The Past is a Grotesque Animal

by shinelikemillions

Summary

Modern AU - A target has been placed on the Stark family, and it is up to Arya to answer the questions of who and why. In the midst of chaos she flees the city with some new friends, carrying with her a grudge and a secret. But Arya isn't the only one with a hidden agenda, and she will soon learn that everything her father taught her about trust, honor, and love, might just be the reason for her ultimate demise.

Notes

I already have the whole plot laid out (I think), but I'm going to take my time with the story so bear with me please! Also, I couldn't come up with a proper title so I just used the first thing that came to mind. The Past is a Grotesque Animal is actually a song by Of Montreal. Listen here if you're interested: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3RAI8Ntamw (it's seriously just 10+ minutes of what the fuq?)
Chapter 1

As the sky began graying in preparation for the coming dawn, Arya sat perched against the headboard of her bed, flipping through the little sketchbook she had been doodling in for the past few months. She allowed herself a small smile, quite pleased with how quickly her talent was developing. The first time Sansa saw her drawings her sister had spurted out lemon water through her nostrils. But Arya had not been daunted in the least bit; Sansa might be a successful fashion designer by the ripe young age of twenty, but she could never draw a stick-figure half as well as Arya could.

A sudden crashing noise came from downstairs, causing her to jump with a start. She threw back her sheets and hopped out of bed with cat-like reflexes, but once her bare feet touched the cold wooden floor she retreated right back into the warmness of her sanctuary. Arya bit her lip, wondering what she should do to salvage her dignity. Hastily, she grabbed her cellphone off of the nightstand and texted Sansa: "What the hell was that, are you okay?" Then, after a moment, she decided to add an exclamation point, just to bump up her level of concern.

Her phone vibrated seconds later, alerting her of a new message. She opened it and read her sister's text: "Omg there's a dick in the kitchen!!"

Raising a quizzical eyebrow Arya replied: "Don't be frightened, Sansa. The first time seeing one was jarring for me too..."

Bz. Bz. "You've seen one before?! When?? Why didn't you tell me!"

Arya didn't think that was information one would share with others, even if they were sisters. Nevertheless, she was tempted to say it was Jon's porn collection, but then thought better of it. Ygritte was proof enough that their brother wasn't into that stuff. But before she could think of something else to say she suddenly heard quacking. A duck, she thought stupidly. Sansa needs to do something about that autocorrect.

Bracing herself for another shock of cold, Arya hopped out of bed once more and ran as quickly as she could downstairs. In the kitchen she found Sansa, Bran and Rickon petting a baby duckling on the marble counter. With bright eyes and a goofy grin Arya jumped right into the action, stroking the ball of fluff with greedy fingers. "Where did he come from?" she asked her siblings, still smiling. Ducks were not very common in the frigid lands around Winterfell, especially not one so ridiculously adorable.

"He just walked in through the back door," Bran chuckled. "Poor thing must be lost."

Robb emerged from the hallway, his auburn hair looking like a nest that had been flying through a hurricane all night. Arya bit back a snide remark, knowing full well what the name of that hurricane was. "Mother's not going to be very happy once she finds out you've been letting a stray duck run around on her kitchen counter," he warned with a yawn.

Rickon smiled and said, "Mother won't know. She and father went to see Robert today remember? They won't be back for days."

"She'll find out either way," Jon, who was sitting at the table nursing a cup of orange juice, remarked. "You all have big mouths, the lot of you."

Arya tore off a chunk of bread from the counter and tossed it at her favorite brother. She smirked in
satisfaction when it bounced off his forehead and landed in his drink. Jon made a disgusted face but Arya ran to him and squeezed his neck in an embrace before he could speak. "What?" she challenged, "you got something to say? Huh?" She squeezed even harder until he let out a whimpered choke. When she released him he gasped hungrily for air.

"Christ, Arya, what was that for!"

"Nothing," she said sweetly, "I just wanted to hug you is all."

Jon pursed his lips and rolled his eyes, but otherwise let it slide. "Anyway," he said, "what's everyone doing today?"

Sansa had moved away from the duck and was now raiding the fridge for something to eat. "Joffrey and I are going out later," she said casually. "He's picking me up in a few hours."

Everyone let out a unified groan. "Honestly, Sansa, how long will it take for you to realize that Joffrey is an absolute prick?" Robb spoke first.

"An ass," Bran added.


The four siblings then looked to Rickon in expectance of his contribution. The youngest boy twisted his face in thought, then let it fall. "Oh, come on guys, that's not fair. You took all the good ones!"

"Not true," Jon quipped. "There's cocksucker, ball licker, shithead."

"Douche canoe, clitsquiggle, fuckface," Arya intoned.

"Dickhead, pussy, asswipe," Robb pointed out.

"Eunch, twat, jerk," Bran suggested (he had always been the nice one).

"Titty wrinkle!" Rickon shouted loudly, throwing up his hands in victory and beaming with pride.

Arya snorted in laughter, but Sansa was indignant. "Enough! All of you! Joffrey is lovely," she said defensively. "He just has a temper is all, like his father."

Jon scoffed. "That little shit is nothing like his father. His mother's so greedy she probably took over Robert's half of Joffrey's DNA."

"Oh, shut up. Lucky he's nothing like that drunken old sot." Veering the attention away from herself she asked, "What are the rest of you guys doing?"

"I've got to go to work in Father's place," Robb sighed. As the oldest, he was to take over the family business when the time came. Father had always been proud of Robb; at only twenty-three his son was already doing as well as any man twice his age.

Jon would have shared the responsibility, being the same age as Robb and all, but he wanted to join the Night's Watch instead - the most prestigious military faction in Westeros. Arya had begged him not to join, since it meant that he would be away at the Wall for several months or even years at a time, but Jon had explained to her that it was an honor to serve and protect their home. She didn't talk to him for weeks after that, but he made amends when one night he brought her a present. A real valyrian steel dagger. "Stick 'em with the pointy end," Jon had instructed, "but don't go around
poking holes in everyone who makes you angry. If you did, there'd be no one left for me to protect.” She was twelve at the time, and over the six years that had passed since then, they had never fought again.

Arya's fond ruminations were interrupted by Bran's voice. "Me and Rickon are going to visit Meera and Jojen to pick up Summer and Shaggydog."

"Rickon and I," corrected Sansa.

"Potato, tomato," he waved vaguely at the air, demonstrating how little he cared for grammar. "Anyway," he continued to answer Jon's question before his sister could say another word, "do you and Arya want to come?"

She tossed a handful of cereal into her mouth, chewed thoughtfully, then took a swig out of the milk carton. "Oh, gross!" Sansa exclaimed in disgust.

Arya stuck her tongue out - coated in what looked remarkably like shit but was actually soggy Cocoa Puffs - to indicate that she didn't give a flying fuck. "No thanks," she told Bran. "Besides, they're your friends, not mine."

Bran shrugged. "They wouldn't mind, but suit yourself. What about you, Jon?"

"I know them even less than she does, so I see no reason to go either. But hey," he looked at Arya then, "wanna to go to the lake? You know, to celebrate the first day of summer?"

Arya's face lit up. "Can we bring Nymeria and Ghost?"

Upon hearing their names, both Arya and Jon's wolves trotted into the kitchen, their fur matted with sleep. The duckling, which had fallen asleep in Rickon's arms, jerked awake and began quacking in fear. After watching Rickon step outside, Jon frowned. "Arya, they're wolves. You know it's illegal to keep them as pets. The only reason we haven't been arrested yet is because we're so far up north, where no one bothers to check for criminals."

"I thought the reason why we haven't been arrested yet is because Father practically runs the justice system."

"She has a point," Robb agreed, peeling a banana. "There are law enforcements in every city, but as the leader of the northern province, Father has the last say in all matters, major or otherwise."

"Wow, look at Robb all grown up and serious," Sansa acknowledged approvingly. "Too bad Father isn't here to kiss you on the forehead and give you a gold star."

Robb made to throw the banana peel at his sister, but she shied away and hid behind Bran.

"Well even so, we can't just bring wolves out in the public. People will shit their pants."

Arya hugged Nymeria and let the beast lick her unwashed face. "I can understand if people would do that after seeing Ghost, but how can they be afraid of my wittle buggy wuggy boo?"

"Wittle?" Bran hooted, "Nymeria is the second biggest of the pack. She could tear out a grown man's throat in half a second."

"Only if I told her to," Arya grinned mischievously.

"It doesn't matter," Jon sighed heavily, "we can't bring them."
All of a sudden Bethoveen's Symphony No. 5 began playing loudly. The whole room broke out in laughter as Arya looked at her phone to see that it was their father.

"That's the ringtone you gave him?" Robb raised his eyebrows in disbelief.

"Actually, it's the ringtone I use for everyone."

"Why? It sounds like the Doom is coming or something."

"Exactly. Everyone knows I only text, so if someone calls I'll know that I'm either in huge trouble, or there's a dire emergency."

The laughter died down in an instant, and Arya, when she realized that she had been staying out of trouble of late, froze in panic. After a beat, she picked up the phone. "Hello?" her voice was hesitant. "Oh. Oh my god, are you serious? Yeah, do you want to talk to them? Oh. Okay. Sansa and Bran? Yeah, okay I'll tell them. Okay. Yeah. Yeah, see you soon. Love you, too. Bye." She clicked off her phone and looked up. "Jon Arryn is dead," she said softly.

A flurry of shouts and questions attacked her all at once.

"What are you serious?"

"How?"

"What happened?"

"What do we do?"

"Is Father coming home?"

"Where are they right now?"

"Hey! Hello? Tell us!"

"Okay, everyone needs to just CALM. THE FUCK. DOWN." Arya smoothed her still-bedraggled hair and took a deep breath as she waited for her siblings to pipe down. When it was quiet again she explained, "Father is going back to King's Landing with Robert and Joffrey first. Mother is coming home. Robb is staying to take Father's place in his absence, and Rickon is staying as well. Bran is going down to begin learning about the family business, and the three of us - " she nodded at Sansa and Bran, " - are going to attend the funeral. And Jon, since you're leaving for the Wall in less than a week anyway..." she trailed off from there, letting him draw the conclusion himself.

An uncomfortable silence fell upon them like an old scratchy blanket.

"Hey!" Rickon broke the spell as he bounced back into the kitchen, breathless, with a toothy grin spread across his face. "Did I miss anything?"
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Okay so I know I said I wanted to take it slow, but I'm going to try to get out a chapter a day, so please excuse any rough edges. I'll probably come back around and fix little issues later, when I'm not - you know - a lazy fuck. Anyway, enjoy :)

EDIT: Who am I kidding, I can't do a chapter a day. Sorry guys, I'm just so busy daydreaming about celebrities I will never be with. Please understand.

Today was Gendry's day off; nothing special, really. He sat on a squeaky stool, its leather cushion torn and half-gutted, hunched over the clear glass counter in Tobho Mott's shop. He wasn't actually supposed to be here, especially with his boss out on business for the week, but Gendry didn't have anything better to do, and Tobho didn't seem to mind the extra business it earned for his store.

Concentration lined his face as he polished the gun he had recently repaired. The bright light above his head illuminated the tiny blemishes on the dust cover and slide. Gendry grumbled under his breath, wondering what the point of owning a gun was if you weren't even going to take proper care of it.

Those were the exact words Tobho Mott would use when given any weapon that was less than pristine, be it a gun, a knife, or even a rock, for that matter. Gendry had not understood what the fuss was about at first, but when he asked his boss what the big deal was, and told him that it was just a few scratches here and there, he had gotten the worst scolding of his life.

"Gunsmithing is not just a job," the man had bellowed, "it's an art! Which makes gunsmiths artists. Now what kind of artist wants to see his work spit and shat on? What kind, boy?" But when Gendry could only stare wide-eyed in silence, Tobho had continued. "How many, you think, can do what I do? Do you know? Well, do ya? The answer is none! No one can do what I can, and you're the luckiest bastard this city's ever gonna meet, being that I've taken you in as an apprentice for reasons I can't even remember anymore. We are artisans, boy. Well, I am, at least. But you can be too if you clean that wax out of your ears and regrow the half of your brain that's gone missing. We aren't like those good-for-nothing armorers, who shove in bits and pieces of stuff into guns like a dog would stick his prick into a bitch – he might know how to do it and what the result will be, but he won't do it well, and the bitch he's serving, dumb as she may be, will know full well that she hadn't been fucked proper. You understand what I'm saying, boy?"

The thirteen year old in him at the time had almost burst into tears, but now, thinking back, he almost burst into laughter. Tobho was no Shakespeare, to be sure, but his messages always stuck in the end.

As the sun sank deeper into the horizon, and the sky darkened from an orange glow to a purple bruise to a blackened haze, he rubbed his weary eyes and closed up for the night.

Gendry was no drinker, but every so often he would pay a visit to the neighborhood bar, every so often meaning once a year on the same day at the same time. Twelve o'clock was the tradition, though he wasn't quite sure how it actually started.

The bar he always went to was a shabby hole-in-the-wall, still in business thanks to black magic
(because honestly, it was nothing short of a miracle that place was still open). Even on the busiest of nights it was never very crowded, so when Gendry entered through the creaking door he wasn't surprised to see no more than four people, including the bartender and the waitress, inside.

He took a seat at the bar and ordered a scotch, neat. The bartender promptly returned with a frosted mug of – he smelled its contents – beer. “Cheers,” he lifted the glass glumly, then downed a healthy pull of the drink that froze his brain and warmed his belly.

The next hour came and went, and Gendry found himself quite alone, trying hard to ignore the blatant and, quite frankly, uncomfortable flirting between the drink maker and the drink server.

"Excuse me," a small voice came from the other end of the bar in a fruitless effort to get the bartender's attention. "Excuse me? Hey! Hello?"

Gendry rolled his eyes into his glass. There was nothing more annoying than an underaged kid trying to buy drinks at some run down bar. It might have passed at a fancy club, but establishments like those were for the privileged pricks who had enough money to buy their way through the sorry excuse that was the law. In fact, Gendry didn't doubt that those highborn douchebags could very well get away with murder, and not one official would get up to even scratch his ass about it.

He cast a sidelong glance at the figure again, scoffing in amusement. Did the kid really think he could pass for more than sixteen years old? The boy wore a dirty gray hoodie - with the hood pulled up so that his head looked too big for his body - that stopped just above his knobby knees. How did he know they were knobby? he found himself asking; because the jeans that looked like they'd fit his arm in one leg was still too baggy on the boy. You couldn't be that tiny and not have knobby knees, he concluded; it was simply the law of physics. Even Lommy, that scrawny little graffiti kid who only tagged in green for some stupid reason, had more meat on his bones than this poor guy.

For a moment Gendry considered buying the boy a drink, or even some food, just to be nice; it was, after all, what his mother would have done. He downed his drink and moved to get up, but he was a second too late, and two other men seemed to have beat him to it. They were a burly pair, though not overly intimidating; the kid appeared to think so too, for he just stood there still as a stone without even turning around.

"You lost, little boy?" one man, sporting a filthy beard, laughed roughly.

"Did you make a wrong turn on the way to the playground?" the second man with a gaunt, clean-shaven face cackled.

As Gendry watched in silence, he wondered if there was going to be a fight. Most likely, he decided. It might do the boy some good, too. Maybe then he'll stop wandering around on the streets trying to get fucked up, and start helping out his parents or making something of himself. Gendry glanced around, looking for the bartender to order another drink to enjoy the show, but the man was nowhere to be found.

"Hey! We're talking to you, boy!" the bearded man put a heavy hand on the kid's shoulders to turn him around. "Didn't your ma ever teach you some fucking manners?"

"I'm not a boy!" the boy - who apparently wasn't one at all - snapped around with fury in her eyes. She shoved the man's arm away and made to run, but the gaunt man grabbed ahold of her before she could get past them.

Fuck, Gendry thought. The kid was even stupider than he imagined. No girl in her right mind would come down to this place alone, or even at all, for that matter. A rush of thoughts flooded his mind in
an instant as he debated whether to help or just walk away. Jesus, he hoped she wasn't a virgin.

"Let go of me, you fucking pig!" the girl kicked and squirmed violently.

*Christ, this girl just gets stupider and stupider by the second.*

"Take it outside!" someone barked beside Gendry's ear. It was the bartender, who had apparently returned from a quick "bathroom break" with the waitress.

"Gladly," the bearded man smiled a slimy smile. The girl fought weakly in the gaunt man's grip as he pulled her outside, trailing behind his friend.

Gendry ran his hands through his hair, then cursed the god, or gods, or whoever the fuck was up there, beneath his breath. His one wish was for a day of normality. Was that really so much to ask? With a resigned sigh he hopped off his stool, rolled up his sleeves, and followed them into the alley.

The rusted door burst open from the force of his heavy boot, and the sound of it took the men outside by surprise. He looked once at the girl, whose face exposed an expression more of anger than of fear, then at the men.

"Get it line," the gaunt man rasped with a smirk. "We found her first."

"Hey, I'm just here to watch," Gendry raised his palms.

The bearded man leaned forward and eyed him with suspicion. After a moment he hacked up a glob of phlegm and spat it on the floor. "Fuck. Off," he growled.

Gendry backed up. "Alright, mate, sorry." He turned around, balled his fist, then swung in a sideways arc, catching the man square in the jaw. He had only a second to savor the sight of a tooth dislodging from the man's mouth before his gaunt-faced friend came flying at him.

"Run!" he shouted at the girl, then ducked under a swing. But when she didn't move he looked her right in the eye and said, "Are you deaf? Get the fuck out of here!"

She ran then, but with his attention directed elsewhere, the blow to his stomach came as an unpleasant surprise, knocking the wind right out of him. He doubled over, and a second blow landed on his cheek. The man aimed for another shot, but Gendry lurched forward to topple his opponent to the floor, then continued to beat the pervert to a bloody pulp.

Suddenly there came a roar from behind, and he turned around to find that bearded man was coming at him with a broken bottle. Gendry scrambled to his feet, but tripped on the unconscious man beneath him as he tried to run backwards.

*THUNK!*

He winced at the sound, then opened his eyes again only to find the bearded man sprawled out on the ground, knocked out cold. He looked up and saw the girl standing over him, her shoulders heaving up and down in tune to her ragged breaths. There was a plank of wood in her hands, with a splattering of blood at the end. Despite himself, Gendry laughed.

The look the girl gave him was one of disbelief. "What's so funny?!" she demanded to know.

He snorted and wiped an imaginary tear from his eye, only to realize that his cheek was bleeding. That only made him laugh harder.
"Stop laughing or I'll hit you, too!" she warned, lifting her weapon.

Gendry clutched at his stomach and forced himself to stop. "I'm sorry," he breathed, letting out one last chuckle, "it's just... you look... you look ridiculous."

The girl glanced at him, then at the board in her hands, then at him again. "Yeah," a goofy grin broke out across her face, "yeah, I guess I do." She tossed it aside and walked over to help him up.

He dusted off his clothes and touched his nose and lip to check if there was any blood. There wasn't. "You shouldn't be out here by yourself," he told her seriously. "What would you have done if I hadn't been here?"

Suddenly her smile fell into a petulant pout. "I would have fought them on my own," she snapped.

Gendry wanted to laugh again, but thought better of it. "Oh really?"

"Yes! I don't need a stupid boy like you to help me." She crossed her arms and turned away from him.

He watched her back for a while, then sighed. "I'm not saying you can't take care of yourself. All I'm saying is you should be more careful. Okay?"

She turned around reluctantly and glared at him. "Fine."

He smiled at the girl's - what was it? Spunk?. "What's your name, anyway? I've never seen you before."

"Maybe you just didn't look hard enough," she shrugged casually.

"I've lived here all my life. I'd remember your face if you came within a mile of this area. Trust me."

She hesitated, then relented. "I'm Ar... Arry."

"Arry? I'm Gendry," he extended his hand, then pulled it back again after remembering that it was covered in blood. He frowned. "Will you be okay getting home?"

Arry scanned the dark alley, then the street beyond it where a cab was parked by the curb. "I'll just take the cab," she said, walking towards it even as she spoke. He didn't follow her, but when she got into the car she rolled down the window, waved, and shouted "Thanks!" before disappearing into the night.

Gendry waved back long after she was gone, then walked home with a goofy grin on his face.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

So I made this chapter a bit long to make up for the past few days of no updates. I've been mostly busy with reading lately, so I'll be writing slower than I had originally anticipated. But anywho, for those who are interested, I'm reading Tigana by Guy Gavriel Kay, and Mistborn by Brandon Sanderson. Being an ASOIAF fan, I'm confident you'll enjoy these (if you choose to take a stab at them) as well!

Arya shifted uncomfortably in her seat, more than slightly annoyed at the lace on her blouse and the length of her skirt. She had never been to a funeral before, but she'd watched enough movies to know that you're supposed to dress solemn, not up.

She stole a glance around the room and realized that attire wasn't the only inappropriate thing the guests had donned; their expressions were grossly unsuitable as well. Arya's eyes fell on Cersei Baratheon who, sitting beside her twin brother Jaime, wore a smile on her pristine face – the first one, Arya realized, she had seen since she and her family first arrived. Cersei's head perked up after Jaime had finished whispering in her ear, and Arya instinctively looked away.

"Stop fidgeting," her sister scolded sternly in a hushed voice, her own face a mix of annoyance and feigned grief. Sansa had known Jon Arryn as well as Arya had – that was, not at all. Their father would occasionally speak of him, but the girls had never had the pleasure of meeting the man in person.

At that thought, Arya looked to her father, who was sitting beside Robert in the front most pew. There was a sadness in his eyes she had never seen before, and for the first time Arya noticed just how lined his face was. Robert's visage, in contrast, was red and merry from his daily drink. His skin was smoother than her father's, pulled taut by the excess fat beneath it. Sansa wrote the Baratheon off as a drunken buffoon, but Arya thought him more like a Santa Claus who ate one too many cookies and had a tendency to spike his milk.

Up ahead, the minister read a eulogy honoring the recently deceased and his many great deeds. "He leaves behind a wife and child..." Arya heard the minister say. Speaking of...

Her eyes scanned the room again, noting the absence of said “wife and child”. Odd, she thought. But then again, it could be that they were simply too ashamed. Jon Arryn, one of the greatest men (apparently) of the business, had died abruptly in his bed after a night of too much feasting and drinking.

As the procession wore on, Arya stifled a yawn, to which Bran giggled and Sansa nudged her firmly in the arm. “Don't be rude,” her sister scolded once again.

Arya narrowed her eyes in response. “You should be nicer to me,” she said through gritted teeth, “or else I'll change my mind about the beach house.”

Sansa visibly stiffened, and Arya allowed herself an inward smile. Her sister had asked her to go to the Baratheon beach house in Storm's End a week ago. She wanted to go with Joffrey, but their father would not allow it, not alone at least. Desperate times called for desperate measures, so Sansa
had asked Arya if she would accompany them, taking Tommen along so that the boy would “not feel left out” (though Arya knew what her sister was really planning).

At first Arya had laughed in Sansa’s face. A weekend with her and Joffrey, the most insufferable couple to grace the surface of the earth? Not to mention, babysitting the prick’s little brother? No thanks.

But sneaky little Sansa always had a trick up her sleeve, and that was one of the reasons why Arya hated her all the more. “I know you’ve been sneaking out every night since we got here,” her sister had said with a sly smile.

“You have no proof,” Arya had retorted, trying to act like her hands weren’t red.

“Relax,” was her sister’s airy reply, “I won’t rat you out. But I will cover for you next time, and every time after that. You can stay out later if you’d like, and I’ll lie for you if you ever get caught. That is, if you agree to come.”

Arya was too clever to be caught, but it was heartening to hear that her sister would risk her honor to cover for her. She supposed it would be easier to sneak out with Sansa on her side, and it would relieve some of her anxiety and allow her to have a bit more fun when she was out. And besides, Arya always did want to see the beach. Taking everything into account, she agreed to the deal, sealing it with a pinky swear and a spit shake (the latter sufficiently grossing Sansa out, much to Arya’s pleasure).

Her attention returned to the minister just in time for him to announce that the guests were allowed to stand up and see the corpse, or to walk around and stretch their legs. Arya had no interest in seeing a dead body, so she walked around instead. Bran would have joined her, but he had explained that part of the business was to be respectful, and part of being respectful was acknowledging powerful people, alive or dead.

With a goblet of iced water in her hand she made her way to the garden, envying the southerners and their real summers. A few birds chirped up ahead, then shat next to her foot. Arya muttered curses under her breath and shook an angry fist at the flying rats.

“Stop it!” a voice from over the hedge said sharply, instantly silencing Arya. But when the voice continued talking, she knew the words weren’t directed at her. “Not here. Stop that!” There came a low, masculine chuckle, followed by a soft, feminine sigh – a moan, almost.

Arya crouched down and waddled toward the end of the leafy barrier for a closer look. The voices were replaced by wet noises now. Arya was no fool; she had two older brothers, and neither of them were eunuchs. She knew what those sounds were. Slowly, carefully, she craned her neck forward. Biting her lip she tilted her head, ever so slightly. That's it... a little more... just a bit further...

“Arya!”

“Eep!” she yelped, falling backwards onto her bottom and spilling her drink all over her blouse. Whoever the couple was had also heard the call, and the clicking and clacking of retreating footsteps told her that they had escaped her prying eyes.

“Arya! Where are you?”

It was Bran’s voice, she realized. She hoisted herself back onto her feet and made her way back to the main hall. “I’m here!” she called out, trying to dry her shirt by rubbing the wetness with her palm.

“There you are!” Bran said with a grin. “Wow, what happened?” Arya opened her mouth to explain,
but he cut her off. “Nevermind. Come on, Uncle Robert's treating us out to dinner in the city. Isn't it exciting!”

Speak for yourself, Arya thought with a smirk. She had explored the city the first night they arrived. She smiled, remembering what had happened at the bar. She got a good laugh from that incident, but it was nowhere as funny as the look on Gendry's face the next night when she tracked him down. “How did you find me?” he had asked her, flabbergasted. But she had just winked and told him “I have my ways.” She considered simply telling him the truth – that she went back to the bar to ask around for him – but she liked being mysterious, even if it was just pretend.

Since then, she had spent every night touring the city with Gendry and Hot Pie (a friend of his she had met the third day) as her guides. Barely a month in King’s Landing, and already she knew the place better than most people who had lived there their whole lives.

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The lobster baked in butter was scrumptious. The escargot swimming in cream was delectable. The molten chocolate cake for dessert was heaven on a plate. And goodness, wasn't that vintage Arbor Gold just absolutely divine? Oh, Mother, I love being a pretentious prick, don't you? And Father, why your vest is covered in only three different kinds of sauces tonight! Could it be that you've taken ill and lost your infamous appetite? Have you finally decided to be as refined as my siblings and I? Oh, Mother will be overjoyed! Perhaps now she will sneer in amusement every once in a while, like I always do. Oh, you do not know how to sneer? Well, that is easily remedied; I shall teach you! Just pretend you stepped in dog shit, then pretend that you took the shoe – the one with the dog shit on it – and brought it to your nose. It will crinkle right away, and your face will follow its lead. That's it! That's the one! Why, with a little more practice, Father, you will soon be as good as I!

These were the words Arya imagined to be coming out of Joffrey's mouth as he pretended to make amicable post-dinner conversation. Of course, whatever he was saying was probably much worse, but Arya's mind could never fall to his level, even if she tried.

She leaned in toward her sister, who was gazing into loverboy's icy blue eyes as if she were a deer and his eyes were the headlights of a massive eighteen-wheeler truck. “Sansa,” she hissed, “I'm going out. Cover for me.”

“What?” her sister snapped her head around. “Are you mad? Not now!”

“Fine,” she shrugged, returning to her previous slouched position, “deal's off then.”

“Fine!” Sansa glared at her. “Goodness, Arya, sometimes you can be so difficult.”

“That's why you love me,” she smiled.

Her sister gave her one last death glare before politely clearing her throat and announcing, “Arya and I wanted to see the shopping centers. Would it be alright if we went, Father?”

Their father frowned deeply. “I don't know, sweetling. It's already late, and I'm not comfortable letting my two girls out by themselves at night.”

“We'll be fine, Father,” Sansa flashed her perfect smile – the one that flaunted her glistening white teeth and made her blue eyes twinkle like stars.

Ned sighed. “Alright, girls, you may go. But answer the phone when I call, and come right home when you're done. Understand?”
“You have until I finish shopping,” Sansa said once they were outside. Her slender arm was extended as she hailed a cab; four stopped almost right away. She climbed into one, waved goodbye, and then was off, leaving Arya alone on the curb.

Arya stepped into another cab, and directed the driver to the arcade. *Fantastic, I have all night.*

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She found them where they always were: shooting zombies with plastic guns painted red and blue. Gendry had the blue one, Hot Pie the red one.

“Boo!” she grabbed both boys' shoulders just as an undead enemy emerged from behind a digitalized wooden crate.

“HOLY FUCK!” Hot Pie screamed, dropping his gun as his hands shot up to soothe his thumping heart. “What the fuck, Arry?!”

Gendry hooted, and Arya joined in on the laughter. Hot Pie, however, was clearly not amused. “It's not fucking funny,” he grumbled, still not dropping his hands from his chest.

“Ah, come on, Hot Pie. It was just a bit of fun. Lighten up.” Gendry smacked his friend square in the back, knocking him forward and causing him to cough.

That only made the boy angrier. “Don't you dare give me that face,” Arya warned. But when his face appeared to be staying, she said, “Hey I know what'll cheer you up. A drink!”

Hot Pie's face brightened immediately, then fell again. “Are you buying?” he asked warily.

Arya rolled her eyes and waved her hand at him dismissively as she turned to walk out. “Yes, yes,” she said, then looked at Gendry. “Well come on,” she sighed impatiently, “I'll buy for you too.”

“Hey, Arry,” Hot Pie said as they crossed the street.

“Hum?” she replied absently.

“Why you all dressed up?”

She stiffened. “None of your business,” she said flatly.

“Aw, come on,” he probed, “were you on a date?” When she didn't answer he said, “you were, weren't you! Hey Gendry, Arry went on a date. Can you imagine?”

“No!” Arya snapped at the same time Gendry replied contemplatively: “No.”

They looked at each other but Hot Pie was oblivious to the interaction. “Who was he?” he asked her. “Where did you go? Did he try to get into your pants?”

Both Arya and Gendry punched Hot Pie in each shoulder. “OW!” he cried, rubbing his arms.

“I was having dinner with my family, you twat,” she spat as she opened a red door. “Now shut up, or I won't buy you any drinks.”

This particular bar was much nicer than the one she had met Gendry in, but was still nowhere near fancy. It was crowded, but not so much that Arya felt like a sardine packed in a tin can. The trio claimed a booth in the back, where there was a good view of the entire place, customers included. She was surprised to see so many obviously underaged drinkers. But since they made up the
majority, she supposed that the owners would rather shun the law than a hefty profit.

A waitress approached them a few minutes after they had seated themselves. She had curly blonde hair and emerald green eyes. She was slim in some places, and curvy in others. She eyed Gendry with interest, conspicuously taking in whatever wasn't covered by the table. Arya watched as Gendry turned red and away. The hilarious sight was enough to return her to her previous cheerful mood.

“What can I do ya for?” the waitress said in a perky tone when Arya cleared her throat.

“A bottle of vodka please,” Arya requested.


Arya reached into her bag and pulled out a handful of bills, not bothering to count. “Here.”

Hot Pie and Gendry's eyes went wide, and their owl-like stares fell on her once the waitress was gone. “What?” she asked, annoyed.

But before either could answer, the waitress returned promptly with three shot glasses and a bottle of clear, white liquid. She gave Gendry one last lingering glance, then sauntered away, hips swaying and hair flipping.

Arya looked at Gendry and released her suppressed laughter. “What. Was that?” she tilted her head inquisitively.

He grabbed the bottle and poured himself a shot, then downed it and turned away.

“Woah, woah, woah,” Arya snatched the bottle away from him. “Did I say we could start? No!” She reached for Hot Pie's and her own glass and poured it to the brim with alcohol. “Here,” she handed one to the eager boy beside her. She swallowed her own at the same time Hot Pie did his. “Okay, now that we're even,” she gathered all three glasses in a row and filled them again. “We can start.”

“Start what?” Gendry was more suspicious than excited.

“A contest!” she exclaimed, throwing her hands up joyously.

“What's the contest?” Hot Pie asked, interested.

Arya looked at the boy to see whether he was joking, or if he was really that stupid. The genuine expression of anticipation told her he was really that stupid. She sighed, then hooked one arm into Hot Pie's, and the other into Gendry's. She drew them closer. “Third place runs butt naked down the block. Second place will be my servant. And first place – well, that'll be me.” She smiled, but her friends did not. Unperturbed, she picked up a glass and gulped down its contents. After a moment, Gendry and Hot Pie did too, their faces stern and resolute. This is going to be fun, she thought as she took a third shot.

Hot Pie was gone by the eighth glass, his head buried in his folded arms on the table, drool pooling in the crevices of his fat. Beside him, Arya watched as Gendry matched her twelfth serving, the look of determination unwavering on the surface, but breaking underneath. “Let's take a break,” Arya suggested, studying his glazed-over eyes.

“What's the matter? Had enough already?” he taunted with a slur.

“No,” she said firmly, “I just don't want to ruin this outfit with your vomit.
“Oh yeah,” he said, “I was wondering about that.”

“About what?”

“Why are you all dressed up? I've only ever seen you wear loose sweaters and ripped jeans. The truth now. Did you go on a date?”

“I already said I didn't!” she shouted, slamming a fist into his arm. “ Seriously, you and Hot Pie need to shut the fuck up about it already.”

Gendry sat in guilty silence.

“I've never even been on a date,” she admitted casually before her face darkened. “But now my stupid sister is trying to set me up with her prick of a boyfriend's – well he's not her boyfriend, but whatever. Anyway, my stupid bitch sister is trying to set me up with his little brother by making me go on a double-date with them at a beach house this weekend. She does it as if she thinks I don't see it, as if I'm stupid or something! It's so fucking frustrating. Sometimes I could just strangle her -”

Arya stopped abruptly when she realized she was rambling. “Sorry,” she mumbled, looking down at her hands. “I'm an angry drunk.”

When Gendry didn't say anything she looked up again. He looked a little upset, though for what reason she couldn't say.

“Double-date, huh?” he said as if tasting the concept on his tongue.

“Yeah,” she sighed. “It's terrible, isn't it?”

“Yeah,” Gendry agreed, searching her eyes.

“What?” she asked, twisting up her face. “What?” she asked again, more urgently, when he didn't respond.

“You look pretty,” he said finally, more to himself than to her.

Ignoring her confused hesitation, Gendry began to lean in. Slightly at first, but more perceptibly as he got closer. “Gendry...” Arya said slowly, scooting back; but she could only get so far until Hot Pie's big fat ass obstructed the way. As Gendry continued to get closer, his eyes began drooping closed and, just as Arya was about to slap him, his head fell lifelessly onto her lap.

Arya sat motionless for a minute, trying to comprehend what just happened. She shook her leg, and Gendry's head shook with it. She reached down and mussed his unkempt hair, but he didn't react. She laughed then – a single snort – and poured herself one more round, swallowing it with earnest before slamming it down into the table.

“Stupid bullheaded boy,” she slapped his cheek gently, “I told you I'd win.”
I'm sorry if this chapter seems a bit rushed, but I was just so excited to jump into the action.

On a side note, Carlotta has requested that I explore other relationships instead of focusing solely on Arya/Gendry. Others would include Sansa/Sandor, Jon/Ygritte, and Robb/?? (I haven't decided yet). I think it would be a good idea in the sense that it would expand the story, but it would also make it more complex, and I'd have to change up the plot a bit. However, if readers don't mind waiting a bit longer, I think I can make it happen. Just to clarify, this doesn't mean that I'm watering down Arya/Gendry. If things get too hectic, I'm still going to make them my first priority.

Anyway, if possible, can I have a vote on whether or not you guys would mind me adding more [in depth] relationships? Or would you rather just leave it as is? Thank you for your opinions, and keep the reviews coming :)

Hour one of my descent into hell. Joffrey is an asshole. Sansa is an airhead. Tommen brought his kittens. I fear I have underestimated my foes.

Hour two of my descent into hell. Sleep has persistently eluded me. Could it be that I have been betrayed by my own body? Is the degradation of my sanity accelerated by the prolonged presence of the devil prince, whose very name is a black mark upon all things holy? One can only hope otherwise.

Hour three of my descent into hell. Ser Pounce has clawed my arm. Are the kittens guardians of the underworld? I must avoid the feline menaces at all costs, lest I get torn to shreds before this journey is through.

Hour four of my descent into hell. The speck of dust that had become my companion for the past half hour has abandoned me. I cannot say that I am angry; no, I wish it all the best. I am glad that it has succeeded where I have failed – that is, escaping eternal damnation. Oh, when will the torture cease? Am I doomed to suffer this brutality until the end of my mortal life? What, O’ Holy One, did I do to deserve this fate?

The car rolled to a stop as it pulled into the driveway of the Baratheon beach house, gravel crunching noisily beneath the tires. I have finally arrived in hell, Arya logged in her last mental diary entry. If I survive this, I will thenceforth be able to conquer any and all obstacles thrown my way. If I do not, I only hope that my family will remember that I love them. Goodbye, cruel world.

“Oh, it's beautiful!” Sansa beamed as she stepped out of the car, her pedicured feet wrapped in a pair of strappy yellow sandals. “Arya, isn't it just lovely?”

Ignoring her infuriatingly cheerful sister, Arya hopped out from the backseat, her boots stirring up dust and sand as she made her way to the trunk.

Sansa frowned. “Arya, we're at the beach in the middle of summer. Why on earth would you wear
boots?”

“I happen to like them,” she said tersely, grabbing her duffel bag lodged beneath her sister's trunks filled with crap, crap, and more crap. She grunted from the effort of yanking it out. “Sansa, seriously? We're here for *three* days. Did you really need to bring everything but the goddamn kitchen sink?” She gave one last tug, then stumbled backwards when her bag flung out from under the mountain. “Scratch that. I'm pretty sure the sink is in there somewhere, too.”

Sansa rounded the side of the car and gave her a wry smile. “I happen to need all those things. Makeup, clothes, toiletry…”

“Condoms,” Arya added without humor.

Her sister shot her a sharp look. “That's none of your business,” she said.

A list of choice profanities waited on Arya's tongue, but the sudden appearance of several attendants prevented the words from passing her lips. She settled, instead, for a look of disapproval.

“Would you like us to take your bags, miss?” a man wearing a dress shirt and black slacks asked her politely.

“No,” she grumbled, watching her sister hook her arm into Joffrey's, “I got it.”

She hefted her bag – which was filled with little more than a few clothes and a toothbrush – and stomped toward the house.

“Arya?” a voice came from behind. She pivoted on her heel, annoyed, but softened her features when she saw the hurt expression on Tommen's face. “What?” she asked wearily.

“Your... um...” he started, looking down nervously.

Arya followed his gaze to his hands, which held her sketchbook. A wave of guilt coursed through her momentarily when she saw that he was shaking ever so slightly. Was she really that scary? “Oh,” she said, taking the object from the boy's extended arm, “thank you.” She started to walk away, but then turned around again. “You didn't want to come either, did you?”

Tommen eyes found hers, darted quickly to the house, then returned to her face. He nodded meekly. The boy was only a few years younger than her, but he acted very much like a frightened child.

Arya sighed. “Do you like to draw?” she asked him.

He hesitated for a second, surprised by her attempt at conversation, then nodded. “I'm not very good, though,” he admitted, blushing.

Despite herself, Arya laughed. “Do you want to see my drawings? I'm probably worse than you are. Sansa only gave me this sketchbook because she had a bunch of extras.” She flipped it open to a random page and handed it to him, smiling when Tommen did. “Pretty bad, huh?”

The boy looked up, abashed. “No!” he said hastily, “it's very good. The limbs are... very proportionate.” Arya laughed again, louder this time. “However,” Tommen continued, encouraged by her levity, “the details could use a little improvement. For example, the hair – I'm pretty sure humans have more than one strand on each side.”

“Hum,” Arya mused, “I thought something was off. I was going to confer with Google, but the internet was down so I just went with my gut instinct.”
A toothy grin broke out across Tommen's face. “Do you want to play with the kittens later?” he asked eagerly, “I promise they won't scratch you again. Ser Pounce was just scared in the car. He's never been away from home before.”

Arya's attention turned to the three kittens at Tommen's feet. “Sure,” she shrugged, “why not.”

Tommen's company, to Arya's pleasant surprise, was very enjoyable, despite his shy demeanor.

On the second day, while Joffrey and Sansa were out wreaking havoc on their credit cards, Arya and Tommen stayed in the mercifully air-conditioned house.

Sitting cross-legged on the wooden floor, Tommen introduced his babies. “That's Boots, and this is Lady Whiskers. Ser Pounce, you've already met. He says he's sorry for scratching you.”

“He talks to you?” she asked with mock incredulity, stroking the white kitten, Lady Whiskers.

“In his own way,” Tommen replied sincerely. He giggled when boots, the gray kitten with black paws, curled up in his lap.

Arya tucked her knees under her body atop the oversized cushion she used for a seat. She watched with fascination at how loving the boy was with the animals. “Tommen...” she found herself saying. The boy, oblivious to her solemn tone, looked up and smiled. “You're not what I expected. I mean, you're nothing like Joffrey.”

There was a flicker of emotion in Tommen's eyes at the mention of his brother's name; Arya could have sworn it was fear. “You're not like your sister,” he countered softly.

He had a point, Arya allowed, but still. She pondered a moment. “Tommen, does he... I mean, does he hurt you or anything?”

The boy's jaw clenched at the question. “I'm sorry,” Arya apologized immediately, realizing what she had just asked. Was she even thinking? “I shouldn't have said that. I -”

“It's okay,” he cut in, still staring at Boots in his lap.

“No, really. I'm sorry. Forget I said anything. I had no right -”

“Yes.”

Arya blinked stupidly. “Yes what?”

The boy looked up at her, his eyes glossy. “He hurts us.”

“Us?” she swallowed a lump in her throat.

Tommen nodded. “Myrcella and I.”

“You and Myrcella...” she repeated to herself. “Tommen,” she leaned forward after a long bout of silence. When he recoiled, Arya retreated in response. She cleared her throat. “What does he... what does he do to you and your sister?”

Tommen's eyes went wide with horror, and he began to shake his head vigorously. “No, nothing! He doesn't do anything! I shouldn't have said that. Please, don't tell him I said anything. Please.”
Arya's heart caught in her throat as she watched a tear fall from the boy's eyes. She lurched forward, ignoring his discomfort, and pulled him in. "Shh," she stroked his hair, "I won't tell. I promise. I swear." She felt him nod in her shoulder. After a moment, she pushed him back gently.

"Tommen," she said gravely, locking her eyes with his. "Is my sister in danger?"

The boy hiccuped, then sniffed. He shook his head slowly, his eyes never leaving hers. "You all are."

Just then, Arya's phone rang. She picked it up tentatively.

"Arya," her father's voice was urgent on the other line, "Bran's been shot."
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Here's another chapter since sleep, apparently, is no longer my friend.

A mugging gone wrong, Arya repeated in her head. Someone tried to rob Bran, and then they shot him.

“A bullet to the spine,” the doctor had concluded. “Paralyzed him from the waist down.”

If Arya had been there, she would have pummeled the doctor to the ground and strangled him until he promised to fix her little brother. But she wasn't there. She was too late. The drive back from Storm's End felt twice as long as the drive getting there. She had begged Joffrey to go faster, but he ignored her pleas, claiming that it wasn't good for the car.

She would have killed the piece of shit right then and there if it hadn't been for her sister. Sansa had sat with her in the back, holding her hand the entire way; Arya seething with rage, Sansa silent with anxiety, but both girls choked with fear.

Bran, Arya pleaded to her comatose brother, if you can hear me, please wake up. Please. She tilted her head up to the twilit sky, searching for the plane that was taking him home to Winterfell. “I love you,” she whispered. “If you love me too, you'll open your eyes.”

“Arya?” Sansa's voice was a soft murmur from the doorway of the balcony. “Are you okay?”

Of course she wasn't okay. Their brother had been shot and now he's going to live the rest of his life as a cripple; that is, if he lives at all. Why the hell would she be okay? Was her sister an idiot? No; she chastised herself, quelling the fire in her belly. Your sister is not an idiot. She's just worried. We all are. Don't be angry at her. Be angry at the person who did this to Bran. “I'm just... thinking,” she said quietly into the coming night.

A warm arm slinked around hers. Arya turned to see a face lined with grief. Even in the dimming light she could make out the blueness of her sister's eyes. It was clear that Sansa took after their mother – lush auburn hair, high cheekbones, and full lips. Bran has auburn hair, too. And his eyes are the same color as Sansa's. Looking at her now she could almost see Bran's smile, hear his laugh, smell his scent. Arya swallowed her tears. Don't you dare cry, you little shit. If you cry, you're admitting he's dead. Bran isn't dead, he's just asleep.

Arya's gaze snapped back to the gardens below, unable to look at her sister any longer. “Sansa,” she spoke to her hands, “you know I love you, right?”

Her sister chuckled, sweet and humorless. “Of course I do. I love you, too.”

“Do you hate me for all the times I was mean to you?”

“You're my little sister,” Sansa sighed, leaning forward on the rails to share the view. “Of course I do.”

Arya chewed her lip, fiddling nervously with her fingers. “I'm sorry. I don't mean to be.”
Her sister’s arm tightened around Arya’s, drawing her closer. Arya could smell the flowery perfume exuding from Sansa’s pulse points, and for once, she wasn’t repulsed. In fact, she would have swam in a tub full of the scented liquid just now if it would make her sister happy.

“Don’t apologize. I love you when you’re nice, and I love you even more when you’re mean.” Sansa laughed when Arya furrowed her eyebrows in confusion. “It’s true,” she explained. “You’re stubborn and temperamental, and that mouth of yours would put truckers and sailors to shame. Everyone is more or less the same when they’re trying to be nice, but there are countless numbers of ways to be mean, and no matter how hard someone tries, they will never come close to being you. That’s why I love you, Arya. You’re my little sister, and there’s no one else in the world who could take your place.”

Arya was speechless, fighting back tears that threatened to resurface. “Thank you,” she finally managed, her voice thick and clumsy.

Sansa kissed her forehead. “You’re welcome... stupid.”

She smiled, and they watched as the curtain of light drew open to reveal a canvas of twinkling stars.

“Sansa?” Arya spoke again after what seemed like an eternity.

“Hm?” her sister hummed absently.

“If Bran was mugged, why didn’t the mugger take his things?”

Sansa shrugged. “Something went wrong, so the guy must have panicked and ran. Thieves are not very smart. That’s why they’re thieves. Come on,” she said, studying Arya’s face, “it’s getting late, and you haven’t slept in days.”

Arya nodded abjectly in agreement, allowing her sister to pull her back into the room.

Hours later, when Sansa was sound asleep, Arya remained restless and awake. Something wasn’t quite right, and she intended to find out what that something was. Carefully, she pulled back the sheets and crept to the closet, donning a shirt and shorts and slipping on her boots last. She hesitated at the door, her hand lingering on the knob, then turned back, tiptoeing to her suitcase to retrieve Jon’s dagger and tucking it away safely in her shoe. Tommen had said that her family was in danger, and even though the guest house was quite a ways from the Baratheon mansion, she dared not take any chances.

To her relief, the stairs didn’t creak when she made her way down to her father’s bedroom; Arya wanted to ask him some questions, but if someone else was with him, she did not want whoever it was to think her suspicious.

As she neared the door of the room, the sound of a muffled voice heightened her senses. She perked her ears and leaned in, biting her lip in concentration.

“... got the bullet, yes... downtown... only one, I'm sure...” Arya realized that her father was pacing the room as the volume of his voice fluctuated from low to loud. “... going right now... suspect anything... not safe... call you after... bye.”

There was a small beeping sound, followed by rapid footsteps approaching the door. *Fuck*, Arya panicked, *got to hide*. Quick as a snake she scurried out of the hallway and into a darkened guest room. Thankfully, her father did not see her; he seemed to be in too much of a hurry. *But where is he going at this hour*, she wondered curiously, *and what's this about a bullet?* Arya heard the front door open then close. Without another thought, she followed him.
King's Landing was a city that never really slept, so it was easy for Arya's taxi to hide in the pool of hundreds of others just like it. Such a circumstance would have been a double-edged sword, but Luck had granted her a deft driver who successfully followed her father's cab downtown to a place called Steel Street.

The neighborhood was rather shoddy, but it was nowhere near as bad as Flea Bottom. She ducked into the shadows of a narrow alleyway across the street and watched her father enter an unmarked store in an unassuming brick building. She considered following him in, then thought better of it. If her father knew she was sneaking around right after the accident with Bran, he would never let her out of his sight again.

And so she waited... and waited... and waited. She was already half asleep and ready to pass out when she heard the heavy footfalls.

From her hiding place she watched as her father strolled to the street corner and hailed a cab. Moments later, a car pulled up – black, not yellow. She saw her father hesitate, then back away, reaching into his coat. Oh no, she breathed, something's wrong. Something's very wrong. Dad! she wanted to scream, but the words caught in her throat. Dad! Run! Jesus fucking Christ, get the fuck out of –

The sound of a gunshot echoed throughout the neighborhood.

Arya's hands flew to her mouth to muffle her gasp. In the silence of the night she heard the clicking of a tongue. A head emerged from the car, and in the lamplight she could see that whoever it was had yellow hair. The head turned, and Arya instinctively whirled around and crouched down behind a garbage bin, trying her hardest to still her shaking body.

Her heart was beating as loud as drums, and she held her breath in fear that the whole world could hear it. One, two, three, breathe. One, two, three, breathe. One, two, three, breathe. One, two, three, breathe. One, two, three, breathe.

A minute passed.

Two minutes passed.

Ten minutes passed.

An hour passed.

Slowly, hesitantly, Arya unbent her knees and peeked over the edge of the garbage bin. The car was gone, and so was her father. Releasing a quavering breath she took a step forward, then another, then another.

There came a crashing sound nearby, and she froze in place. A cat scuttled across her feet, mewing hungrily. Arya squeezed her eyes shut. One, two, three, breathe. One, two, three, breathe. One, two, three, breathe. One, two, three, breathe. When her wits were returned to her she continued forward. One foot in front of the other, one step at a time.

She never reached the street. She didn't need to see it to know, but she saw it anyway. A pool of blood. A pool of her father's blood. A cry tried to escape her throat, but all that came out was a squeak. She took a step back, then another, then another. She turned around, and ran.

She felt no sadness, no grief, no remorse. All she felt was fear, and an unwavering sense of urgency. Don't stop running, don't stop running, don't stop running – she turned a corner – don't stop running, don't stop running, don't stop running – she crossed a street – don't stop running, don't stop running
she shoved past pedestrians – don't stop, don't stop, don't stop, don't –

“WOAH!” a hand lashed out and grabbed her by the arm.

Arya shrieked at the top of her lungs. “LET GO OF ME! LET GO LET GO LET GO!” Someone was saying something to her, but she couldn’t hear the words over her own screams. All she could think was that she was going to die.

“ARRY!” came a familiar voice, “ARRY, STOP!”

Gendry? Arya stopped kicking and focused her vision. A pair of bright blue eyes stared back at her, frantic. “Gendry?” she breathed, her chest rising and falling at a frightening rate.

“Arry!” he grabbed both her shoulders and shook her still. “Arry, what the fuck is wrong with you?”

“Gendry?” she said again, unbelieving. Then, with a sudden wave of clarity, she yelled, “GENDRY!” His eyes went wide at her outburst, but she ignored it. “Gendry, we need to get out of here. We need to get out of here, now!”

Gendry didn’t move.

“NOW!” she roared, grabbing his hand and running.

“Where are we going!” he shouted at her as they weaved through the crowds.

“Somewhere, anywhere! Where's a safe place? Think, Gendry, think!”

“We can go to my apartment,” he said after a moment, his voice laced with uncertainty.

“Fine!” she answered loudly so he could hear over the noise of the city. “Lead!”

He ran ahead of her, twisting and turning this way and that. A few blocks later the crowds thinned out. A few yards later, the streets were dimmer. A few feet later, Arya saw it. The same unassuming brick building she had just run from.

“No,” Arya uttered, stopping dead in her tracks. “No, no, no, no, no.”

“Arry?” Gendry stopped when she did, his hand still clutching her’s. “Arry, what's wrong?”

“Gendry...” she breathed, “We need to leave.”

“Arry – ”

Arya clasped a firm hand over his mouth. “Shh,” she hissed, “listen.”

His head snapped around when he heard voices down the street.

“Where's your apartment?” she asked quietly.

Gendry’s eyes rolled upward, pointing to the fourth and top floor of the building. Arya brought her finger to her lips, then removed her hand from his mouth when he nodded in understanding.

They hastened up the stairway and stopped in front of a metal door. As Gendry fished for his keys he asked, “Who are those men?”

Arya glared at him for talking, but answered anyway. “I don’t know,” she said, for she truly wasn’t
sure whether or not they were working with her father's murderer, “but if they find us they might – ”

“Kill you,” a rough voice finished for her as the door swung open. The stranger smiled at Arya and Gendry, then cocked his gun.
Gendry slipped in front of Arya, shielding her from the pointed barrel. “Run,” he whispered to her, “go!”

When she hesitated, he jerked his hand from her grip and shoved her backwards. She stumbled a bit, but otherwise held firm. “No!” she hissed in reply, grabbing his arm, “we can run together. We can escape.”

“He'll shoot us both if we do.”

“He'll shoot us anyway!”

Gendry clenched his jaw. “Arry -”

“Gendry,” she cut him off, “I'm not leaving without you. I'm not letting you die because of me.”

“I'm not going to -”

“Ahem,” the stranger cleared his throat across the room. Arya and Gendry snapped to attention, acknowledging the man's presence with renewed awareness “If you two are done dilly daddling, I'd like to speak.”

Gendry swallowed in apprehension while Arya held her breath.

The man rolled his eyes and lowered his gun. “Bunch of idiots,” he grumbled under his breath, bringing the gun to his squinted eyes for inspection.

Arya and Gendry stood frozen in place for several minutes.

“Um,” Gendry was the first to speak, “what's... what's going on?”

“Huh?” the stranger looked up as if realizing that he wasn't alone for the first time. “Oh!” his ears pulled back to attention. When he sniffed, one side of his lip curled up into something akin to a snarl. “I'm Yoren,” the man introduced himself. “I'm here to protect you.”

“Protect... us?” Arya inched out from behind Gendry. Yoren's eyes flickered to her, lingering for a second longer than comfortable. When he glanced away there was a look of disdain on his face.

“That's right,” he cleared his throat with a stuttering cough, “so you better listen to me, ya hear?
When I say sit down, you sit down. When I say shut up, you shut up. And when I say jump, you ask how high? Got it?"

“Hang on a minute,” Gendry took a foolish step forward, clearly not 'getting it'. But when Yoren’s hand tightened on the gun handle, he caught himself. “Alright, look here. We don't want any trouble or anything, but...” he licked his lips and shook his head without comprehension, “how the fuck did you get into my apartment?”

“The door?” the man raised an eyebrow.

Gendry rolled his eyes. “I know, but how did you get in – you know, without a key?”

“Broke in,” Yoren shrugged with nonchalance, his attention refocused on inspecting the gun.

Arya sighed with impatience. This was obviously getting them nowhere. She marched forward before Gendry could stop her. “Now see here, Yoren, if that's your real name. Who are you, who do you work for, and why are you here?”

Yoren regarded her coolly, then mirrored her impatient sigh. “I told you, the name's Yoren. And I'm here to protect you – I said that already, too. Now, who I work for – that's something I'm not allowed to tell you. But you're just gonna have to trust me, okay little girl?”

Arya rolled her hands into fists and stamped her foot. “I'm not a little girl!”

Behind her, Gendry scoffed. She whirled around, rage in her eyes. “And what, might I ask, is so funny... huh ?”

Gendry's smile dropped. “Nothing!” he said rushedly, suddenly very interested in his shoes. “Not a thing. Sorry.”

Arya was still fuming, but she redirected her anger back at Yoren. “How do we know you're not working for them ?”

Yoren craned his neck toward the window. “You mean those guys?” he pointed down at the street with a thumb.

Arya couldn't see the men, but she nodded anyway.

“Well for one thing,” he stood up, arms crossed, and took a step toward her, “I'm not a transvestite prostitute. And for another thing,” he walked three strides closer, “if I wanted you dead, you'd be swimming in a pool of your own blood right now, like that poor son of a bitch downstairs.”

“What? Tobho?! ” Gendry shuffled forward in haste, throwing caution to the wind. “What did you do with him?!”

Yoren did not seem the least bit intimidated by the young man's outrage, but he stopped where he stood while he explained. “I didn't do anything, so you best drop that fist of yours before I shoot you in the face.” He looked to Arya without even checking to make sure that Gendry wasn't going to attack him. “I found him dead when I got there. A shame, too. The man had good taste in weapons.”

Yoren hefted the gun again, and Arya saw Gendry's hand twitch out of the corner of her eye.

“That's Tobho's prized possession,” he said in a dangerously low voice, “you stole it.”

Yoren's eyes oscillated back to Gendry. “A dead man's got no use for a gun.” He flipped it in the air and caught it by the barrel, then offered it to Gendry hilt-first. “Know how to use one, boy?”
After a moment’s hesitation, Gendry took it. He immediately removed the magazine and thrust the loaded piece into his pocket. “I know how to use one,” he said, “but I won’t use it.”

“Suit yourself.” Yoren turned around and reached for something behind him. Arya saw Gendry’s arm move for the magazine, but when Yoren turned back around there was only an empty black bag in his hands. “Here,” he tossed it at Gendry’s feet, a hint of amusement in his eyes. “Fill it up with guns, knives, whatever. Come right back when you’re finished.”

Gendry was launched into action by the command, but when Arya made to follow, Yoren said, “You stay.”

Arya looked to her friend in askance, but he only shrugged, as unsure as she was. Eventually, she nodded, signaling the okay for him to leave her alone.

“Does he know?” Yoren asked when Gendry was gone.

“No,” she said simply, already knowing what the man was referring to.

“Good,” he clipped the word. “Don’t tell him.”

“I wasn’t going to – ”

“And you never will, got it?” Arya chewed her lip. “Got it?” he repeated, sterner this time. She nodded lamely. “Good. Now,” he tossed a second bag at her feet, “fill it up with whatever you think we might need. We leave at dawn.”

“Leave? Where?”

“Away.”

“Away where?” she pressed.

“It doesn’t matter.”

“But what about my sister? She’s still with the Baratheons! What about Robert? What about Tommen.. and Myrcella?”

Yoren glared at her. “I ain’t going back for them. And neither are you or your little boyfriend. Understood?”

“He’s not my boyfriend!” she protested, “and I’m not leaving without Sansa!”

“I said no.”

“Then I won’t go!” she shouted at him, no longer afraid.

“Fine!” Yoren shouted back, “you can stay here and die then!”

“Fine!” she turned her back to him and planted her bottom on the floor, “I will!”

For a long time neither of them spoke, but the sound of footsteps broke the silence. A heavy hand fell on her shoulder. “Look at me,” Yoren commanded, but Arya stubbornly refused. “LOOK AT ME!” he shook her, and out of fear she did as she was told. “Your sister,” he said as his dark eyes bore into hers, “is dead.”
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Okay I owe you guys a HUGE apology for delaying an update for so long. I've been busy reestablishing my existence in - well, life - tutoring a family friend's daughter in English, and absorbed in a new book. Again, I'm REALLY sorry for making you all wait for so long. I promise to try to write more very soon! Thanks, everyone, for being so patient. I really appreciate it :)

Arya sat in a dark corner of the apartment, her back pressed against the cold brick wall, her shoulders slouched as if they bore the weight of the entire world. Minutes passed with excruciating slowness as the clock ticked away the seconds before dawn, ignorant to the misery of the lives it dictated.

She watched the wall with blind eyes, listened to the night with deaf ears, cursed the heavens with muted words, and thought of her family with numbed emotions. First Bran, then Father, then Sansa. All within a week. And what of her mother and remaining brothers? Were they safe, or had death found them as well?

Across the room Yoren was cleaning his weapons – spit, shine, polish; lather, rinse, repeat. Gendry had been gone for a while now, and Arya would not be surprised if he was dead, too. How did she feel about that? she found herself wondering. He was her friend – her best friend, perhaps (aside from Jon, of course). If Gendry had left her too, what would she do? The thought spawned another idea: what if he had just run away? And if he had, would she blame him for it? She was a hazard, and the people around her were dropping like flies. Arya chewed her cheeks. Was Gendry angry at her for getting his boss killed?

As if in answer, footsteps stomped heavily up the stairway outside. Yoren hopped off the workbench he had been perched atop and made his way to the locked door, a scowl etched across his face as he drew the same conclusion as Arya had: that Gendry, or whoever it was out there, was not alone. Following the man's lead, Arya scrambled to her feet and drew her dagger from its hiding place. Yoren raised an eyebrow at her as her fingers curled around the velvety grip, amusement flickering in his eyes for just a moment before it hardened again with caution. With a jerk of his head he motioned for her to stay back, then pulled the door open, gun cocked and aimed at the ready.

“HOLY SHIT DON'T SHOOT OH GOD PLEASE DON'T SHOOT I'M INNOCENT I'M SORRY I'M SORRY OH JESUS I DON'T WANT TO DIE DON'T KILL ME PLEAS– OW!”

Gendry wiped his palm down the front of his shirt, drying it of Hot Pie's head-sweat. “Christ, Hot Pie, shut the fuck up will you? You'll get us all killed.”

The boy fell silent, but remained shaking like a leaf in the dead of winter, whimpering pathetically through forcibly closed lips.

“How's this?” Yoren demanded to know, waving the still-cocked gun in Hot Pie's face. The boy's eyes crossed and uncrossed as they followed the weapon with fearful desperation. “I send you out to get weapons, and you come back hours later with a kid?”

“I brought the weapons,” Gendry said brusquely, tossing the black duffel bag at Yoren's feet. Arya
was surprised that he got it to zip all the way; the thing looked close to bursting at the seams.

“I don’t recall asking you to pick up a goddamn liability on your way back,” Yoren spat, studying Hot Pie out of the corner of his eye with poorly concealed antipathy. “I’ll have none to do with an overgrown baby who can’t even control his own bladder. Get him out of my sight. He ain’t comin’ with us.”

Ignoring the fact that Hot Pie had, in fact, wet his pants, Gendry stepped forward, a raging determination in his eyes. ‘They’ll kill him, too! Whoever is after Arry will do whatever it takes to find her. Sooner or later they’ll find Hot Pie and torture him for information. And when he doesn’t know jack shit, what do you think they’ll do? Apologize for the inconvenience and let him go his merry way? I don’t fucking think so.”

“My job is to protect you, not some pisspot gutter rat that just so happened to be dumb enough to become friends with you and a skinny twig of a girl. And you better talk to me with a little less attitude and a little more respect if you want to live long enough to feel up another pair of tits at least one more time. Now get him out of my sight, or I’ll do it myself.”

Yoren was clearly not swayed, and Gendry looked on the verge of murder as well. Arya remained in her corner, her mind racing with a hundred different thoughts, but focusing on just one. Hot Pie was her friend, no matter how useless and annoying he might be. If she wasn't going to let Gendry die for her, why should she let Hot Pie? With a decision made, she stepped out from the shadows of the room, finding her voice again. “Hot Pie's staying,” she said resolutely, maintaining eye contact with Yoren.

“Oh?” Yoren was unimpressed by her boldness, “says who?”

“Says me,” she replied with unwavering conviction, her knuckles whitening from the force of her tightening grip.

Yoren laughed drily. “You think a wee little knife like that is going to scare me? Well, happens I got a weapon of my own. A bit heavier than yours. Faster, too. And correct me if I’m wrong, but more powerful as well. So, what’s it gonna be, boy? You,” he aimed his gun back at Hot Pie, “or the girl?” he swung his arm around to point it at Arya.

One second Arya was staring at the barrel of a gun, the next she was watching Gendry tackle the wielder to the ground, wresting the weapon out of Yoren's hands and sliding it across the floor until it stopped inches in front of her feet. She was surprised that it did not go off, but when she picked it up off the ground she realized that the magazine was gone; Gendry had simply removed it too fast for her to see.

Yoren was sprawled beneath Gendry's weight, but with a grunt and a shove he heaved himself onto his hands and knees and sent his assailant toppling over. Gendry landed with a painful thud, but there was no sympathy in Yoren's eyes – only fury. “Don't you dare do that again,” he warned in a low, dark voice. “I promise you, next time you won't be so lucky.” The man dusted off his clothes and threw another lingering glance at Hot Pie, his upper lip curling into a disapproving snarl. A minute passed before he finally said, “Go put on some clean pants, I won't have you stinking up my car.”

Hot Pie, frozen with fear, could barely manage a nod, let alone jump into action. It was only when Arya said, “Hot Pie, get your fat ass moving! GO!” that the command finally processed in his thick skull. The boy looked to Gendry, and Gendry motioned him to a dresser where he would be able to find some pants that might fit.

“I'm sorry for tackling you,” Gendry apologized to Yoren when Hot Pie disappeared into the
Yoren eyed Gendry with mute appraisal, then sniffed with indifference. “Just don’t do it again. You
hear me, boy?” Gendry bristled at the title, but otherwise nodded in understanding.

A silence settled in shortly after, and Arya found herself engrossed in the details of her dagger as the
two men returned to prepping their recent haul. The grip was a soft grey leather, supple as sin, and
the steel of the blade was a deep blue hue, the beauty of it when the light bounced off the surface a
mere trick to the eye that made it seem less deadly than it actually was. Intricate designs were carved
into the blade from the tip to the base, as faint as mist and as delicate as lace. Arya carried it with her
everywhere she could – one of the reasons why she always wore boots – but in the six years that she
had owned it, not once had she found a reason to use it... until now. She swallowed a lump in her
throat as her thoughts drifted to Jon. If anyone was safe, it was him. He was in the Night's Watch; no
one would dare harm a Black Brother.

“Hey,” a sudden voice startled her, making the knife draw blood from her thumb as it ghosted along
the edges. She winced, then brought the wound to her mouth. “Shit, I didn't mean to scare you,”
Gendry frowned, “are you okay?” He reached over to pull her hand from her mouth, but Arya
resisted.

“Um fyn,” she mumbled, her finger impairing her articulation. “Jush er curt.”

Reluctantly, Gendry retreated, but Yoren came forward with sudden interest. “Is that what I think it
is?” He stared at the dagger but made no attempt to grab it.

Arya nodded. “Valyrian steel,” she told him what he already knew, pulling her thumb out of her
mouth. She examined the cut. It was wide but shallow.

“Where did you get it?” he asked, twisting his neck around to better scrutinize the detailing. “Those
things are almost as rare as unicorns.”

Despite all that had happened in the past few hours, Arya found herself smiling – however small it
was – with pride. “My brother gave it to me,” she said. “I love him more than anything.”

“You have a brother?” Gendry joined the conversation. “You never told me.”

Arya shrugged. “Never came up. What does it matter to you, anyway?”

Gendry mirrored her shrug. “I don't know. You told me about your sister, and you hate her.”

“I never hated her!” she all but shouted, an abrupt wave a guilt and rage washing over her. “I loved
my sister, and I always will! Don't you ever presume that I don't love my family. Ever.”

“No, wait, I didn't mean it like that,” Gendry said quickly, flushed with shame, “I'm just – I was
just...”

“Forget it,” Arya snapped curtly, retreating back to her brooding silence. But when she glimpsed the
dark shadow of contrition cast over Gendry's face, she sighed. “I'm sorry,” she said softly, “I know
you didn't mean it like that. Jon is my favorite brother. I have four, including him.” Ignoring the silent
warning Yoren's eyes threw at her, she continued. “Bran is a year younger than me. He was shot a
few days ago. He's in a coma now.”

Gendry's Adam's apple bobbed up and down with deliberate slowness as he processed the
information. It was a while before he spoke again. “You said you loved your sister... what – what did
you mean by that?”
Arya looked up at him, the back of her eyes stinging as tears pricked them and brimmed their edges. Even as she spoke her bottom lip quivered. “She's dead.”

“Arry...” Gendry said in a hushed whisper. He pitched forward to embrace her, but was stopped when Hot Pie made his loud reentrance.

“Fucking hell, Gendry,” Hot Pie announced loudly, the fear dissipated from his demeanor, “why the fuck are all your pants so tight?”

“It's not the pants' fault you're so fat,” Gendry retorted without humor. Arya saw him look at her once more as she wiped the unfallen tears from her eyes, then stand up to make his way to Hot Pie.

Yoren turned to look at the boy as well, who was wearing a pair of ill-fitting basketball shorts. “About bloody time,” the man cursed, pushing himself to his feet. “A minute longer and we'd all be dead.”

Arya looked outside the window. The sun had yet to grace the world with its presence, but she could already see that night was beginning to ebb. Unexpectedly, her thoughts wandered to that fateful day she and her family first received the news of Jon Arryn's death. The sky was as gray as it was now, she realized. But today was not then. Arya would never again see her siblings all together in one room, never again watch Bran swing his legs over the countertop, never again taunt Sansa about boys, and never again receive a call from her father and hear his voice. These things were of the past now, and this time, dawn would bring nothing more than despair.

“Hey Arry,” Hot Pie came up to her with a look of genuine concern on his face. “You okay?”

“You're... you're not mad at me?” Arya stammered, nonplussed.

Hot Pie cocked an eyebrow. “Why would I be mad you?”

“If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't be in this mess. You could stay here and live out a normal life.”

“You mean stay here in this filthy place by myself?” The boy scoffed and looked at Gendry, who was throwing on a jacket over his shoulders. “If Gendry leaves, I'm dead anyway. You see,” he leaned in closer so he could whisper, “I've got a few... debts... to pay. Gendry's my only protection.”

“Oh,” Arya said. “I see.” She followed Hot Pie's eyes to Gendry. He is strong, she admitted. But when Gendry turned around to look at them, she averted her eyes and fumbled with her hands in an effort to pretend like she was doing something else.

“Got everything?” Yoren's voice distracted her from her sudden embarassment.

Arya picked up the black bag she had filled with food, some clean clothes, and a first aid kit. She had never been in Gendry's apartment before today, but the guy was more organized than she was, and she had gotten everything packed within an hour, with a few minutes to spare for her curiosity to take charge.

Gendry flung the other pack over his shoulder and said, “here,” to Hot Pie, then tossed him a sheathed knife. Hot Pie stared at it with wide eyes. “Just don't stab any of us, alright?”

The boy nodded, his eyes wide and his lips curled back over a toothy grin. He pocketed the weapon and looked to Yoren for further intructions.

“Well?” Yoren barked sharply, “what are you sorry bastards waiting for? Get going!”
As she shuffled out through the door between Gendry, Hot Pie, and Yoren, Arya felt, for the first time in days, *safe.*
Chapter 8

Alright, so to make amends I decided to give you guys a [relatively] long chapter of - wait for it... - FLUFF. Yep, this whole thing is just a bunch of Arya and Gendry interaction that will make you roll your eyes and wish that they would just fuck already. So please enjoy this filler chapter in which I've inserted a few things that might make your heart flutter because it's so cheesy.

Also, since I posted this the same day at Chapter 7, don't accidentally skip over that one and come straight to this!

BONUS (brownie points for whoever gets it):

Trivia #2: Where did I get the idea for Yoren's car from? (Hint: it's another awesome TV show)

Trivia #3: There is a line in here that relates to Tyrion. Which quote is it and who is the original speaker?

Also, the answer the Trivia #1 (if anyone cares) about where the reference of my author's note came from is The Simpsons, in which Lisa comes across a sign that says 'Do Not Enter', but since it's a sign, not a cop, so it can't really do anything...

The smell of aftershave and cigarettes assaulted Arya's nostrils the second she climbed into Yoren's black 1967 Impala, but the full frontal attack subsided as the seconds turned to minutes, to hours, to days. The coast had been clear when they left Gendry's apartment, and there had been no sign of them being followed since they began their journey, but Yoren was not one to take any chances. “Better safe than dead,” was the man's, admittedly valid, explanation.

Arya stared idly out the window, where the lightness of day was dwindling into the haze of dusk. Opposite her Gendry sat reclined against the leather upholstery, looking rather at ease given the circumstances. Today was Hot Pie's turn to sit passenger, and, after endlessly complaining about his sore ass for the past few hours, the boy was – to everyone's vast relief – fast asleep, drool oozing viscously down his chins and onto his shirt.

Upon hearing Hot Pie snore, Arya tried – and failed – to stifle a yawn. She rubbed her weary eyes, her hand coming away with tears smeared across the knuckles.

“You should sleep,” Gendry suggested, not looking the least bit tired himself.

“I'm fine,” Arya replied, her eyes flickering to him before returning to the window. *I can stay awake as long as you and Yoren*, she assured herself.

“No. You're not,” her friend sighed. She peered at him with annoyance, but his attention was focused elsewhere – on the bland scenery of the empty road. He still didn't look at her when he spoke again. “You haven't slept in – what? three, four days?”

*Three*. “Neither have you,” Arya countered, refusing to let him think her weak. “Neither has
Yoren.”

“Neither have I what?” Yoren eyed his rear-view mirror.

“Slept,” she answered, then turned back to Gendry. “I'm fine. Stop heckling me. You sound like my mother.”

This time Gendry turned to her, his eyebrow perked. “You have a bedtime?” he asked, a smug expression painted on his face.

Arya seethed. “No,” she ground out. “I'm eighteen.”

“So? Doesn't mean you can't have a bedtime.”

“My mother lets me do what I want,” she lied, “I'm an adult.”

“You are?” Gendry feigned surprise, “my apologies, I didn't know.”

Arya leaned over and punched the condescending jerk in the arm. “Shut up! Or else I'll – ”

“Or else you'll what?” he cut her off, grinning.

She coiled her hand into another fist in preparation for a second blow, but then backed down, biting her lip. She settled back neatly into her seat and smoothed her hair and shirt. “I'm not going to get angry,” she said with strained composure, “I'm an adult.”

Gendry guffawed, and Arya's poise shattered in half a heart beat. She unbuckled her seatbelt and threw herself at the laughing asshole, showering him with a storm of fists. Despite her efforts to inflict real pain, all she received in response was more laughter. Finally, she clapped her hand firmly over his mouth so that his voice was no more that a muffled cry. She pulled his ear until he let out a whimper, then said, “Are you going to shut up now?” Arya could tell he was still laughing when tears sprung to his eyes. She yanked harder. “Are you!?”

Her victim nodded vigorously, indicating his surrender, but she did not let go. After all the months that she had known Gendry, she had never noticed how blue his eyes were; then again, after all that time she had never been this close to him before, either. His irises were not icy and insolent like Joffrey's, nor were they soft and sweet like her mother's and siblings'; no, his were deep and determined like.. like.. Well, there was a familiarity to them, but at the moment she could not place its roots.

It was then that she snapped out of her trance and realized that Gendry had stopped squirming beneath her, and was, instead, staring back at her with equal intensity. Calmly, she released her grip on his ear and mouth, then sank back into her seat without another word. She could feel him watching her, even with her head turned as far away from him as possible. Her cheeks were ablaze, but whether it was from the effort of the fight or the proximity of her body to his, she could not be sure. It was something Arya did not want to think about, so instead of nursing the thought, she drifted off to sleep.

When she closed her eyes she had been sitting upright, head propped against the cold hard glass of the window. When she opened them again, hours later, she was lying down on her side, her head resting against the leather of the seat, with a jacket – Gendry's jacket – tossed over her shoulders.

Stiff from sleep, she forced herself back to sitting, pulling off the makeshift blanket and handing it back to Gendry with a questioning gaze.
Gendry only shrugged in answer. “Yoren turned on the AC. You looked cold.”

“Oh,” was all she could manage. “Thanks.” It was an awkward deliverance of gratitude, but Arya was still – as much as she hated to admit – a bit troubled about what had happened earlier. Desperate for a distraction she turned her attention outside, and realized that they had rolled to a stop. “Where are we?” She asked Yoren, who was pulling the keys out of the ignition.

“Acorn Hall,” he said almost proudly. “The finest motel in High Heart. Figured it's safe to stop for at least one night. Besides,” he gave her and Gendry a deploring look, “I don't want to risk getting my car destroyed while the two of you are back there clawing each others' eyes out.”

Arya mumbled an apology as she shot Gendry a venomous glare that said: 'this is all your fault.'

Gendry, in return, looked back at her sheepishly, his eyes saying something along the lines of: 'I'm sorry for being a stubborn little dickhead, I should have shut my big fat stupid mouth because everything I say is pure idiocy. You are smart and mature while I am an imbecile and a dumbass.'

Arya smiled, pleased at Gendry's unspoken apology, then hopped out of the car, happier than she ever thought possible now that she could finally stretch her legs and take in a breath of the cool, summer night air.

Hot Pie exited the car after her, wiping a trail of half-dried saliva from his face with the back of his hand.

“Gross,” Arya said, grimacing at the sight. But slumber still clouded Hot Pie's brain, and he paid her no mind.

When they got settled in the room, Arya was the first to shower, washing herself of all the sweat and grime and stink she had accumulated from the long ride. When she came out of the bathroom she found Yoren already asleep on one of the two beds. She wasn't sure how the sleeping arrangements were supposed to go, but the issue did not bother her too much; she was wide awake from the nap in the car, and doubted that she would be able to sleep tonight.

While Gendry showered and Hot Pie feasted on the last of the food they had packed, Arya decided to take advantage of her freedom and explore.

“Isn't it not safe to go outside by yourself?” Hot Pie had asked her when she told him her plans. “Someone could be out there waiting to kill you.”

In reply, Arya had said, “If I sit and do nothing for another minute, I might just kill me myself. Anyway, if Gendry or Yoren ask, tell them I'll be back soon.” And, to put an end to the boy's protests, she had added, “I'll bring you back some food if I find anything good.”

There was a winding path behind the motel. It twisted and turned up a lofty hill, and at the end of it was a small clearing that overlooked the lights of High Heart. It was a small, quaint town, dominated more by grass and trees than roads and buildings. Arya had only ever known the city life. Winterfell, despite it being almost desolate compared to the bustling crowds of King's Landing, was still more modernized than this place. But the rustic feel of the town was comforting to Arya, and she found that she liked it almost as much as she loved her home.

There came a snapping of twigs behind her, but somehow – though she wasn't sure exactly how – she knew who it was.

“Arry?” came Gendry's voice, low and familiar.
Without turning around she said, “You shouldn’t be here. It's not safe.”

He scoffed as he approached with growing confidence. “I'm pretty sure I can take care of myself. You, on the other hand...”

Arya snapped her head around. “I can take care of myself, too, thank you very much.”

Gendry granted her a smile. “I know you can.” He sat down beside her, elbows resting on his knees. “What are you doing out here anyway?”

She tilted her head up to the sky. “There are more stars here,” she said quietly, not wanting to disturb the peace of nature.

Following her gaze Gendry said, “Yeah. I've never seen so many before.”

They were silent for a long while, relishing the tranquility of the night.

It was Arya who broke the spell when she said, “I'm sorry.”

Gendry looked at her with a puzzled expression. “For what?”

“You would have been better off not being my friend. I dragged you and Hot Pie into this – out of your home... out of safety.”

Arya didn't look at him, but by the tone of his voice she could tell that he was frowning deeply. “Do you regret being my friend?” Gendry asked.

She glanced up then, searching his eyes – an electric blue even in the darkness – for the answer she didn't know. “I...” she tried to speak, “I'm... not sure. I mean, you and Hot Pie are my best friends. My only friends, not counting my siblings. But if I could take it all back so you two wouldn't be in this mess with me, I would.”

For a while Gendry said nothing. Then: “I've been alone most of my life. My mother died when I was very young, and my father left even before that. I was sent to an orphanage. That's where I met Hot Pie. I think I was about ten at the time, I'm not sure. But Hot Pie and I, we had this partnership where if I protected Hot Pie, he would sneak me food from the kitchens where he worked.” Gendry paused to smile at her. When she returned the gesture he continued. “Then one day – I was thirteen – someone came and offered me an apprenticeship with Tobbo Mott. He was a gunsmith, and I knew jack shit about guns. But the man took me in anyway, and from then on I just kind of... I don't know, it came naturally to me. Gunsmithing, that is.”

“What about Hot Pie?” Arya asked the expected question.

“He stayed at the orphanage for another few years or so, until I found him a job at a bakery. Technically it wasn't legal for him to leave the orphanage without a guardian, him not being eighteen and all yet, but where we come from the law isn't so much as strict rules as it is general guidelines. Anyway, long story short I got Hot Pie a job and from then on we just kind of, you know, stuck together.”

Arya nodded, touched by the story but unsure where Gendry was going with it.

“What I'm trying to say is,” Gendry read her mind, “that home is not defined by where your apartment is, or where your things are. Home is where your friends and family are. Home is... where your heart is.”
Arya bit her lip, studied Gendry's face, then burst out into laughter. “Oh. My god,” she chortled, “are you some kind of low-key poet or what?”

She expected Gendry to be offended, but instead he vaulted forward and knocked her over to the ground, laughing along with her. The attack took Arya completely by surprise, but she gathered her wits and poked him hard in the ribs.

"Ow!" he cried in pain, his grip on her wrists loosening long enough for Arya to escape his grasp.

She scrambled away and kicked him playfully, but he was quick to action. Grabbing her ankle, he dragged her toward him, but she wriggled free as she launched a fistful of grass in his face. He leaned over and shook the green blades onto her, and she spat boorishly when some of it fell into her mouth. When she sat back up and glared at him, he burst into laughter at the sight of her.

"What's so funny?" she demanded as she tossed a small stone at him. It bounced off his chest unceremoniously, but Gendry's eyes remained fixed on her's. He crawled forward on his hands and knees, then reached up to pluck twigs and leaves from her hair.

She rolled her eyes upward and lent an extra pair of hands to help with the effort. “How do I look?” she asked as the last bits of tree debris fell to the ground.

“Beautiful,” Gendry mumbled.

“What?”

As if suddenly realizing what just came out of his mouth, he quickly spun away and began adamantly denying that he had said anything at all. Arya eyed him suspiciously, but left the matter alone.

“Oh!” she said suddenly in remembrance. “I have something for you.”

Gendry turned back to her, his face flushed under the moonlight.

“When I was packing, I, uh...” she paused for a moment, wondering if Gendry would be angry at her. “I sort of, um, went through your things.” She reached into her pocket and withdrew a cloth pouch. “Um,” she said, “I wasn't sure whose it was, but I figured it must have been important if you took so much care to hide it and all.”

She handed the item to him, and his eyes went from narrowed to wide when she did. He unbuttoned the front of the pouch and withdrew a heavy metal ring. It was very plain, with nothing more than a tiny engraving on the inside. It was the first time Arya had seen it – she thought it would have been rude to open it without permission.

“This was my mother's,” Gendry whispered almost inaudibly.

“Um,” Arya said lamely, “I hope you're not mad I took it. I mean, I wasn't going to keep it for myself, if that's what you're thinking.”

“I wasn't thinking that at all,” Gendry assured her, still twisting the thing in his fingers. “Thank you. For bringing it. I can't believe I forgot about it.”

Arya licked her lips. “The thing you said... about family and friends...”

“Yeah?” he encouraged her to continue.
“Well, my... father...” it was hard for her to talk about him just now, “well, he once told me something.”

“And what's that?”

“He said that when the cold wind blows, the lone wolf dies and the pack survives.”

Gendry nodded in comprehension. “Your father was a wise man.”

Arya nodded as well, but said nothing further on the subject. Instead, she nudged him gently with her shoulder. “Come on. I promised Hot Pie I’d bring him food. If we don't get back soon he might starve. Help me up.”

“As my lady commands.”

“Excuse me?” she said incredulously as she gave him her hands.

“I said ‘as my lady commands’,” he repeated casually.

“I know, I'm not deaf,” she rolled her eyes. “I meant, why did you call me that?”

“I'm a man of honor,” Gendry said with exaggerated polish, “I stick by my word.”

“And what word are we talking about, exactly?”

“Why, don't you recall, my lady, the night we had a drinking contest? I believe that I have procured second place, which would make me – though this I rue to acquiesce – your servant. In which case, it would only be fitting for me to refer to you with a proper title, am I not wrong?”

Taking a deep, calming breath, Arya squeezed her eyes shut and pinched the bridge of her nose. “If you call me 'my lady' again, I will chop off your manhood and feed it to the goats, understood? Besides, if you're my servant, that means Hot Pie will have to run around naked in public. Ew. Just – ew.”

“If it's so ew, why did you make it one of the conditions? Unless...” Gendry gave her a wolfish grin, “you wanted me to get third place.”

Not believing what she had just heard, and refusing to honor the comment with a reply, she shoved Gendry to the ground. “That wasn't very ladylike,” he laughed, but all she did was give him the finger and shout, “Fuck you!” before stomping away back down the hill.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Back to the action! So I'm trying to pump out more chapters because I'm going to be really busy next month. I'm so excited to finish this, but at this point I can't really predict how much more I have left to write. Anyway, more reviews would be very much appreciated, so I don't feel like such a dolt for being so ridiculously excited about a story that readers might actually think is just painfully mediocre...

Moving along, time to announce the trivia winner!

+500 to xxsupernaturalgalxx for detecting the Supernatural reference to Dean Winchester's 1967 Chevy Impala!

The answer to trivia #3 is the quote: "I will chop off your manhood and feed it to the goats", said by Shagga son of Dolf to Tyrion Lannister :)

Although Arya had never been the epitome of courtesy, she was not one to tolerate rudeness whenever it was unnecessary. Such social guidelines were blurred, however, when it came to her friends and agreeable acquaintances, which was why she would have welcomed any greeting from Yoren or Hot Pie upon her return to the motel, whether it be "where the fuck have you been?" or "about bloody time you got back", or "are you a fucking idiot for running off like that?" Any of these lines would have been acceptable, but the one line that Arya did not care for was: "We've been followed." Which was, of course, what Yoren had said the moment she set foot into the room.

"What?" she blurted, eyes wide with disbelief. "You said it was safe!"

"I did," Yoren replied curtly, tossing their unpacked items back into the duffel bag. "Get ready. We're getting out of here."

Gendry, who had come in not a second after Arya, barred the door and asked, "where are they, do you know?"

"Close," was all the answer he received.

Arya's eyes shifted to Hot Pie, whose legs were spread in a straddle as he frantically packed all the food he had taken out back into the supplies bag. "Jesus fuck, Hot Pie, forget the food, get the weapons!"

"We'll die without food!" Hot Pie protested shrilly.

"This isn't the middle fucking ages! We can buy more, you idiot!"

Hot Pie flushed, but eventually – though begrudgingly – gave in to Arya's anger.

With that settled, she turned to Yoren. "How long do we have?"

"Not long enough," he tossed a gun into Gendry's waiting hands. "Here," he gave one to her, too, "you're leaving out the back."
"Don't you mean we?" she inserted a new magazine and pulled back the slide, ensuring that a bullet was in the chamber at the ready.

"What I mean is: I don't know how many are out there, so you and the boys will be leaving out the back while I hold them off in the front. Can you drive, boy?" he asked Hot Pie. The boy nodded fervently, looking dangerously close to pissing his pants again. "Good," Yoren threw him his keys. "Wait in the car with the engine running. Anyone comes, Arry and Gendry shoot. If I'm not there in ten minutes, drive away – as fast as you can, as far as you can. Got it?"

Hot Pie prolonged his previous nod to include the answer to Yoren's second question, while Gendry gave a single, succinct inclination of his head. Arya, on the other hand, was not won over by these terms. "We can fight with you," she declared. "Right, Gendry?" She looked to him for support, and found it after a moment's hesitation.

She whirled back to Yoren, but he held firm on his decision. "Those men play with guns for a living. You'll be dead before you even fire a shot. Now take the bags and get moving. Go!"

Determined as she was to prove her worth, the vehemence in Yoren's voice temporarily drove away her stubbornness. She pursed her lips and motioned for Gendry and Hot Pie to follow her to the rear of the room. As she helped squeeze the boys out of the window, she cast one last glance at Yoren who, in turn, offered her a reassuring nod that – unfortunately – wasn't very reassuring at all.

The shooting ensued even before her feet made contact with solid ground. Arya twisted her head over her shoulder, brows knitted in contrition.

"Arry! Hurry up, let's go!" came Hot Pie's voice, laced with fear and urgency.

"We have to help," she said, her own tone matching her friend's urgency, but lacking the fear. "We can't just leave him."

"We're not leaving him," Gendry reasoned, "we're going to wait for him. He'll come to us."

Arya shook her head. "No. There are too many. Can't you hear it? We have to help him. He'll die!" At the last sentence she looked to Gendry, pleading for him to understand. "Please," she said, "he's part of our pack."

The hardened expression on Gendry's face did not falter at her words, and Arya's stomach coiled in pain at the thought of him betraying their pack. But the moment was fleeting, and a wave of relief washed over her when he said, "You're right."

She smiled despite the situation, but Hot Pie did not share in her joy. "Are you guys fucking crazy? If he can't go up against those guys, what chance do we have?" He looked to Arya, the source of the insanity. "You can't save everyone, Arry! You're only one person. We're only three kids."

"I'm eighteen," she growled at Hot Pie. "I'm an adult." And with that, she hopped down from the ledge, grabbed two magazines from the bag, and stole off into the shadows of the night. Expectedly, Gendry trailed right behind her, with Hot Pie bringing up the rear.

"Stay low," she instructed in a hushed voice, "and if someone comes – "

"GET DOWN!" Gendry shoved Arya to the ground at the same time he grabbed Hot Pie's arm to drag him down as well. A bullet whizzed by, though how close it was and in which direction it came from, Arya could not tell.

Somewhere nearby the sound of a drum pounded incessantly in her ears. It took her several seconds
to realize that it was her own heart, beating with such vigor that she thought her ribs might just crack under the force of it. But as her eyes adjusted to the darkness, and she saw the frightened distress of Hot Pie and the stoic resolve of Gendry, Arya compelled herself to have courage.

"I'll find Yoren," she said with as much calm as she could muster, "you two hold off the others for as long as you can. We'll meet at the car. Okay?" She didn't wait for an answer, however.

*Swift as a deer,* she chanted to herself as she dashed across the clearing scattered with only a few shrubs and trees. Gunshots rang all around her, but she forced herself to stay focused, and did not stop to shoot back.

*Quick as a snake,* the mantra continued as she ducked under a protruding branch and zipped past another shot.

*Calm as still water,* she eased her mind as the sound of gunshots came louder and clearer as she delved deeper into the fray.

*Fierce as a wolverine,* she told herself as she rushed to a man clad in red and gold attire, her bullet catching him square in the face before he could even think to blink.

"*Where is the bastard?*" She heard an unfamiliar voice boom. Her attention snapped in the direction of the voice, and in her field of vision she saw two dark figures – one standing upright, his back to her, looming over another; the other on his knees, head and shoulders slumped over in half-consciousness, blood dripping from his gaping mouth. "*Yoren,*" Arya breathed.

*Swift as a deer, quick as a snake, calm as still water, fierce as a wolverine.* "Strong as a bear," she said aloud, tackling the stranger to the ground. She slammed the butt of her gun hard into the man's temple once, twice, three times. She elbowed him in the chest, then gripped and twisted his fingers until they snapped when he tried to pry her off of him. She had never seen this man before, but suddenly he had yellow hair and a sardonic smirk. She pulled out her gun and emptied five rounds into his head, his chest, his stomach. When her magazine was empty she tossed it aside and loaded it with a new one. She emptied that one in him too, but this time her eyes were too blurry with hot, salty tears for her to see where she was hitting.

It wasn't until she was two shots into her third magazine that she heard him.

"Arry!" Yoren shouted at her with a painfully ragged voice. "Arry, stop! He's dead!"

Arya looked at the man she had been straddling at the waist. He was more than dead. He was mutilated. But though she could no longer make out a face, she could see that his hair was not yellow, and his mouth was not twisted into a smirk. Her chest heaved up and down, and for a moment she could not move.

When that moment passed, she pushed away from the corpse and ran to Yoren, who was now sprawled on his back, his hand gripping a bullet wound to his belly. "*Yoren!*" she shouted at him as his eyes drooped closed, "*Yoren, wake up you son of a bitch! We have to go, we have to get out of here!*"

Yoren's eyes fluttered opened before dropping closed again, but he still smiled, then laughed, then coughed. Blood sputtered from his lips and glistened a bright red in the moonlight. "*Go,*" he told her.

"*No,*" she objected, "*we're not leaving without you!*"

He coughed again, expelling another glob of blood. "*Gendry...*" he rasped.
"Gendry?" Arya repeated. "Gendry what?"

"His father... tell him... tell him..."


And in that moment, the weight of the world that burdened her shoulders finally crushed her feeble body as heaving sobs came and ripped her apart. The tears that brimmed her eyes streamed down her cheeks like waterfalls, cutting through the dirt and blood that stained them.

Her grief was not only for Yoren, she knew. This was for her little brother, Bran, who used to creep into her bed at night when he had nightmares, and raced with her through the woods until they were both so sore they could hardly stand anymore; this was for her only sister, Sansa, who didn't laugh when she was scared the first time she bled, and who loved her despite all the fights they've ever had; this was for her father, who tolerated her rebelliousness and kissed her forehead every night before bed and called her a wolf like her Aunt Lyanna; this was for Robb and Rickon and Mother and Jon, who she may never see again because everyone around her was dying; this was for Hot Pie and Gendry, who – "

"ARRY!"

Arya's head unburied itself from her hands, and she looked up to see that Hot Pie was running toward her, his eyes wide with fear.

"HOT PIE!" she shouted back, scrambling to her feet, "RUN!" There were men emerging from behind the trees. "FOR F**K'S SAKE, HOT PIE, RUN!"

"WHAT?" The boy obviously could not hear her.

Arya counted three men, and she only had four bullets left. She raised her arm and squinted her eyes. Hot Pie froze in place – no doubt pissing his pants – but Arya did not waste time explaining. She fired three shots in rapid succession, and the trio of uniformed strangers fell dead in an instant. "FIND GENDRY!" Arya yelled at the top of her lungs to the frightened boy, "GO!"

This time, Hot Pie heard her, and he ran. Arya glimpsed back at Yoren once more, his hand painted red to the elbow and his blood soaking into the damp soil beneath him. As Arya recalled the light passing from Yoren's eyes, an abrupt rush of clarity came over her. That's when she knew what she had to do. With one bullet left, Arya lifted her arm, aimed the gun, and pulled the trigger.

Hot Pie fell face first into the grass.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See, I promised I'd update quicker :) There's not much to say about this one other than:

enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With Hot Pie's ceaselessly obnoxious crying Arya almost wished she had killed him after all. But no, she had only shot him – purposefully – in the side. This, however, was unknown to Hot Pie – both that Arya was the shooter and that he wasn't, in fact, going to die. There was still a good amount of blood, though, so his time was limited. Arya knew she needed to act fast.

"We have to get him to a hospital," Gendry said with urgency. Through the rear-view mirror she could see his hands bloodied with his friend's blood as well as his own.

"It's too dangerous," she told him, her eyes focused on the road. "We'll have to take our chances with someone out here."

"Are you crazy? Who's going to help us? There's no one out here. And even if there was, what will they think if three strangers suddenly showed up at their doorstep covered in blood?"

Arya rolled her eyes. "See with your eyes, Gendry. Look around you." She peeked at the mirror and saw him cast a transient glance out the window.

"Arry, I don't know if you've noticed, but Hot Pie could be dying here. We don't have time for a game of I-Spy."

"What do you see?" Arya snapped with boiling impatience, quite frankly not in the mood for his sarcasm.

Gendry sighed, but was smart enough to know that Arya was genuinely angry. "I see trees," he replied. "Woods. A forest. Whatever. So what?"

Honestly, Arya thought to herself, Gendry could be so dense sometimes. "What do people do in the forest?" she asked, but in the interest of time she answered for him. "They hunt. And what do hunters do? They use guns. And what kinds of injuries do guns cause? The kind you and Hot Pie have. And if people have to deal with gun injuries, what do you think they're capable of? Fixing them. Are you following me now, or should I explain it again slower?"

She could tell that her transparent condescendence infuriated Gendry, but he kept silent. The atmosphere in the car was pulled taut by tension, and the silence that lingered was breached only by Hot Pie's sporadic whimpers.

"Look," Arya said finally, "there's a dirt road up ahead." It was unmarked and overgrown with grass and weeds, but it still showed signs of occasional usage. "Maybe it leads to someone's house."

"And if it doesn't?" Gendry's tone was sharpened by his bitterness.

Arya bit back a snide remark, deciding it best not to fan the flames of his temper. Instead, without
speaking, she led the car in the direction of the road, driving right into the thick of the woods. The path was winding, and seemed to dwindle at times, or even disappear completely for a while. Fifteen minutes later – though to Arya it felt more like an eternity – they arrived at their destination: an empty clearing.

A number of words would have appropriately described Arya's disappointment at that moment, a few being [mother]fuck, [bull]shit, and [god]dammit. In the end, Arya settled for: "Seriously?"

She turned off the engine and stepped out of the car, hoping against hope that somehow there was an invisible house in the middle of the clearing that would reveal itself once it realized it had company.

Behind her, Arya heard the car door swing open, then slam closed. As she felt Gendry approach, she closed her eyes and braced herself for a tongue lashing. But when he came to stand beside her, all that came between them was a stretch of uncomfortable silence.

When Gendry finally spoke, his voice – though barely more than a whisper – sounded like thunder in the stillness of the woods. "We have to go back and find a hospital," he said without looking at her.

Arya shook her head absently. "We're lost."

She expected Gendry to shout in a burst of outrage, but what he did instead was infinitely more torturous. He sighed, and said, "I might have Hot Pie's blood on my hands, but its yours that it dirties." With that, he strode back to the car and shut the door softly after him.

She wasn't sure how long she stood there – eyes open and mind shut – but when she heard the clopping of hooves, the sun was beginning its descent into the horizon, making the sky blush brilliant shades of red and pink. Arya turned to the direction of the noise, slowly, wearily, warily. What emerged from the trees did nothing less than surprise her.

A horse-drawn carriage.

"Hullooo!" a man who looked to be about sixty or so greeted her with a smile and a wave as he reigned his horse to a stop. "Are you lost, miss?"

"We are," Gendry said stiffly but civilly, returning to his position next to Arya. "Can you tell us how to get back to the main road?"

The carriage-driver's eyes hovered over her friend's blood-stained clothes, then frowned. "What happened to you, young man, if you don't mind me asking?"


The stranger, with a head of gray hair and loose, sagging skin grinned amicably, revealing two rows of crooked but white teeth. "Might be that I can," he affirmed. "Where is your friend?"

"In the car," Gendry replied. "He's hurt real bad. I don't think he can move."

The stranger, with a head of gray hair and loose, sagging skin grinned amicably, revealing two rows of crooked but white teeth. "Might be that I can," he affirmed. "Where is your friend?"


The man hummed contemplatively to himself, then climbed down from his seat, landing in the grass with a muted thud. He gestured for Gendry to lead the way to Hot Pie, then peered through the open window at their dying friend. The man hummed again, clicked his tongue against his teeth, then, without asking another question, said, "Help me get him in the carriage. We'll have to deal with him at the inn."
"How do we know you're not leading us into some kind of trap?" Gendry eyed the man queerly, suspicious and blunt as always.

The stranger laughed and laid a friendly hand on Gendry's shoulder. "You are right to be doubtful, young man, and for that, I commend you. However, it seems that your friend there is not the only one who is hurt. I can see quite clearly that you have a wound of your own." The man inclined his head and pointed it at Gendry's injured arm. "Lucky for you, I know a good doctor who just so happens to work at the inn."

"Who?" Arya rejoined the conversation, realizing only after that it was a silly question to ask.

But the man obliged her anyway. "Me," he said, his eyes smiling. "I am Dr. Thoros – of Myr – at your service."

"Myr?" Arya asked wonderingly, "what are you doing all the way out here?"

"I would be more than happy to tell you my story," Dr. Thoros chuckled at her wide eyes, "but first, let us return your friends to good health, shall we?"

Arya looked to Gendry for a decision, though even if he disagreed with her she wouldn't have listened. Thankfully, he nodded in accession, and the three of them helped the moaning Hot Pie into the carriage.

The inn was a good twenty minutes away from the clearing, but Arya wished that it would never end. The forest scenery reminded her so much of home, and her heart ached with an unfathomable pain knowing that things would never be the same again. Even so, there was only one thing in the world she wanted more than going home, and the more she thought about it the more her insides twisted into knots. She hadn't even realized she was crying until the trees turned into nothing more than smudges of green and brown. Hurriedly, she wiped away the treacherous tears with the back of her hand, hoping that Gendry did not see it.

As it turned out, he did not, because at that moment the carriage pulled to a stop. Arya poked her head out of the window and watched the doctor clamber down from the driver's seat once more. When his eyes met hers he gave her yet another smile and gestured to an old wooden sign. It was worn and weathered, rustic and homely. "HEDDLES" it read in large, capital letters on the top. "Bed & Breakfast" was beneath it, writ in smaller, cursive letters.

"Masha!" the doctor bellowed to the cozy looking inn beyond the sign. Strained and quiet as his voice was, a woman appeared seconds later, drying her hands on a stained apron as she approached the carriage.

"What's this?" the woman named Masha asked not unkindly.

"Some new friends got into a bit of an accident and need tending to. You wouldn't happen to have a room or two prepped for use, would you?"

Arya did not see it, but the sound of the woman's voice told her that she was smiling. "My hands are not idle like yours, Dr. Thoros," she chided blithely, "I always have a room or two prepped for unexpected guests." She turned to Arya and Gendry then, who had emerged from the carriage to stand beside the doctor. "Jeyne! Willow!" she put the doctor's attempt at a shout to shame. "Come down here!"

In an instant, two girls – plain but pretty – shuffled to the woman's side. "Jeyne, Willow, meet..."

"Arry," Arya offered when Masha looked to her.
"Gendry," Gendry followed suit when it was his turn.

Masha beamed brightly. "Arry, Gendry, these are my daughters, Jeyne and Willow. Jeyne is twenty-one, and Willow is eighteen." The girls' smiles were shy and sweet, and lingered a beat longer on Gendry than it did on Arya.

Both Jeyne and Willow had light brown hair, combed straight so that it shined and settled neatly atop their heads. Suddenly, for no reason she could distinguish, Arya felt very self-conscious of her own hair, which was a darker brown – unkempt, uncombed, and inconsistent in the sense that it was somewhere in between straight and wavy.

"Gendry appears to be hurt," the doctor interrupted Arya's self-reflection as he spoke to the innkeeper, "but it's just a minor scratch. Will you have your girls see to him? I'm afraid my hands will be full with another patient."

Though Masha's daughters maintained an air of graceful dignity by not squealing and/or jumping on Gendry in that instant, Arya detected the glint of anticipation in their eyes as both girls gave a single, complaisant nod. It annoyed her to no end. Stupid girls, she thought, what's so great about Gendry anyway?

Her question went unanswered, however, as Hot Pie and Gendry were taken upstairs to be tended to. When the boys were gone, Masha turned to her and asked if she would like a bed to sleep in. "My other guests will be returning in an hour or so for a late supper. There's a boy about your age – very charming and polite. Perhaps you two could be friends."

Ignoring the implication presented by the obtrusive but well-meaning woman, Arya gratefully accepted the bed. Once in the room, however, sleep would not take her. She found herself plagued with thoughts best not to be dwelled on. About her family, about Yoren...

Yoren, she thought, recalling that night. What was he trying to tell me about Gendry's father? And why was the man I killed asking about a bastard? Were they looking for Jon? Why would they, though? Jon was in the Night's Watch. They were immune to the politics of the rest of the country. For more than an hour Arya pondered these questions, but a knocking at the door forced her to save the ruminations for another time. "Who is it?" she ventured, head still buried in her folded arms.

"Gendry," was her visitor's answer, muffled by the thick slab of oak that closed the room.

Reluctantly, she forced herself out of bed and padded across the floor. When she opened the door, Gendry took one look at her and flushed from the neck up. "What?" she sighed heavily, too tired to be anything but direct.

"Um," Gendry hesitated, looking away. "Do you want to um – you know – put on some pants?"

Arya looked down and realized that she was, in fact, in her underwear. Not the least bit embarrassed, she shot him a pointed look. "You're a grown man, Gendry. Act like one." She hastened back under the covers and said, "what do you want?"

Gendry, who now appeared only marginally less uncomfortable, shut the door behind him. He took a seat in the chair beside the bed, his eyes focusing on anything but Arya. She had almost forgotten that he was in the room until Gendry finally found the words he wanted to say.

"Back at the clearing... that thing I said about Hot Pie..." he looked at his hands, "I didn't mean it."

But you were right. "It doesn't matter. I'm over it."
"I'm sorry."

"I forgive you," she said airily, picking at a notch in the wood of the windowsill.

At that, Gendry snapped at her. "Arya!" he said loud enough to catch her attention. She looked at him, annoyed. "I'm being serious! What I said was unforgivable and – "

"Fine, then I don't forgive you. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

Gendry clenched his jaw, his gaze unwavering. "The only thing I want from you is understanding," he said levelly. "I was upset, and what I said – I didn't mean it. Forgive me or don't forgive me, just know that I hold nothing against you. You said so yourself – in times like these, we either stick together, or die."

Arya shifted uncomfortably as a battle of morals ensued in her mind. "How's Hot Pie?" she changed the subject.

She watched as Gendry leaned back into his chair, relaxing ever-so-slightly. "He's doing well. He's going to live."

_I knew he would._ "Did the doctor say how long he'll take to recover?"

"He says not for a long time."

Arya chewed her lip. _Tread carefully, _she told herself, _don't unravel everything you've already done._ "I can't stay here for long," she said, "it's not safe for any of us."

"I understand that, but Hot Pie needs to rest. He's lost a lot of blood, and he needs time to heal."

"I know," she agreed, "which is why I think he should stay here." Gendry opened his mouth to speak, but Arya continued before he could. "I think you should stay here with him, too."

Gendry closed his mouth, swallowed, then opened it again. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that I'm going home by myself. It's quicker and and safer that way. You and Hot Pie can hide out here. They won't bother going through so much trouble to find you when all they want is me."

"Safer?" he exclaimed disbelievingly. "You think that going out there – alone – with a fucking warrant for your head is safer? Were you not listening to a word I said? You can be a real idiot sometimes, Arry, but this is by far the stupidest idea I have ever heard."

Furious, Arya balled her fists and prepared to deliver a hostile retort, but Gendry cut her off. He pushed back his chair so abruptly that it toppled over. "I'm not letting you leave here by yourself, and if that means leaving Hot Pie, then so be it. Like you said, they're looking for you, not him. He'll survive alone, you won't."

"But – " Arya tried to protest.

"But nothing," he growled, his fury frightening her for the first time, "and nothing you say can make me change my mind." Without another word, Gendry stalked out of the room, slamming the door shut behind him.

When he was gone, Arya smirked. Did he seriously think she wouldn't have a plan B? Honestly, she thought to herself, _Gendry could be so dense sometimes._
FYI I tweaked Jeyne and Willow's appearance/personality/age to fit the story a bit better.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Oh god I bet you all hate me now. I'm so sorry, I know I promised not to do this again, but I did. I've just been so busy and have been getting little to no sleep these past few days... And last night I went to see my first concert ever (Kaskade fans, anyone?) and it was absolutely amazing but left me no time to post this chapter like I had planned.

As you can tell, this one is a bit longer than the rest, and is kind of a filler and kind of fluffy. It's (for the most part) unedited, because I felt so bad for making you guys wait so long. Unfortunately, this might become normal for the next few days/weeks because I'll be going to another 2-day concert next week, then a roadtrip to Oregon, then out of country a few weeks after that. Again, I'll try my very best to write whenever I can. I hope you guys will understand :(

It was just past seven o'clock when Gendry had stormed out of her room, and Arya had about – if Masha's estimations were correct – one or two hours before the other guests were to return from their evening hunt. That's more than enough time to plan, Arya thought, suddenly feeling very sleepy. I have time for a quick ten-minute nap... was what she told herself right before she woke up when there was a rap at her door nearly two hours later.

"Arry?" a voice Arya did not recognize came from without the room, muffled by the wooden barrier between them.

Arya glanced at the wall clock and saw that it was almost nine. "Shit," she cursed quietly to herself. Her hand slid under the pillow to retrieve her dagger. She tucked it securely into her left boot as she replied, "Just a minute!" Then, as she reached for her shorts, she stopped herself. "Fuck it, guess I'll just wing it."

"Um," the voice spoke again. "Masha just wanted me to let you know that – "

"Yes?" Arya swung the door open, only slightly breathless from rushing across the room.

"Oh," the young man standing before her blinked dumbly. In the dimness of the yellow-orange light she could see that he had sandy colored hair and eyes so dark and blue they appeared almost purple. And though he stood nearly a whole head taller than her, his presence was not intimidating the way Gendry's was.

Arya arched an eyebrow at his prolonged silence. "Yes?" she repeated.

"Oh," he said again. "Um," he promptly averted his eyes and refocused them on something very fascinating on the wall beside the door frame. "Did you want to change first?" he asked, clearing his throat nervously.

"Looks like I'll be needing a lot of alcohol," Arya reflected as she assessed the boy before her. "Crap," she feigned surprise and embarrassment, "sorry. I was in such a rush to answer the door I forgot..." she looked down, for the second time tonight, at her underwear.
"No, no," the young man said quickly, "it's my fault for disturbing you. I just came to tell you that supper will be served soon. I'll leave you to whatever it is you need to do now."

"Wait!" Arya blurted as he turned to go, reaching out and laying a gentle hand on his forearm. She smiled shyly when his eyes met hers. "I mean, I won't be long. Will you wait for me? I don't often get to meet many people..." her sentence trailed off.

The small smile playing at the boy's lips told Arya that she had successfully taken the first step forward. "I'll wait here," he assured her, stepping back so she could close the door. Not a minute later Arya stood in front of him again, this time fully clad in her shorts.

"I'm Ned," the young man introduced himself properly, offering her his hand.

Arya hesitated, not at the hand, but at the name. Her father's name. She couldn't remember the last time she had heard it, or even thought about it. Days? Weeks? Months? The memory was like a fist closing around her heart, squeezing until the blood ran dry. With substantial effort, she willed the painful thoughts from her head.

Mistaking her hesitation for rejection, Ned pulled back, though slow enough so that Arya could catch it before it fell completely to his side. She shook it twice, then grinned up half-heartedly at him. "It isn't you," she explained, "it's just, my father's name was also Ned. But he's gone now."

Ned looked at her with sympathetic eyes. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "You can call me Edric instead. My full name is Edric Dayne."

Dayne... Arya tasted the name on her tongue. Where had she heard it before?

"I'm Arya," she stated the obvious, pushing the previous thought out of her mind. Before Edric could ask for a last name, she continued with, "I hope I didn't make anyone wait. I'm not even that hungry."

"Not at all, we just got back."

"We?"

"My uncle and a few of his friends."

"Oh. What are you guys here for?"

"Hunting trip," Edric seemed to answer a tad too quickly. Then, as if realizing this himself, he hurriedly asked the same of Arya.

"Roadtrip," the lie came easily to her. "Me and two of my friends."

"Is one of them a girl?"

Arya peered at him suspiciously. "No. Why do you ask?"

"I – " he hesitated, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean for that to sound creepy or anything. I was just wondering... I mean... you're traveling with three guys alone..."

"Have you met them yet?" she asked him.

"Only Gendry," he answered. "He's an... interesting individual."

Arya laughed aloud at that, then realized, when she suddenly felt a roomful of eyes fall on her, that
they had arrived in the dining hall. Of all the faces fixed on her, the first she picked out from the crowd was Gendry's: stern, but otherwise unreadable. "Yeah," she spoke softly so only Edric could hear, "that he certainly is."

No doubt perplexed by Arya's odd tone, Edric took pause before changing the subject. "Would you like a drink? I'm afraid Uncle Beric is still skinning some of the rabbits we brought back."

"Does Masha have alcohol?" she requested immediately.

Edric gave her a questioning look. "How old are you?"

"Eighteen." His suggestions made Arya shake her head, amusement coupled with pity. She touched his arm (that's what Sansa always did with Joffrey) and felt him stiffen ever-so-slightly under her fingertips. "Nothing fruity, please," she offered a small chuckle. "Is there scotch? Vodka? Whiskey? Anything strong."

Despite the conflict in the young man's eyes, a smirk still tugged at the corner of his lips. "I'll see what I can do," was all he said before disappearing into another room.

Arya only had a second's respite after Edric was gone before she was reimmersed in company.

"I don't think so," Arya turned to disagree with a man sporting long, thin brown hair. He had a hooked nose and looked to be about fifty or sixty years of age.

"No," the man said lightly. "A shame, then... I'm Tom O'Sevens, by the way," he introduced himself, extending a hand bestowed with impossibly long and nimble fingers. "Are you playing an instrument?"

"Ah, an observant one, I see. As a matter of fact, little lady, I do. The harp, to be precise. And I sing, too. Would you like to hear?"

"No one wants to hear any more of your insufferable singing," another stranger approached them. "You scared away half the forest while we were out hunting." The newcomer looked to be in his thirties, with a shock of red hair and freckles to match. His easy grin contrasted sharply with his berating manner towards Tom. "I'm Anguy," he inclined his head politely in Arya's direction, "Anguy Archer. A pleasure to meet you."

"Arry..." she reciprocated slowly, her eyes darting between the two men. "Nice to meet you, too."

"So, Arry," Anguy said, straddling the wooden bench, "what brings you to the middle of nowhere?"

Arya shot a swift glance in Gendry's direction. He wasn't alone anymore, she saw. Jeyne sat beside him, nursing a cup of dark drink and laughing at something that Gendry apparently did not find very funny at all.
Tom, following her gaze, asked, "Your boyfriend?"

"No!" she retorted immediately. Gendry would make a terrible boyfriend, she decided. Stubborn and short-tempered. And dumb as a... a... It doesn't matter! she all but screamed at herself. Gendry is stupid and you're better off without him. "He's just a friend," she said to both Tom and Anguy. We're supposed to be on a roadtrip, but then we got lost."

"Oh?" it was Anguy now. "Where are you two going?"

"Three," she corrected, "we have another friend upstairs. He's... sleeping."

"I see. And where are you three going?"

Shit. Hadn't thought that one through. Thankfully, Arya was saved the effort of conjuring a lie when Edric reappeared with what she hoped to be something very potent.

"I see you've met my uncle's friends," Edric smiled as he placed a shotglass in front of her. He lined another few beside hers, then pulled the two bottles of what could only be vodka out from under his arms and planted it firmly on the table. "Care to join us?" he asked the men.

"Not until I get something in my belly first," Tom scowled. "I'm afraid my aging body can no longer boast the tolerance I once had as a youth."

"Speak for yourself, old man," Anguy laughed, snatching up an empty glass and raising it up to the still-standing Edric. "Hit me."

"Does your friend want to join us?" Edric spoke as he poured for Anguy.

Arya craned her neck around a second time in Gendry's direction. Her stomach did a strange flip when his eyes locked with hers, as if she were embarrassed that he caught her looking.

Don't be silly, she scolded herself yet again, you have every reason to be looking. She raised her cup at him as an invitation, but his lips drew into a line and he looked away without a word. "What a dick," she mumbled bitterly.

"What'd you say?" Anguy chirped as he smelled the contents of his drink.

"Nothing," she handed her glass over to be filled, "he doesn't want to drink."

"Why not?" Tom, who had left and come back in an instant, strummed his harp as he asked the question.

"He's just upset because I can outdrink him."

"You?" Anguy barked in laughter. "Can your stomach hold more than a pint of beer? I'll bet Lem's leather coat weighs more than you do."

The comment elicited a chuckle from Tom, but Arya, who didn't even know who Lem was, remained resolute. "I bet I can outdrink you, too," she challenged. "All of you, as a matter of fact." She leaned back and crossed her arms smugly, waiting for a reply.

Edric and Anguy exchanged a single look before turning their attention back to Arya. "Challenge accepted," they said at the same time. The three then raised their glasses in unison and swallowed the contents in one gulp, thus marking the beginning of a long night.

The alcohol was still flowing even after supper – which consisted of skewered grilled beef, baked
potatoes, and rabbit and vegetable soup – was over. Tom, true to his word, had passed out long before the chocolate stout cake and peach cobbler dessert, after not being able to wait until his stomach was full enough before accepting Arya's challenge.

"He's the lucky one," Thoros chuckled beside her. "It took me years to lose over one hundred pounds, and now Masha – damn that wretched woman – has undone nearly half my success in a single night.

Arya smiled at the doctor, partly from imagining him being fat, but mostly from the eight shots of vodka and two bottles of beer. It was well past twelve o'clock now, but the room seemed to be getting warmer – not colder – by the minute.

Her eyes grazed the dining hall and found Anguy in the corner talking about his knife with Lem. Lem Lemoncloak, whom Arya had met shortly before the meal, was a hulk of a man, almost as big as Robert Baratheon, but with muscle where Robert had fat. His leather coat, which Anguy had used for a rough comparison to her weight, was, indeed, very large and very heavy. But despite his frightening appearance, the man was – more or less – amiable when drunk.

Continuing their rotation around the room, her eyes stopped on Beric Dondarrion next. Edric's uncle – though he was less an uncle and more an extremely close family friend, Arya had learned not long after meeting the man – was ruggedly handsome, with red-gold hair and a matching, close-trimmed beard. But though he looked like a man with charisma and charm, he was, as it turned out, very quiet and recluse; a man, Arya mused, with secrets. And just now, as he nodded in acknowledgment at her, she knew that he would be the first to retire for the night.

Masha and Willow came into her field of view after Beric. Willow was looking rather put out as she collected the dirty plates and dishes strewn across the table, but Masha was wearing her usual smile. It was then that Arya realized that Jeyne and Gendry were nowhere to be found. The room wasn't very large, so it wasn't like they were hiding in a nook or cranny. Arya scrunched up her nose in distaste. Why should she care what they were doing? Jeyne was a dolt and Gendry was a dick. They deserved each other.

"Arry?" Edric's voice interrupted her thoughts. "You okay?"

Arya whirled around to find Edric a mere inches away from her face. Instead of being flustered, however, she laughed. When he asked her what was so funny, she responded truthfully: "You look like a tomato."

She didn't think Edric could get any redder, but she was put to shame when a blush rose up his neck to his cheeks and turned him brighter than a flame. She laughed again, but took his hand in hers. "Come on," she said, "let's get some fresh air."

Moving from the inn to the outdoors was like stepping out from an oven into a refrigerator. Arya shivered involuntarily.

"Are you cold?" Edric frowned. "We can go back inside."

"I want to stay out here," she said, rubbing her goose-fleshed arms.

Concern still lining his face, Edric unzipped his jacket and threw it over Arya's shoulders.

"Thanks," she muttered as she drew it tighter around her body. "Come on, let's walk." Arya stepped forward, but was pulled back when Edric didn't move. "What's the matter?" she taunted, "afraid of the dark?"
"It's not that," he said softly, "it's just..."

"What?" she tugged playfully at his hand. For a moment, she didn't think he would budge. But when she flashed him her most charming smile, he gave in. Now I know how Sansa got away with everything, she realized with sudden understanding. She wished desperately that her sister was still alive to teach her a few more nifty tricks.

She and Edric walked for about an hour before either spoke a word. Arya was the first to shatter the quiet. "I've never seen so many stars before," she breathed in wonder as the moon hovered ominously up ahead.

"It really is lovely here," he agreed, tilting his own head to the sky.

"The trees are nice, too," Arya dropped her gaze. "They remind me of the ones back at home." She regretted saying that even before she finished the sentence. Fuck, she panicked, stupid, stupid, stupid. And I'm not even drunk anymore. What's wrong with me?

"Where are you from?" Edric asked the expected, though she flinched nonetheless. But by the will of the infinitely merciful deities above, there was a rustle of leaves nearby. "What was that?" Arya whispered, grateful beyond words at the distraction.

"Probably just an animal," her companion whispered back.

They stood frozen for several seconds before the rustling came again, this time followed by a deep voice. "... should get back," she heard it say. "... don't think she's out here." It took her no effort to identify it as Gendry's voice. But who was he talking to? As if in answer, a second voice joined in as they got closer. "... stay. It's so beautiful."

"That's Jeyne," Edric spoke directly into her ear. His breath sent a shiver down her spine, despite its warmth.

This is too perfect, she thought. "Come on," she nudged him gently with her elbow, intentionally pressing herself into the fold of his body. "Let's sneak up on them."

Crouching low, Arya tiptoed forward – Edric trailing close behind – with her fingers still entwined with his. The earth beneath her boots was damp and soft, drowning the sound of her footfalls. Twigs were strewn all across the ground, and Arya was careful not to step on one... at least not yet. She had to get closer first. They weren't far now, she knew. Just a few more steps. One foot in front of the other... until finally, she saw them. Through the thick of the brush she could see that their backs were to her, and Jeyne's shoulder was tactfully pressed against Gendry's arm as they stood staring at the sky.

There was a twig at Arya's feet, just waiting to be snapped. And so, not being one to disappoint, she did as was expected: she stepped on it.

The sound might not have been much louder than the squeak of a mouse, but in the deafening silence that draped the night, the snap of the twig rang as loud as church bells on a Sunday morning.

Arya spun around immediately, tucking her head into Edric's chest. When she peered up at him she brought a finger to her lips, and left it there until he nodded in understanding. Behind her, she could hear Jeyne and Gendry approaching with caution. As she waited for them to find her, she let her eyes fix on Edric's. In the moonlight they were a striking violet, and for the first time Arya did not need to pretend to be stricken by the young man before her.
And as the footsteps from came closer and closer, Arya leaned forward and kissed him.

His lips were warm and soft, and when she brought her hand to his cheek she felt the burning beneath his skin. Arya's first kiss had been when she was sixteen. It was with a boy named Mycah, the son of her father's favorite local butcher. They had both been pathetically unpracticed at the time, but Arya was a quick learner, while Mycah had never been the sharpest tool in the shed. It had been two years since she'd kissed somebody, but when Edric's tongue slipped past her lips to tangle itself with hers, she knew she still had it.

She sucked in a sharp breath through her nose as his one hand snaked around her neck to draw her in closer, while his other hand ran slowly down her side – from her shoulders, down to the side of her breast, around the contour of her ribs, to the curve of her waist – in one, smooth motion. As his fingers crept from her hip, to her bottom, to her back beneath her blouse, Arya leaned in further and... toppled over.

She let out an uncharacteristic giggle just as the curtain of foliage drew back behind them. Arya twisted her neck around and was welcomed by the sight of Gendry's boots.

"Oh," she spoke to his shoes, "hi." Slowly, she eased herself off of Edric and straightened her shirt. Sitting on her feet now, she sniffed once, then looked up at Gendry. "Can we help you?"

The only response she received was a blank stare. No one spoke for a long while.

"Ahem," Edric finally cleared his throat awkwardly behind her, but Gendry paid him no mind. "Ahem," he coughed again. "It's getting late, we should probably go..."

"No," Gendry put in no effort to disguise the bitterness of his tone, "you stay. We'll go. Sorry for intruding on your... moment." With that, he walked away, not even checking to see if Jeyne was following.

Soon after, with the mood ruined, Arya and Edric returned to the inn as well.

The combination of too much food and too much alcohol had clearly taken a toll on Edric's body and mind, and as soon as Arya helped him into bed he was fast asleep, as was everyone else in the Heddles' Bed & Breakfast.

Well, almost everyone.

She heard it as she was making her way back to her room. The unmistakable squeaking of bedsprings, and the poorly muffled sound of pleasure. It came from Gendry's room. A fortunate coincidence that it just happened to share a wall with hers, Arya thought ruefully as she packed what little she owned into a small bag. But when she stepped out into the cold night once more, she couldn't help but stop one last time to say goodbye.

Goodbye to the fat and useless Hot Pie, goodbye to the sweet and unsuspecting Edric, and goodbye to the stupid bullheaded asshole who would have been stopping her from running away right now were he not too busy sticking his dick in crazy. And even though this is what she was expecting all along – what she was planning all along – she still couldn't help but feel a little hurt.

She was a lone wolf now; but it was the lone wolf, not the pack, that survived.

Chapter End Notes
Alright so this chapter deviates from canon characters a bit. First, Edric is Arya's age in the book, but I like the idea of Arya with older guys more (please don't hate me!). Also, in the book, it is implied that Gendry's love interest is more likely to be Willow than Jeyne. But in a modern AU, Gendry doesn't strike me as someone to go for girls so much younger than him, and I like the idea that Arya would be the only exception. Therefore, I made it Gendry/Jeyne. I apologize to anyone who demands otherwise!

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