But I think we’ve all become so preoccupied with forgiving one another because we’ve been apart for so long and we want to be a family again so desperately that we’ve forgotten how important it is to forgive ourselves.” She released a steady exhale through barely parted lips. “I blame her, Jon. I don’t blame you.”

“It’s okay if you do. Everyone else does.”

“Including you. I know.” Arya reached for the door, turning the knob but keeping her hand upon the metal until she was ready. "If I makes you feel any better I've done things I can't forgive myself for. But I do forgive you. I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

I was really, really, REALLY hoping to be able to finish this chapter telling you to go check out my new fic but the day got away from me and I don’t have it up yet. The first chapter to that is almost done so once it’s complete, I’ll post it and then plug it at the end of the next 'Exhale' chapter...which is one of my favorites, by the way!

Thanks to all for reading/reviewing/leaving love of any kind! The support has been unreal and I’m so appreciative. Please keep it up! I’m so ready to give these two idiots the happy ending they deserve and the reviews/kudos are a salve to my often cynical/self-loathing soul.

Did I mention I appreciate you?!

x. Elle
Her world at Dragonstone felt so small when Arya first arrived and now, with doors opened, it felt vast and almost overwhelming. Even with the island emptying and everything seeming much more calm and in order, the ocean she looked out upon felt foreign. There was a life beyond it she had left behind and also a life she had yet to live and somehow, with the moon unbelievably high in the sky, Arya knew the two were one in the same.

She heard the door creak open but she did not move from where she sat, a huddled mass on a stone seat just outside the very small window in Gendry’s chambers. She was enjoying feeling insignificant and she knew the moment she presented herself to him, Gendry would worship her. He always had and likely always would; every teasing remark, every trip or pinch or wrestling match on the floor of the smithy was a sign of respect. Gendry only ever wanted Arya to be Arya, the fact of which nearly had her weeping. The sky mimicked her emotions, starting to rain down in sporadic tear drops that coated Arya’s tunic in patches. She pushed back at her hairline and moved to stand. She could have jumped if she wanted to. Instead she crawled back through the small porthole and eased herself down to the floor, clearly startling Gendry who had only begun to get ready for bed.

“She’s seven Hells,” he muttered, wearing a smile all the same.

Arya smiled too, thankful the rain covered up her sadness. “You’re lucky you’re so big or else I’d be worried about everyone sneaking up on you.”

“The war’s won, innit? Who’d be sneaking up on me?”

“Me, I suppose.”

Gendry cocked his head to the side. He narrowed his eyes too, his vision calling her bluff before his mouth had the chance to. “What’s wrong?”

Arya shook her head. “Just dinner. With Jon.”
Gendry nodded. Arya felt the warmth of his calloused palm upon her cheek only after she realized she had leaned into his touch. Her eyes closed too, reveling in the sweet gesture - getting lost in it.

“Oh,” he accepted as his thumb soothed at her cheekbone.

Arya finally looked to him. “It just all feels like a lot right now.”

“What does?”

“Dragonstone. Jon being King. I wanted to get back to Winterfell. I didn’t want any of this.”

Gendry let out a lopsided grin. “Even me? The bastard smith?”

“You’re not a bastard,” Arya assured, her voice persistent, begging for him to believe her as if doing so meant he also agreed. “You were always part of my plans. Even if you didn’t want to be.”

Gendry took another step in. “I wanted to be.”

Arya looked up to him with a neck craned back. They were so close now their bodies were flush and as heat radiated off their skin their lungs fought for dominance, chests heaving in a tug of war - back and forth, back and forth.

“Do you still want to be?” she asked, her voice soft.

Gendry smiled. “If you’ll have me.”

Arya nodded. Her own confirmation was stunted as she leaned up and seized his mouth. Gendry met her halfway; he had to, he was much too tall for her to reach and the casual, trusting way Arya draped her arms over his shoulders did little to aid in increasing this proximity. It did, however, encourage the stronghold Gendry had upon the curve of Arya’s waist. His hands instinctively gripped the fabric and Arya smiled into his mouth, breaking the kiss, as she felt him tug the linen out of her breeches.
“Go on,” she encouraged, even stepping back to give Gendry more leverage. A short distance separated them now, only the faintest space for Gendry to slowly pull at Arya’s shirt, the pads of his fingers ghosting against her sides as the fabric bunched and he continued to drag it up. Arya raised her hands in surrender, making his final move of gently removing the garment altogether, an easy one. Her damp hair fell back down around her shoulders, curling slightly from the salty rain that only barely kissed her head earlier.

Naked before him, Arya waited. She wanted to cover herself up just as much as she wanted him to see her. It had never been like this. The first time had been somewhat awkward, fumbling and hungry. Neither of them had much time to admire one another with death feeling so close. The reality of something so long awaited was enough then.

The second time was angry and rough and satisfying. She had teased him and they had argued and he had spilled his seed inside of her without apology. She had liked it too, that raw closeness. She didn’t want tenderness then. She only wanted him as she once again looked upon death, certain she could not avoid it for a second time. Like their first, their second coupling had been enough. Having him always seemed unbelievable. Now Arya wondered what emotion would fill her in astonishment’s absence. She was certain she wouldn’t die the next day and with a blind certainty she could guarantee Gendry a similar fate. They could be quiet and delicate and warm. Yes, Arya wanted Gendry to look at her as he currently was.

A tentative hand reached out to cup Arya’s breast. Instantly goosebumps spread across her chest, encouraged only when Gendry’s thumb stroked at her nipple, turning the supple skin pert under his touch. Arya’s breath hitched when he reached out to touch her other breast and performed the same task there. He was cupping all of her in his hands and she wished for a moment that she had more to offer. Standing in offering in front of Gendry’s own muscled form had Arya feeling self-conscious, more than she ever had before. He was handsome and his body, like art, breathtaking at times. She was—

“Beautiful...” Gendry’s raspy whisper let out, interrupting her own thoughts.

He leaned down to take a breast in his mouth. He kissed her skin at first, the hot heat of his mouth gentle before he began to suck, causing Arya’s mouth to fall open as she instinctively arched her back into him, craving more than she realized. When Gendry lifted his head he smiled, only to disappear again as he gave her other tit a squeeze before sucking at her nipple, his teeth dragging upon the sensitive skin when he finally detached.

The firelight dried all remnants of his erotic kisses so when Arya stepped back into Gendry and grabbed at his neck to keep him close, he felt nothing but her hard chest and the sensation of her forearms moving upon his shoulders as if struggling to hold on. She gave up and Gendry thought
that maybe she’d happened upon her senses. This all felt surreal and not because he figured they’d die tomorrow. It felt surreal because he knew they wouldn’t and Arya was giving herself to him anyway.

Arya’s fingertip made a languid journey down the center of Gendry’s chest, into the light dusting of hair at the center of his abdomen all before coming to an abrupt stop at the top of his breeches. Her finger curled, pulling the linen away from his skin. The shorts he wore beneath his breeches came with it, hindering Arya’s bravery.

“Go on,” he teased.

When Arya remained still, Gendry leaned in to kiss her. It was encouragement and permission. He was asking for all the same things she wanted.

Arya carefully pulled at the tie keeping Gendry’s pants up on his hips. The taut lines that curved away from his hips and disappeared beneath his breeches were more clear now. More hair and skin revealed itself with each tug until finally the ties were loose and the fabric was separated enough to begin falling off Gendry’s hips. Arya allowed gravity to take over but soon grew impatient. She used her thumbs to push his pants down, exposing him. Gendry’s cockhead dragged along Arya’s stomach as she leaned down to help him step out of the rest of his clothes. Still in bed in only her own breeches she relaxed atop the too small straw mattress. The weight of her body caused her to bounce and when she finally reached a balance, Gendry looked down at her, waiting.

“I...I need a minute.”

Gendry grinned “Alright.” He thought she might push him away but instead she reached out to cup him, one hand fondling his balls while the other wrapped around his length. She didn’t move her fingers but instead leaned forward to taste him. The bead of precum evident on his tip vanished as Arya took the head of his cock in her mouth. It was warm and smooth against her tongue and when she pulled back the kiss she’d left behind had another bead of cum spurting out.

Her confidence dwindling, Arya leaned back as if in offering. She left her breeches on but she laid flat atop the mattress, waiting until Gendry calmly did what she expected. He knelt in the space her spread legs created. He was naked and stunning. She felt inadequate, once again wanting to move her hands up to her chest to conceal her nakedness.

“Can I...” His words trailed off. Arya had been so sure the past two times they were together that Gendry wondered if maybe he should have stopped all of this. But Arya nodded, her head shaking up and down with an aching urgency. She swallowed and Gendry leaned down, not caring that his
length folded up between them, pressed flat to her tummy as he stole a passionate kiss. Arya’s eyes were slow to open afterward but when they did she smiled and brought Gendry’s hands to her hips. It was all the reassurance he needed and soon he was leaning back on his haunches as he dragged Arya’s pants off her legs and away. In an instant she was exposed before him, looking as beautiful as ever as the fire crackled and painted her skin in uneven flashes of orange and shadow.

In an attempt to rid Arya of her fears, Gendry captured her mouth in a soft, wanting kiss. There was a slow drag away as they detached and then Gendry began his descent, kissing, nipping, and lapping at Arya’s exposed skin from her chin, down the valley of her breads, past the length of her tummy until finally his mouth was just above her center. He’d never done this before and his fingers were proof of that as he spread her cunt and began to feel around.

Arya just waited, allowing Gendry the time as she silently celebrated sharing this first with him. It was silly to expect a man to have only one partner but she wanted it all the same. It was something a lady should want. It was foolish and stupid and she never thought she’d care, mostly because she never thought she’d be here, laying beneath a man whose only intention was to adore her as much as he could. This wasn’t real, a passing notion confirmed as she felt Gendry’s tongue sucking at the space he’d just revealed. Her legs twitched and fell open, giving him better access. His nose tickled at the soft hair between her legs, breathing her in as he continued his ministrations. A rhythm was established, of shared suckling and lapping.

A flat tongue dragging upward upon her center had Arya releasing a strangled cry. “Gendryyyyy,” she whined while her hands scraped at his scalp, asking for more.

He raised his head and grinned, his lips and chin wet with the taste of her. Arya hid a laugh behind her palm. The action was cut off when Gendry gripped Arya’s thighs and gave them a slight pull. She was flat on her back now and she blinked, wondering where he’d take her next. In the moment she trusted Gendry more than she’d ever trusted another person.

“Do you—“

“Yes,” Arya tossed out.

Gendry snickered. “You don’t know what I was going to ask.”

“It doesn’t matter. The answer is yes.”
“It’s okay like this then?” Gendry attempted, waiting for her reaction.

Arya nodded anyway. “I want what you want.”

“I want you comfortable. We’ve never done it like this before.”

“I want to,” Arya reassured, now with a gentle hand to his scruffy cheek. She raised so she could kiss Gendry’s cheek and when she pulled away, she whispered: “I just want you. And I trust you.” Then: “Take me. Please.”

Gendry didn’t need anything else from Arya. Honestly, having her naked was enough. He could have just as easily laid down beside her and pulled her in close. He dreamed about that very act many nights when they were separated. This was better though, he thought.

Gendry lined his cock up with her entrance and slowly pushed inside. Arya dropped her head back as he filled her. His weight was pressing her into the mattress now as his elbows rested on either side of her head. Her hands once again found a lazy home around his shoulders. As Gendry bucked into Arya, and she met each thrust to increase their shared friction, the pair shared sloppy kisses. The pistoning of their lovemaking made kisses nearly impossible but they attempted anyway. Often times a sigh or a keen had their teeth clashing or their lips dragging upon one another as their hips met. Arya was especially delirious when she felt Gendry’s cock bump against a particularly sensitive spot, deep inside her. He also rolled his hips to press down on the swollen nub between her legs.

Arya whined. She’d never felt like this before. The other two times they’d slept together she had felt perfectly lovely. Now she was on fire, loving the feel of his length filling her up as he grunted and sighed into her skin, trying to hold off on a similar semblance of control.

“Let go,” Arya urged, as she kissed his brow. Her own show of affection was halted as Gendry gave one last thrust. She cried out and when it was silent again she noticed the streams of cum upon her tummy. Gendry’s length glistened as he flopped down beside her, his prick going limp against his thigh.

“Sorry,” he murmured with a kiss to her temple.

Arya smirked. “Why would you be sorry for anything that just happened?”
“Here,” Gendry offered, handing over his discarded shirt. Before Arya could grab for it he had swiped at her stomach to remove the proof of their coupling. She watched, almost sad to see her skin clean again. There was something rather animalistic about the way it felt when he came inside her or the way, afterward, she felt without him as his seed spilled out onto her thigh. She knew the risks and she was appreciative of his levelhead but selfishly Arya always found herself wanting more. Lately, in particular, it was as if she couldn’t get enough of him. Things had obviously been much more chaste prior to this night but their lovemaking followed suit.

Gendry raised up on an elbow, his eyes boring her in as his free hand reached out to rub at her tummy. His fingers gently ran the length of her scars there and Arya leaned back, allowing him to inspect the permanently damaged skin.

“They’re ugly…”

“What happened?”

“That’s for another day,” Arya said, almost pleading.

Gendry must have understood because he nodded and shifted his attention elsewhere. Originally it was so him thumbs could run gentle circles on her protruding hip bone but then he was caressing her arm where all of her previous burns had started to fade. All the blisters were gone and what was left was mere patches of raised skin, some of them still warm to the touch.

“Do these still hurt?”

Arya shook her head, causing Gendry to grin. “Not much. But they’ll scar. Just like everything else.”

Gendry leaned over her, looking like he was inspecting her remaining burns but the closer he became the clearer his intentions were. All was confirmed as he placed a kiss to the inside of her elbow then another to the skin just below. A smattering of kisses followed, all featherlight and deliberate. What his mouth could not soothe, his fingers did, running gently up and down the length of Arya’s arms, only stopping to grip at her shoulders for leverage as he moved further south. Goosebumps dotted her skin under his touch and when Gendry moved to lay between her thighs all of her tingled in anticipation.

“Can I…”
Arya nodded again, this time with her head pushed flat against her pillow — Gendry’s pillow, really.

“What’s the matter?”

“You don’t have to,” she assured abruptly. “We can just fuck again. I liked that.”

Gendry shifted upward to kiss her stomach, paying special attention to her belly button which he dipped his tongue inside after licking its taut edge. Even in her weakened state she was still mostly muscle and the fact turned Gendry on like no other. He was fairly certain that if Arya clamped her thighs shut around his head, she could make him lose consciousness. It was for this reason, and a few others, that he decided to tread carefully as he continued.

“I liked that too,” Gendry confirmed. “But I think I liked it a bit more than you—”

“Don’t pretend to know what I like!”

Gendry snorted. “I was selfish, is all. And I’ve heard…” His hand moved south, caressing the valley that separated her thighs from her hips. “This is supposed to feel good.”

Arya waited, remaining still as she supported her weight back on her elbows. She looked down to Gendry in all his naked glory and wanted to chuckle. This was what she had always wanted but never knew was possible. The teenage girl she used to be, the one that couldn’t help but to consider romance as even a silly option, had loved Gendry in some capacity then. Now, a woman, she was certain she loved him. She loved him in an almost painful way because she knew now how easily he could be taken from her. Dreaming was one thing but having Gendry and losing him with the clear knowledge of what he was capable of and how much he reciprocated her feelings was different. She couldn’t lose him; wouldn’t lose him - Not again, not ever.

“Arya?”

She looked down. “Hmm?”

Gendry wore a patient smile, one that told that perhaps he was amused as well. “Do you trust me?”
“Of course I trust you.”

He exhaled a bated breath, causing his chest to heave as he leaned back in. Gendry used his large palms to push Arya’s legs again and when she was revealed to him more fully, he wrapped those same hands around her thighs so he could pull her further down the bed.

“Oof!” Arya let out, followed by a giggle.

Gendry looked up one last time, a knowing smile etched across his face before he disappeared, causing another sound to emanate from Arya’s parted lips. “Ooh...oh,” she sighed. A hand felt around the bed for a sheet to grip onto for purchase while the other skirted down her stomach to the top of his head. If she leaned forward she could keep her hand at the back of his neck, spurring him on. *Would he want that?*, she wondered.

She didn’t know. She didn’t have time to even contemplate it. Soon Gendry had two then three fingers inside of her, pumping in and out while his mouth sucked and lapped at the sensitive folds of her cunt. The air was filled with the melody of Arya’s keening and she struggled to catch her breath when his mouth pulsed on her clit then suddenly stopped, only to blow on the nub, causing the most delicious shiver to travel up her spine and swirl in her belly.

“Relax…” Gendry ordered before licking the length of her again. He placed a hand to her stomach when her hips began to push up off the bed, instinctively bucking toward his giving mouth. Gendry could only chuckle as he continued his ministrations, all without apology.

“Oh...oh, Gendry, I’m...ooh,” Arya sighed out. If she was close to a precipice she was suddenly pulled from the edge and made to calm down. Then, just when she thought he’d finished he began again, suckling her clit in the most exciting way. She was powerless to him like this and as Gendry lapped at her wetness and tasted the proof of her passing orgasm, he reached up to cover her mouth with his palm.

Arya only pushed it away and boldly screamed out. “Fuck!”

From between her legs, Arya felt the vibrations of Gendry’s laughter. Satisfied, he reemerged again and kissed a return-journey, up Arya’s abdomen, through the valley of her breasts, pass her clavicle and up her neck before finally claiming her lips. She could taste herself on his tongue and the thought had her flushing wet between her legs again.
Exhausted, Gendry gave her one last peck before falling onto his back. Arya giggled and rolled over so she was on her stomach, her face only inches from his. “Is that how the commoners do it?”

Gendry chuckled. “I wouldn’t know. I’ve never done that before.”

Arya cupped his cheek and demanded another kiss. “That was wonderful.”

“Better than having me inside of you?”

Arya rolled her eyes. “Depends.”

Gendry laughed. “Is that so?”

“I love...I like when you fuck me. But it’s different. The closeness...it makes me forget. I’m consumed by it. It’s like we’re in our own world…” She looked away. “I sound like a tosser, don’t I?”

Gendry shook his head, still smiling. “You don’t.”

“But that was...what you did with your mouth...and your fingers,” she lamented in adoration. “That can’t be a thing all women expect?”

He shrugged. “Wouldn’t know. But…” He moved to kiss her shoulder. “It doesn’t matter what anyone else does or what’s normal or what’s not. We’ve never really fit into a mold, have we?”

Arya waited, struck by his honesty. “No, I suppose we haven’t.” She breathed out. “Thank you, Gendry.”

He chortled. “For getting you off? Anytime.”

Arya covered her head with her hands. When Gendry’s laughter died down he removed her palms to find her face scarlet and her eyes shut tight. “I always said I’d take whatever you gave me, Arya Stark, but I’d be lying if I said I didn’t like having control. I like you trusting me to have control. Not
everyone in this world is going to hurt you.”

Arya blinked up to the ceiling, nodding. “I know.”

“Do you?”

Without warning a single tear began to cascade down Arya’s cheek, landing at the corner of her mouth where it would soon be joined by others. Gendry repositioned himself so he was above her, one hand touching her cheek while the other rested gently on her hip. “What’s wrong? What did I do?”

“The Hound, he...he told me to go. He wouldn’t let me kill Cersei and I wanted to kill him for that but I knew he was right. I’m not meant to be this hateful person—”

“You’re not hateful—”

“I have hate in me,” she assured. “Because of what I’ve seen and gone through. Because of the things my family has endured.”

“None of any of that was your fault.”

“It doesn’t matter. It all still hurts and I ignored it for a really long time. The killing felt good...if I did it now, I’m sure it still would but Sandor, he reminded me that I wasn’t built for that. I’m better than that. I can fix myself.”

“You’re not broken, Arya. You never have been. He shouldn’t have made you think—”

“He didn’t! But I am! And sometimes all I can think about is the fact that you wouldn’t come with me to Winterfell then and then I changed and the world continued to take things from me and now you’re here…”

“Are you wondering if things had been different if we’d be here now?”
“No,” she gave softly, shaking her head. “I’m wondering how you can possibly care for me now.”

“I—”

“I know that you do,” she assured, now with both hands to his cheeks. “But with Jon tonight I realized...there’s still so much you don’t know. And I wonder if once you find out, if you’ll leave. Or if maybe me figuring all of that out will be too much for you.”

“It won’t—”

“But you can’t be sure!” Her voice was high-pitched and pained as she choked back another sob. “We can’t live in Dragonstone forever. I need to be able to leave this place eventually. It all just feels so safe right now…”

“That’s not a bad thing. You make me feel safe too.”

Arya sniffed out a laugh. “Do you think this is what The Hound meant then? This is what I’m meant to be doing?”

“Fucking me?”

“Being with you,” she corrected as she slapped his shoulder.

“I think that maybe I’m just part of your plan, Arya.”

“Just a part of it?”

“Aye.”

“Am I a part of yours?”
“Sure. Though I don’t have many plans. I planned to get you out of your room and I’ve done a decent job there. I think that when I figure out my plans, I’d like you to be a part of them.”

“Do you want me before? Is that okay then? Like you’ll do for me...I can help you figure out your plans?”

“Sure,” Gendry nodded. He leaned in to kiss her and she gratefully accepted the momentary distraction. When he pulled away, the blue in his eyes seemed darker somehow. “And maybe we can make some plans together?”

Arya swallowed. “Sure.” She looked up to the ceiling, as if already brainstorming.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a chuckle from Gendry who had moved to his side in an attempt to get comfortable. “Our first plan,” he grumbled, as he reached an arm around Arya’s naked midsection and pulled her close again, “should be to do this in your bed as much as we can. This bed’s too bloody small.”

Chapter End Notes

NOW! I can FINALLY promote my new story - Careful Fear and Dead Devotion. It’s a Modern AU Gendrya story with the premise: “If King’s Landing was Washington, DC…” It’s trope-city: buddy cop, falling for your brother’s best friend, roommates, secretive mutual pining...all with the typical Gendrya forbidden love/class conflict aspect. There are also a ton of references to the show so the story isn’t completely removed from canon. I’d be super honored if you checked it out and left a review!

ALSO - I’m looking for a beta. Some of these chapters have been a bit of a mess because I’ve got so much going on I can’t give them the editing attention they need. I just want someone who can just read my chapters over before I post and make sure that I’m not missing any details that may be obvious to me but that a reader might need clarification on. It (hopefully) wouldn’t be too time consuming. If you’re interested, please let me know!
It was odd to think that the girl that had once disappeared in the woods so she could hide her womanhood away now stood before Gendry, bare skinned and vulnerable.

“What would your parents say?”

Arya laughed and Gendry was immediately thankful for the sound. “What?”

“I just mean...”

Arya returned to bed now carrying a cup of freshly-poured cider. She leaned across Gendry to place it on the bedside table. She was so shameless in her nudity that she didn't care much that her breasts and toned tummy were pressed into him and she practically asked for the way Gendry reached out to grab for her waist, steadying her as she laid back down.

There Arya mimicked his own position, his face buried in the pillow he clutched, looking to her like she was worth more than the moon in the sky and the sun that would soon follow it in the morning. Soon Arya was on her stomach too, ignorant to the way his eyes adored her, only giggling like a true and proper girl when Gendry reached out to move her hair off her shoulder so he could see her better. From above they surely looked like children sharing secrets. That was the problem, or at least it once had been. That was the entire point of Gendry’s question.

“I showed you my cock,” he said, covering his red cheeks to laugh.

Arya scrunched her nose and joined him. “Yes, you’ve showed me your cock often, Gendry. Once tonight. Twice yesterday and the day before...”
He pinched her backside, causing her hips to raise from the featherbed. “I meant before. With the Night’s Watch. You wouldn’t even take a piss in front of us but you didn’t walk away when the rest of us had to.”

“I didn’t look!” Arya defended. Gendry raised a brow in challenge and it was her turn to cover her scarlet cheeks. “I didn’t look at anyone other than you!” she corrected.

“Mhm.”

“What do you think? I cared to look at Hot Pie? At Lommy?”

“You cared to look at me?”

“I was thirteen. I had...urges. Just like you did, I’m sure. Actually, if I remember correctly, I woke up to a few of your urges poking me in the back—”

“Piss off. You were...younger then. It wasn’t like that.”

“Was it not like that in the same way you told Jon this isn’t like this?”

“It didn’t matter. You were hightborn. You were off limits. You could have been older than me and I still wouldn’t have—”

“Liar.” Gendry paused and the sight of his handsome features softening had Arya’s mouth gone dry. “Your whores...was one at The Peach?”

“What? No!” He paused. “Why do you care? They were whores.”

“I hated that bitch. I didn’t know why then but I did.”

“Because you had seen my cock and you wanted my cock?”
Arya flicked the back of Gendry’s head. “I didn’t want your cock I just didn’t want anyone else to have your cock.” She breathed in, her voice suddenly small. “I didn’t know then that the two were the same.”

Gendry shook his head and the moment fizzled between them, the air crackling like the logs that settled in the nearby fire: comfortable and warm.

“What did you mean...what would my parents think?”

“I didn’t mean anything. I need to shut my stupid mouth—”

“You don’t. What did you mean?”

Gendry reluctantly inhaled. “I just mean...for a lady you’re quite comfortable being naked.”

“Are you complaining?”

“Definitely not. It’s how I like you best—”

“Is that so?” Gendry quirked a brow in acknowledgement. Arya grinned and looked away. “Are you asking what they’d think of my unladylike behavior or what they’d think of my unladylike behavior with you?”

“Is it unladylike if we’re married?”

Arya swallowed. “What?”

“Oh. No. I mean...is this...never mind.”

Arya snickered. “Your stupid mouth might be my favorite part of you, Gendry Waters.”
In an instant, Gendry had her in his arms, tickling her sides to coax her into surrender. It was also an attempt at distraction — a successful attempt that ended with Gendry’s innuendo pressed to Arya’s belly. “Are you sure that’s your favorite part?”

“It’s certainly the biggest part.”

His eyes widened and the grip he had on her tightened but in a way that had goosebumps painting Arya’s skin. “You tease...”

Arya reached beneath the covers to grab Gendry’s cock and begin to stroke. “Don’t be a brute.”

He lost his breath over her shoulder while she continued her ministrations. “Arya..”

“You’re right,” she announced, suddenly letting go. “I am a tease.”

All at once she was a mess of giggles and together they were a mess of limbs, wrestling atop her featherbed. It ended with Arya on top and as the pair worked to catch their breath she thoughtlessly leaned down to seize Gendry’s lips, stealing what little bit of oxygen he had left. Together they inhaled, breathing one another in, before slowly opening their eyes.

“If you meant to ask what my mother and father would think of me now...I don’t think it’d be much different than what they thought of me before.”

“No?”

“No. Not really. I was hopeless in my mother’s eyes...adored and revered in my father’s. He encouraged the wolf in me while my mother tried to tame it. It’s a wonder the two got along.”

“They did though, didn’t they?”

“Always.”

“They were in love?”
“Very much so. Theirs was a good marriage.”

Gendry reached up to push back the hair that began to frame Arya’s face. “Sounds nice.”

Arya waited, biting her lip. “Do you remember your mother much?”

“No,” Gendry breathed out. “Not much at all.”

“Did she look like you?”

“I don’t think so but I barely recall. She had lighter hair. She had a pretty voice...a kind smile. I remember flashes...simple memories.”

Arya reached down to cup Gendry’s cheek. She would have kissed him if she weren’t so distracted by the stoic nature of his features. “I’m sorry.”

“Why are you sorry? Less to remember is less to miss.”

"I think about that sometimes. All the time, lately..." Arya's voice trailed off.

"Missing them?"

"No...well, yes. Always. But..." She smiled despite herself. "If they were still here, you wouldn't be."

"Oh."

"If my dad hadn't died I never would have...I wouldn't know you. I'd be a Lady of the North. You'd be—"
"Burned to death in King's Landing, most likely."

Arya rolled off Gendry and instinctively settled into his side as if it were the very place she belonged. “This is a stupid conversation.”

He looked to her, pressed a kiss to her forehead then looked up to the ceiling in agreement. “Very stupid.”

The past was gone and with it the people that had raised them. Even a tender moment couldn’t touch that pain and neither was bold enough to wonder if time would ever change that. They’d both been so good at being strong they forgot what weak felt like and now, even together and with hope on the horizon, they were terrified to find out.

“I’ve never swam in the ocean before, you know,” Arya managed, her voice cutting through the thick silence.

“What?”

“For fun. I’ve never—”

Gendry looked down to her, then back up to the ceiling, smiling again. The moment was gone — banished — they didn’t have control of then but they had control of now. “We should change that.”

~!~

Jon had yet to get used to the constant escort: to and from his chambers as he managed through meals and meetings and councils. His father had not needed protecting walking around Winterfell but that was a different world, Jon knew now. It felt like a different life too, as if the same boy foolish and naive enough to believe such a thing could not have possibly grown up to be King. Even if this life and his role within it was a temporary one, it still felt surreal. Bran would arrive in a few short weeks and Jon was already counting the days. There was so much to plan and set into motion before then, most notably his place in the world outside of King’s Landing, when he’d return to being a man without a title. There were other facets too: ensuring Sansa was protected as Queen of the North, helping Bran to implement only the best advisors, and making sure Arya...

His mind drifted off at the sight of her, stone-cold features and straight spine, the last of her sop
consumed as she now sipped at the dwindling wine it had been drenched in. Her eyes were like ice as they watched the hall, scanning amongst the nobles that ate and chatted, each group getting smaller by the day as everyone slowly attempted to assimilate back to life in their homelands. But for Arya it was company enough, especially considering how everyone, despite their best clear efforts, couldn’t help but to glance to the Princess much as Jon was now. If she were a mirage, blinking did nothing to vanish her and the closer Jon got the more he felt her presence. He was at least thankful to see needle at her side as he sat down beside her. She didn’t look to him at first but when she did she was silent, waiting for the words that soon came.

“You’re...here,” was all Jon could manage.

Arya returned her attention to the room. “I am.”

“Why?”

Arya smirked. She wouldn’t bother with the truth, that being that her lovemaking with Gendry had given her enough life to consider that maybe a world existed outside of the room she’d locked herself away in. She had an ocean to see, but before that a brother to make amends with. “It was time.”

Jon nodded. He thanked the servant girl that placed his plate down before him, his mind and tongue a hasty mess as he looked to Arya still, as if patiently waiting for her to disappear. “What happened?”

Finally, Arya looked to him. “Can we not make a scene of it?”

He swallowed, filling his lungs with forgotten air as his nearby gruel grew cold. “Of course.”

“I just thought about our dinner and...I can’t stay here forever.”

“Well—”

“And shut-in to runaway seemed like a big jump.”

Jon swayed in agreement. “T’would be.”
“They’ll start talking. They already have.”

“You said it yourself. They were talking already. What difference does it make?”

“I’m going to ignore it. Act like I’ve been here all along.”

Jon smirked as he finally dug at his meal. “You have been here all along.”

“I know. I mean...never mind,” she sighed.

Without warning Arya stood. It happened so quickly that Jon only noticed her when she was steps away. He hadn’t felt her stand up, hadn’t heard her chair scrape as she pushed off of it and then pushed it in. Suddenly she was at a distance, her presence threatening to go just as Jon had expected it would. She was stealthy and private but she was predictable in those things. The only level of uncertainty Arya held was in the timing of her quiet brilliance. She could be whoever she wanted to be, on her own time.

“Where are you going?” Jon boldly called out.

Arya shrugged. “Swimming, maybe.”

~!~

“Bollocks, Arya! Not fair!”

An attempt at a kiss, after several only cut short by the need to breathe, had Arya pushing Gendry down into the ocean. The gentle currents lapped at his neck as foam tickled the fingers that fell back into the sand. Gendry pushed off the earth and began to run after Arya who was already several paces away, holding her tunic up as if it weren’t already soaked.

Gendry ran at her, aiming for her calves with steady deliberation, enough concentration dotting his brow to allow him to lift her weight from the water and throw her over his shoulder. She tapped at
his back in surrender and when another wave approached the shore Gendry dropped her legs, sending Arya headfirst into the rising water. She bobbed up immediately but Gendry was gone by then, his body treading water out where the ocean around Dragonstone truly started. Arya swam to him, forgetting her plans of revenge as he swept her up in his arms. She trusted him then, knowing their flirting had shifted as his mouth began to suckle at her neck. She laughed into the sensation, pushing him away out of instinct. All the while she loved the strong grip his arms had around her waist, keeping their bodies close.

With Arya’s legs finally wrapped around Gendry’s midsection, she didn’t feel the way he moved them toward the shore. She only felt the way the ocean receded and how the sound of waves kissing the sand grew louder with each step. She was too distracted by his kisses, then by the way he looked at her with a knowing smile. They’d never had a chance to be this carefree and both were seemingly shocked at the innate talent required to enjoy the moment. It was nice to know that they worked well together no matter the circumstances, in this life and the next and all the prior lives that led them to this moment, now moving slowly upon one another as their kisses found a passionate rhythm upon the dry land.

The pair remained like that for some time, in a rather innocent coupling compared to their more recent activities hidden away in Arya’s chambers. These were the moments they had never been afforded, moments they had long ago parted ways with. They hadn’t known they were capable of being this reckless; they didn’t want to be, such a thing didn’t seem possible after their separation all those years ago. It was almost as if they were teenagers again, not a bastard and a lady but a boy and a girl from normal families from normal lands outside of times of war.

“It’s getting dark.”

“Good,” Arya moaned as her hands began to wander. “I’m not done with you.”

Gendry sat up. His chest heaved as he looked down to Arya, her hair in thick strands, all of them sand-coated as she lay upon the beach. “Aye. And I, you. But the steps heading back inside are a nightmare when they’re wet. Learned that one the hard way. A few times.”

Arya cackled. “Fell on your ass, did ya?”

“A few times,” he repeated before joining in her laughter.

Gendry stood and reached out a hand in offering, one Arya readily took so she could launch her body up toward his. Their faces nearly collided but Arya took the moment to give Gendry one last slow kiss. When they pulled away both were reluctant to open their eyes but when they did the sky
was somehow darker, as if its aim was to push them back inside.

Arya jumped on Gendry’s back and he stumbled forward as his body accepted the weight of her. He reached behind and repositioned her, taking the chance to stroke at the crease of her upper thigh.

Arya swatted his hand away. “Piss off!”

Gendry chuckled. “I was making sure you were holding on. I told you these steps were slippery.”

“Fuck your steps,” she spat, all before hiding her giggles in the back of his damp shirt.

They made it to the top of the stairs without incident. Just as seamlessly, Arya jumped down and grabbed Gendry’s hand to drag him up toward the castle. The couple was barefoot and still drenched, the salty sea-air highlighting their dishevelment more as they began to dry. Without the ocean soaking their skin their state was telling. Thankfully for them the dawn concealed most of what had transpired, particularly the purple love bites that made their home on the swell of Arya’s breasts or the crescent shaped nail marks etched into Gendry’s back from their initial romp against the rocks. It was not quite dark enough to hide Arya’s identity but a similar disbelief existed out in the bailey as it had that morning during the castle’s broken fast. Southerners knew only of rumors surrounding Lady Arya Stark, some of them so unbelievable they doubted her existence altogether. Surely she wasn’t suddenly frolicking around with the Blacksmith. The King wouldn’t allow such a thing.

He didn’t, or at least, Jon was hesitant to approve. He had been so relieved to see Arya outside of her chambers that he nearly forgave the sight before him, that of his youngest sister and his trusted friend. Arya appeared to him much in the way she had the previous night: older now, all innocent lost. The smile she wore was genuine though, far more genuine than it had been during their dinner. Jon knew now that Arya wouldn’t have attended if it weren’t for Gendry. If it weren’t for him she’d likely still be locked in her room, the fact of which had Jon contemplating rewarding his comrade with a feast or a beheading. The sudden realization that both were within his power had Jon looking away, walking away from the window just as Arya and Gendry disappeared into the castle down below.

With shoulders touching the pair continued much as they had, lost in a conversation they didn’t care if others heard. There was the occasional murmur, a clearly sly remark, then the inevitable laughter. Even if it was given in jest, they couldn’t help but to touch one another. Arya pushed Gendry away more than once, causing him to falter as he instantly sought his lost balance. He pinched her cheek in return, or flicked her ear. There were no apologies, only shared laughter.

“Are you going to supper then?”
“Doubt it.”

“No?”

“Are you bringing me supper? I much preferred that to this morning’s display.”

“Display?”

Arya smirked. “I told you it was a disaster. I’ve been gawked at enough for one day. Don’t avoid the question. Should I expect you soon or—”

“Arya?”

The youngest Stark girl’s face went blank as the familiar voice called upon her, pulling her out of the moment and plunging her into one that was once so comforting. It was not Dragonstone but Winterfell and they were younger then, her and…

“Sansa!” Arya inhaled sharply at the sight of her sister.

Sansa’s hair had been braided back off her shoulders in rejection of the humidity but atop her fiery locks sat a crown. It was delicate steel twisted into intricate knots that eventually revealed themselves as wolves around her hairline. Her usually thick cloak was replaced by a linen dress: still grey, still modest. Gone was the girl that once worshipped King’s Landing. Sansa’s presence was unwavering, marked only by a nearby Lady Brienne standing in the shadows. There was bravery that lifted the eldest Stark daughter’s shoulders, even as she looked to her sister in confusion. The pride that she held in her cheekbones was lost on Arya who still looked as if she’d been consumed by the ocean and was happy because of it.

“Arya,” Sansa nodded stoically. Her eyes then moved toward Gendry and his equally mussed state. “Lord Gendry,” she gave just the same, her head bowing in a way that had Arya’s eyes like saucers: round as her mouth dropped open.

“M’lady,” Gendry offered with a bow of his own.
When Arya finally looked to Sansa she swallowed. If she had been holding Gendry’s hand she no longer was, a fact apparent as she now watched Gendry dismiss himself, disappearing into the shadows in a way that felt like betrayal. Lady Brienne seemed to vanish too, leaving the Stark girls lost in a private moment neither seemed quite prepared for.

“What did you just call him?” Arya whispered.

“Lord Gendry.”

“Wh...Why?”

“What do you mean why?” Sansa smirked as she stepped in toward her sister. “He’s a lord now.”

“What?”

“Arya...Storm’s End. It’s his. Where have you been?”

“All over,” Arya deadpanned. “Not present, apparently.”

“He didn’t tell you?”

“I...no. He...no,” Arya settled once more, sad that was her only option.

“What does it matter? You're a lady. He's a lord.”

“It matters a lot, actually!” Arya balked. “Because I'm not a lady—”

“You most certainly are a lady.”
“I’m no more a lady than he is a lord. Was this your decision?”

“Hardly,” Sansa snickered. “The Dragon Queen made it so. I don’t know how he didn’t—”

“Well he didn’t,” Arya spat. Her words were final, marked by the way she began to march away, her hand on her hip as if to grip needle. Needle wasn’t there.

“Arya!” Sansa called out.

“We’ll take supper together,” Arya insisted strongly.

“We...we will?”

“We will,” she exhaled, pushing the air out past trembling lips - the same lips Gendry had kissed and caressed only moments before. “I have no other plans tonight.”

Chapter End Notes

THANKS FOR READING!!!

Don't forget to check out my new Gendrya Modern AU: "Careful Fear and Dead Devotion". I finished storyboarding it this weekend and I am so. damn. excited to continue posting.

Also, for those of you who have found me on tumblr, yes I have a tumblr and it's the same username there as on here. Let's be friends!! I promise I don't bite! xx

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!