You'd Be M'lady

by AryRiddle

Summary

"I told you once" Gendry said. "You would never be my family. You'd be m'lady."
Arya was furious. "And, as your lady, you would do anything I commanded?"
"Yes, m'lady."
"Fine. I command you to be my family!"

"The Crime of Love" SPIN-OFF!

Notes

This fanfic is a SPIN-OFF of my SanSan story "The Crime of Love". This story contains a bit of spoilers from the other story, and vice-versa. It centers about Arya's life in the period of time covered between chapters 16 and 17 of the other fic, which was not deeply described.
Chapter 1

It was the biggest feast that had been held in Winterfell in a very long time, and hundreds of northerners were happily eating, drinking, singing and dancing, celebrating the return of the Starks to the reconstructed seat of their family. They were celebrating that they had a new liege lord, Bran Stark, who sat on the principal chair in the largest table with his direwolf Summer by his side. At his right, in the place of honor, was sitting his sister, the beautiful Lady Sansa Stark, who was dressed in a beautiful white laced gown, and her shoulders were covered by a yellow cloak with three black dogs on it. For there was a second thing being celebrated that night at Winterfell: Lady Sansa's marriage to Sandor Clegane.

It was the second time that Sansa was married to a Clegane, but contrary to the first time, right now she couldn't have been happier. She was glowing, and her husband was sitting by her side, with the good side of his face facing her. The northerners, instead of hating him like they had done in the past, now liked him. They all knew of how he had sailed across the Narrow Sea all the way to Slaver's Bay to convince the Dragon Queen to return to Westeros, and succeeded; how he had fought valiantly in King's Landing against the Lannisters, and won; how he had returned Lady Sansa and Lady Arya safely to the North. Yes, now they all knew that he was a good, decent man. What some of them didn't like, though, was that he had fathered Sansa's bastard son while he was still the King's dog, and she was still betrothed to that same King, Joffrey Baratheon. But that didn't matter now. The child had died upon being born… or so had they been made to believe.

Arya Stark was enjoying the feast from her seat besides Rickon, who was sitting at Bran's left. Before going to King's Landing, she always amused herself by throwing food to her sister, but she wasn't going to do that now. She didn't want to spoil her sister's especial day, Sansa deserved to be perfectly happy after so much suffering… And Arya was starting to like the Hound. Perhaps he wasn't such a bad option for a goodbrother after all. Arya stoop up from her chair and walked towards the newly weds. Sansa smiled broadly when she saw her sister approaching her.

"Arya!" They gave each other a big, tight hug.

"I'm happy that you are happy" Arya said, and she really meant it. Then she stared sharply at Sandor. "I'm warning you. If you ever hurt my sister, I'll make sure that you end up being uglier than you already are."

Sansa's mouth fell wide open in shock.

"Arya!" she exclaimed for the second time that night, this time scolding her sister. Sandor, on the other hand, smirked.

"And I'm warning you too, she-wolf. If you ever walk in on us, I'll kick you in that bony ass of yours, understood?" before he even finished the threat, Arya had an awful look of disgust on her face.

"Seven hells!" she exclaimed, making both Sansa and Sandor laugh, which annoyed her. "It's not funny, it's disgusting! Yuck!"

"Aye, you're saying that now" Sandor kept saying, still smirking. "But wait and see if you keep looking so disgusted when you find someone that rings your bells for you… Oi!" Sansa had smacked him on his broad chest, covered only by a yellow velvet doublet. "What was that for, little bird?!"
"Language!" was all she said, but she started laughing after a few seconds. Sandor grinned and leaned in to kiss her.

"Yuck!" Arya ran away from then and ack to her chair as fast as she could. Apart from being a bit disgusted, she was red from embarrassment, and she didn't know why. She was so upset from those unknown reasons that she didn't notice Jon staring at her with an amused smile on his face. He was sitting in the Stark tale as the guest of honor, not because he was their astard brother, because he wasn't. He was their cousin, Jon Targaryen. He wasn't a member of the Night's Watch anymore: as they only living relative of Queen Daenerys Stormborn, and given that she was barren, he was the only heir of the Targaryen dynasty, so he had been relieved from his duties, and he had been made Lord of Dragonstone. Besides, he had also been free to marry the former wildling Ygritte. The girl had adapted incredibly well to life on that side of the Wall, and though she was a little wild spirit, she was learning how to become a lady. A warrior and a bit inappropriate lady, but still a lady.

"What's with that dace?" Jon asked Arya, and then he saw that Sandor and Sansa were still kissing. He quickly figured out that that was the reason why Arya looked like she was about to throw up, and that seemed to amuse him. He laughed, which annoyed Arya even further. "Really? After all the times that you've seen them like that, it still bothers you?"

"Doesn't it bother you?"

"I'm married, Arya! I do that all the time!" Jon exclaimed, and Arya made a face.

"Yes, but you are not married to the Hound, you don't kiss him, right?"

It was Jon's turn to make a face, and he turned green. "Oh, gods!"

Ygritte laughed, and Arya smirked.

They saw how Sandor and Sansa stood up from the table to go to dance… or better said, how Sansa dragged Sandor with her to go to the dance. Jon poked Arya in the shoulder, and next thing she knew, she was on her feet being forced by her brother (cousin!) to dance. She tried to get away, but he didn't allow it.

"Come here Arya! You have to dance with me!" he laughed.

"No I don't!"

"Yes you do! What? You don't want to dance with me?"

"No, I don't!"

"Now I'm hurt" Jon said, even though he was still laughing. He finally let go of the girl and he went to pick up his wife, who squealed (squealed? Ygritte squealing? Bloody hells, she needed to spend less time with Sansa!) and they went off to dance.

The son of some lord went to ask Arya to dance, but all he got was a glare from her.

"Don't even think about it" she said, and the boy backed off. Well, he wasn't exactly a boy… He was an attractive young man of about ten and five, or ten and six. That only made Arya frown, since when did she get the attention of attractive young men?!

She didn't realize that she had started to change. She was ten and four (she had been ten and three when they returned to Westeros, and the rebuilding of Winterfell had taken an entire year at a really fast pace and with a lot of help) and she was much taller than she had been before. Her hair
was long, and clean, and it wasn't as messy as before. At that moment, it was loose and curly. Her face was pretty, her features a bit sharper though her face was still a bit round, her lips were full and her eyes were big and grey and beautiful. Even her body was changing, becoming more… curvy. She didn't pay much attention to these changes, but it appeared that men and boys did.

The dancing was suddenly interrupted when Bran asked for silence, and they all looked at him. He had an announcement to make. Sandor seemed to know already what his goodbrother wanted to say.

"Don't you dare…!"

Bran didn't listen to him.

"Time for the bedding!"

The northmen roared and raised their cups, and all of a sudden, Sansa was in the air, lifted by the hands of the same northmen that had roared before. She was laughing and squealing, and she let them carry out of the room towards the stairs while they got her ready for her husband. Sandor couldn't move, suddenly finding himself surrounded by women that were trying to take his clothes off and lead him to the stairs too. His protests were silenced by the happy exclamations of the women. Arya saw that Ygritte joined them, and soon after they made Sandor get out of the room to walk him to his chambers for his wedding night.

Arya had stayed behind watching, and even though she didn't want to, she laughed. How couldn't she, when she saw the Hound being overpowered by a bunch of northern women? After she finally stopped laughing, and the women and men started returning (which meant that Sandor and Sansa were probably destroying their bed chambers at that very moment) she felt bored. She couldn't go to her own chambers, because they were right next to Sandor and Sansa's and she didn't want to hear anything of what was going on there. She would have gone out for a ride, perhaps, if it hadn't been pouring for hours, and it wasn't likely that it would stop anytime soon.

That was going to be a very long night…

She had just sat back down again on her chair, and she was drinking wine from her cup, when she saw the guards coming into the great hall. One of the guards looked at Bran, who hadn't moved from his place the entire time.

"My lord" the man bowed before continuing to speak. "A man arrived, my lord. He says he knows Lady Arya."

Arya frowned again, and she stopped drinking, though her lips were still on the cup. That's when she saw that there was a man with them, dressed as a commoner and soaking wet. He was looking down, so she could only see his black hair. He was tall, and strong. Did she know him? How?

"Who are you?" Bran asked, and the man raised his head to look ahead to the two Starks.

Arya dropped her cup, spilling wine everywhere. Luckily, no drops fell on her, but she didn't care anyways. She could only look at those blue eyes who elonged to the person whom she believed dead since years ago. everyone looked at her when she cried:

"Gendry!"
Chapter 2

Arya stared at Gendry in complete confusion. The bull-headed boy that she had once known, tall and muscular with black of hair and blue eyes had grown to be a fierce looking young man, and much more muscular than before. He wasn't as tall, strong and fierce as the Hound, clearly, but only because that was almost impossible. Gendry's hair had grown a little bit, almost covering his eyes, that were the same blue that Arya remembered.

Everybody had stared at her when she had almost screamed the boy's name, and were looking at her in confusion, specially her brother and Jon. She paid no attention to anyone except Gendry, who was staring at her with a faint smile on his face.

"Arya" he whispered again, and she could hear the happiness and relief in his voice.

"Who are you, Ser?" Bran asked.

"I'm no Ser, m'lord" Gendry replied, lowering his head a little bit. "I'm just a bastard from Flea Bottom, and apprentice armorer. My name is Gendry."

Bran frowned, and so did some of the men that were still in the room.

"And how did you come to know my sister, Gendry?"

"Bran, he was going to the Wall too when I escaped King's Landing" Aryaexplained, tired of her brother's questioning. "He was with me at Harrenhal too. He's my friend."

Bran said nothing in reply, he just stared at both his sister and the bastard, and Arya looked back at Gendry again. She felt a stinging in her eyes. Where those tears? She fought them back, she never cried.

"I thought you were dead" she said in disbelief, but Gendry shook his head.

"I thought the same of you… M'lady" after he said that last word.

It somehow pained Arya that Gendry called her like that exactly at that moment, because it reminded her of a cruel reality. He was a bastard and a blacksmith, and she was a Lady of Winterfell. They could not be friends like they used to be, they would not be allowed. All because it was not proper. Arya scoffed at the thought, not caring who was looking and who wasn't. And it also pained her because she remembered the last few times that she had been with Gendry. He abandoned her.

He was my friend, and he left me. She thought spitefully. He preferred to be with those outlaws that sold him to that woman.

She remembered the Red Witch now, and how she had taken Gendry away. That's why Arya had thought he was dead.

She said nothing else, and it was her brother who spoke.

"I'm sure you must be tired. Have you travelled from afar?"

"All the way from Dorne, m'lord. When I escaped Dragonstone I sailed to King's Landing, and Dorne seemed to be the safest place to be during the war. Then I travelled the whole South on a
horse, and when the poor beast died I had to travel all the way here from the Neck on foot.

"Then you must be tired indeed. Seeing that you are a… friend… of my sister, you are invited to
stay here at Winterfell for as long as you please. You say you are a blacksmith? You will have a
job as well" Bran said. Gendry's face allowed everyone to see that he was thankful for that. "But
I'm afraid that tonight all the rooms are full with our guests. Surely one of the maids will be able to
find a place for you to spend the night…"

"There's an empty room in the tower" Arya quickly intervened, practically without thinking. Before
her brother said anything, she started walking towards the door to get out of the Great Hall. She
gestured for Gendry to go with her, and the lad bowed his head with respect to excuse himself
away from the Lord of Winterfell's presence.

He followed Arya in silence through the stairs and the hallways. Away from the noises made by all
the drunk men in the Great Hall, the thunder from the storm outside could be heard within the
walls of the castle. When they passed next to a window, Arya could see how the rain was falling,
so furiously that she could almost see nothing through it. No wonder that Gendry was so soaked.
The lad had his arms around himself, trying to keep himself warm inside those wet clothes, but he
was freezing cold. Arya was quick to deliver him to the empty bedroom that she had mentioned
before. The door was unlocked and they stepped inside.

"You have everything you need here" she said. She was trying to avoid his gaze, and he noticed.
Arya was uncomfortable, and she wasn't sure why.

"You've changed a lot" Gendry dared to say then. Arya tried to see if there was some kind of
mockery behind his voice, but she found none. She finally raised her head, and her eyes met
Gendry's, which where boring into her. "You're… taller. And your hair is longer. You really look
like a girl now."

Arya scoffed, but before she could say anything Gendry added:

"A very, very pretty girl."

She blushed against her will. She thanked the gods that it was dark and he couldn't notice, and she
felt stupid for it. Most girls blushed, and most girls were idiots. She had always thought so.

"You have changed too" she said, and Gendry raised his eyebrows.

"Really? How?"

"Before, you were a stupid bull-headed boy" she said, and she smiled. "Now you are a stupid bull-
headed man."

Gendry laughed, and thunder stroke in the sky, lighting the room. Gendry felt cold again, and he
shivered.

"Wait, I'll go and fetch you some clothes" she said, leaving the room and Gendry alone in it.

She walked down the corridor, passing quickly in front of one of the chambers with the locked
doors. They were her sister's and Sandor's chambers, and that was their wedding night. Arya
covered her ears right after she started hearing moans coming out of that room.

Gross!

She forgot about it quickly enough. As long as the newlywed couple wasn't too loud, things should
be fine. Arya returned with a set of dry and clean clothes for Gendry. Because she was holding the pile of clothes, she wasn't able to cover her ears these time, and she realized horrified that the moans and grunts and other gross sounds were louder than before.

Seven hells! She practically ran away from that part of the corridor until she reached the chambers in which she had left Gendry waiting for her, and she was horrified that her room was right next to the couple's chambers. That was going to be an awful night for her and everyone staying in that tower.

Gendry smiled at her, unaware of what was going on, and she handed him the clothes.

"These should fit you."

He unfolded the pair of brown breeches and nodded.

"Aye, they are fine. Thank you very much, Arya."

"You're welcome..." she whispered. Gendry walked to the back of the room and took off his tunic, leaving his chest bare. Arya found herself staring at his hard muscles in awe. She wanted to touch them, feel them under Gendry's smooth skin...

She quickly shook her head to send those thoughts away. What the hell was wrong with her!

Gendry turned his head and caught her staring, and she felt embarrassed.

"Why did the witch take you away?" she quickly asked, before Gendry could make any sarcastic comment or remark.

Gendry sighed. Clearly, he didn't have very good memories of those days. She put on a new, dry and clean tunic before replying.

"Magic" was all he said. Arya frowned.

"Magic? Why would she want you to make magic, you are not a warlock or anything."

"No, but... she wanted king's blood, so she got it."

That made even less sense than before.

"King's blood?" she repeated.

Gendry opened his mouth, and he looked like he was about to explain it all to her when he felt silent, because Sansa had started screaming at the other end of the corridor, and she could be heard everywhere. Even Sandor's grunts of pleasure could be heard. Arya felt her face turning a dark red color, her cheeks were burning, while Gendry looked alarmed at the door and then at Arya.

"It's my sister's wedding night" she quietly explained, and Gendry's mouth took the shape of an 'o'.

"I see..." was all he said, and Sansa screamed again, this time alongside Sandor. Arya heard the loud noise of something breaking, many other things falling to the floor, and then she heard something slamming against the wall. Multiple times.

"Oh Sandor! Oh oh oh! OOOOH! SANDOR!"

Even Gendry's face turned bright red then. He looked at Arya, his eyes wide just like hers, and then both of them just burst out laughing. Arya laughed so much, partially because of how
disgusted she was and partially because of how ridiculous and embarrassing the whole situation was, that she bent over herself and her knees started shaking. It was enough to make her forget all about the king's blood.

Gendry was bent over to. Arya tried to stand straight again, but she was laughing so much that she almost tripped and she fell against Gendry, throwing both of them to the bed, were they sat down and kept laughing for a good amount of time, until their bellies ached and their ayes were filled with tears.

"I'm so sorry" she tried to said, but it was hard. Gendry just shook his head while he tried to control himself.

"It's all right…"

Arya stood up from the bed and went to close the door of the room. That, at least, muffled the screams some. She returned to the bed to sit down next to Gendry.

"I can find you another bedroom if you want to" she said, and again he shook his head.

"It's alright. I can't hear them anymore… Seven hells…"

Arya grinned.

"How long do you plan to stay?" she asked, suddenly serious again. Gendry's face because serious as well.

"For as long as your brother allows me to" he said, not taking his eyes off her. "If you want."

She said nothing. She looked away from those blue eyes.

"Arya, do you want me to stay?" Gendry asked, suddenly a little worried because she had turned her face away from him. But she couldn't look at him because she was angry, and sad.

"You left me" she said.

"Arya, they sold me to her, I didn't leave…"

"You were going to stay with Beric Dondarrion" she clarified, and Gendry fell silent. "You were going to leave me alone. You chose them over me. Why?"

It was a couple of seconds before Gendry decided to speak.

"It was the worst mistake that I've ever made in my life" he said, and Arya looked at him again. Gendry's face was sad too, but then a small smile appeared on his face, merely a shadow. "And because, as you said, I'm a stupid bull-headed boy."

That made Arya smile, and Gendry's became bigger.

"So, I'm asking you. Do you want me to stay?"

"I don't want you to leave" was all that Arya was able to say. It seemed enough.

"Good" then he yawned. He was exhausted from all the travelling, especially during the storm. Arya was pretty tired herself too.

"Good night" she said softly, and she stood up again from the bed and headed towards the door.
She opened it, but she immediately started hearing again the awful screams and moans from the newlyweds. It seemed that it wasn't going to get any better anytime soon. She quickly closed the door again and stared at Gendry in horror. "Seven hells! I can't get out there again! I can't sleep next to that pair of rabbits in heat!"

It was enough to make Gendry start laughing again. Arya, however, was not amused.

"Gendry!"

"Alright alright. You can sleep here with me today if you want, m'lady."

Any other lady would have immediately been alarmed, and would have thought how inappropriate and unladylike it would be to accept that offer. Arya, however, did not such thing. She had slept among boys lots of times while she was on the run, and she was used to sleeping next to Gendry. She walked over to the bed and climbed on it, and laid down on it. Gendry finished changing his clothes in the shadows, and when he climbed to the soft bed next to Arya, he was completely dressed in clean and dry clothes, while his wet ones were dumped on the floor feet away from them. Once he had closed his eyes, Arya picked up the pillow and hit Gendry on the face with it, startling him.

"Bloody hells! Arya!" he exclaimed in disbelief, but also smiling.

"That's for calling me m'lady" she hissed, and then she put the pillow back in place and rested her head on it.

Gendry laughed.

"I had almost forgotten what an unladylike little annoying girl you were" he whispered, looking up at the ceiling. Arya, however, was staring at him.

"I'm not so little anymore" she protested,

He nodded. "You're not so annoying anymore either."

Almost instinctively rather than willing, Arya hugged him, catching him by surprise.

"I missed you" she admitted, with her head buried in his chest. She felt Gendry's arms surrounding her.

"I've missed you too."

And with that and the sound of rain, Arya slowly dozed out to sleep. But not before she heard him whispering very, very softly.

"Good night, m'lady."
For the next days, Gendry was unable to look at Sandor or Sansa straight to the face. Arya had been amused when she saw him meeting Sansa, and saw him turning red when he learnt who the auburn-haired beauty was. But the real amusement for Arya had come when Gendry had met Sandor. Sansa was confused as to why both her sister and Gendry were acting in such a strange way around her and her husband, but Sandor wasn't fooled. He knew what made Arya and Gendry uncomfortable, and he glared at them. Thankfully the entire matter was forgotten some days later.

Gendry had Bran's approval to stay in Winterfell for as long as they wanted, and he started working as a blacksmith for the castle. He was very good, and he had kept learning while he was in Dorne. Arya visited him in his work place as often as she could, and she did not care at all about the disapproving looks and whispers of many of the people that lived in the castle. Besides, what was wrong about her visiting Gendry? They were just friends! Gendry did seem a little bit uncomfortable about those looks and whispers, thought.

"Arya… Maybe you should stay away from me" he said one day. He was working on a sword, and his chest was bare and sweaty from all the hard work. Arya was sitting down on a stool watching, remembering one time at Harrenhal when she had done the same thing. "Us being friends… it's not proper. Not for a lady like you and… well, and a bastard like me."

"You are stupid" she said. She had an apple on her hand, and she bit it. It was cold outside, it had been snowing during the entire previous night, and so she was wearing a white fur cloak. "We can be friends if we want to, who are they to say anything against it?"

Gendry didn't say anything, he just stared at her while he held the sword that he was making in his hand.

Arya shrugged. "Besides, I'm of the ladies of Winterfell. I can do as I please, and I will order them to shut up if all their whispering and murmuring bothers you. And if they don't obey, well…” she sighed. "Then I guess that we'll have to punish them!"

Gendry opened his eyes and stared at her in shock.

"That's not necessary, Arya!"

She rolled her eyes before looking at him.

"I'm not being serious, stupid. But they won't know that, will they?"

Gendry thought about it for a second and then he shrugged before getting back to work.

"I've heard whispers about your sister too" he murmured them, sounding as if he was shy or unsure whether to speak those words or not. When he saw that Arya was listening to him and her face was serious, he proceeded. "And her husband."

"What have you heard?"

Gendry looked uncomfortable.

"Well… they say that… Forget it."

Arya was not going to forget it. She might have hated her sister when they were younger, but now
she loved her, and she would not tolerate anything bad to be said about her.

"I know what you heard about her and Sandor" she said, her voice hostile. Gendry shot her a quick glance, but said nothing. "If you ever dare to say anything bad about my sister…

"I won't" Gendry said, and he was sincere, so Arya spoke no more of the matter.

"My sister is going to go away" she said then, and she was sad. Once again, Gendry stopped working to listen to her. "She and Sandor are going to move to the Dreadfort, you know? All the Boltons are dead, and the Queen has given them that castle. They are going to be Lord and lady Clegane of the Dreadfort."

"And you don't want them to go" Gendry understood that sadness. Arya nodded. "You can go with them."

"And leave Winterfell and Bran and Rickon?" Arya could not leave Winterfell behind again, she couldn't. She feared that if she ever left again, she would never come back this time. No, she would have to say goodbye to her sister. Besides, Sansa would be fine, she had her husband, she was going to be very happy. While Arya would be alone… "Would you go with me?"

"What?" Gendry asked, not understanding.

"Would you go with me? If I left Winterfell" Arya said, looking at him straight in the eye. "Or do you want to stay here?"

There were a few moments of silence until Gendry said, without a trace of doubt in his voice:

"I will go wherever you go if you want me to, m'lady."

And with that he bowed his head and continued working. Arya didn't say anything, she just stood up from the stool and left the smithy, walking back to the castle. She felt strange: usually she got mad whenever Gendry called her 'm'lady'. Today, however, she felt kind of happy, and she couldn't stop herself from smiling.

She encountered Bran being carried by Hodor on one of the hallways. Bran called her name to get her attention and she stopped walking and smiled at her younger brother.

"Arya, would you invite your friend Gendry to have supper with us tonight?" Bran asked, making Arya frown. Gendry? Having supper with the Starks?

"Sure" she nodded. She actually really liked the idea, she wanted Gendry to be closer to her and her family… She wanted him to feel like family. "I'll go and tell him."

She just hoped that Gendry didn't decline the offer… which he nearly did.

"Why would a high lord invite me to supper with him?" he asked, clearly very confused. He had that pained expression that he always had whenever he was thinking too hard.

"You are my friend, I'm sure he just wants to know you a bit better" Arya guessed. "And you and I both escaped King's Landing together, and we were through a lot together. Maybe he wants to hear your side of the story!"

"My side of the story? Bloody hells, Arya, I can't go, it's not… proper."

She was starting to get really annoyed with all the proper things.
"If you don't go, you can kiss Winterfell goodbye" she warned him before walking away… again. What she had just said wasn't true, she wouldn't kick Gendry out of Winterfell, and neither would Bran. But she really wanted very badly that Gendry accepted.

Sansa, Bran, Rickon and Jon talked a lot to Gendry during supper, which eventually made him feel more comfortable between them. He had been quite tense at first, surrounded by all those highborn people, and he wasn't used to it. Practically all the highborn people that he had met during his life had not treated him well, and many of them had tried to kill him for various reasons. They asked him about his work, about his short stay in Dorne, about how he and Arya had met… They laughed a lot specially when he told them how he had discovered that she was a girl, although he was embarrassed to tell them how he had addressed her until she confessed the truth.

Arya hadn't paid a lot of attention to her siblings and Gendry taking. She had been distracted talking to Sandor and Ygritte, who had similar interests to those that she had, so it was easier and more entertaining to talk to them. Also, Sandor had news for her.

"I've heard word that Walder Frey is back at the Twins" he rasped, making Arya's face grow pale and her eyes go wide. "That rat has been hiding since the war ended, but now he has nowhere else to go. Huh. I'll say that's a bad decision that he made."

"Are you sure?" Arya asked. She didn't notice that her lower lip was trembling and that her hands were shaking.

Sandor nodded. Arya remembered the Red Wedding, and the memories came back to her like images in front of her eyes. She remembered when she saw the mutilated body of her brother Robb, beheaded and with the head of his direwolf in place of his. She had sworn that she would get her revenge… The Boltons were dead, and now it was the time for Walder Frey to pay. It had all been because of his treason… Because of him, Robb and her mother were dead.

She looked at Sandor in the eyes, and she could see that he knew perfectly fine what she was thinking.

"Take me to the Twins" she said, her voice serious and practically emotionless. "I'm going to kill him."

Everybody fell silent then, and they all looked at Sandor. Arya could see Sansa and Ygritte from the corners of her eyes, and she saw that they both silently agreed to what she wanted to do. Ygritte had been a spearwife, she had no trouble with the thought of Arya killing anybody. And Sansa… Sansa had killed her first husband to safe her life and get revenge for what had happened to her son. It had been an accident, sort of, but that did not matter. What mattered was that Sansa approved. Jon knew better than to tell Arya what she could and what she could not do; Bran was perfectly aware that Arya would not care what he had to say; Rickon was silent. He wanted revenge too, though he never said anything.

It was Gendry the one that suddenly jumped on his chair.

"What?! Are you mad?!"

She ignored him.

"Are you going to take me there?" she asked Sandor.

He turned his head to the side to look at Sansa and Bran, checking if anyone had anything to say against it. When he saw that neither one of them was going to stop them, he stared back at Arya
and nodded.

"How do we do it?" she wanted to know.

"You were trained in the House of Black and White by the Faceless Men, weren't you?"

"Until you popped out of nowhere in Braavos and took me away to Meeren, yes."

"Then it will be easy enough. I'll make sure that you get inside and stay out of trouble, then you take care of the old decrepit. You can avenge your mother and brother then."

Yes, she was going to make Walder Frey pay. She would make him suffer. She would never forget the sight of her dead brother with the head of Grey Wind on his shoulders. She wanted to cry when she remembered that.

Gendry pulled her out of her thoughts.

"Arya, you can't..." he was saying. He appeared to be nervous. "It's too dangerous."

"I'll be fine, Gendry."

"No, you won't" he insisted. "That castle will be filled with people, you can't just go in and kill its lord, they will kill you first! And even if you do kill him, how do you get out? You are only two people, Arya, two people..."

"We escaped Harrenhal, remember? And you escaped the Red Woman."

"With help!" he exclaimed. He appeared to have forgotten that he was with the entire Stark family, and he was practically yelling at one of them. "Why don't you send a raven to the Dragon Queen? She can get Walder Frey out of the Twins and you can go to the execution. Kill him yourself, if you want, but do it once it's safe to do it!"

"I want to kill him in the same place where he betrayed and murdered my family!" Arya shouted, and Gendry stared at her in silence, a little bit shocked. Arya was furious, and she still wanted to cry. She could feel the tears stinging in her eyes. "And neither you nor anyone will stop me from doing it!"

She stood up from the table and stormed out of the dining room, and Sansa followed her.

"Arya! Arya!" Sansa stopped her in the middle of the hallway. Arya was already crying when Sansa caught her. "Arya, it's alright... It's alright..."

"No, Sansa, it's not alright... You don't know how horrible it was, seeing our brother there, dead with Grey Wind's head sewn to his shoulders..."

Sansa took a deep breath. It was hard for her to imagine such a thing.

"I can imagine, Arya, believe me... I can. But maybe Gendry is right? Maybe you should wait..."

Arya snapped.

"How did you feel when they told you that your son was dead?"

She had never seen her sister so pale. She could tell that she was trying to control the anger that had suddenly filled her inside.
"My son is not dead" Sansa hissed.

She kept saying that every time, that her son wasn't dead. She kept repeating her version, that her baby had been stolen by Joffrey and Cersei when he was born, but the truth was that Sansa had run away and no one had ever seen that baby, dead or alive. They all believed that she was crazy.

"Fine, but ether way… if he is dead, or if he was stolen, it doesn't matter. He was taken away from you. How does that feel, Sansa?" Arya said in a quiet voice. "You killed the man that hurt you… So don't you understand me? I need to kill the man that did that to my mother and brother. And I need to do it myself, I can't wait. He is old, he can die any day, and I don't want him to leave this world peacefully and warm in his bed."

That, Sansa could understand. That was why, when Arya was going to leave with Sandor and Jon a few days later to go to the Twins, she went to tell her goodbye and wish her luck. Jon and Sandor were saying goodbye to Ygritte and Sansa, and Arya used that moment to walk to were Gendry was standing.

"So… I guess that you are not coming" she said.

"This is madness, Arya" was all he said.

"I need to do this. For my family, Gendry!" she tried to explain to him, but he wouldn't understand her. How could he? He had no family. It made Arya feel mad. "So, I will ask you again. Will you come with me, or not?"

Gendry thought about it for a second, not taking his blue eyes off her.

"I will not go and watch you kill yourself" he replied then. "I will not stand there as I lose you again. I will not help you with this madness."

She wanted to yell and punch him. But she did neither one of those things. Instead, she stared at him coldly, and when she spoke, her voice was just as cold and deadly.

"So much for 'I'll go wherever you go if you want me to, m'lady'" she spat.

Before gendry could say anything back, she turned her back on him and walked away. She mounted her horse and went to join Jon and Sandor, and together, the three of them rode away from Winterfell, starting their way towards the Twins.
Chapter 4

After a long day of riding, Arya, Sandor and Jon, along with the men that they had taken with them, dismounted their horses and fed them, and then settled down for the night after they ate something. Arya hadn't spoken a word in the entire day, and she had been rather absent-minded. Jon and Sandor hadn't failed to notice, but they chose not to mention it until they were getting ready to rest for the night.

"You can still back off" Jon told her at nightfall.

"What? No!" she exclaimed, frowning and finally speaking. She shivered and tried to cover herself up more with the blanket that she had brought. Although they had stopped to sleep in a very good place, it was winter and it was freezing cold.

"You've been tense the whole buggering day" Sandor said. "Is it because of that smith?"

"NO!"

She knew that Sandor and Jon knew that she was lying, and she felt her cheeks burning hot with rage, but both men restrained himself from saying anything. Sandor just shrugged and went off to sleep beneath his own blanket. It was just a matter of seconds before he fell asleep and started snoring lightly. Jon, on the other hand, laid down on his back and stared at the bright stars that were shining brightly in the dark sky.

Arya could not sleep so easily. The truth was that she was furious. First Gendry said one thing, and then he did another, it got on her nerves. The truth was that she wasn't surprised; after all, it wasn't the first time that he did such a thing. He had already left her alone years ago. She should have told Bran to kick him out of Winterfell that first night that he appeared in the castle, and they should have let him rot under the rain. Arya wanted to feel sorry for having helped him and been his friend... But she couldn't completely hate him. And she hated that awkward feeling inside her chest and belly, like if she had a pit full of butterflies deep inside her.

In the end, she just wanted to arrive at the Twins and get that whole situation over with. And she needed to forget Gendry and how mad she was with him, at least for the time being. She needed to sleep.

She twisted and turned around over and over again under her blanket, uncomfortable and wide awake yet tired, and the cold wasn't helping. She didn't know how late it was, or how many hours of sleep she had left, and it was starting to bother her.

Then she remembered a similar situation in which she had found herself in the past, at Harrenhal, and she remembered how she had managed to get some sleep back then. In the past she had many names, but in the present she had only one name to whisper:

"Walder Frey."

She whispered the name under her breath many times. *Walder Frey, Walder Frey, Walder Frey, Walder Frey, Walder Frey...* The name had already lost it's sense when sleep claimed her.

It was sunrise when they woke her up. She was so tired that she did not want to open her eyes, and she grunted in a bad mood. Sandor or Jon (she supposed that it was one of them trying to wake her up) shook her more insistently, and she protested more. In her sleep, she had forgotten all about
going to the Twins, and her back and neck hurt from the uncomfortable position in which she had been during the cold night. She just wanted some more rest.

"Get lost!" she muttered, her eyes still shut.

She heard an indignant laugh that most certainly did not belong to Jon or the Hound.

"Damn it, Arya, wake up!" a voice that even more certainly wasn't the Hound's or Jon's said with an amused ring to it.

Her eyes went wide open, and she gasped when she saw the young smiling man with the black hair and the blue eyes. As soon as her shock faded, rage filled her up. Before she said anything, she raised her had and hit Gendry as hard as she could on his shoulder.

"Stupid!" she exclaimed angrily, but that did not erase the grin from Gendry's face. She wanted to punch him so hard... "What are you doing here?!"

"Well, I realized that it would be stupid to let you go on with this madness alone. You could get hurt."

"I'm not alone!" she protested. She stood up and then rolled the blanket with her hands before throwing it at Gendry's face. The impact made him take a step back.

"Bloody hells, Arya, your arms are stronger than before!" Gendry exclaimed, still with a grin on his face. Arya thought that his voice sounded funny somehow, but she didn't pay much attention to it.

"You two lovebirds!" Sandor exclaimed then, trying to get their attention. Arya felt her face turn even a darker red than before. "Are you coming or not!"

They broke their fast, and then they mounted their horses to keep riding towards the Twins. Arya eyed Gendry's horse; she had never seen that horse, black as the night, in Winterfell, so she wondered where he had gotten it. Had he stole it? She didn't find it necessary to steal a horse when Bran would just give Gendry any horse that he wanted.

Her direwolf, Nymeria, had also come with them. A direwolf always came in handy in a fight, if there was to be one. Arya had found Nymeria months ago, in the woods near Winterfell. Somehow, the direwolf had managed to find her master, and Arya had never been happier. She had missed her direwolf terrily since the day that she had to make her run away so that Cersei Lannister wouldn't dispose of her just as she did with Lady. Jon was also travelling with his direwolf Ghost.

"How did you find us?" Jon suddenly asked Gendry, making the young man turn his head around to look at him. Everyone's attention was now on the bastard, for they all wondered the same thing. He just shrugged.

"I followed the tracks. It wasn't that hard. Besides, I already knew which way you were going, didn't I?"

Of course, it had been a stupid question. It was obvious that Gendry only had to follow the way from Winterfell to the Twins, and sooner or later he would have found them. It had been sooner rather than later.

"Have you any idea how you're going to get in once you're there?" Gendry asked then. Sandor grunted and shook his head.
"No. We still have to decide and make a plan."

"Why don't we just go in and that's it?" Arya asked then. She didn't understand why it was so complicated for everyone else. "The Tullys are their liege lords, I'm half a Tully, and they don't know that we know that Walder Frey is there! For all they know, you could be going there to negotiate marrying me off!"

Right after she said that, she felt bile rising up in her throat at the mere thought of it, which was disgusting.

"After what happened the last time that your family was there for a wedding?!" Sandor exclaimed. "Hell no, they aren't that fucking stupid. They know that no Stark or Tully will ever marry a Frey again."

"Or even go to the Twins to peacefully talk" Jon added.

"And, they betrayed their guests once. Who says they won't do it again?"

"But we are not at war anymore…"

"But you are still a threat" Sandor rasped. "When they look at you, they won't see the little wolf-bitch of years ago. They will see the Stark that rode into Westeros mounted on a fucking dragon and almost burned King's Landing to the ground. And they won't like it. People don't like to be afraid. They want to get rid of their fears, just as little kids kill spiders in fear that it will bite them. For the Freys, you are that spider."

"I'm not a spider" she replied a little bit angrily. "I'm a wolf of Winterfell."

Sandor looked at her but said nothing. After a few seconds of tense silence, he just nodded his head, as if recognizing that she was right. Sandor had gained a lot of respect for Arya in the few past years, and it had been the same the other way around. And he did have to give it to her, she was a fierce wolf. All of the Starks were.

"Will they also try to kill him?" Gendry asked then, referring to Jon. "He's the Prince, after all."

Sandor scoffed.

"They already killed a King. What will stop them from doing the same to a Prince?"

"Surely they won't want Daenerys's dragons burning them alive if they dare to harm her nephew."

"It's too risky" Sandor said. "We have to get inside the fucking Twins without been seen. The best thing would be at night, and we need a fucking good plan."

"Then leave it to me" Gendry said with determination, and they all looked at him, frowning. He looked at all three of them in the eyes. "I can get us in."

"How?" Sandor asked, narrowing his eyes with suspicion.

"Trust me."

"Why would I do that? You could get all of our sorry arses killed!"

"Sandor, trust him" Arya said then, earning a stunned stare from his goodbrother.

"Now you favor him!? Last night you didn't seem so happy with him!"
She felt her cheeks burning.

"I'm still not happy with him" she muttered, glaring at Gendry, who was looking at her in silence. "But I trust him. And we need to get inside the Twins. He says he can do it, and at least he has an idea. That's more than what you can say."

Neither Sandor nor Jon said anything, for they both knew that she was right. She wasn't happy about defending Gendry, but in that situation she had no other choice; she desperately wanted to be in front of Walder Frey, look him in the eyes and make him pay. If Gendry could make that happen, so be it.

She looked at the young man again, only to find that he was still staring at her. When their eyes met, her heart skipped a beat, and he gave her a little sideways smile, as in gratitude for giving him a chance, or maybe it was a comforting smile. She didn't want to guess which one, and she didn't want to look at him any longer because she was still terribly mad at him. Yes, he had changed his mind and was now going with her to the Twins, but that didn't change the fact that he hadn't gone with her at the beginning.

"If they catch us because of you, I'll geld you, boy" Sandor rasped menacingly, pointing a warning finger at Gendry.

"Don't worry. That won't happen."

The night that they finally arrived at the Twins, they all waited patiently hidden between the trees while Gendry went off to deal with the guards at the gates. Honestly, Arya had no idea of how Gendry pretended to try and do that, but she hadn't seen him in years, and she had no clue of what he was capable of doing now. Maybe he had received training of some kind, and he was truly capable of sneaking them in. She waited quite impatiently; even thought she hadn't talked much to Gendry while on the road and she was still pretending that she had mad at him, she was really anxious and scared. What if something bad happened to him? What if he was caught and killed? She was suddenly afraid, and she dreaded that that would happen. She realized that she couldn't take it.

"Why is he taking so long?" she whispered, his voice was shaking.

"Hush, Arya, it's not easy to get rid of the guards at the gates" Jon told her. "You said you trusted him."

"I do! But… But… Shouldn't we send Nymeria and Ghost to help him?"

"Do you want to get discovered?" Sandor rasped, and she shook her head. "Then wait and stay quiet!"

"But can you hear anything?"

"No! Now shut up."

A few minutes passed, and then they suddenly heard a whistle. That was the sign. Gendry had succeeded.

"Move!" Sandor told Arya, Jon and the knights to get out of their hiding.

They all walked towards the Twins. Gendry was there at the gates of the first tower, and on a pile next to him where the bodies of all the dead guards. It shocked Arya and she nearly stopped
walking because of that. Had Gendry really done that all by himself? But how?! She had never seen him killing anyone.

Sandor and Jon were surprised as well, and Gendry greeted all of them with a grin on his face.

"I told you you could trust me" he said, and again Arya thought that his voice sounded funny somehow. That was not the best time to point it out, however, so she said nothing about it.

They all crossed the gates and entered the Twins. Arya could not believe it, they made it! They were inside! Now all she had to do was find Walder Frey, and have her vengeance.

"What should we do know?" one of the knights that had come with them dared to ask, keeping his voice very low so that they wouldn't be discovered by anyone inside the castle.

"We need to find Walder Frey" Jon said.

"How do we do that? If anyone sees us…"

"I'll go alone" Arya said then, earning the shocked looks of both her cousin and her goodbrother and also the knights. "I was trained in Braavos, I can sneak around without been seen. I can take Nymeria with me, she'll protect me" she added, patting her direwolf in the head.

"Arya, this is crazy…" Jon started saying, but Sandor cut him off.

"She can do it" he rasped. "She is perfectly capable of doing it. Let her go."

Jon seemed to doubt at first, but then he just looked at Arya and sighed before nodding, letting her know that he was ok with it. She smile a small smile that was supposed to comfort Jon and let him know that nothing was going to happen to her, and then she also looked at Sandor to silently let him know that she was grateful to him for trusting her.

"Be careful" she said. "Anyone could pass by here and find you. Do whatever you have to do."

"Are you sure you will be alright?"

"I will" she nodded. She had never been so sure of anything in her life. She stared at her direwolf. "Come, Nymeria."

She had her sword Needle in her hand, and she started walking through the hallways of the castle. It was all dark, but she had no trouble finding her way; she was using all her senses, and she trusted her instinct.

"Nymeria" she whispered to her direwolf "find Walder Frey. Go girl."

It seemed that the direwolf had understood her, because she started leading the way. Arya trusted the direwolf, and she followed behind her. What other choice did she have, anyways? She was starting to get a funny feeling in the pit of her stomach, like if she was sick. She was nervous. She had waited a long time for this moment.

She hated that place. Her brother and mother had been murdered there, along with the Stark men. Arya thought that she could hear the screams filling the dark and cold hallways, the clashing of the steel of the swords, the bards singing the Rains of Castamere…

She shivered. She remembered when she had arrived at that place only to see the Freys parading around the body of her dead brother with Greywind's head sewed on top of his shoulders. She
wanted to cry, but she wouldn't. She couldn't. She had a task to do. Tonight, the Red God would receive a death.

"Arya."

She turned around, startled, and almost stabbed Gendry in the belly with Needle. He jumped back just in time to dodge the Valyrian steel word.

"What are you doing here?!" she hissed, angry because he had scared her. "I could have screamed! I could have killed you!"

"I had to come with you. What if someone finds you? You'll need a hand!"

"I don't need your help, and I don't want it. Where are the others?"

"We heard footsteps, so they had to hide" Gendry explained. "I came here to find you. Do you even know where you are going?"

"Nymeria is going to find Walder Frey for me" Arya said, and Gendry looked down at the direwolf, who was staring back at him. As soon as the young man and the direwolf made eye contact, Nymeria started growling with an angry face.

"I don't think your pet likes me" Gendry commented, partially amused. For the third time, Arya noticed how his voice sounded off and strange.

"She's smart" she spat. "And what is wrong with your voice?"

Gendry looked at her confused, and he frowned.

"My voice?"

"Yes, it sounds funny… Like if you had an accent."

"Maybe I picked it up in Dorne."

"No, you didn't. You didn't sound like that in Winterfell."

"Arya, there's nothing wrong with my voice, and I don't think that this is a great time to discuss such matters" he said. "Unless you want to be found and killed."

She scoffed, and turned her back on him, and resumed following Nymeria around the castle. The direwolf silently guided her the right way, leading Arya and Gendry to the great hall.

The door was open, and they could look inside. It was dark, illuminated only by the moonlight that came through the narrow windows. It was empty, except for a very old man that stood in front of one of the windows, looking outside at the river.

Arya had never seen Walder Frey, but she knew that it was him. Her instinct was screaming at her that it was him.

She silently ordered Nymeria to stay quiet and still outside, and then she looked at Gendry in the eyes. He was serious, and there was a cold determination in his blue eyes. Arya felt something strange deep inside her once again. Those were not the eyes that she knew, there was something different about them. But that wasn't the time for such thoughts. What had to be done needed to be done quickly. Gendry nodded slightly, giving her courage, and she took a deep and silent breath before leaving him behind and entering the great hall.
Silent as a cat, quick as a snake she thought, remembering Syrio Forel's lessons. He had taught her how to be a water dancer, and she would not fail.

She silently sneakied up behind Walder Frey's back, getting closer and closer to him. Her grip on her sword was so strong that it hurt. She could feel her heart beating furiously inside her chest…

She was right behind him now. One move, that's all that it would take. One move, and it was over.

This is for my mother, and for Robb.

Walder Frey turned around then, and looked at her with his half blind eyes. Arya froze, afraid that he would shout for help, but the old man did no such thing.

"Young Stark… heh, I knew that you would come someday, heh…" he said with a broken voice. He seemed to be waiting, but Arya didn't move. She just stood there with Needle in her hand, while she looked at the man who destroyed her family with eyes full of hate. "Well? Are you just going to stay there? Heh."

Arya wanted to kill him, every cell in her body was screaming at her to do it, but she was frozen in place. Hot tears were filling her eyes, and threatening to fall down her cheeks.

Walder Frey raised an old, wrinkled, boney and shaking finger and pointed at a spot on the floor of the great hall.

"That's… where your goodsister was slaughtered, heh. She was with child, heh." he said. Arya couldn't decipher the tone of his voice, she couldn't tell if he was enjoying telling her that or not. Then the old man pointed at another spot on the floor, close to the first one. "That's where Roose Bolton… heh, stabbed your brother, heh."

There was a faint smile in his old, cruel and wrinkled face now. Tears ran down Arya's face now, and she felt that she couldn't breath.

Finally, Walder Frey pointed at a third spot.

"And that's where your mother was killed, heh. She screamed like a pig in heat before they cut her throat open, heh."

Neddle buried itself Walder Frey's body, stopping the words from coming out of his mouth anymore. He looked at Arya with his eyes wide open, and his mouth and hands were shaking. Arya twisted the small sword inside his belly, causing a pool of blood to form beneath them on the stone floor. When she spoke, she did it loud and clear, so that the man that had betrayed her mother and brother could hear her:

"Valar Morghulis."

She took Needle out of his body with one quick movement, and Walder Frey's lifeless corpse fell to the floor at her feet. She looked at him with no joy, nor hatred nor pity. She felt nothing. She just stood there, with a bloodstained Needle in her hand, on a pool of traitor's blood.

She heard a voice behind her then. At first she thought that she had been discovered, but she recognized the strongly accented voice that she hadn't heard in years.

"A girl has grown. A girl has no mercy."
Ok, so I have no idea how the rules of the Faceless Men work but if there are restrictions when it comes to whom they can change into... But whatever, this is my story! I can do whatever I want!

Enjoy!

Arya turned around as soon as she heard those words. In the entrance of the main hall, where Gendry had been standing mere seconds ago, was now Jaquen H'ghar, the Faceless Man that Arya hadn't seen in four years, since he helped her escape Harrenhal and taught her those words in High Valyrian that she had pronounced as she killed Walder Frey- Valar Morghulis.

Jaquen was dressed with Gendry's clothes, and he had the same face that he had when Arya first met him: she recognized immediately the hair red on one side and white on the other. His voice sounded funny in the same way that Gendry's had sounded, just that now the accent was stronger. It only took Arya two seconds to realize what had happened.

"You..." she mumbled, her voice shaking. Jaquen just nodded, his eyes never leaving her face.

"Why...?"

"A girl needed help. A man gave it to her."

"But why?!" she exclaimed, her voice stronger now. She took a few steps backward, leaving bloody footsteps on the stone floor. She didn't know how she felt, she was confused. But angry was probably the best way to describe her feelings right at that moment. Cheated, maybe. "Why did you come?! Why did you help me?! Why are you disguised as Gendry?! How did you find us?!"

"A man followed a girl all the way from Winterfell. A man was curious to see what a girl would do" Jaquen said as he slowly approached her. "Taking a boy's face was the safest way for a man to approach a girl and see what a man wanted to see."

"But, but... Have you been Gendry the whole time?" she asked, now in a calmer tone of voice (she didn't want to wake up the inhabitants of the castle and alert of the murder of their lord) but she was still shaking. She dreaded the answer.

Much to her relief, this time Jaquen shook his head. For some reason, the thought that Jaquen might have been disguised as Gendry the whole time had scared her, and she was happy that Gendry was still at Winterfell... Until she realized what that meant.

"Then... Gendry never changed his mind? He left me alone...?" she whispered with astonishment. Jaquen didn't say anything, he just stood there watching her. She scoffed, feeling furious and... abandoned. "He left me alone."

It wasn't a question this time. It was a statement. And it hurt, it hurt more than anything in the world. She gasped (which sounded more like a sob than a gasp) and her back hit the wall. She dropped Needle without even noticing that she had let go of the sword, and she closed her hand to a fist, burying her fingernails in her palm.
'Is a girl alright?' Jaquen asked, taking another small step towards her.

Arya didn't look at him, she was looking at the floor, and she slowly shook her head. "No" she finally said "a girl is not alright."

"A man knew a girl needed help."

"A girl didn't need help!" she exclaimed angrily again.

"But a girl wanted the help. She wanted company. Is a man wrong?"

Jaquen was right. She didn't need Gendry, she didn't need anyone. But she hadn't wanted to be alone. She hadn't been alone, Jon and Sandor had been there with her, but she had wanted Gendry there with her too. The fact that he had decided to stay at Winterfell hurt her like a knife in the heart, and she couldn't understand why. Stupid, stupid bull headed boy! And stupid her for feeling that way! What in Seven Hells was wrong with her?!

She felt tears stinging in her eyes, and she dried then using her sleeve. Then she saw the corpse of Walder Frey lying on the floor in a pool of blood, and she felt something shattering within herself. She had taking her revenge believing the entire time that Gendry was the one standing behind her, supporting her, but he hadn't been there. In her place there was Jaquen, the man that had also left her when they escaped Harrenhal. Everybody left her at some point or another, and those who didn't died. She was sick and tired of it, and she hadn't been able to admit it to herself until now.

"I want to get out of here" she said, picking Needle from the floor. Then she looked at Jaquen, whose eyes were still fixed on her. "Please."

He nodded, and then he turned around to walked towards the doors, where he awaited for her. She shed, and took a last look around the place where the Red Wedding had happened years ago, the place where her mother, brother, and goodsister had perished in the hands of treason. She wanted to get out of that horrible place, so she looked down to the floor and followed Jaquen to the doors. There she stopped and looked at him again, but it was like she saw him for the first time that night. Now she was looking at him without remembering Gendry, and she was able to smile a little bit. She was taller now, so she didn't have to look up a lot to look at Jaquen in the eyes, like she had to do before. He stared back at her, and then she hugged him (being careful as to not hurt him with Needle). It seemed to catch him by surprise, but he returned the hug.

"It's good to see you again, Jaquen" she whispered.

"It's good to see a girl again" the Faceless Man admitted.

"What are you really doing here?"

"A man saw a girl back in Braavos, before a girl left with her family. A man has heard many stories about a girl, flying on a dragon into King's Landing with the Queen. A man has been watching over a girl, and a man has seen that a girl is very brave... But a girl can not do everything alone."

She didn't insist anymore saying that she didn't need help, because she knew that Jaquen was right anyways. She couldn't do everything alone. He was right when he had said that she had wanted the company. She had been alone for so long, felt alone for so long that she couldn't resist it anymore.

"What are you going to do now?" she asked then. Would Jaquen leave, now that she had killed Walder Frey? "Are you going to leave?"
"Does a girl want a man to leave?" he asked in return to her question.

Arya thought about it and realized that she would feel much worse if he left. She slowly shook her head, and it was answer enough for the Faceless man.

"A man will take a girl to Winterfell. Now let's go and find your friends..."

They walked all the way back without making any noise and without being discovered. They found Sandor and Jon alone near the main entrance of the castle, with the knight that had accompanied them nowhere in sight. Arya wondered what had happened, and she saw Jon's and Sandor's swords bloodstained.

"There were some knights" Sandor explained, whispering so that they wouldn't be discovered. "We killed them before they could raise the alarm... Did you find the fucking old bastard?"

Arya just nodded her head without saying any words, and she could hear Sandor whispering "good!" while Jon also remained silent. When she raised her eyes to him, she saw that her cousin was staring at Jaquen and was pointing his sword at him.

"Who are you?" he asked then, and Sandor just seemed to notice the Faceless man. He pointed his sword at him as well.

"Bloody hells!"

"He's a friend" Arya quickly said before anything bad happened, and Jon and Sandor shot her a perplexed look. "His name is Jaquen, he helped me escape when I was in Harrenhal."

"Why is he wearing the smith's clothes?"

"He has been the smith the whole way over here" Arya said then, her voice sounding somewhat resentful even though she didn't notice it, and she walked past the two men to leave the castle with Jaquen behind.

"Where are the other men?" Jaquen asked then.

"We sent them back with the horses."

They went back to the place where they had left the horses hidden and where the knights had been waiting for them after Jon and Sandor told them to leave the castle. They seemed extremely relieved to see that they were all safe and sound, but they were also extremely confused when they saw Jaquen instead of Gendry mounting the horse that the young man had been riding all those days. However, they knew (judging by Arya's expression) that they shouldn't ask questions.

They all looked back at the Twins one last time to make sure that they still hadn't been discovered and no one was following them, and then they rode away in silence. The way back to Winterfell seemed much shorter than the trip down to the Riverlands, but it was even more tortuous for Arya than the first one had been. She barely said a word, and even thought she felt relieved that she had finally had her revenge, she felt awful. Not because of what she had done, obviously. She couldn't really explain what was happening to her. It felt as if something had broken inside her, and she wasn't able to fix it, mainly because she had no idea what was wrong. She felt stupid, and acted moody the whole time. Sandor and Jon had tried to talk to her, but she kept pushing them away. Only Jaquen succeeded in getting closer to her and actually get her to speak a word.

"Why did you do it?" she asked one day, so lowly that only Jaquen was able to hear her. "Come
with me. I know that you said that you knew that I... couldn't do it alone" she felt embarrassed of saying those words out loud, they tasted like vinegar in her mouth. "But why? Why did you care?"

Jaquen didn't respond for a couple of seconds, he just stared into the distance. Arya was started to doubt he had heard her, when suddenly he replied:

"A girl is strong, and brave. She has the courage of a thousand armies of strong warriors" he turned his head to stare at her. His eyes were somehow warm. "A man admires a girl."

Finally, after many days of keeping her expression hard as stone and cold as ice, Arya smiled a little bit. It was a very small, almost unnoticeable smile, but it was enough.

When they finally reached Winterfell days later, Sansa ran towards them, eager to hug her husband and sister and cousin, and Ygritte came running behind her.

"Seven hells, I was so worried!" she exclaimed. Sansa almost never swore, which meant that she had been really scared for them while they were gone. "I thought you might be dead!"

Sandor was the one that took her in her arms first, and they kissed passionately before she let go of her husband, hugged her cousin who later ran to the arms of his wife, and then she saw Arya.

"Arya!" Sansa exclaimed with a huge and relieved smile on her face. "Gods, Arya, I was so scared... Are you alright?"

Arya nodded. "He's dead" was all she said.

Sansa immediately understood, and a serious and solemn expression took over her face. She knew how revenge tasted like, and she knew that her sister had needed her.

"Good" she said then, really meaning it.

Arya didn't talk anymore with her older sister, for she had just seen Gendry standing on his feet a few meters away from where they were, his eyes moving nervously from her to the ground, unsure of what to do or say or where to look, but he also looked relieved. Very relieved and incredibly uncomfortable. Arya fell a hot rage within her, an explosion of fury, and she walked past her sister and everybody else towards Gendry.

"Arya..."

He couldn't finish what he wanted to say, for in that moment Arya's fist collided against his face. Gendry fell to the ground and he took his hands to his face, where he had a pained (and surprised!) expression. Blood was running from his nose.

Arya heard everyone gasping behind her back (but maybe a man or two chuckled, amused) but she didn't say anything. She didn't as much as give Gendry a second glance before she walked away and entered the castle.
Chapter 6

His face hurt. It hurt a lot. Specially his jaw and his nose, though he wasn't sure if he could feel his cheek. Bloody hells! Who would have thought that such a little thing as Arya Stark would have such a steel-like fist?!

Gendry took his hand to his nose and found blood in it when he removed it. He was shocked. He knew that Arya was mad, (ok, very mad) but he had thought that he would push him away or something, like she always did when she was younger and she got pissed off with him.

But she no longer is that little girl, Gendry realized while he stared at the blood in his hand. Everyone knows that. She's like the bloody Stranger now.

He got up from the ground, shaking the dirt off his messy clothes, and he wiped the blood off his face. His nose wasn't broken, but he didn't care about that anyways.

He had been so relieved when he had seen her come back. For weeks, he thought he had really lost her forever this time. He couldn't sleep, he had nightmares of a raven coming from the Twins warning about Arya's death, murderer during the attempt of her crazy, suicidal plan. He couldn't eat, he couldn't even think properly! He thought he was going mad with each day that passed and he looked at the horizon outside the walls of Winterfell and she was not there. He remembered how he had had the change of going with her, he could have talked her out of her stupid idea on the way to the Twins! But he, being a stupid bull as he was, hadn't done anything. He had just stood there and watched as she rode off.

He had thought about taking one of the horses and going after her, but he hadn't for two reasons. He was afraid of two things that could happen at the Twins. One was watching her die, his heart would shatter in pieces if Arya were killed and he was there unable to stop it from happening. His other fear, however, was that his guilt would haunt him to madness. Guilt of what happened years ago...

He raised his head then, and he saw the people watching him with concern and shock after what had happened with Arya and him. No one had expected the young lady to punch him, much less to punch him with so much anger! Sansa Stark sighed and ran off chasing after her little sister, hoping to see what was wrong. Gendry glared at everyone else, and they all took their eyes off him...

... All of them except one man. At first, he thought that he had never seen that man before in Winterfell, and he frowned. Then he recognized him, and he could feel the blood draining from his face, making him pale. He just felt plain confused, and then... then he felt furious.

It was that man, Jaqen Whatever-The-Fuck-His-Family-Name-Was. The assassin, the man that had helped them escape Harrenhal... The man that had spent a great deal of time with Arya when they were prisoners, whispering the-gods-knew-what in the shadows...

He walked towards the man, who didn't move even an inch when he saw the young man coming. Gendry stopped in front of him, and shot daggers through his eyes to the other man. The braavosi didn't even seem to care, his face was like cold hard marble.

"What are you doing here?" Gendry hissed.

"A man was doing his job" was the simple answer.

"Oh really? And what was that?" Gendry spat. "We haven't seen you in years, you just left after
you took us away from that place. Why have you come back now? Why were you with Arya?"

Jaqen raised his eyebrows with curiosity. Gendry found it annoying, and extremely so.

"A boy suddenly cares? A boy asks why a man was in the company of a girl?"

"I always care about anything that has to do with her" Gendry said. He really hated the way that
that man had of speaking and referring of himself and other people.

Jaqen looked skeptic. "Really? A boy cares about a girl? But a boy does not seem to care much
about what happens to a girl. A boy left her alone."

Wait, what?! Who was this guy anyway to come and say to him that he did not care about Arya?!
Gendry wanted so badly to punch him in the face, but he restrained himself. He knew that the man
was dangerous.

"What she wanted to do was stupid and suicidal" he said, shaking.

"So a boy left a girl to die alone."

"I didn't...!"

"Yes, a boy did. A boy knew that a girl would be in danger, and a boy was too coward to do what
he should have done if he were a real man."

"How dare you...?!"

"A man dares, because it is true" for the first time since the beginning of that conversation, Jaqen
seemed annoyed and displeased. He looked down on Gendry like he was some worthless little
insect. He took a step closer, intimidating Gendry with his gaze. The smith had to admit that the
braavosi man did have a dangerous halo around him. "A boy wants to know what a man was doing
with a girl? A man was doing what a boy was not able to do."

Those words hit Gendry just like Arya's fist had hit him in the face, or maybe even worse. His first
reaction was being infuriated and indignant; he wanted to yell at the man and lunch him and kick
him out of that place... But he couldn't kick someone out of a castle that was not his.

His second reaction was feeling pain at the realization of how right Jaqen H'ghar was. It was true,
the man had been doing for Arya was Gendry couldn't do. It had always been like that, since years
ago. Back at Harrenhal, Jaqen had killed for Arya, he had helped her and her friends escape... He
had given Arya the freedom that Gendry couldn't. And now he had protected her while she carried
out her revenge, a moment in which she needed help and Gendry had not been able to see it.

He swallowed hard, trying to put his thoughts in order. It was very difficult, with the pain and fury
and shame and guilt that he was feeling. And also, envy. He remembered the day that Arya had
said that she needed Jaqen. She had said it with such desperation in her voice... It felt like
something was eating Gendry's intestines.

"You also left her alone" he muttered, trying to come up with an excuse to not feel like such a huge
little shit. "You went to whatever hole you came from and left her alone."

"A man proposed her to go with him, but she said she had to find her family" Jaqen hissed. It was
unnatural to sense such sudden anger in the foreign man's voice. "And even then, she had a man's
help, help with which she travelled to Braavos, to a safe place! It was in Braavos where, without
her knowing it, a man was watching over her day and night, training her, making sure a girl was
alright, until her family came and took her away. Then a man let her go, and then travelled to Westeros to see with a man's own eyes that a girl was happy and safe. And what did a man find? A cowardly boy that would let a lovely girl die a terrible death."

Jaqen took a step forward, and Gendry took a step back against his will. Jaqen grinned.

"Perhaps a man should turn a cowardly boy into an offering for the Red God?"

Gendry paled. He had already had his share of bad experiences in name of that fucking red god, and only the memory of Dragonstone almost made his tremble. He opened his mouth, wanting to say something to defend himself, when Sandor arrived at their side with a suspicious look on his face.

"Everything alright here?" he rasped, eyeing both men.

Jaqen raised his eyebrows at Gendry, waiting for him to answer. Irritated, Gendry answered between his teeth:

"Yes, milord. Everything's just fine..."

Sandor didn't appear to believe it. That man could sniff lies, Gendry was sure of it.

"You know each other?"

"We've met before" this time, Jaqen answered. Sandor didn't seem happy with him, Gendry could sense it.

"Look, whoever the fuck you are, just know that I don't like you" Sandor rasped, and Gendry felt a faint sensation of relieve upon hearing those words. "I don't trust you, though the little she-wolf has told us to do so. But I don't like all that shit of changing faces. If you cross the line, just know that Arya can go bugger herself for all I care, because I will kill you. Understood?"

Instead of threatened or scared, Jaqen seemed highly amused an about to burst out laughing. Maybe if Gendry was lucky, the man would do just that and the abound would kill him. But he didn't laugh.

"Of course" he said. And without saying another word, he turned around an left, leaving a very annoyed Sandor and a very angry Gendry behind.

"I hate him" the young man muttered, and Sandor stared down at him, looking displeased.

"Just so you know, I don't like you either" the huge scarred man said. "From now on, if I were you I would be more careful around Arya, if you don't want to end with something worse than that bloody nose. She could stick you with the pointy end."

Then he walked away, leaving Gendry alone, and incredibly confused but with the certain knowledge that, regarding Arya Stark, he had completely screwed up everything.
Sansa entered her sister's chambers and entered when she saw Arya sitting on the bed, with her back facing the door and her long brunette curls cascading down her shoulders. Sansa approached her silently and sat by her side.

Arya was looking down at Needle, the blade resting in her hands. She seemed completely lost in her own thoughts, but Sansa was able to detect a deep sadness in the younger Stark's grey eyes. She sighed and took a strand of hair away from Arya's face.

"What's wrong, Arya?" she asked softly. She really wanted her sister to open up to her and trust her. She wanted to help her, just like Arya had helped her in the past.

Arya wasn't sure if she was in the mood to be talked to. However, she couldn't tell Sansa to leave. Right now Sansa was the only person that Arya wanted to be there with her.

"I hate him" Arya muttered. Her voice was soft, but full of anger. She was almost holding up a sob. "I trusted him, but he keeps betraying me."

"Gendry?"

Arya nodded.

"How has he betrayed you before?"

"When we were travelling together, and Beric Dondarrion found us... He was going to take me back to Mother and Robb, but Gendry decided to stay with them. He said that he wanted a family, and apparently, I couldn't be his family" Arya's anger kept increasing in her voice, and Sansa was glad that there wasn't anyone else in the room with them, or she feared that Arya might stab them with Needle. "I'm so happy that they betrayed and sold him instead! He deserved it!"

"Arya..."

"That bastard!"

Of course, Arya wasn't referring to Gendry's birth, but insulting him. Sansa couldn't help herself and she slightly smiled when she saw her sister like that. Arya saw her and stared at her with a hurt expression.

"Do you think that this is funny?!"

"No! No, of course I don't, but... Arya, Gendry was so worried about you. I promise, he couldn't hold still while we all awaited your return..."

"That does not fix it!" Arya exploded. "If he was so worried, why didn't he come with me?!"

"Some men are like that..."

"He doesn't care about me!"

"I'm sure he does..."

"He left me!"
"Sandor left me once too" Sansa said then. "The night of the Battle of the Blackwater. He left the city and I stayed behind."

"Because you wanted to! And he came back for you ten minutes later!" arya protested. Her sister could not compare their stories, she could not! Sandor had never given up on Sansa, whereas Gendry... Gendry took every opportunity that he had to screw everything up!

*That stupid bull!*

Why was she even so mad? That's what made her more angry of all things, the fact that she felt so incredibly furious, and the fact that she could not stop her chest from hurting. Why? Why, *why*? It was all so frustrating!

"Every person is different" Sansa reminded her sister, not really knowing how to calm her down. Sometimes Arya was like a furious volcano about to explode. "Some people are better at some things, and some are very bad. Gendry, for example, is very bad at making choices. But he is very good at the time of choosing people that he cares about."

"What?" Arya was confused. "What in seven hells are you talking about?"

"Gendry cares about you."

"He does not. He's just an idiot."

Sansa sighed. She knew her younger sister and she knew that she was stubborn, so the older Stark didn't try to convince Arya of the contrary. But she could not shut down her curiosity.

"Do you care about him?"

"I don't" Arya replied way too quickly, she only realized it after the words had already escaped her mouth. She felt her face turn poker red and hot. She looked away from her sister, but it was too late now.

"You do."

"I don't!"

"Admit it. Not even just a little bit?"

Arya sighed, giving up. Sansa always told her all her secrets anyways.

"Okay, a little, maybe" she had to admit. Her face was still red and hot because of the embarrassment. "But he doesn't deserve that I care about him even a little, so don't try to change my mind. I won't forgive him."

"I'm not telling you to do that" Sansa said, shaking her head. She reached her hand out and took Arya's hand. "But being resentful is not going to do any good to you."

"That's funny, coming from you. You are resentful towards the Lannisters."

"I'm not resentful towards the Lannisters" Sansa said. Her voice was soft, but it sent chills down Arya's spine. "*I hate* the Lannisters. They killed my family."

Sansa was right. Arya shouldn't have acussed her before. She hated the Lannisters as well, she hated them more than anything.
"I'm not going to forgive Gendry" she whispered then, looking down to the floor. "He hurt me. Not physically, but he might as well have done it."

"I understand" her sister said. She really did understand. Then the corners of her mouth curled up in a soft smile. "Who is that man? The one that you came with..."

"Jaqen?" Arya almost laughed. "He's a friend. The one that I told you about, he helped us escape from Harrenhal..."

Sansa's blue eyes widened.

"That's him? That's the Faceless Man?!"

"Yes, why?"

"He's handsome!"

Arya did laugh this time. "You think so?"

"Yes!"

"He's old."

Sansa frowned. "He's not! He appears to be of Sandor's age."

"Yeah, that's what I mean. He's old."

Sansa hit her sister in the leg, pretending to be offended, but then she laughed and Arya laughed too, forgetting all about her sadness for a moment.

"Don't ever tell Sandor that you think he's old."

"But he is!"

"He is not!" Sansa insisted. "He's thirty and two! That's not old at all!"

Arya rolled her eyes, choosing not to argue against her sister about that. After all, Sandor was Sansa's husband and also he had helped and protected Arya many times, he was her friend, it wouldn't be very nice to be calling him old behind his back.

"How come did Jaqen know that you were going to the Twins?" Sansa asked then, confused.

Arya shrugged. "He says he's been watching over me since I got back to Braavos, making sure I was alright... I have no clue why he would bother with that in the first place, but..."

"He fancies you" Sansa said, grinning mischievously. Arya sighed and rolled her eyes again. Of course, Sansa always thought that everybody fancied everybody! She had grown up a lot and she had matured a she had become the strongest woman that Arya had ever known, but she still loved all stories of romance, and proposed a new romance whenever she had the chance to. She always said that love was the cure to all evil.

"He does not..."

"He does. The way he was looking at you..."

"We are friends" Arya protested. "And he can't fancy me, I'm only ten and four!"
"Arya, have you taken a look at yourself? You are a woman now, and men notice it. Believe me, I should know! At your age, I already had a son!" Sansa exclaimed.

"Yes, but because Sandor is a sick old dog!" Arya replied, obviously joking. Sansa's jaw dropped, and she picked up a pillow from the bed, hitting Arya in the face with it. Arya just stood there stunned, and then both Stark girls burst into laughing.

Arya felt stupid and like most girls, feeling wounded because of the betrayal of a boy, and talking about men with her sister and laughing. Arya never did that, Arya wasn't like most girls. But she guessed that she couldn't be all that tough at all times. She was hurt and she needed some relief from that unexplainable pain that she was feeling in her chest, and Sansa was helping her get it. So she didn't stop laughing. She laughed until her lungs and ribs and belly hurt from laughing so much, and tears came to her eyes.

Sansa was the first one to stop laughing, though she was still smiling at her younger sister.

"Come, you need to take a bath and change clothes. We are gonna have a feast in honor of your victory at the Twins" she said taking her sister's hand in hers and making her stand up from the bed. Arya didn't protest at any moment.

Some hours later, Arya was bathed (which felt so good after so many days!) and she had allowed her sister to put her into a beautiful blue silk dress with silver embroidery, and her hair was loose over her shoulders and covering her back in a cascade of long curls. Arya had never thought of herself as beautiful, until now. No one could deny it anymore.

She followed Sansa (who was dressed in a beautiful green dress) into the great hall, were the food was already served, the music was loud, and the people were feasting. Arya watched her sister go towards her husband and plant a kiss on his lips, and she turned her head around to watch everyone else. Jon was with Ygritte, as always, and Bran and Rickon were talking. She started walking to meet them at the table, as she had nothing else to do, but someone stepped in her way. She stopped and looked up at the person in front of her, and her gaze met familiar blue eyes. She frowned immediately, anger filling her up.

"Get out of my way" she hissed.

"Arya, you need to listen to me..."

"No, I don't. I don't need to listen to you, I don't have to listen at you, and most importantly, I don't want to listen to you. I can't even stand looking at you right now" she spat.

She had never seen anyone's face look so shocked or sad. Incredibly sad, not just a little bit sad. Gendry couldn't have appeared to be more wounded even if he had been stabbed with a sword through the heart. But still, he did not move away.

"Arya... Please..." he was begging now.

Arya slowly shook her head from side to side. "No, Gendry. Admit it. You have lost me."

She felt a hand on her shoulder then, and she saw Gendry tense. She turned her head around enough to see that the hand belonged to Jaqen, now changed into more gallant red clothes that made him look like the perfect noblemen that girls all around the world would whisper for. He was giving Gendry a sharp look.

"Is everything alright here?" he asked with his ever-calm and heavy accented voice. Gendry
clenched his jaw.

"It is none of your business..."

"Didn't a man make himself clear earlier?" Jaqen suddenly hissed, taking a menacing step past Arya and towards Gendry while glaring at him. Arya had no idea what Jaqen and Gendry had talked about earlier, but suddenly Gendry's face was all red. Whether from shame or fury, she did not know.

Apparently pleased by Gendry's reaction, Jaqen stepped back and away from them, but he didn't go far away. Arya stared at Gendry: she could see the swollen veins in his neck because of how furious he was.

"What did he do to you?" he asked then, in such a low voice that Arya did not hear what he said. She did, however, the anger and poison in his words. "What happened while you were away with him?"

"What?"

"Did he become your lover while you were on and about killing Freys in the Riverlands?"

Arya's eyes became as wide as plates, and her jaw dropped. She could not believe what she was hearing. How did he dare to...?! She blushed so badly that she feared her face was not distinguishable from a tomato.

"NO!" she exclaimed in a high-pitched voice that didn't seem her own. Gendry looked like he didn't believe it.

"No? You didn't do anything with him?"

Her words stuck in her throat. She really couldn't believe what she was hearing. With what right did Gendry come to her with such questions?!

Her hands turned to fists at her sides. She wanted so badly to punch Gendry's face for a second time that day...

"Why would I do anything with him? I thought it was you!"

Her words inflicted him more pain than any punch could ever have. Just looking at his pale face and incredibly wide eyes right then, Arya felt impossibly proud of herself.

Then she sighed, tired of that situation. She wanted to have a peaceful night, and she did not want to see Gendry anymore. She turned around and walked away. Gendry didn't follow her, too stunned to even move, while Jaqen joined her again. Arya could feel the weight of Gendry's stare on their backs.

"I do not need you to come to my rescue" she hissed to Jaqen, who was very close to her. The man only smiled, apparently amused.

"A man knows. A girl does not need saving, never. But that boy seems to need to be reminded that he has no rights over a girl anymore."

"No one has any right over me, never" Arya said, glaring at Jaqen. "I'm the only one who has any right over myself."
Jaqen raised an eyebrow, impressed.

"A girl has a sharp tongue and a strong will, unlike most of the ladies here at Westeros..." he commented, and they kept walking in silence. Arya was walking towards the main table again, while Jaqen simply seemed to be following her. Well, it was normal, since he was new at that place and he was there because of her, thus making him her guest. Jaqen decided to break the silence (though it wasn't a great silence, with the music and laughter all around them). "Tell me, lovely girl. Are you planning in ever forgiving that young fool?"

"No" she said without even giving it a second thought.

"Was his wrongdoing such a big offense to the lovely girl?"

"He betrayed a friend. Is there a greater offense?"

"Well... maybe the foolish boy had reasons?"

Arya shot him a suspicious look. "Are you trying to get me to forgive him or something?"

Jaqen snorted after hearing that, and actually laughed with cold amusement. "Gods forbid it, no, a man is certainly not trying to do anything like that... A man is just curious about what triggered this situation."

"Well, he had no reasons to betray me" Aya sneered, narrowing her grey eyes. "Only cowardice. And dishonor."

"A girl talks about dishonor? But there is not a bit of honor in a girl. If a man remembers correctly, a girl used her friend in the most despicable way to get what she wanted" after saying that, he grabbed Arya's arm without harming her and he pulled her towards him, making her turn around and narrow the distance between them. Arya almost tripped, but she kept her balance by pressing her hands against Jaqen's chest, and her eyes were locked on his. Those piercing bluish grey eyes seemed to be digging into her very soul. "Doesn't a girl remember? A man does."

Arya studied his expression while the images of that day rushed into her mind. She remembered, she remembered it very well... She had used Jaqen's promise of taking three lives against him, giving him his own name in order to get him to open her path to freedom. Truth be told, she had never felt guilty about giving Jaqen his own name, and she never would feel bad about it. She did what needed to be done to get her and her... friends... to safety.

"A girl remembers" she nodded. She smiled a small smile, almost sinister, and she toyed with the fingers that were pressed against his chest. "But you are mistaken. A girl was honorable... After all, I unnamed you, didn't I?"

He didn't reply to her words, and she pushed him away with a soft but fast movement of her hands, and she turned away still grinning ad feeling something funny within her tummy. She finally reached the table in which her family was sitting, and she sat down in the spot reserved for her, at Bran's right. She was occupying the place of honor that night, because it was her night. She had earned it.

"To Arya Stark!" everyone roared with their cups high in the air. "The avenger of the North!"

The avenger of the North... That's how everyone was calling her because she had killed Lord Walder Frey, the man that betrayed the King in the North, Robb Stark. But she didn't feel like an avenger. She had killed only one man, and the wound that his betrayal had caused was not yet healed. It would always and forever leave a huge scar in everyone's hearts and in the history of the
However, she smiled and accepted to be called like that.

*Let them have an illusion, if I can give it to them* she thought while drinking from her cup.

Her eyes searched the place, and they met Jaqen's once again. He also had a cup in his hand, and he raised it to her before bringing it to his lips and drinking the wine from it. His eyes never left Arya, and she felt again an uncomfortable sensation in the pit of her stomach. Almost unconsciously, Sansa's words came back to her mind.

*"He's handsome."*

Arya couldn't deny it, he was. He was tall, well built, and the features of his face were both soft and piercing. His mouth almost constantly twisted in a mockery smile was attractive, and his grey eyes were cold and... dangerous. Powerful.

*It's not even his real face, Arya* she reminded herself then, and she felt disappointed. She set her cup down on the table and broke off eye contact with the man. But doing that, her eyes met Gendry's.

Again, that feeling of rage took over her, but she didn't look away. Gendry had retreated into the back of the room, where is was dark and more quiet, and he was observing her with his back against the wall and his arms crossed over his chest. He seemed... defiant. Defiant and ashamed all at once. And angry. Definitely angry.

Arya felt so frustrated. Why couldn't she ever tell what was going through his mind?! She couldn't understand him. Why was he angry at her for the treatment that she was giving him?! Didn't he realize that she was acting like this because of him, that it was all his fault? No, apparently he couldn't see that, he was too stupid. He was the one that had acted wrongly...

She had to admit she was sad. She missed those days in the past months in which she had been incredibly happy, spending almost everyday with Gendry and daring anyone to say that the friendship of a lady with a bastard smith was not proper. She would have kicked anyone who dared to say that. She would have done anything for Gendry back then... Because that's what friends were supposed to do, right?

She remembered how happy she had been the day that he discovered that he was alive, the night of her sister's wedding. She had beloved him dead since the moment that the Red Woman took him away, and she had mourned him. She had been completely willing to forget that he had not wanted to be with her before they took him away, because the joy of having him next to her again was greater than anything else. The lone memory of the night that she spent with him in his bed the night that he appeared in Winterfell made her feel pain.

How could she forgive him now, just because he said he was sorry? She couldn't trust him anymore!

Her eyes stung, and she was afraid that she would cry. She didn't want Gendry to see her cry, so she quit staring at him. She drained her cup of wine before letting it down in the table, and she stood up from the chair.

"I need some air" she excused herself before disappearing away from the room walking through the back door. She walked and didn't look back until she could no longer hear the music, or the signif or the laughter or the ceaseless talking. Only when she was submerged in complete silence in the middle of one of Winterfell's dark halls did she stop, and she let her emotions to be set free, and
they did so in the form of a loud sob.

*Stupid, stupid, stupid!* she kept shouting in her mind, though she didn't know who she was insulting anymore. Gendry, or herself? Who knew, maybe both.

*I could kick him out* she thought then. *Bran wouldn't let him stay here for even one more minute if you wished him gone.*

She shook her head. No, she would not kick Gendry out of Winterfell. *Let him stay. Let him see me everyday and realize what a stupid boy he is. Let him see what he has lost.*

Yes, that would do. She would torture him with her constant presence and indifference.

Managing to put a small back on her face, she took a deep breath and returned to the feast.

"Why would I do anything with him? I thought he was you?!"

The moment that Arya had said those words, he had wanted to die. Why? Because he felt like a complete worthless shit. Those words had been her ultimate statement that she had no desire for him, no feelings at all. And why would she?! It was obvious, she was a Lady, a Princess in the North! But him? He was just some bastard born and raised in Flea Bottom...

Of course, he could be more if he wanted. If he revealed the truth. It happened to Arya's cousin, didn't it? He went from being a Snow to being a Targaryen! The same could happen to Gendry, he could get rid of his bastard surname Waters, maybe... But then he would have to tell all the truth. He would have to tell her he found out, and he wasn't a great liar. The truth of what happened in Dragonstone, and he had no desire for such thing. Every time he remembered that day, he felt sick to his stomach, he wanted to truth up. No, it was better to stay silent.

At that moment, he was burning up with rage. Arya's words had opened a whole inside his chest, and he could think of no way of healing it again. What was worse, he saw her walking away side by side with that arrogant foreigner man, Jaqen H'ghar... Few times had Gendry despised someone so much in his entire life. Watching the man talking with her girl that he loved while she turned her back in him was a worse torture that he could ever imagine.

Because he did love Arya. Seven bloody hells, Gendry loved her more than anything! He had only realized it way too late, and now he had messed everything up. He had to admit it, he was terrible at the time of dealing with stressful situations. He was weak, while Arya was string. Arya could face her fears, and Gendry hadn't been able to accompany her to the Twins in fear of facing his own fears... Damn it, he couldn't even tell the truth about why he hadn't wanted to go there in the first place!

He watched them with resentfulness the entire time. However, when Arya practically ran away from the place, he wanted to follow. Sansa Stark stopped him.

"You need to give her space" the girl told him. She wasn't mad at him or anything, her voice was very calm. She was just giving Gendry a piece of advice, she knew her sister well. "She needs time."

"She hates me, doesn't she?" he asked resigned. "She wants me to leave."

"No, but she is angry" Sansa said. "Just let her be mad for a few days, and then try to talk to her. Go step by step, don't get her even angrier. She's boiling with anger, and it will all just explode in your face if you try to push things. Let her be, for now."
"He won't be leaving her alone" Gendry hissed, pointing towards Jaqen with a movement of his head. Sansa sighed.

"Right now, he's her friend. You need to regain her trust. Stop worrying about that man and focus on being a person worthy of my sister."

Gendry clenched his jaw and thought about it. Yes, maybe Sansa was right. He needed to be a better person for Arya. A man worthy of her wouldn't have let her go in that journey alone.

That's when he saw Arya returning to the great hall and sitting back at the table. A big smile decorated her face, and her his eyes met hers, he just saw indifference there.

He sighed inwardly. He felt that there was a long way ahead of him before Arya even spoke another word to him.
Chapter 8

The week had passed quickly and without any incidents. There was peace and quiet in Winterfell, but everyone was a little sad. The reason was that Sandor and Sansa were finally going to move to the Dreadfort, to rule that castle as lord and lady after the fall of the Boltons. Sansa was happy because she was starting a new life away with her husband, but she was also sad because she didn't want to say goodbye to her siblings.

Arya had no idea whether if she was going with them or staying. Winterfell was home for her, it had always been, and she had wanted so badly to return to it for such a long time! But she didn't want to say goodbye to Sansa, no more than she wanted to say good bye to Bran or Rickon or Jon.

Jon was leaving in a day. He and Ygritte had only come to Winterfell for Sansa's wedding to Sandor, and they had been constantly postponing the day of going back home to Dragonstone. They couldn't do that anymore, they needed to be back there. A castle can not be left alone unprotected for long without its lord and lady. Arya wanted to go with them, she had never seen Dragonstone, but they had told her that it would have to be another time and that they would take her with them the next time that they came visiting.

Arya hated goodbyes. She hadn't minded them when she was younger, but after the war, it hurt to be separated from her family. Having to choose between leaving Winterfell or going to the Dreadfort with Sandor and Sansa was stressing her, and she decided to forget that stress and relax with a hot bath. Maybe the warm water would help her make a decision.

The streams of hot water that came from the earth underneath Winterfell and went through its walls and kept the castle warm also served to provide water for the baths. Arya's maids filled her bathtub with the steaming water and left her alone at her command. Once they closed the door behind them, Arya started getting rid of her clothes and she tossed them carelessly on the floor, and then she entered the hot bathtub, sinking into the water. Its warmth immediately relaxed her muscles, which were also sore from training with the men in the courtyard, and it felt good. Her head rested on the tub, and she closed her eyes, allowing herself to doze off for a little bit. Her wet dark hair was floating around her.

Arya was almost falling asleep when she heard someone knocking on the door three times. She opened only one eye an stared at the door, having no idea who it might be. It could be her maids, or her sister, or one of her brothers maybe. It could not be Gendry, for she hadn't spoken to him during the entire week, and he hadn't tried to approach her either. Arya didn't know if that satisfied or angered her.

"Who is it?" she said, closing her eyes again.

No one answered. Instead, she heard the door opening and closing again, and careful, slow steps. A man's steps. She felt uneasy and observed, and she opened her eyes again. She almost jumped off the bathtub, startled.
It was Jaqen, who had entered her room uninvited and was now watching her inside the bathtub. Not that he could see anything, beside Arya's long dark hair was covering her womanly body.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, but she was not angered like any other woman would have been. She had just been startled at first, nothing else. Still, she could not ignore the fact that there was a grown man watching her naked inside a bathtub in her room.

"A girl must not worry about a man" Jaqen said, obviously knowing what she was thinking. "A man is not going to hurt a girl."

"Yet a man must know how inappropriate it is to watch a girl while she bathes" Arya pointed out. Jaqen smiled.

"Since when does a girl care about what's proper?"

Fair enough. She didn't. Really, she couldn't care less that Jaqen was there in her room. She relaxed again under the water, and started toying with her leg and foot, splashing a little bit.

"You haven't answered me" she said, no longer looking at Jaqen in the eye. "What are you doing here?"

"A man wanted to talk to a girl. A man wanted to know what had a girl decided. To leave, or to stay?"

"I don't know what I'm going to do" she admitted, raising her knee above the water. "Why do you want to know?"

"So that a man can make plans."

"Plans for what?"

"A man needs to decide what to do with his life too. A man needs to decide if he is going back to Braavos or if he is lingering in Westeros for a while longer."

"You want to stay?" Arya was surprised by that, but she didn't want Jaqen to leave yet, not really. She had just realized that.

Jaqen shrugged. "A man likes it here. He enjoys the company of a girl. A girl that is going to get wrinkles like a crone if she lingers in the water any longer."

He was right, and the water had started to get colder, though it was still warm and enjoyable. Arya looked around to search for the sponge. She sighed; she had left it on the stool. She reached for it with her arm, but she couldn't get a hold of it.

"Jaqen, could you please...?"

But Jaqen had already walked over towards the stool and he grabbed the sponge. Arya muttered a soft "thanks" and reached her hand out to take the sponge from Jaqen, but he didn't give it to her. She frowned when he kneeled behind the bathtub, right behind her. She shot him a puzzled look.

"Jaqen, what are you doing...?"

"A girl is tired. A girl needs to relax. Maybe a man can help?"

"I-I don't think that's-"
"A girl has nothing to worry about" he repeated, and his deep eyes stared back at her with such intensity that she felt she was shaking. "Or doesn't a girl trust a man?"

"I do trust you" she said, and it was true. Jaqen had watched over her for such a long time and made sure she was alright even though she didn't know it at the time, it was unlikely that he was going to do anything bad to her now. She turned her head around and let it rest again on the tub, and she closed her eyes. Her arms rested on the side of the bathtub, and she let out a long sigh.

She shivered when the sponge, guided by Jaqen's hand, touched the skin of her neck. Jaqen had previously submerged it in the water, so it was warm and wet, and he gently scrubbed Arya's skin with it. He moved it over both her arms and then down to her tummy, under the water.

If my siblings or Jon find out... she started thinking, but then she stopped, realizing something. Jon had been north of the Wall doing the Gods knew what with Ygritte; Sansa had been doing such extremely improper things with Sandor that she ended up pregnant; and Rickon was too young to even be scandalized by anything. The only problem could be Bran, but he knew Arya well enough to know that she would do whatever she wanted.

And right now, she was really enjoying the fact that Jaquen H'ghar was giving her a bath.

Her lips curled up in a small smile, and Jaqen noticed.

"Is a girl enjoying herself?" he almost chuckled, which was funny coming from Jaqen, the dangerous assassin.

"A man could say so, yes."

It was true, she was loving the fact that she could just relax and get a good bath without even having to lift a finger. So what if Jaqen was a man? Arya didn't feel embarrassed at all. Her hair covered her breasts, and her legs were crossed so her womanly parts were not exposed. And anyways, she very much doubted that a man like Jaqen would feel interest in...

"Oh!" she suddenly moaned. Yes, she moaned. Because Jaqen had passed the sponge painfully slowly over her left breast. She stirred in the water, and she opened her eyes just a bit. "Jaqen...?"

"Shh..." he hushed her. "A girl must not be afraid."

She wasn't. She was confused. Very confused. But again, she relaxed, and though she did not want to, she couldn't help but moan softly when the sponge brushed her breast again this time going in the opposite direction. The sponge had moved her hair out of the way, and know her breast was fully exposed, and her nipples hardened. Not only that, but she also felt an ache in her womanly parts.

She heard Jaqen's voice again very close to her ear.

"A girl has become very beautiful..." he was saying in an incredibly soft and deep voice, almost like a cat's purr. "A girl is no longer a girl, but a woman instead..."

He moved the sponge down to her waist, while his left hand entered the bathtub and touched the skin of her side, making Arya shiver again.

What is happening to me?

She didn't know, but whatever it was, it felt really good. She didn't want to stop Jaqen's wandering hand, however awkward it seemed. The man's hand travelled up the side of her body, sending
sparks all over her nerves, and then his fingers gently brushed the sensitive skin of her exposed breast...

...at the same time that the hand that held the sponge reached inside her thighs, where the place between her legs was pulsing furiously.

Practically without realizing it, Arya moaned even louder than before and her back arched, raising her upper body out of the water.

"Have you seen Lady Arya anywhere?" Gendry asked one of Winterfell's servants, who was the first person that he encountered in the hallways.

"Lady Arya is in her chambers" the servant said. Gendry started heading there without even blinking.

He needed to see Arya, he needed to see her now. He hadn't had the courage before, but there was something that he needed to tell her. He had been about to do so the first day that he set foot in Winterfell, but he had been too much of a coward. He needed to stop that, and tell her the truth. She thought he hadn't gone with her to the Twins because he had betrayed her, because he didn't care about her. Lies! It was time that Arya knew the real reasons.

It was all because of that Red Woman and what she had done years ago. That was the real reason, it was all his fault. His fault only... He felt like shit everytime that he looked at Arya precisely for that.

He knew where her room was, it was next to the room where he had stayed the first night that he was there. Arya had fallen asleep in his arms, and it had been perfect. He had never felt better in his life, and he wished he could go back to that day and make different decisions. He wanted to do everything right.

He hoped it wasn't already too late to try to at least make the right decisions now.

Arya quickly grabbed Jaqen's arm, stopping it's movement. Her eyes were wide open.

"What- what are you doing?"

Jaqen had his eyebrows raised.

"Don't be afraid, lovely girl."

"I'm not afraid!" she wasn't, but all that was just so strange. What was happening! Why was Jaqen behaving that way! Arya had heard that men did things like that to please woman, but who would want to please her?! And specially Jaqen?

"Then relax, and a man will do the rest."

She did as told, because she was loving the strange sensations that Jaqen's touch was giving her, and judging by Jaqen's expression, he was enjoying doing that. So she closed her eyes, and Jaqen's left hand squeezed her breast, while the fingers on his right hand caressed her between her legs. Arya didn't understand, why was that so pleasuring?!

"Seven bloody-"
"Does a girl want a piece of advice from a man?" Jaqen whispered in her ear.

"Yes..."

"A lovely girl must never let her guard down. Bad things could happen."

Before she could ask what that meant, Jaqen's right hand raised from the water and abandoned the bathtub, and a second later she felt the cold bite of steel on her neck. She opened her eyes. There was a dagger pressing against her skin.

Yes, he would tell Arya the truth, and she would understand him and everything would go back to the things they were before. Or not, maybe she could hate him and think he was an even bigger coward. Who cared?! Yes, he cared, the thought that Arya would hate him forever was killing him, but she deserved to know the truth! She needed to know his secret!

It was now or never.

He finally reached the hallway in which her room was. He could see the closed door. He took a deep breath, he was ready.

He approached the door...

I knew there was something going on here she thought bitterly, unable to move.

"What are you doing?" she hissed. Her voice was shaky, both because she was angry, and because pleasure was still lingering in that sensitive spot. Besides, Jaqen's hand was still on her breast.

"A man is teaching a girl a lesson" he simply said. "A man has no intention of harming a girl, but a girl could get in trouble with someone else."

She hit the water with her hand, splashing Jaqen full in the face, soaking him. Some water got in his eyes, so he pulled away from her and he took the knife away from her face, moment that she used to get out of the bathtub and to take Jaqen's knife away from his hand. He pointed at him with it, and looked at him defiantly.

"Maybe they will be the ones that get in trouble with me" she muttered.

Jaqen smiled, which made Arya realize that he was going to make a move. She was right; he grabbed the arm with which she held the knife, so she let go of it and the weapon fell to the floor. She pushed Jaqen with her free hand and he hit the bed with the back of his legs. He pulled Arya with him and turned around, so Arya ended up lying on her back on the bed, with Jaqen on top of her. Almost before even realizing this, she slammed her knee between his legs, and his face twisted with pain. Arya used the distraction to roll over, so Jaqen ended up with his back on the bed, and Arya was on top of him, victorious.

"See?" she said, breathless. "It is a man that could get in trouble, not a girl..."

Their faces were terribly close, merely inches apart, and their eyes were fixed on each other's. Arya started feeling funny again, because she had just realized what their situation was. Jaqen was lying on his back on her bed, and she was on top of him, with her legs at his sides, and she was completely naked. Jaqen was wearing normal clothes, breeches and a tunic, and she could feel him under the thin layers.
Her face turned dark red with embarrassment when she realized that what she was feeling directly underneath her (because she was sitting right on it) was his manhood. And it was hard. Very hard.

She turned an even darker shade of red, but she didn't take her eyes away from Jaqen's, which were filled with... Was that lust? No, it couldn't be. It definitelly wasn't.

She tried to move away, but Jaqen's arms moved quickly and he put them around her, pulling her closer and pressing her body completely against his. Arya felt her face burning.

She looked down at his lips. They were so close. Her own lips almost touched his...

... The door opened suddenly, and Arya turned her face towards the door, startled. She thought that she would have to start making up a excuse for her intimate position with Jaqen to her family, and she was about to start speaking when suddenly she froze. Much to her horror, it wasn't her family on the door.

It was Gendry.

The boy looked shocked at first. Then angered, furious, scary. Then he just looked like he had been sent to the Seventh Hell. It wasn't pain, or sadness in his eyes. It was misery what had installed itself in them.

"Gendry..." Arya started saying. Gendry just shook his head, muttering something under his breath, and then slammed the door shut.

Arya and Jaqen were left alone again in complete silence. A few seconds that seemed like an eternity passed before Arya was able to react.

"Gendry!" she exclaimed, but it sounded more like a cry.

She pushed herself away from Jaqen and raced to put some ckothes on her. She forgot about the smallclothes, pulling a pair of breeches (she usually wore those instead of dresses) and throwing a tunic over herself. She ran towards the door.

"Lovely girl..."

"Shut up" she snapped as she opened the door and ran into the hallway, chasing after Gendry.
Chapter 9

I've noticed that there are both Gendrya shippers and Jaqen/Arya shippers here... Things might get complicated, but I hope that in the end we'll all have our fair share of drama and romance and sexy times for our favorite couple of choice!

And now, let's go on with our daily dosis of stupid Gendry! Because no matter how much time passes, he'll always be a stupid bull-headed fool! (L)

And our dosis of hot Jaqen too!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He stormed out of the castle and ran to his smithy, which was at a side of the courtyard. He felt ad if his entire body was on fire, burning with the immense rage that he felt. He couldn't understand why he wanted to break through the skin in his chest with his hand and tear his heart out. Maybe it was to stop the pain.

He couldn't get the image out of his head. Arya, naked in all of her glory, on top of Jaqen H'ghar in her bed. It was something that he should not have seen, something that he did not want to see. If what Arya had wanted was to punish him, she had succeeded. She had, at last and for all, destroyed him.

Gendry grabbed the hammer and started hitting a sword that he was making and that rested in the anvil with all the strenght of his arm. It was the only way that he could think of to liberate his fury without harming anybody. If any man got in his way at that moment, he would hit the poor fool.

The hammer kept beating the sword until the steel was all ruined. Even when the sword broke, Gendry kept bringing the hammer down, and he screamed. He didn't know why he screamed, he just needed to. His face was covered in sweat, and the muscles in his armed hurt.

He threw the hammer away against a barrel with such force that the wood of the barrel broke, spilling water all over the place, but he didn't care. He buried his hands in his hair, pulling at it, and he closed his eyes. His mind was immediatly filled with the torturous image that he was so desperatedly trying to forget.

Just in how many ways was that girl going to tear his heart out?

He wanted to go back, interrupt them again dying whatever the fuck they were doing at that moment, and just start hitting Jaqen H'ghar face the same way that his hammer hit the swords that he forged.

"Gendry?"

He opened his eyes and turned around. Aeya wad in the entrance of the smithy, looking at him with a worried expression on her face. She was wearing the men's clothes that she liked to wear when she isn't have to dress like a girl, and her hair was all wet and tangled, falling around her face.
The instant that he saw her, Gendry knew that he wasn't angry at her. He was furious, yes, but he could never be furious with her. How could he hate such a small, beautiful and precious thing as she was to him? No, he was furious with Jaqen H'ghar, not with Arya. Not with Arya...

But he couldn't let her see that. He couldn't let her see that all that would take would be a single word from her, a single movement of her fingers, and she would crush him.

So he stared at her with eyes as cold as ice, and an expression as hard as stone.

"I'm sorry, m'lady" he said bitterly. "I did not mean to interrupt your... activities."

"You didn't interrupt anything" Arya said, and she sounded confused. Gendry scoffed.

"I'm sure that Jaqen H'ghar would disagree with that."

"Gendry-"

"Why did you come, m'lady? Surely you have more important things to do."

"Gendry, listen to me! What you think you saw, it was nothing! He tripped and I fell over him, nothing else!"

Gendry was shocked. Did she really expect him to believe that?! Did she really think he was that stupid! He was many things, he was a fool, but he wasn't an idiot. They hadn't 'tripped'. But what shocked even more was that Arya had actually chased after him to try to explain to him (by lying) what had happened. Arya hadn't spoken to him in a week, she had said that she hated him and didn't want to be near him ever again, and yet there she was. The lady was breaking her promise and she was trying to explain herself to the worthless bastard.

"Even if that was true, what was that man doing in your chambers while you were naked, m'lady?" he asked, clenching his jaw. He didn't realize that the water that had fallen off the barrel that he broke had already reached him and was soaking his boots.

Arya opened her mouth, but no words came off it. Instead, her face turned a deep shade of red, either because it had just sunk in to her that Gendry had seen her naked and she was extremely embarrassed, or because she wasn't telling all the truth, just as he believed.

"It is... not your business what he was doing there" she finally said, looking away from him, feeling uncomfortable, and she swallowed hard.

Gendry narrowed his eyes. "So I thought" he turned around and looked at the broken sword that rested on the anvil, and cursed under his breath. He would have to melt the steel again and make a new sword, giving him even more work than he already had. "If that isn't my business, then none of it is. You don't have to follow me here to lie and make up fake excuses. I won't say a word to your family or anyone else about your lover."

"Seven hells, stop it, Gendry!" Arya yelled, frustrated. He turned around to face her again, surprised by her sudden fit of anger and frustration. Arya was shooting daggers at him through her grey eyes. "Jaqen is not my lover! It was an accident! And yes, none of it is your business, but I wanted you to know anyways!"

"Well, I already know" he muttered. "Now you can go back to ignoring me and hating me."

She seemed indignant with the comment.
"I'm mad at you because you lied to me and said that you would go anywhere with me!"

"Yes, but not to see you killed! I couldn't bear that, Arya, don't you understand?!" he exclaimed, just as frustrated as she was, or even more.

"If I had been in danger of death, you could have protected me if you had been there, with me!" Arya shot back at him. "But you weren't there. You are a coward."

She turned around to leave, and Gendry watched her back as she moved towards the door of the smithy. He bit down on his lip so hard that he could taste blood, while he tried to decide... After all, he went to her room to tell her the truth, and in the end he didn't because of that twice-damned scene that he had seen. So now that he had the chance, he might as well just get it over with. He needed the truth to get out of his body and stop blackening his heart.

"Yes, I am a coward" he admitted. His voice didn't sound as strong as he had expected, but Arya heard the words anyways and stopped walking to look at him again. "And you are right, I could have protected you if I had been there with you. In fact, I didn't really lie, Arya, I would follow you anywhere. To the end of the world and to the Seventh Hell if necessary. I travelled all the way from Dorne to this place to be with you... But the Twins... The Twins appear in my nightmares every night, Arya... Every night since the Red Wedding..."

"That's stupid" Arya muttered. "Why would you have nightmares about the Red Wedding? You weren't there, you didn't know anyone who was there! You have never even been at the Twins!"

Gendry didn't respond right away. He needed to tell her the truth, and he would tell it to her from the beginning, so that she could understand.

"Remember the day that the Red Priestess came and took me away?" he asked softly.

There was a moment of silence. Then, slowly, Arya nodded her head.

"I tried to stop them..." she whispered. Her voice shook a little.

"I know you did" he said. He had seen Arya trying to pull the guards away from him, but they were too many, too big and too strong for the little girl that she had been at that moment. And no one could fight against Melissandre of Asshai. "She needed me, you know? Not any other person or bastard boy, she needed me."

Arya actually looked skeptic after he said that. No wonder, even Gendry himself knew that what he said sounded ridiculous! However, that didn't stop it from being the truth. Arya crossed her arms over her chest and raised an eyebrow while she looked at him.

"Oh, really? She needed you?" she asked mockingly, though there was also a trace of bitterness in her face and voice. "For what, keeping her bed warm at night?"

Gendry felt like a hand had smacked him full in the face. He thought that his ears were trying to fool him, but no! Arya had actually said that! Recalling that... -well, that event- filled his mind with unpleasant memories, and he felt disgusted. He quickly shook his head, and Arya's eyebrow raised even higher than before.

"Oh, come on, Gendry, you couldn't really believe that I wouldn't guess at some point, right? I'm not a child anymore, in case you haven't noticed. I'm not a fool. I know how men are, I've seen it enough. I even have my brother Robb, and Jon and Sandor Clegane as perfect examples that men can't keep their pants on even if their lives depend on it."
Gendry couldn't deny it, but he had never been more embarrassed in his entire life. Arya was right. It hadn't exactly been as she thought, but he couldn't just start spitting out excuses when he knew that in the end, it didn't matter. He passed his hand over his face, not knowing what to say, and ignoring the intense jealousy that was burning in Arya's grey eyes.

"You don't deny it then?"

He shook his head. "No, Arya, I don't..."

"Then with what right do you dare to reproach me about Jaqen, regardless of the fact that I wasn't doing anything with him?!"

"Because now I know that it's a mistake!" he exclaimed, taking his hand away from his face. "Because I know how much you regret it later! Because I don't want that for you, Arya! I don't want you to make the same mistake!!" that was a poor excuse for a reason. The real one was that he was jealous like a mad dog. But he wasn't about to say that out loud.

"You still haven't told me why in Seven Hells that witch needed you" she interrupted him, guiding the conversation away to another subject. Gendry breathed hard. He felt that what was coming was going to be much more difficult to say. He clenched his teeth and closed his hands into fists.

"Because she needed... She needed king's blood" he said. That wasn't the difficult part. It was still a part that he hated, but it wasn't what was giving him nightmares at night. He did not know how to prepare himself for that. While he dreaded that moment, Arya frowned.

"Oh, I remember you saying something like that, the night that you arrived..." she murmured, recalling those moments. "Yeah, but we were interrupted... well, you know why we were interrupted!" she blushed for a second, but she immediately went back to her serious expression. "King's blood? What do you mean by that? The blood of someone born in King's Landing?"

It would be easy to just nod his head and made her believe that. So simple... but it would be a lie. Gendry shook his head.

"No... The blood of the son of a king" he was looking at the floor while he said that, he was too embarrassed and ashamed. Sure, most would think that being the son of a king was much better than being the bastard of some bloody nameless bugger, but he did not share that opinion. He had never respected king Robert, he had thought him a drunk that was doing nothing for his kingdom. Not only that, but he also left Gendry's mother pregnant and then left her alone to care for a bastard child that he never even met. Gendry was disgusted.

Slowly, he raised his eyes to stare back into Arya's... The was even more confused than before, if that was possible.

"The blood of my father" Gendry finished saying.

Arya's expression changed. It went from confusion to recognition to astonishment and finally to disbelief. She backed away one step.

"Seven hells..." she whispered, her eyes wide with incredulity. Very slowly, she started shaking her head from side to side. "No, it can't be... But it can! How did I not see it before! You are exactly like him!"

Gendry snorted and he felt his blood stir when he heard that. "Like the king? I'm nothing like him. He was a drunkard."
"You are both equally stupid" Arya sneered.

There was a long moment of awkward silence in which they both just stared at each other. Slowly, Arya's amazement disappeared from her face. She had heard so many incredulous things in the past years that it was now very easy for her to accept the fact that Gendry was the former King's bastard son. She shrugged.

"So" she said, breaking the silence "why did that woman need your... king's blood?"

"To do magic" Gendry muttered. That caught Arya's attention, but she don't say anything; she was waiting for him to tell the whole story. Gendry felt that he was starting to get sick. He knew that once he said everything, there was no going back. Once he got the truth out of him, Arya might hate him forever.

_I can't lie to her forever_ a voice inside his head said. _For once in your life, you idiot, grow some balls. Tell her._

_I can't._

_Tell her!_

He took a big, long breath...

"To kill my uncle's enemies. The other kings."

Arya's head made a quick movement, backing away from him. From her expression, he could tell that she was understood what he had just said, but at the same time she didn't understand the _whole_ meaning of what he wanted to say. He had hoped that she would figure out everything without the need of making him tell her, because it would be easier. Saying the exact words out loud would be extra pain inflicted in both of them.

"She took some of my blood out with leeches. With three leeches" he said, recalling the painful and shameful event. "Then she threw them to the fire one by one. As she cashed the leeches into the fire, she said three names for each one. Robb Stark. Joffrey Baratheon. Balon Greyjoy." He made a very quit pause to organize his thoughts. He felt his heart beating furiously inside his throat. "I have no idea how Balon Greyjoy died, but I know he did. And Joffrey... well, we all know what happened to him. And... the Red Wedding..."

He heard Arya gasp. He wasn't entirely sure that it was a gasp. It sounded more like a cry... or like a silent scream. When he looked at her, he saw that she had covered her mouth with her hands, silencing herself. Still, her breath was fast and forced, and for a second Gendry was afraid that something bad was happening to her. He tried to take a step towards her, but Arya immediately backed away from him.

"Stay away from me!" she hissed, and he froze still. Arya wasn't looking at him anymore. She was keeping her eyes away from him, and she raised her hands in front of her to keep him away.

"Arya... Please..."

"No!" she was screaming now. "Stay away from me! I don't want you to come near me!"

"Arya, I swear I didn't..."

"Do you know what they did to my brother, Gendry?!" she yelled at him. She was mad with grief. Her face was red, and tears were running down her cheeks and soaking them. "I was there, I saw it!
You you want to know?! They cut his head off and they sewed his wolf's head in place, and paraded him around to celebrate! And I saw it, Gendry! And- and now you come here... saying that it was because they made magic with your blood?!

He had no idea what to say. I'm sorry, they tied me to a bed and some leeches sucked my blood and that got your family killed and I had no idea that would happen? It sounded pathetic. He wanted the earth to swallow him and make him disappear so that he could stop feeling that shame and guilt. But, more than anything, so that he could stop seeing Arya crying. Few things were so horrible in life, and her sobs were killing him.

And it's my fault.

Would he ever stop feeling miserable?

"The moment I found out what had happened to your brother... Few times have I felt worse in my life, Arya" he confessed. There was nothing that he could do in that moment, he could only talk. "I didn't care about the other two kings. I wouldn't have given it a second thought if it had been anyone else, either. But it was Robb Stark, your brother... And his wife, and your mother... It was your family, Arya" his voice was barely audible anymore, no more than a whisper. Still, he kept talking. He felt tears stinging in his eyes. "Your family... And it could have been you too, if you hadn't run away! And every time that I close my eyes, I see the leech falling into the fire and Melisandre saying the names. And I see the Twins, and... and I see the massacre in my head! I can see all of them, your brother, your mother... They haunt me, Arya..." he paused, taking a big breath to calm down. He felt like something was stuck inside his chest, and it felt like he was asphyxiating. "I didn't go to the Twins because... Because I was afraid... I was afraid to face their ghosts, my demons. I couldn't, Arya, I just couldn't."

He knew as soon as he said it that there wasn't anyone that was such a coward as he was. He had allowed the girl that meant more than anything else in the world to him to venture on a suicide mission without his support because he hadn't been able to face his fears... Mere ghosts of the past that existed only in his head.

Arya was weeping almost in silence now, and she had slowly backed against a corner of the smithy. Her back hit the wall, and she slid down to the floor. Once her body hit the floor and she was sitting cuddling in the corner, she started sobbing loudly again with her eyes closed and her face twisted with pain.. Gendry could swear that he heard his heart shatter in a thousand pieces. He hurried to kneel by her side, and he took her in his arms. As soon as he did that, Arya tried to pull away from him and she punched him in the chest repeatedly, trying to make him let go of her. But he didn't. Neither did he fight back. He just stood there as Arya punched him with less and less strength as seconds passed by, and he never stopped holding her because he knew that she needed it. She needed to be held and loved, and she needed to get all her pain out of her, because she hadn't done it before. So he allowed her to punch him until she finally stopped and had only the strength left to cry her eyes out. Even then, Gendry did not let go of her, and Arya wasn't trying to get away from him anymore. It was the other way around, actually. Arya threw herself against him and she clung to him as if her life depended on it, and she cried, and cried, and cried... the whole time with Gendry's arms around her, comforting her.

Suddenly she pushed him away, this time using all of her strength, and she finally made him let go of her. Arya stood up on her feet again, and took several quick steps to get away from him.

"You should have been dead" she hissed, and the sound made the hairs of the back of Gendry's neck stand on end. He had never heard such hate in anyone's voice ever before. And all of Arya's loathing was directed towards him at that moment. "You should have been dead, I should have let
you die before. I should have left you behind in Harrenhal, and none of this would have
happened..."

She couldn't be talking seriously... She couldn't, she wasn't. It was just grief speaking through her
mouth, she wasn't herself... Arya wouldn't want him to die, would she? No matter how mad she
was, she couldn't care that little about him!

"Arya, I never wanted any of this to happen" he swore, not knowing what else to say, but it wasn't
enough. "I would have never done anything to hurt you..."

"**BUT YOU DID!**" she screamed. "You did, you always do something! First it was other things,
and now this!"

"I know how you feel..."

"**NO, YOU DON'T!** You can't know how I feel! You never had a family! You never met your
father, you don't remember your mother, you never had any siblings!"

"I had siblings..."

"It's not the same! You never knew they were your half brothers and sisters, none of you did!
Blood doesn't make you family, Gendry, loyalty does!"

Then she turned around ran away, leaving the smithy in less time that it took him to realize that she
was gone. He tried to go after her, and when he got out of the smithy he shouted her name.

"Arya! **ARYA!**"

She didn't listen to him, didn't look back. She was already too far away and disappeared from his
sight, so he didn't follow her. He didn't think it was a good idea, Arya needed to be alone, she
needed to put her thoughts in order, and let what he had told her sink in...

She will never forgive me... Damn it, she will never forgive me!

Gendry started cursing and went back inside into the smithy, where he punched a wall. He felt a
throbbing pain in his hand after he did that, and bit his tongue when he refrained himself from
screaming.

You did the right thing, the voice in his head said. You did the right thing. Secrets are no good for
anyone.

Maybe he was right, but it didn't console him. There was only one thing of which he was almost
completely sure, and it was that he had lost Arya forever.

She cried. She ran. She didn't even know where she was going. All she knew was that she wanted
to get as far away from Gendry as possible.

She hated him. No, she didn't hate **him**. She hated that they had used him to do do such a horrible
thing, to perform magic to... to kill her family. Robb and her mother were dead because the Red
Woman had taken Gendry away, and later she had taken his blood.

It couldn't be possible. It couldn't be true. She didn't want it to be true. If they had used anyone
else, maybe it wouldn't have hurt so much, but Gendry... Why Gendry?!
Because he isn't lowborn. Because he is the son of a king.

In another occasion, she might have been happy for him, because at least now he knew where he came from. But she couldn't focus on anything else that wasn't the pain in her heart.

Yes, she didn't hate Gendry... But at that moment, she was furious with him. And the truth was she didn't want to ever see him again. Never. She just couldn't. Everytime that she did she would remember the horrible truth behind his abducting.

I could ask Bran to kick him out...

No, she couldn't. She wouldn't kick him out.

She was having trouble breathing, and her legs ached from running away from the smithy. She looked being her and was relieved to see that Gendry was nowhere to be found. She pressed her bak against the granite wall and started sobbing harder than she had done in the presence of the boy. Now that she was alone, there was nothing stopping her from letting her express her real feelings.

She slides down the wall until she was sitting on the cold hard floor, and she hugged her legs against her. She buried her face in her knees, which muffled the sound of her cries and sobs. She wanted to scream. And most of all, she wanted to kill the Red Woman just as much as she had wanted to kill Walder Frey and succeeded. Who was going to stop her from getting a full revenge?

She heard steps near where she was, and as the steps got closer, they also got quicker. Whoever those steps belonged to, he had for sure seen Arya and was hurrying to check on her. She was ready to dismiss whoever it was, she didn't want to be with anyone...

"Lovely girl?"

She raised her head from her knees and saw Jaqen kneeling in front of her. He looked worried. Arya thought that she probably looked hideous, with her red swollen and wet face covered in tears, and unable to stop sobbing...

Jaqen out a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"Lovely girl, are you alright?"

She wanted to say yes, but she ended up telling the truth and shaking her head from side to side. Jaqen's expression darkened.

"Did the stupid fool mistreat you? Did the imbecile harm you?" he asked with an ice-cold voice. Again, Arya shook her head. "Is a girl hurt?"

"No..."

"Then why is a lovely girl crying?" he asked, more softly now. He wiped some tears away from her face with his finger.

"Ja-Jaqen... Do-does dark ma-magic e-exist...?" she asked between sobs. She was unable to properly pronounce anything.

Jaqen frowned, confused by her question, but he answered. "Of course it does... A man has seen it many times. Why is a girl asking?"
Arya didn't respond, she couldn't. Her lips were trembling, and her shoulders were shaking too much. She tried to stop herself from moaning, but she couldn't. She had never felt more defenseless in her life.

Surprisingly, Jaqen leaned forward and took her in his arms, embracing and comforting her. Arya felt a bit safer... Just like she had when Gendry had pressed her against his chest. Despite of everything, for a moment the bull had made her feel warm, and safe, and loved.

Now it was Jaqen pulling her in his embrace, and she didn't push him away.

"Tell a man what he can do to make a lovely girl feel better, and a man will do it."

She had an answer for that request. It was the most difficult and perhaps stupid decision of her life, but she had to do it.

"Take me away" she sobbed, her voice half muffled against his chest. "Take me away from Winterfell. Take me away from here, far, very far away... I don't want to be here anymore."

At first there was silence, except from the noise that he cries made. She thought that Jaqen was going to tell her that she was crazy and what she was asking for was stupid, when suddenly, and without previous notice, Jaqen sneaked one arm behind her back and the other one behind her knees, and he stood up. Arya put her arms around his neck, and Jaqen started walking away while carrying her towards the castle's gates.

Chapter End Notes

I hate myself right now...

Also, I have to put this as a response to a guest review. I know perfectly fine the reason of the Red Wedding, but Gendry feels guilty. That's the thing in this fic, because I want it to be that way. And I have read the books! I just feel like following the show and Melissandre's logic. Period. So I hope that's clear, I know that the Red Wedding happened because Robb was an idiot and the Freys were little shits! Not because of the leeches... BUT GENDRY DOESN'T KNOW THAT! And now Arya is very mad, because he reminded her of the murder of her family, which is not cool!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

I was planning on making this chapter waaaaay longer... but then I liked it like this! ^^
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Gendry."

Gendry turned around as soon as he heard someone calling his name. He was surprised to see that it was Jon Targaryen, who was being accompanied by Sandor Clegane. Both lords walked towards him crossing the hallway with quick steps. Gendry wondered what they wanted from him, but judging by the expression on their faces it wasn't something very good... Maybe they had already found out what he had told Arya. It had been hours since that awful conversation between them happened, and he was really regretting it. He wasn't feeling any better than he did before, and Arya was more upset than she ever was.

However, Jon and Sandor weren't there to get an explanation of his conversation with Arya.

"Yes?"

"Have you seen Jaqen H'ghar anywhere?" Jon asked him. "We can't find him."

Gendry frowned. He had seen Jaqen H'ghar, earlier in Arya's chambers... But he wasn't about to mention that to Arya's family. He couldn't stop the look of infinite hatred that appeared in his face, but neither Jon nor Sandor seemed surprised about it. It was already well known in Winterfell that Gendry and the braavosi didn't get along very well.

He shook his head.

"No, I haven't seen him. Why?"

"He had some matters to discuss with him. We need someone with his skill" Sandor said.

Again, Gendry shook his head, slower this time.

"Well, no, I haven't seen him... I dint know where he might be either" that last part was true, at least.

"Oh, well, no one seems to have seen him all day..." Jon murmured. He and Sandor were about to turn around to leave when someone else made her appearance in the hallway.

"Has anyone seen my sister?" Sansa Stark asked. Her voice was covered with a layer of concern. She took her husband's hands when she reached him and she looked up at him in hopes that he would say yes, but he shook his head.

"No, little bird... I haven't seen the wolf-girl anywhere."

"Maybe she's in her chambers?" Jon suggested.
"No, I have looked for her everywhere. She's nowhere, it's like she has vanished."

That called Gendry's attention. Arya was always out there doing something, running around Winterfell getting into trouble, and there was always someone who had saw her somewhere. And now no one knew where she was? That was very unusual.

*She must be hiding*, he thought. *It was the most logical reason. She was very upset after our conversation...*

He didn't mention any of that to any of the three lords and lady in front of him. The least that he needed at that moment was to talk about that. However, he was worried about Arya.

*Where are you, damn you!*

"Maybe she went out for a ride? She loves to do that" Sandor Clegane rasped. His wife shook her head again.

"I already asked the guards if they saw her, but they said that only one person crossed the gates. Jaqen H'ghar."

Jon almost gasped, Sandor grunted and Gendry paled. Sansa looked to be confused, and frowned when her husband started cursing and swearing.

"My love, what is wrong?"

"He took her! That fucking idiot took your sister away, that is what's wrong!" he exclaimed, infuriated. *"How dare he...?!"*

"Do you really think he abducted her?" Jon asked, apparently in a bit of shock, same as Sansa.

"What else if not?!"

"Why would he want to kidnap her?! They are friends, he has been protecting her for a long time!" Sansa exclaimed in disbelief. Sandor snorted.

"Well, that doesn't seem to be the case anymore, does it?" he snarled. "Jon, tell Bran to call on his guards, we need to leave now if you want to find your cousin."

Jon nodded, and turned around to do what the man had told him. Sandor stayed where he was to calm Sansa down; his young wife was very distressed by the thought that maybe her little sister was in danger. Gendry, on the other hand, was paralyzed and had no idea what to do. He knew that he had to tell them what had happened, but he was struggling with his own thoughts.

*What have I done?!*

"He didn't kidnap her..." he managed to say. He say it loud enough that Jon heard him and turned around and stared at him with suspicious eyes. Sansa and Sandor were also confused. "She went with him..."

"What are you saying, boy?"

"I'm saying that you are wrong!" he exclaimed. "He didn't kidnap her, she... She ran away with him!"

In less than a second he was slammed against the wall, with Jon furiously grabbing him by his tunic and choking him. Gendry didn't even have time to react or fight back.
"What are you insinuating?! That my little sister is a common whore that runs away with any man?!
" the former member of the Night's Watch yelled right in front of Gendry's face, infuriated.

"Jon, let him go!" Sansa commanded. "Let him go, you're choking him, Jon!"

Jon didn't listen to her, so Sandor had to step forward and grab Jon's shoulder and pull the man away from the smith. Once Gendry was free of Jon, he fell to the floor on his knees and took several long and deep breaths to get back the air that he had lost. Sandor was still grabbing Jon to stop him from attacking Gendry again.

"Jon, calm down!" Sansa exclaimed, and then she turned her attention to Gendry. He was already back on his feet, avoiding the eyes of the lord of Dragonstone. "Gendry, what did you mean? Why did you say that Arya had run away with Jaqen H'ghar?"

"Because she's mad at me" he confessed. He recievied three confused looks in return, so he had no choice but explain further what had happened. He told them everything that he had told Arya, how she had reacted, how she had run away and dissapeared from his sight. He was afraid that, after revealing to Sansa Stark and Jon Targaryen what he believed to be the reason that had led to the Red Wedding, no one would stop them from tearing him to pieces. It was their right, wasn't it? But that was not what happened after he finished giving his explanation.

Sansa and Jon remained silent and shocked. Gendry wasn't really able to read in their faces what they were thinking. Sandor, however, was getting red in the face and seemed to be about to explode at any second. Which he did.

"YOU BLOODY BUGGERING IDIOT!"

He had been execting another kind of reaction, another kind of insults, and possibly a punch or two in the face. He was grateful that that didn't happen, but he was confused when, instead of hate in everyone's eyes, he saw frustration and annoyance. Sansa rolled her eyes and sighed, Jon shook his head from side to side, and Sandor was shooting daggers at him through his grey eyes.

"What-?" Gendry mumbled.

"You really think that a bit of magic caused all that? That treason was planned months before it happened! It was planned before your Red Witch attempted to use her fire tricks to win the throne for Stannis!"

"How do you know that?" Gendry asked.

"When we defeated lord Bolton, we went to the Dreadfort" Sansa said, speaking more calmy than her husband. "There we found the messages that lord Tywin and lord Bolton had been exchanging, planning everything with lord Walder since Robb's wedding. It couldn't be prevented."

"The Red Wedding was caused in part by Robb's foolishness" Jon hissed. "And it was all the product of treason, not magic. And now Arya is the-gods-know-where with a dangerous man, and they have been gone for hours!"

"All because of your stupidity!" Sandor barked.

"Enough!" Sansa silenced both of them. "Arguing is not going to help us find my sister, we have to leave now before she's too far away and it's too late!"

Everyone agreed with her. When Sansa started walking down the hallway, the men went to follow her, but Sandor pointed a menacing finger towards Gendry, making him freeze were he was
standing.

"You are staying here" Sandor rasped. "You've caused enough fucking trouble already."

Gendry closed his hands into fists, but there was no point in quarreling with a man twice as big and fierce than him, so he just lowered his head as a sign that he understood. Sandor walked away then, leaving him alone in the dark hallway. Gendry waited until he couldn't hear footsteps anymore.

"Like hell" he angrily muttered before walking away from that place too, going in the opposite direction as the others. He went out of the castle through a different gate, and stayed hidden where he could not be seen. He wasn't going to obey Sandor Clegane's order of staying there arms-crossed while Arya was out there.

He watched as Sansa Stark, Jon Targaryen and Sandor Clegane mounted their horses and left the castle walls followed by a dozen knights in a search party for Arya. Gendry waited five minutes after they left, to make sure they didn't return and were already far away. Then, when those five minutes passed, he sneaked out of his hissing place and towards the stables, where his horse was. He quickly out the saddle and reigns on the animal and mounted it, leaving the stables.

Then, suddenly and without warning, thunder struck the grey sky and it started raining furiously. Gendry was immediatly soaked from head to toe, and blinked several times when rain drops entered his eyes. Thunder struck again, making his horse uneasy, and he had to make a big effort to control the animal.

"Easy, boy!" he exclaimed when the horse raised itself on its back legs.

Around Gendry, many people that had been standing in the courtyard ran to the castle's interior to seek refuge from the heavy rain and the thunderstorm. The sky was darkening fast, illuminated every few seconds by the terrible lightning. Gendry didn't allow himself to be intimidated by the storm. He hadn't been caught in the middle of many powerful ones, but he had never feared them; they felt natural to him. The lightning, the rain, the strong wind...

However, a particularly loud thunder made him realize that he had no time to waste. Arya was out there in the middle if that storm, and he needed to bring her back home, to safety. He urged the horse to move, but the animal refused stubbornly. That was when Gendry realized that the horse was scared, but not by the lightning, but by the huge direwolf that was in front of him.

Gendry hadn't seen her before. Nymeria was just sitting there, without caring about the mud and the rain that soaked her fur. The direwolf was looking directly into Gendry's eyes, as if questioning him... Gendry dismounted his horse, and carefully, very carefully, he approached Arya's direwolf. He extended his hand towards the majestic animal (trying to shake away the fear of losing that hand) and got close enough to it to caress its head. Nymeria didn't growl or try to bite him; she trusted and accepted him. It made Gendry breathe more calmly.

"Nymeria" he whispered "Arya is out there, somewhere... She got very mad at me, you know? I need to find her, to tell her that I'm sorry... that she means more than anything in the world to me. I didn't realize it before, but I need to keep her safe."

He wasn't sure if the direwolf could understand him, but it always seemed to understand Arya, so it was worth the try. Gendry locked his blue eyes on Nymeria's intelligent wolf eyes. He had heard stories about the Starks, about how they could warg into their pets and see through their eyes. Was Arya seeing him right now through Nymeria's eyes? Gendry did not know. Slowly, he put his arm around the direwolf, almost hugging the creature. He rested his head on top of Nymeria's, and just then, he confessed his deepest secret, and also his biggest truth.
"I love her."

When he whispered those words, his voice was almost muted by the rain and the thunder, but he didn't care. What mattered was that he had finally said them out loud.

The direwolf made a strange whimpering sound in the back of its throat and moved its head. Gendry let go of Nymeria and looked at her in the eyes, and was amazed when he saw that the creature had understood him! What other explanation could there be for the way in which Nymeria's eyes were bright with comprehension?

"I need to find her, Nymeria" Gendry whispered with hope, caressing its wet fur. "You have to help me find her, and I swear that, unless she asks me to, I will never let her go again. I promise."

Nymeria threw her head back suddenly and howled. It startled Gendry at first, but then he laughed. She stood back up on his feet and ran back to mount his horse again. He grabbed the reigns and followed Nymeria when the direwolf started running towards the gates, which had been left open. He galloped away from Winterfell without looking back, and vowing to himself never to return until he had found Arya.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked it! I'll try to post the next chapter tomorrow, now that my midterms are going to be finally over! I'll really try.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Hi! I planned to update earlier, but there wasn't time :S ok, so new chapter!

There might be grammar mistakes, typos, words that don't make sense... Blame my
IPod and autocorrect! If there are any mistakes, I didn't see them (thought I did notice
that this thing keeps changing "direwolf" to "firewood"!) If there are, then let me
know and I'll change them. I'm currently changing other chapter in which they told me
there were mistakes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The storm didn't recede. Instead, it just kept growing stronger and fiercer. The sound of the wind
was deafening, and rain fell with such strength that it had already flooded the ground beneath them.
Sansa, Sandor and Jon had been searching for Arya for hours, riding south. The knights had broken
into four groups, and each on of them went in different directions: north, south, west and east.
Sansa, Sandor and Jon were riding south, and for now they had been unsuccessful in their mission.
As minutes passed, things just seemed to be getting worse. They had no idea in which direction
Jaqen and Arya had escaped, and the storm didn't allow them to see anything. They felt that they
were riding towards a dead end.

"Arya!" Sansa was yelling, trying to be heard over the noise of the storm. "ARYA!"

"Aryaaa!" Jon called the girl, hoping to get a response.

"Fucking hells, wolf-bitch!" Sandor barked, feeling in an even darker mood as time passed and he
was even more tired and annoyed. "When we find you, I'm gonna gut you for running away
today!"

He didn't mean it, of course, but he was really annoyed.

They couldn't hear or see anything. They heard the tree branches cracking and they feared that one
would fall on them. Sansa wasn't worried about herself, but Jon and Sandor did feel afraid for her.

"Sansa, we have to go back!" Jon shouted. "It's very dangerous!"

"No! We need to find Arya first!" she shouted back. "I'm not going back home without my sister!"

"I'll go to the seventh hell before I let you stay one more minute in this fucking storm and get
killed, little bird!" Sandor yelled, angry. He wa really worried about his wife, and he didn't want
any harm coming to her. As much as he wanted to save his goodsister, he had to think about Sansa
first. She was more important than anything else to him, and right now she was in danger. "We'll
come back to look for her when the storm is gone, I promise!"

"By then, it might be too late!" Sansa replied, looking around desperate, but there was nothing
there.

"Please, Sansa!" her husband begged. "The braavosi will be taking care of Arya! Now I need to
take care of you!"
Sansa didn't say anything, she just sighed, and nodded, agreeing with Sandor to return to Winterfell for safety during the storm. Just as she was turning her horse around, lightning illuminated the sky, allowing to see a figure that passed galloping at great speed next to her, splashing water everywhere and following a great direwolf.

"Gendry!" Jon shouted at the young man, recognizing him as he galloped away.

"Where are you going, you son of a whore?!"

Gendry ignored them. He just kept urging his horse to run faster behind Nymeria, who was leading him towards the south. He was completely ignoring the raging storm around him, he wasn't frightened by the powerful thunder omnirange the furious wind and rain that blinded him. The only thought was that Arya was out there, and she could get hurt in this weather. In spirit, she was incredibly tough, but she was also a fragile little being that could not stand against a storm like that. The sooner that Gendry found her, the safer that she would be. He was worried sick about her.

*Where are you, damn you Arya, where are you...?* Gendry muttered in his mind. He couldn't see a thing around him but he could see Nymeria, and he was just following her without questioning the direwolf. He had long ago left behind Sansa, Jon and Sandor, and now he was almost completely alone, save for Nymeria.

"Arya!" he shouted, hoping to be heard over the wind. "ARYA!"

The wasn't a reply. How far away was she? Had Jaqen H'ghar hurried a lot to get both him and the young lady as far away from Winterfell as possible? Where they still alive? Gendry didn't even want to consider the alternative to the last question. He was going to find Arya, he was going to find her...

"**ARYA!**" his voice got lost in the storm.

Far away from there, Arya Stark rode in the back of a horse with her arms richly grapped around Jaqen H'ghar, trying very hard not to fall off. She wasn't afraid of the storm, or at least not a lot, but she had kept her eyes shut since the lightning started to get more intense, and flinched at the sound of the thunder that made her feel like her ears were going to explode. She pressed the side of her face against Jaqen's back, who hadn't said anything since they left Winterfell. Was he regretting leaving the castle and adventuring into that dangerous weather?

As if he had read her mind, Jaqen suddenly spoke.

"Are you alright, lovely girl?!!" he asked, loud enough to be heard over the storm.

"Yes!" she said without hesitation. She wasn't afraid, she really wasn't.

"You haven't changed your mind?!!" he kept asking.

"Do you want to go back?" she shot back. Maybe he was really regretting it after all.

"No!" he said then. "A man will only do what a girl tells him to do! What do you want me to do, lovely girl?!!"

"I don't want to go back" she whispered. Somehow, he heard her, and he kept galloping.

She wasn't sure where he was taking her. She knew that they were going south, but they hadn't taken the kingsroad. No one would have it easy to find them that way. They were galloping
through the woods, and the trees were shaking around them, moved by the wind and whipped by the rain. Arya was a little afraid that one of the trees might fall on them a crush them. She had seen many trees that had been torn out of the ground by strong winds like those. She held on tigger to Jaqen, almost crushing the breath out of him.

"Don't be afraid!" she heard Jaqen exclaim. His voice seemed to come from far, far away... "A girl must not be afraid while a man is with her!"

She knew that. Nothing was going to happen to her. So she relaxed, and just let herself be carried away on top of the galloping horse through the storm and the woods. She didn't really know how much time had passed, or how far away they were. Had people already realized that she was gone? Were they looking for her? Was Gendry looking for her?

She surprised herself with that last question. What did she care if Gendry was looking for her? She hoped he wasn't, and if he was, then she didn't want him to ever find her. She didn't want to ever see him again. She regreted not having brought Needle with her, so that she could stick the stupid bull with the pointy end if she ever saw him again.

Thunder struck right in the sky over their heads, illuminating everything for moment in a terrifying way. The sound was deafening. Arya screamed, actually frightened this time, and Jaqen's horse stopped galloping and raised itself over it's back legs, throwing Arya off it's back and into the wet and muddy ground. She felt the air leaving her lungs when her back hit the ground, and the mud stained her clothes and hair, but the heavy rain washed it away when she stood up. Jaqen managed to control his horse quickly, and he extended his hand towards Arya to help her up again. However, before she could even hold his hand, yet another thunder struck again, and this time it hit one of the trees in front of them. The tree was immediately set on fire and it broke in half, falling in front of them, blocking the path.

Jaqen's horse went crazy with fear. Jaqen held the reins tightly, trying to control the animal and calm it down.

"Bloody beast!" Arya heard the man muttering before he fell off the horse as well. The animal acted like if it was possessed, and ran off in fear of the fire as soon as it found itself free of its master.

Arya though that maybe Jaqen would run after the horse, but he didn't; he just let the animal go and run for it's life. Jaqen closed the distance between himself and Arya with two quick steps, and grabbed her arm.

"Come, lovely girl. It's not safe here" because he was closer to her now than he had been before, he didn't need to shout anymore, and Arya heard him perfectly fine.

She looked up at the dark sky for a second before following Jaqen, who was walking away from the fallen tree that had been set on fire. Arya still had no idea where they were heading, but she knew that being out there in the open right at that moment was extremelly dangerous. They needed to find a safe place to hide from the storm, and quickly, before another tree fell on them or lightning hit them. Arya didn't want either one of those two things to happen to them.

"Where are we going?!" she asked, trying to keep up with Jaqen. The man was still holding her arm and was almost running, and he was too fast. "We could look for an inn!"

"The closest inn is in the kingsroad, lovely girl, and we have kept a big distance from it. We will be dead before reaching it in this weather."
"But we don't know where we are going?!" she exclaimed. She didn't want to panic, but she was starting to.

Jaqen turned his head around to look at her. The rain had soaked him too from head to toe and his hair was all over his face. His eyes were dead serious, but a small smile appeared on his mouth.

"A man does" he said then, urging Arya to move faster. She did, and didn't ask any more questions. She just followed him, and before long, they found a little cave big enough to fit them both in if they knelt down on the ground. It wasn't exactly a cave, but more like a hole in the ground made by rocks, dirt and lifted tree roots. However, it was enough for them, as long as it kept them from further soaking under the rain.

"There" Jaqen said, pointing with his finger to the small refuge. Both him and Arya immediatly ran towards the place, hurrying inside it. It was a relief to stop being constantly hit by the heavy rain drops.

It wasn't very comfortable inside that place. It was terribly small, and Jaqen had to kneel and bend his head down a little to completely fit inside it. Arya was smaller than him and didn't have to bend her head, but she also had to kneel down. Both their backs hit the wall made of dirt, rocks and roots, so they couldn't get farer away from the rain that fell down in the open, but at least the place was wide enough from side to side so that they could lay down to rest. They didn't do that yet, however. Jaqen's eyes were moving around, trying to find any dangers that could be hissing out in the open in front of them. Arya was at his side, hugging herself tightly. She was freezing and couldn't stop trembling. She hadn't bothered to grab more clothes when she ran away from Winterfell, and she just had a tunic, breeches and a pair of boots on, nothing more. Jaqen seemed to notice that when he heard her teeth were chattering.

He removed the coat he was wearing and threw it over her shoulders. Arya felt instantly better and warmer. It might be because the coat still had Jaqen's warmth on.

"Thank you" she murmured. She noticed then that Jaqen was wearing only a tunic too. "But now you are going to be cold..."

Jaqen shook his head. "A man will be fine. But a man wants to know what happened to the lovely girl back in the castle. What did the boy do?"

Arya didn't want to talk about it, but she figured that since Jaqen hadn't questioned her before and was stuck in the middle of that terrible storm because of her, because she had asked him to take her away. She knew that he deserved an explanation, but she couldn't bring herself to talk about it yet. She was still in shock.

Jaqen understood, and he sighed.

"It's alright... You can tell a man in the morrow, when things are better" he said, gently placing his hand on her shoulder in a comforting way.

"I'll tell you" she whispered. "I just need to rest."

"A man knows. Sleep, girl. A man will keep watch for the night."

"Dont let them find me" she quickly said. He eyed her suspiciously.

"A man won't let that happen" he said, and Arya knew that he wasn't lying. He had promised her that he would do whatever she wanted, and she knew perfectly fine that he always kept his promises. "But if you change your mind, a girl needs only ask..."
"I want to leave Westeros" she suddenly blurted out.

She didn't know where that had come from. She had just said it. She didn't know why she had said it, but she knew that at that moment that was the only thing that she wanted.

Jaqen looked to be alarmed. He hadn't expected her to say that, and now he was frowning. He stared down at her trying to find out what was on her mind, but he couldn't. He gave up, and he sighed yet another time.

"As a man said before, a girl need only ask. A girl commands, and a man will obey."

Good, she thought. She felt calmer then, knowing that they would really go very far away, as promised. She didn't really want to leave Winterfell, she didn't want to leave her family. But her almost irrational mind could only think of Gendry, and she wanted to be as far away from Gendry as possible. Going away to Essos would fix that.

It started raining even more heavily that before. The noise it made was extremely loud, and the rain was coming inside their little refuge, keeping them from being dry and warm.

A cold chill ran through Arya's body, and she shivered. The coat wasn't enough to keep her warm; if she continued like that, and soaked as she was, she was going to catch a cold and that would be bad.

Suddenly, Jaqen's arms were around her, and his hands were rubbing her back to keep her warm. Arya silently thanked the gesture, and rested her head against Jaqen's chest. In a minute or so, she was warm enough to stop shivering, though she was still soaked to her bones.

"Thanks" she whispered.

"Is that better?" Jaqen asked. Arya nodded, and pulled away from him. He let his hands go of her.

There was an awkward silence between them then. The only thing that could be heard was the wind, the rain, the movement of the trees... Arya stared straight into Jaqen's eyes. She felt something in the pit of her stomach then, and she didn't know whether to move her sight away from him or not.

She did look away, when an specially powerful lightning illuminated everything, making everything as light as in plain daylight. Both Arya and Jaqen took their eyes away from each other and looked outside from their small refuge for a second, observing everything while it was still illuminated. A few seconds later, when it was dark again, they heard the thunder. They looked into each other's eyes then, just for an instant...

She didn't know how or why she did it. She just knew that suddenly, she was kissing Jaqen.

She hadn't even planned it, and she was just as surprised as he was. She had felt the impulse, and she had followed her instinct. She pressed her mouth against Jaqen's, feeling the soft touch of his lips against hers. It was a very strange feeling, yet pleasant. Her lips were pressed hard against his, and it was an impulsive kiss, yet it was innocent. Jaqen seemed to be startled at first, completely taken by surprise, but he didn't pull away. He just stood there until Arya separated her mouth from his and pulled back.

She stared directly into his eyes while she felt that she was blushing furiously. She was afraid that what she had just done was a stupid, foolish thing. Why had she kissed him! Obviously Jaqen couldn't like her... Surely she was mad at her now, and he would leave her alone in the middle of that awful storm...
Another lightning and thunder. Before it was over, Arya and Jaqen found themselves in each other's arms, kissing passionately. Arya was kissing him, and he was kissing her back!

Arya couldn't think of anything more than what was happening right there at that moment. There wasn't anything soft or innocent of gentle about that kiss; that kiss was fierce and desperate. Jaqen's arms held her tightly, and she moaned against his mouth. Her lips parted, and the kiss deepened, becoming something wet and exciting. Their tongues danced in their mouths, exploring each other. Jaqen buried his fingers in Arya's hair, while her arms were around his neck, and she pressed herself against him. All that was something completely new and unexplored for her. She felt an infinity of sensations exploding deep within herself, making her skin burn with... desire?

Arya leaned more against Jaqen, making the kiss harder, and the man feverishly kissed her in return. Arya heard him moaning in the back of his throat... No, she didn't hear him, she felt him. Then the kiss became softer, and as quickly as it had started it ended. Arya and Jaqen separated from each other and they stared into their eyes. Arya's face was burning, and Jaqen was pacing. It was so strange for Arya to see the man like that... he was always so calm in every occasion, yet here he looked like he had no idea how to act, or what to say, or even could put his thought in order. Arya felt the same way. Her lips were sore and swollen (just like Jaqen's!) and she felt like there was a hurricane inside her. What had just happened? Why had it happened?

"Jaqen..." she started saying, but he gently hushed her. His hands were still on her hip and tangled in her long wet locks, were they had stayed during the whole time they were kissing, instead of roaming around her body like she knew that other men did to women. She realized that Jaqen had been very... respectful. She didn't exactly know what to make of it, but she felt comfortable.

Jaqen took his hand away from her hair and caressed her face with his fingers. It was strange that an assassin's hand could have such a gentle touch. He was still breathing hard, but he had manage to regain a but of control over himself.

"A girl has had a long day" he said then. "A girl should rest."

"But..."

"Go to sleep" he insisted, but not harshly. "A girl needs all her strenght for tomorrow."

"And what about you?" she asked.

"A man will keep watch, to make sure no enemies approach a girl in the dark" he said with a small smile on his lips. He leaned forward and Arya thought that he was goig to kiss her again, but he didn't, not exactly. He placed a soft kiss on her hair, and then he took his hands away from her hip and face.

Arya laid down on the cold and wet ground. It wasn't very comfortable, but she had gotten used to sleeping in worse places during the war. Besides, she was incredibly tired, and she just wanted some sleep. Too many things had happened that day. She closed her eyes, and she heard Jaqen making himself more comfortable in the little space that they were in, sitting in a proper position to keep watch. Then, with the sound of the outing rain and the now more distant thunder, Arya slowly fell into a deep sleep full of dreams.

Gendry was in every single one of them.

Chapter End Notes
My Gendrya feels are HURTING!
Chapter 12

She was standing alone in darkness... She couldn't see anything or anyone around her, but she could hear the sound of a raging battle somewhere in the distance... She turned her head in every direction, trying to see what was happening, but it was useless, everything was so dark...

The noise of the battle grew in intensity, becoming almost deafening. She heard men screaming, swords clashing, bows shooting arrows...

She heard someone shout her name then. She looked in the direction where the voice came from, right in front of her in the darkness. In the distance, a little spot of light had appeared and was slowly growing, shedding a bit of light in that absolute darkness. She narrowed her eyes, blinded by that sudden faint luminosity, and she saw the contour of a person running towards her, sword in hand. The stranger shouted her name again, as he came closer and the light grew stronger. Arya saw that she was in some kind of tunnel, a place completely unknown to her, but she ignored that. The man came even closer, and shouted her name again.

"Gendry...?"

She could see him now; it was definitely Gendry, running towards her sword in hand. He finally reached her, and their eyes met. Gendry stopped running and just stood there, staring at her. Arya could see the relief in his blue eyes, and a small smile appearing in his lips.

"Arya..." he whispered.

Then he dropped his sword, and fell on his knees. He looked at her one last time before falling facedown on the cold hard ground of that tunnel, and then Arya could see the arrows on his back. She saw the pool of blood that was forming around Gendry's dead body and quickly expanding over the ground, reaching her.

Then the darkness covered everything again.

"GENDRY!"

She woke up with a start. She was panting furiously, and she was covered in cold sweat. She was also shaking.

She took several deep breaths to calm herself down, and when she was finally breathing a little bit more slowly, she sat up and looked around. She wasn't in that strange tunnel anymore, but in the little cave in which she had fallen asleep last night to hide from the rain. The ground was dry now, and the sun was up, illuminating everything with it's bright light.

She rubbed her eyes to feel more awake, and thought of the nightmare that she had just had. What the hell had that been about? It had felt so strange, so... real... the noise of battle, the tunnel, Gendry's voice... Gendry's death!

But what felt more real than anything else was the deep pain that she felt in her heart after seeing him drop dead with the arrows on his back. She could still feel that pain in her chest, it was like a hand had grabbed her heart and was pitilessly crushing it.

She couldn't find any sense to that dream. What had it meant? Why had she dreamed that? Why was she feeling like that upon seeing Gendry in that nightmare? It all felt so strange...
She quickly shook her head to rid herself of the images from the nightmare that still haunted her mind. She opened her eyes and blinked several times until she was used to the bright sunlight, and then she crawled out of the little refuge. She stood up on her feet and shook the dirt off her clothes. That's when she realized that she was still wearing Jaqen's coat.

Jaqen. She had forgotten all about him, not remembering him for even a second since she woke up from the nightmare. She turned around to look back at the little refuge, and she saw that Jaqen wasn't there. He wasn't anywhere around there. Arya frowned when she saw that she was completely alone.

"Jaqen?" she called out loud, searching for the man, but she got no response.

Had he left in the middle of the night and abandoned her? Had he gone back to Winterfell to tell everybody where she was? Or maybe he had just left on his own, no longer wanting to help her. Maybe he had grown tired of it all, of her, of Westeros...

She was about to start cursing out loud when she heard the sound of horses' hooves hitting the soft ground, approaching the place where she was. The first thing that came to her mind was "hide!", but when she was about to do that she saw Jaqen H'ghar walking towards her between the trees, holding the reigns of two horses in his hands.

"A man thought that a girl would still be asleep when he returned" he said when he was close enough so that she could hear him.

"Where were you?" she asked.

"A man walked towards the nearest inn. A man got horses for a girl and himself."

"You didn't buy them" she said, looking at the two horses. They were good horses, worth a lot of coin, and neither she nor Jaqen had taken that amount of gold or silver with them when they left Winterfell. "You stole them."

Jaqen shrugged. "A man never said he bought them, he said he got them. How a man did it is not important."

Arya didn't care either that he had stole the horses, but she didn't some fat lord chasing them around the North to get their heads for stealing his horses in a rainy night.

"What happened to yours?" she asked. "You didn't find him?"

Jaqen shook his head. He stopped walking and tied the horses' reins to a tree branch before getting to Arya's side. He was carrying a bag with him; he took a big piece of bread from inside it and gave it to Arya. She took it and started eating it; it was freshly baked and warm, and it tasted delicious. She hadn't realized how hungry she was until now. While she ate, Jaqen watched her.

"A girl has not slept well" he said, noticing the dark circles underneath Arya's eyes. "A girl was having nightmares."

"No, I wasn't" she lied.

"A man spent almost the entire night next to a girl, hearing her whimpering and calling names" he said, making her fall silent. Did he know what she had been dreaming?

It seemed like Jaqen was waiting for her to say something, but she didn't. She wasn't going to tell him what she had dreamed about, so she acted instead like she had no idea what he was talking
"Really?" she had already eaten the entire piece of bread. "What was I saying?"

"A girl was calling a boy's name" that was enough, Arya knew then that Jaqen had heard her calling Gendry's name... after they had kissed.

It just struck her then. They had kissed! How could she forget?! She didn't know why but she had kissed Jaqen, and then all of a sudden Jaqen had kissed her back...

*Seven hells!*

The sole memory made her blush, and she was unable to meet Jaqen's eyes. The problem was that now Jaqen must have been thinking that she was blushing because of her dreams, not because of the kiss... Well, really she was blushing because of both things! She was confused!

It was such an uncomfortable situation!

She made an effort to look at Jaqen in the eyes... The expression in his face was unreadable. Arya could not tell at all what was going through his mind, and she found it kind of frustrating. She decided to talk then.

"I was probably cursing him while gutting him in my dreams" she said, trying to give an explanation to why she had called Gendry's name in her dreams.

"Sure it was that" Jaqen said. Arya thought that he sounded skeptical, but she didn't say anything about it. Jaqen kept talking. "A man remembers a time in the past, when a girl would say prayers to the Red God in her sleep... Joffrey, Cersei, Ilyn Payne, the Hound... Names whispered in dreams..." as he spoke he approached her with cautious and slow steps, getting closer and closer to her with each word that came out of his mouth. His eyes were locked on hers, and she found herself unable to look away. His gaze was too powerful. "Perhaps a girl is praying again?"

It immediately struck her what he was insinuating. She gasped and moved away from him.

"No!" she exclaimed, horrified. "I'm not naming him! You are not going to kill him! You are not going to kill him, Jaqen! Are you listening to me?! You are not going to!"

She was pointing a warning finger towards him. Her sudden explosion of fierce anger surprised her, but she didn't change her attitude. Jaqen was still staring at her, his face as unreadable as before.

"Less than a day ago a girl wasn't protecting a boy" he said, narrowing his eyes.

"Well...!" that was true, less than a day ago she was hating Gendry's guts. She still was. But Jaqen's words had triggered a strange alarm within her and she couldn't stop herself. "Well, now I am! You are not going to touch him, Jaqen."

The man nodded, and backed away from her a few steps.

"A man was just asking a question. A man understands."

"Good" she said, lowering her hand and her finger. She moved her hair away from her face; her long dark curls had fallen all over her eyes while she was almost yelling at Jaqen. Her expression lost her fierceness then, and she no longer felt angry like she had a few moments ago. She didn't understand at all that sudden protectiveness that had overcome her. She decided that changing the
subject was what would be best. "So, what are the plans?"

"You wanted to leave Westeros. The best option is Braavos. A ship is needed to go to cross the Narrow Sea" Jaqen said while he tended to the horses to get them ready. Arya followed behind him.

"Fine. We can get a ship at White Harbor, it's not far from here" she said.

Jaqen scoffed. "If a girl wants to get caught, then you can go to White Harbor. They are the bannermen of your brother, and he must be looking everywhere for you. Half the North will look for you, and if they see you, they will return you to Winterfell."

"Can't you stop them from doing that?"

"A man could kill then, if that pleases a girl."

No, she couldn't allow that. The Manderlys and everyone else in the North were her family's loyal friends, she could not let Jaqen kill any of them just so that she wouldn't get caught. It wouldn't be fair, or right. The Faceless Man seemed to read her mind.

"A man figured as much..."

"What are we going to do then?"

"We travel to King's Landing" he answered, mounting his new horse. He waited for Arya to mount her own, which was already prepared for her. Jaqen smirked. "It's easier to sneak around there without being noticed, thought we must be wary of the spies."

"And of the Queen's dragons" she reminded him. "She has three giant ones. I mounted one of them once, they are dangerous."

Jaqen wasn't too concerned. "The Silver Queen won't send her dragons against her nephew's family. And a man is not afraid of fire."

That was true. King's Landing was their only way out now.

"Then let's go" she said before kicking her horse and starting to gallop away from that place, followed closely by Jaqen.

"I tell ye', there has been no storm that wild in the North for years!" a fat man exclaimed to his friend. They were sitting in one of the tables of the inn and could be heard by everyone because of how loudly they were talking. "Brought trees down... Took even the roots out of the earth!"

"Took houses down, if what I've heard is right..." his friend, another fat man, said before finishing drinking his cup of ale.

Gendry had stopped in that inn just for a moment to get some food and drink and then leave. The storm had indeed been very fierce, and he had been hurt when the wind threw a branch against his back. Thankfully there were no injuries, and he just felt a little sore and tired, but he was not going to stop looking for Arya. In his hurry to get out of Winterfell so that he could look for her he hadn't brought any food or water with him, and he was hungry. He had eating a bit of porridge while he awaited for the innkeeper, who was preparing him a bag full of food and skins with both water and wine. Gendry did have some coin in his pockets, which had come in very handy for the moment. He couldn't look for Arya if he was starving.
He wanted to resume the search as soon as he paid the innkeeper. He hadn't stopped worrying about her, wondering if she was alright. That storm had destroyed many things in its path... He just hoped that Arya hadn't been one of those things.

*She's strong,* he kept telling himself. *She wouldn't let herself be defeated by a storm. She's somewhere, in the woods or down the kingsroad, but she's somewhere, and she's alive. She better be.*

Of course, he also couldn't stop blaming himself for his stupidity. Why had he said anything? Since the moment in which his words left his mouth and he confessed Arya his fears about the Red Wedding, he had regretted saying anything. Specially since Sandor Clegane, Jon Targaryen and Sansa Stark told him that the Red Wedding had been planned long before Melissandre of Asshai performed any sorcery with his blood. The Red Wedding had been a product of the war, it was to blame on the Lannisters and the Freys, not on him! And he had realized it too late! What should have been a reason for relief for him had turned out to be a reason for even more guilt. Now, Arya was probably in danger because of him...

*At least she didn't leave alone.*

He scoffed. Who was he lying to, he was even more desperate precisely because she hadn't left alone. In some part, he was relieved that there was someone protecting her, but Gendry couldn't help it. He was burning with jealousy.

He had seen with his own two eyes how Arya sometimes looked at Jaqen. It wasn't the same look that she gave him when she was younger ad they were in Harrehal, no. That look was the one that women, *grown* women, gave to men. Because there was no denying it anymore, Arya was a grown woman, and a very desirable one. Gendry had seen many boys and men staring at her in inappropriate ways in Winterfell, and he was jealous, but he didn't worry because Arya always ignored those men! But she didn't ignore Jaqen H'ghar...

Gendry's worst fear was that the man would do something to Arya... that he would hurt her. The thought made his blood boil, and he felt sick to his stomach. He couldn't help it, though. He feared that, taking advantage of their solitude and their distance from Winterfell, Jaqen H'ghar would stop protecting Arya to abuse her. Arya was strong and she could take care of herself, but she couldn't fight against a skilled assassin...

He had to find her before any harm came to her, or he would never forgive himself.

There was another fear going through him. Even in the case that Jaqen H'ghar remained an honorable man and kept his promise of protecting Arya instead of doing what most men would do if they found themselves in the company of a defenseless and beautiful young woman, there was still the possibility that Arya gave herself willingly to the man.

Again, Gendry felt sick. He couldn't erase from his mind the moment when he walked through the door, and saw them both together. The man lying on his back on the bed, and Arya naked and on top of him. Arya had said that it had been an accident, that they had tripped. He believed her, he wanted to believe her. He could usually tell when Arya was lying, he had been good at it when they were younger, and her face seemed to be telling the truth when she gave him that excuse. But it was undeniable that even if that had been an accident, it hadn't *not* meant anything. He saw it in their eyes...

His grip on the cup of wine that he was holding became so tight that his knuckles turned white. His shoulders were shaking.
Does she not care about me? he asked to himself. Or does she not see that I love her...?

Even if she did care about him, or if she knew about his real feelings for her, why would she say anything? Why would she love a coward like himself?

*Jaqen H'ghar was right when he told me that I should have been there with her. I should have never, never left her alone.*

Wasn't he trying to redeem his wrong actions? Wasn't he trying to find Arya and bring her home? He would never let her be in danger again, even if after finding her the price to keep her safe was to leave and never see her again. He was willing to do that for her.

*But please, I need to make sure she's alright... I need to look at her one more time and at least... at least tell her that I love her. I need her to know that.*

Yes, he would find her, take her home with her family where she belonged, and he would let her know what he felt. And then he would do anything he commanded, because he was entirely at her mercy. She owned him, body and soul, and he had been too much of a fool to realize it until it was too late.

When had it all started? When had he, Gendry Waters, a bastard from King's Landing, fallen in love with Arya Stark, a lady and a princess and the wildest girl he had ever known? Had it then that night, when he had seen her for the first time in years after so much time and they had laughed together and she had fallen asleep in his arms after hitting him with a pillow? Had it then, had it then before, had it been after? He didn't know. All he knew was that he loved her, and nothing would change that ever.

He knew it now, he would do *anything* for her. But he couldn't have her, that much he knew without anyone telling him. And if after he took her back to Winterfell she wanted to be with anyone else... *even with Jaqen H'ghar, all be damned!*... then there wasn't anything he could do about it.

But first things first. He had to find her.

He raised the cup of wine and took a sip out of it, when a man that had left the inn a couple of minutes ago entered it again in a mad rage.

"Someone stole me horse!" he yelled. Everyone looked at him in silence, and then another man followed him.

"They stole my horse too!"

"Thieves!"

Gendry payed no attention to them, he had better things to worry about than the fact that two strangers' horses were stolen in some old inn. As long as they didn't steal his horse...

The innkeeper arrived with the bag full of food for a couple of days and some skins of wine and water, and Gendry payed him the coins that he owed the man. He took the bag and the skins, stood up from the stool in which he had been sitting for the last few minutes that he had spent waiting, and made his way to the door. He walked outside the inn and towards the stables, where his horse was resting. He looked up at the sky: it was clear, and it didn't look like there was another storm coming, at least for the moment. He hoped it stayed that way, or finding Arya would be a more difficult task than he thought at first. Well, he never really thought that it was going to be any easy, to begin with...
He tied the bag and the skins to the horse's saddle, and then he took the horse out of the stables and mounted it, resuming his way down the road. He had no idea where he was going, because he had no idea where Arya and Jaqen had run off to, and he had no way of tracking them. He was just riding south, hoping to find them or find any clue that would lead him to them. The storm hadn't made that very easy.

Frustrated, he galloped down the road between the woods, determined not to give up looking for Arya.

The gods must have taken pity of him, because luck found him a couple of hours later. He was still galloping down the road when he saw a man approaching in the opposite direction, going north. The man himself didn't really stand out for anything, but he was holding the reigns of a horse that Gendry recognized immediately.

"Where did you find that horse?" he asked he man with urgency once he reached him. The man looked at him with distrust at first, but when he saw that Gendry meant no harm he answered.

"In the woods, not far from here. Poor beast was scared to death. Must have been the storm, probably threw its master off its back."

Gendry remembered then the two men complaining that their horses had been stolen. He realized then that it must have been Arya and Jaqen that had stolen them, to be able to keep riding south!

"That horse is the property of Winterfell. Take it there and tell the lords where you found the animal, they are looking for the man that was riding it. Where exactly did you find it?"

The man pointed with his finger in the right direction. After Gendry bid him farewell, he spurred his horse and raced in that direction. If he was lucky, then maybe he could catch up with them...

A fortnight later, riding at a good pace and almost non-stop, Arya and Jaqen reached King's Landing. She hadn't been in the capital since the day that Daenerys Targaryen conquered Westeros on top of her dragons, burning down the Lannister army with their deadly fire. She still remembered that day perfectly, because she had been riding one of those dragons with Jon; they had ridden Rhaegal. Sansa had been on her own riding another dragon, Viserion, while Daenerys Targaryen rode Drogon. Arya had had that opportunity because she had travelled to Meereen with her sister when they found each other, because Sansa had been on a journey to find her kidnapped (or so she said) son, Ned. They had gone in search of Daenerys' help, and she had granted it to them, but little Ned Clegane was never found. After that Arya had left with her family to go to Winterfell. Now she was back to go on a ship and sail away from home and from Westeros.

Why am I doing this? she asked to herself. She didn't really find much sense to her decision anymore.

Did she really want to leave because of what Gendry had told her? She had at first, but in those last weeks she had had time to think about it, and now she knew that all of it had been stupid. Gendry wasn't guilty for what had happened. Even if the magic could have been the reason why that massacre happened, his blood was taken against his will, if what he had told her was true. She shouldn't have been so mad at him, and now she kind of understood why he hadn't wanted to go near the Twins. She could understand perfectly what it was to be haunted by nightmares. She had experienced it before, and knew the fear that one felt.

However, it was too late to turn back now, she couldn't go back home. She hadn't changed her mind, she was still going with Jaqen to Braavos, even though she couldn't find a strong reason to
do so... But she felt like she had to.

She had kept having nightmares like the one she had had on the first night, about her being trapped in that strange tunnel, though it wasn't the same. Some details varied, she could hear people talking and walking around her, though she couldn't see them or understand what they were saying. She saw fire, and she saw arrows, and blood... She heard wolves howling to the moon in pain. And she heard Gendry's voice calling her name, but she couldn't see him. She couldn't find any sense to those dreams.

She shook her head to forget those dreams. She had to forget them. She had to forget Gendry. She was going far away, where she would not see him again.

That is what you want, isn't it? To not see him again. But why? Why is it that reason? Why isn't it because you don't want to be a lady, or because you want to be a fierce warrior, or go back to the House of Black and White? a little voice in the back of her head kept asking her everyday.

She thought she knew the answer... But she was scared of it. So she didn't think about it.

She was waiting for Jaqen. They had sold the horses and they had received good coin for them, to buy supplies. Jaqen had gone off to buy them a passage to Braavos in a ship, and he had left an impatient Arya in the port.

Their relationship during their little trip had been... strange. Arya did not know how else told describe it. neither one of them had mentioned their kiss, not even once. It was as if it had never happened, but Arya was completely sure she hadn't imagined or dreamed it. I had been real, and she could still remember how it had felt. It startled her, really. She still didn't know what had moved her to do such a thing, or how come Jaqen had kissed her back! Sometimes she wanted to forget it, and sometimes she wished that Jaqen would at least mention it. Just once. But he didn't.

Arya did catch him looking at her sometimes, thought, She wasn't sure if he knew that he had caught him or not, but she could see him from times to time staring at her with the same fire in the eyes with which he had stared at her when they kissed, and when she had accidentally tripped over him on the bed. And when Arya caught him watching her, she blushed. She felt like a stupid girl, like all the rest. It was so unlike her.

Sansa is the one that blushes, not me!

But how could she not blush, after having kissed Jaqen H'ghar?

It hadn't been the first time that she had felt the desire to kiss someone. Thought she didn't want to admit it, there had been some times... several times... when she had wanted to kiss Gendry. Whenever she stared into his deep blue eyes, she just felt that ridiculous desire! It was one of the things that had scared her away, because she knew that even thought she had wanted that, Gendry hadn't. If he had he wouldn't have acted like such an idiot... Right?

She hadn't felt the same thing when she had wanted to kiss Jaqen than when she wanted to kiss Gendry. There was some mysterious force that made her want to get closer to Gendry, be with him... When she had kissed Jaqen, it felt like she was relieving an ache, or applying cold water on a burn on her skin. She did not know how to describe the two cases, but it frustrated her so much. SHE did not want to be acting that way! It was stupid!

"You'll understand when you are older" Sansa had once told her some years ago when she did not understand people and their relationships, that it was all too complicated and didn't make sense. Well, now she had confirmation that it didn't make sense, but she was starting to get a bit of
understanding on how difficult dealing with grown up feelings of a different kind than she had ever had was.

She hadn't realized that Jaqen was back and standing besides her.

"Arya?" he called her, making her snap out of her thoughts. He looked down at her with a small smile. "A man has the passaged to the ship."

"Can we go in now?" Arya asked with little patience. She was a bit nervous, standing there where she could be recognized by anyone who knew her from her previous visits to King’s Landing.

Jaqen nodded. "The ship will leave soon. We must hurry."

Arya followed him trough the dock until they reached the ship. It was a fairly big ship, so it should be comfortable during the voyage when it came to space. She then followed Jaqen to their cabin.

"It was the only one available" Jaqen told her when they went in. It wasn't very big, and it only had one old-looking and small bed that seemed uncomfortable, but it would feel like paradise after having slept on the cold hard ground for so much time. "Is a girl happy with it?"

She nodded. She didn't find anything wrong with the cabin, it served its purpose.

"Good. A man will go back to the deck, to ask the captain when we are leaving."

"Where are you going to sleep?" she asked him then. She was looking at the only bed that there was on the cabin. There was nowhere else for a person to sleep.

"A man will find a place. A man can sleep on the floor."

"You don't have to" Arya kept saying, though she hesitated a bit before speaking the words. "I mean... the bed is big enough for two people..."

Silence. Long... uncomfortable... silence. Jaqen just stared at her, barely blinking, holding her gaze. It felt like a challenge that Arya was not willing to lose.

"Is a girl not afraid?" he asked, taking one step towards her.

"Why would I be afraid?"

"Most girls would."

"Most girls are stupid" Arya said for the hundredth time in her life.

"A girl has more courage than sense" Jaqen said, bringing Arya memories from when she was Arry and not Arya, and she couldn't hold a chuckle from escaping her mouth.

"I've heard that before" she whispered. Next thing she knew, her back was against the cabin wall and they were kissing again.

It was similar to the first kiss, hungry and passionate and at the same time careful, if that was possible. Jaqen put his hands on her waist and pressed his body against hers, trapping her between the wooden wall and himself, and she put her arms around his neck instinctively, pulling him closer to her. She had very little (next to non-existent) experience on that kind of things, so she just did what felt right. Her lips moved at the same time that Jaqen's did. When his tongue touched hers, she was a little bit startled. Was it supposed to be like that? But it felt good, oh so good, so she didn't stop. their lips and tongues danced together, making the kiss something wild and wet, yet
their hands remained in the same place as before. Jaqen's hand had a tight grip on Arya's waist. Arya couldn't resist it and removed her arms from around Jaqen's neck, carefully moving her hands over his chest, feeling the muscles underneath.

A deep groan sounded in the back of Jaqen's mouth, and Arya smiled against his mouth. She touched his neck, slid her hands over his chest, put her arms around him... She wanted to explore. This was something completely new to her. She had always been interested in sword fighting and shooting bows and arrows and going on adventures and that kind of stuff, but she was just starting to discover this very feminine part of herself and the burning feeling in the pit of her stomach that came with it. She was curious, and she sent away the embarrassment that she felt so that she could explore in peace.

So this is how it feels to be... a woman? She wondered as she kissed Jaqen and he kissed her and she realized how good it felt. I shouldn't have made so much fun of Sansa and Jon and everyone else...

They stopped kissing and gasped. They needed air, and they breathed heavily. Arya's face was hot, and she could sense that Jaqen's was too.

"I thought you were... mad at me..." Arya said, panting. "After that night... you didn't say anything, didn't do anything..."

Jaqen raised an eyebrow in that very particular way in which he always did it whenever Arya asked something that he found funny or amusing "Mad at you? How could a man be mad at a girl...?"

"Because... Because I don't know..."

"A girl is not a girl no more. A girl is a beautiful woman. A girl should know what she can do to a man now."

They kissed again, just as fiercely as before. Arya could sense that Jaqen was hungry for her... To be honest, it gave her an strange sense of power, knowing that she could provoke a man like him to feel like this...

But she knew that there was more to it. This was just kissing, nothing more... She wasn't sure of what she was doing, but slowly and awkwardly, she removed her arms from around Jaqen's body and with unsure hands and trembling fingers she started unlacing her tunic...

Jaqen's hand left her waist and grabbed her arm, stopping her from unlacing her tunic. He pulled away from her, and she gasped with surprise because of that brusque interruption.

"No" he said.

Arya was confused. No? What did he mean, no?!

"But I thought..."

"A girl thought wrong."

She was even more confused than before.

"But I thought... I thought that you wanted me..." she said, and she actually sounded hurt.

Jaqen stood in silence for a few seconds before he let out a small and low, almost silent, laugh. Arya was about to feel angry, thinking that he was laughing at her, but he quickly proceeded to
take her out of her mistake.

"A man does want a girl... very much. As a man said before, a pretty girl has turned into a very beautiful and fierce and brave young woman. A man wants a girl very much... But a man cannot have a girl."

His words actually shocked her. What did he mean? Why not?!

"Why?" she asked. Her voice was shaking.

Jaqen released her arm and caressed her cheek with his hand.

"Because a girl needs to be loved. And a man cannot give that to her."

"I don't understand..." she whispered through trembling lips.

"A man cares about a girl very much. A man will always be there for a girl when a girl needs him, but a man cannot give a girl what she needs. A man cannot give love, for Faceless Men cannot love. Faceless Men are instruments of war and chaos and death. Maybe, if the war was still happening and a girl had that same rage and hatred and darkness that she had before inside of her, and what she needed was more darkness, then a man could have been hers. But times have changed."

Arya was shaking almost violently. Jaqen held her face between his hands. He never stopped staring at her.

"What a girl needs now is peace. A man cannot give that to her. But there is someone else who can."

Arya broke down in tears then. She was crying... because he was so right.

She leaned forward and hugged him, and he hugged her back. She cried on his shoulder for what seemed an eternity, even though in reality it was just a few seconds. When she stopped shaking she moved back again to look at the man in the eyes. She still couldn't speak, she was too shaken up, but Jaqen knew her mind perfectly.

"A girl needed to do this journey to realize her true desires, those that are not easy to understand at first. A girl wants to forgive, does she not?"

She knew what he meant by that, and what he had meant earlier when he had mentioned "someone". Was there really anything that escaped Jaqen's knowledge?

"I cannot go back now" was all she said. "Can I still go with you? To Braavos?"

He nodded. "A girl can. A girl will always be welcome in Braavos."

"But will I be welcome at your side?" she asked then, in a fiercer tone than before. "What if what I want isn't peace? What if I don't mind the darkness and chaos that you bring?"

"Is that a girl's heart truest desire?" he asked, answering like that to her question.

No. No it wasn't.

"I care about you too" she said, not wanting him to believe that she had kissed and attempted to give herself to him just like any common whore would have.
"A man knows... But there is someone else in a girl's heart for whom she feels more than affection, is there not?"

She didn't answer. She looked down to the floor, embarrassed, and she wiped the tears out of her face with the palm of her hand. Her breath became a bit steadier, and then she looked up again to stare into Jaqen's eyes.

"How did you know?" he asked. It was a genuine question, because he had realized the truth even before she had.

"A man could see it in a girl's eyes..."

"Well then... I-I don't care. I don't care about my truest desires. It doesn't matter what I want if he continues to act like an idiot and doesn't care about me... So I'm still going to Braavos, even though you probably don't want me there."

"A man just said that a girl is always welcome-"

"Yes, but you don't want me at your side! I bet that once we reach Braavos, you are going to leave me there on my own and you are going to go off and do your own thing!"

Jaqen shook his head. "A man swears that he will never leave a girl alone whenever she needs him to be there. And a man can also promise to a girl... That she's not as alone as she thinks she is."

Arya frowned, a bit confused. What did that mean? Of course she was alone, right now she only had him! But she didn't reply anything to his words. Jaqen leaned forward and placed a soft kiss on her hair, but Arya quickly moved her head and captured his lips in yet another kiss. This last kiss was, however, softer, and a bit innocent, very different to the others they had shared... It felt like a good-bye kiss, even though they were not parting their ways yet. It was more sort of a token of appreciation that Arya wanted to give him, and that Jaqen accepted.

When they parted, they looked at each other for a few seconds, and then Arya turn around and left the cabin. She needed to go up to the deck and have some air. Too many things had happened, and she needed to think about everything that Jaqen had said to her. It angered her that he was right and she couldn't deny anything. She never thought that she would... fall in love. She always thought that only stupid girls did that and that it didn't make sense. But it had happened.

She had fallen in love with the stupid bull, and she was just running away from it, because she was so scared...

She quickened her pace to get to the deck. She needed to know when that bloody ship was going to set sail.
Hey guys! Today I'm feeling happy! It's my 18th birthday! So I'm updating today as a happy birthday gift from myself to myself and to all of you! Enjoy! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She had already talked to the captain of the ship. They were getting ready to leave in a few minutes, all the merchandise that was going to be taken to the Free Cities and all the passengers and crew were already on board, so they shouldn't linger in King's Landing much longer. They were just waiting for the moment when the wind was favorable, and it was likely to be so soon. Arya was satisfied with the answer, she wanted to part from Westeros as soon as possible. She didn't want to have time for any second thoughts. She was afraid of changing her mind, of wanting to get down of that ship.

Arya was walking on the deck of the ship, trying to get distracted while she waited for the ship to finally set sail and move. The wind played with her long hair, which was messy after all the travelling and little time to tend to it properly (not that she cared much), and made it float around her and get in her face and get tangled, but she didn't mind. She had had the opportunity to change into clean clothes, getting rid of the filthy and almost torn breeches and tunic that she had worn all the way from Winterfell to the capital. It felt nice to be clean again, though she would still need many warm baths to feel decent enough. However, she would have to wait until arriving at Braavos for that. There were no hot baths on a ship.

She had nothing to do, other than walk around trying to get distracted watching the sailors go from one place to the other fulfilling their captain's orders and found their chores. She wanted to do something, but she had no idea of how to do anything on a ship. Even if she did, she was tired. She had almost exhausted herself on the journey, both physically and emotionally. As much as she liked going around doing things and being active and helping out with men's activities, she needed to rest and relax a little bit, so she didn't protest when the only thing the could do was enjoy the views from the deck of the ship.

For the hundredth time, she had time to reflect on everything that had been happening lately. Specially earlier that day. She had already admitted to herself one of the most difficult things that she ever had before. She loved Gendry. She really did, but so many things had happened that had scared her off... So she was leaving to run away from all that. She had decided to get away from Gendry and run off to Braavos with Jaqen, whom she had kissed...

Why in Seven Hells did I kiss him? she asked to herself, and she frowned.

Maybe because he was the complete opposite of Gendry? Maybe because he was there with her when she needed him? Maybe because he was strong, dangerous, and had an incredible halo of power surrounding him? She was somehow attracted to him, that was undeniable. But attraction did not mean love, that much she knew very well. Her sister Sansa had taught her the difference with her own experiences; you can be attracted to what's perfect, while love is almost always imperfect, but that was what made it valuable. Arya's relationship with Gendry was the most imperfect thing in the world, because they were both imperfect and she knew it. Arya had trouble trusting people, it
was what life had taught her. And she was incredibly stubborn, just like Gendry. Gendry had a rock-hard head. Arya felt like putting her hands around his throat at some times and choking the life out of him!

...But then again, with Gendry she felt home.

At least she did when he wasn't being an idiot. Like he had been doing lately.

Arya let out a sigh of frustration. She had to stop thinking about all that! She was going to the Free Cities to start a new life, and that was the end of that! But as soon as she stopped thinking about Gendry, she thought about her family. About Sansa and Bran and Rickon and Jon and Ygritte and even Sandor. And she thought about how sellfish she was being by leaving them like that.

*I'll send them a raven when I'm in my new home,* she decided.

She hadn't really thought about what she would do once she was in Braavos. Her life would be very different from how it had been in Winterfell. Maybe she would go back to train in the House of Black and White... But she didn't feel like she did years ago. She didn't really want to be one of the Faceless Men, she didn't want to be No One. She was Arya Stark.

"What am I doing...?" she asked in a whisper, rubbing her face with her hands.

*I'm an idiot. I should have stayed home..."

She wanted to hit her head against something hard, because as she had feared, she was having second thoughts, and that wasn't good.

She wanted to hit her head against something hard, because as she had feared, she was having second thoughts, and that wasn't good.

*But why not?,* her mind kept asking her.

*Just because,* she stubbornly mentally replied.

She heard footsteps approaching her on the deck of the ship, and she moved her hands away from her face and opened her eyes to see who it was. It was Jaqen, who had been down in the cabin since she left it.

"Is a girl alright?" he asked. Arya nodded, but she didn't say anything. She didn't want to talk at that moment. Jaqen walked closer to her, but stopped when he was about two feet away from her. "Is a girl ready to depart?"

Arya moved her eyes away from him and looked down, to the port of King's Landing and at the people going from one place to the other. She listened to the mixed sound of their voices, the hooves of horses hitting the ground, the movement of carts, the shouting of the guards... It was an overwhelming noise, the sound of King's Landing. The sound of the voices of Westeros. She hated King's Landing because of all the pain and loss it represented for her in her life, but she didn't hate the rest of Westeros. If she left, she was leaving many loved things behind.

"I don't know" she finally admitted, not afraid to say it in Jaqen's presence. "I used to be ready, but now I'm not so sure anymore..."

Jaqen followed the line of her sight and locked his own eyes on the port of King's Landing.

"Perhaps..." he murmured "a girl will find the answer to her doubts in time. Perhaps it is getting
closer at this precise moment."

Arya had no idea what that meant. She got closer to the ship's rail, and she leaned her arms on in, and rested her chin on her arms.

"Yes" she whispered as a seagull flew right in front of her eyes, "perhaps."

The guards stopped Gendry as he was about to cross the gates to King's Landing. They weren't stopping everybody, just a few random people that they wished to interrogate, and Gendry cursed his own bad luck that he had been one of those random people. Maybe it was the fact that he was travelling with a giant direwolf. Nymeria had stayed with him during the entire journey, and all the other travelers that had crossed paths with them had quickly moved away in fear of the beast.

One of the gold cloaks approached Gendry. His expression was rather unfriendly.

"You," he called him, placing his hand on his sword and constantly eyeing the direwolf. "What are you doing coming to King's Landing? Why do you bring this beast with you?!

Gendry pulled the reigns of his horse to stop him and then he faced the gold cloak. He hadn't missed those guards. He remembered when they were all over the city and the country, killing Robert's bastards on command of King Joffrey and also looking for his own head. Gendry had had to run away and face multiple dangers to get away from the gold cloaks who wanted to slit his throat.

At least I met Arya thanks to that, he thought. That hadn't been a bad thing.

"I'm looking for Arya Stark," he replied to the question the gold cloak had made him.

The man first smirked and then he laughed. He didn't believe what Gendry had just told him. Of course, how could someone of the likes of Gendry the bastard, with his lowborn appearance, be looking for Lady Arya Stark? It was ridiculous! But that wasn't what made the guard laugh.

"Looking for a Stark? You are a bit down South for that, don't you think, lad? If you want the wolves, go to the fucking North."

"This is her direwolf," Gendry explained, looking down to Nymeria, who growled at the guard. The man stopped laughing and smirking and took two steps back, away from the giant and fierce-looking wolf. "Nymeria has guided me here. Me and the entire Stark family have been looking for Lady Arya for weeks now. Have you seen her?"

"Arya Stark? Haven't seen her in my whole fucking life, I've got no idea how she looks like, boy. Now go on with your way," the guard said. He started walking away mumbling something under his breath that Gendry couldn't really hear.

Gendry didn't move. He couldn't start searching the entire city, it would take him hours! Who knew where Arya could be in that amount of time, or what could happen to her if he didn't find her soon! Nymeria had guided him to King's Landing, and he was sure that Arya was there.

"She's travelling with a man," he said to the gold cloak. Perhaps if he described Jaqen to them they would recognize him. Gendry just hoped that the man hadn't changed his appearance since he left Winterfell with Arya. "He has half his hair white and the other half red. He had a braavosi accent."

"Never saw him" the gold cloak replied, but a second gold cloak stepped forward.
"I've seen that man, he was with a young girl of no more than five and ten. Pretty thing with dark hair and grey eyes, but she looked wild. That is Arya Stark, you say?"

Pretty, dark hair, grey eyes and wild. Yes, that was Arya, no doubt. Gendry nodded, finally hearing some good news. His horse noticed his excitement and moved a little, but Gendry held the reigns tighter to keep him still.

"They arrived some hours ago," the gold cloak said. "I saw them in the streets on my way here. They were heading for the port."

The port. Damn it, they were going to take a ship! He had to hurry, before it was too late! If it wasn't too late already…

"Thank you," he said to the second gold cloak. That was probably the only time in his life that he would ever have words of gratitude towards one of them, but they were true. He started galloping through the streets of King's Landing, making his way through as he could between the crowd. He forced them to move out of the way, he had no time to lose. Thankfully, Nymeria was there with him, and she growled and howled at the people, making the citizens of the capital step aside in fear as soon as they saw the beast.

Gendry managed to get to the port in good time. There, he asked a man where was the ship that went to Braavos. The man pointed to a ship that was just starting to move very slowly away from the port.

"It's that one," the man said.

Gendry's eyes went wide with horror.

No!

He ran towards the ship and looked up. There! There she was! She had her arms and chin leaned on the railing, and she looked absent minded and somehow sad. Gendry's heart skipped a beat when he saw her. She was fine! She was fine, she wasn't hurt… He gave a sigh of relief, but then he became alarmed again. He had just found her, and now she was going away, so far away…

"ARYA!" he shouted.

Arya had been distracted for the last few minutes. She had no idea of what was happening around her, and for a moment she didn't even hear any sound or noise… She was alone in the world, enjoying her little place of solitude inside of her distracted mind…

She was about to close her eyes when suddenly she heard her name. It wasn't Jaqen calling her name, or some stranger. It was…

"Gendry?" she whispered.

It was impossible. But it wasn't! There he was! Mounted on his horse and with Nymeria at his side, on the port in front of them as the ship moved away to set sail. Arya looked at Gendry in disbelief for a second, not believing her eyes. She thought that she was having another one of her crazy dreams. But Gendry's face was so real, and the hurt expression on it and his worry and his disbelief and so many other things!

It was real. He was there. He had come looking for her.
"Gendry!" she shouted. It sounded more indignant than surprised, for some reason.

Jaqen heard her calling that name and approached the railing of the ship. He locked his serious eyes on Gendry and he didn't say a word. Gendry chose to ignore the man's presence.

"Arya, please, you can't leave!" he shouted as he dismounted his horse and got as close as he could to the border of the ship. Arya remembered that Gendry didn't know how to swim. If he fell, he would drown on the Blackwater Bay.

"Yes I can!" she shouted stubbornly. "That's what you wanted, wasn't it?! For me to leave!"

Gendry frowned. He was genuinely confused.

"When did I ever say that? I never said that!"

"Yes, you did!"

"No, I didn't! All I ever did was tell you what my guilt was! Or what I thought my guilt was! But I never, ever told you to leave! Never!"

It was true. He had never said that he wanted her to leave, or be away from him… Arya was just trying desperately for a reason not to get off that ship at that exact moment and send everything to the seven hells. But her pride came first. Gendry had hurt her, and now she was going to leave.

"But you don't want me there! If you did, you wouldn't have been such a halfwit the entire time!" she shouted back.

"I admit it, Arya, I was an idiot!" he shouted from the port. There was a lot more of distance between them at that moment, and people were looking at them amused, wondering if it was some lovers' quarrel. Jaqen was just standing there, watching them argue, and the sailors looked at Arya wondering what to do. Maybe they thought that she would give the order to stop the ship.

"Lady Arya…"

"No!" she exclaimed. "Keep going, keep sailing!"

Gendry kept shouting from the port. Nymeria was at his side, howling. It broke Arya's heart to see her direwolf there, and she felt guilty for leaving her behind. Maybe she should go back, just to get her…

"I was an idiot, and you can't believe how sorry I am for it! There isn't a day or a night when I don't regret taking many of the decisions that I took regarding you, m'lady!"

Arya's heart stung when she heard that. Damn it, what was it about Gendry saying those words, that she hated so much but at the same time made her want to smile? M'lady.

*I only let him call me that… I complain about it, but I never really stop him.*

Gendry was still watching her from the port. His figure was much smaller now. It was too late to go back now, the ship couldn't go back to the port even if Arya wanted or told the sailors to do it.

"You have to believe me, Arya! Please! I need you! Your family needs you! Come back, please!" he begged. He wasn't asking anymore, he was literally begging.

Arya looked at Jaqen for a second. The man hadn't said even a word or even lifted a finger while
Arya and Gendry shouted at each other. But Arya needed him to speak now. She asked a silent question with her eyes that he understood. She needed his help now, more than ever.

"A girl must do what a girl needs to do" he reminded her with a soft but firm voice. Then he smiled a little bit with the corner of his mouth. She returned the little smile and looked back at Gendry again. She couldn't see his features clearly anymore, he was too far away. But if she spoke, he could still hear her.

She felt tears stinging in her eyes as she said the next words.

"You were never willing to fight for me!"

As she shouted that she turned around and walked away from the railing. Her intention was to leave the deck of the ship, go back down to the cabin, lock herself in there, and just let her heart die painfully ad slowly. But before she could do anything of that, Gendry's voice came back to her again.

"I'm willing to fight for you now! Now and always, until my last breath if I need to, m'lady!"

Immediately after that, she heard a heavy splash in the water. Then she heard multiple voice shouting things that she couldn't hear, and she heard Nymeria howling. Arya turned around, frowning and wondering what was going on, and she saw that Gendry wasn't on the port anymore. He had thrown himself to the Blackwater, and he was struggling while trying to swim towards the ship. Arya opened her eyes and her mouth wide, horrified.

"Seven hells, Gendry!"

He can't swim, he is going to die!

She ran back to the railing and without even thinking it once, without hesitating, she jumped over it and dived into the Blackwater Bay. The water was freezing. After all, it was winter! The air had been very cold in the ship, and snow had fallen while they travelled South, but those days had been warmer than the previous months of the winter. However, the water of the bay felt like red-hot needles stabbing her bones. She wanted to scram when she felt the freezing water all around her, and when her head broke out to the surface again, the air hut her lungs. She was almost paralyzed, but she tried really hard to swim. She could see that Gendry was still in the surface, he didn't seem to be struggling that much, except with the cold, of course.

Arya fought against the freezing sensation and managed to swim towards Gendry and eventually reach him. She grabbed him with the little strength that she had at that moment to try and keep him in the surface. She tried to yell at him, but she was too cold and her lips felt numb.

"Y-you id-idiot!" she shouted in his face. Gendry was pale, and his lips were a little bit blue because of the cold, but otherwise he seemed fine. Arya wanted to put her hands around his neck and drown him herself for his stupidity! "Did y-you w-want to k-kill you-yourself?!!"

He shook his head.

"I j-just want-wanted you t-to listen to m-me!" he replied.

"Well I-I'm list-listening!" she said, angrily.

"I k-know you hate me!" she started saying. "And I un-understand why you d-do! I wo-would hate m-myself t-too! But I know n-now, Arya, that w-we c-can't do anything a-about the p-past! But I wa-want to try and do so-something r-right with the present! I want y-you to go h-home and be ha-
happy and fo-forgive me if you c-can! And I pro-promise that I will never fail y-you again! I swear on what is most precious to me in the whole wo-world, Arya!"

"And what is that?!” she asked, not sure of the value of his vow.

"You!"

She felt like she had been slapped in the face.

She stared at Gendry in awe. She couldn't believe that he had just said that. She was, by nature, a distrusting person. She didn't usually believe people when they told her something, but she could see at that moment in Gendry's face that he wasn't lying. What he had just said was the truth. He really cared about her, unlike what she had originally thought about him. But he had been afraid, so afraid... Just like she had been. She had been so afraid, and now she could understand him. When she was afraid, she acted in an aggressive way. On the other hand, when Gendry was afraid, he made the wrong decision, which usually meant acting the wrong way or not acting at all. It was just that simple.

"C-can you promise me o-one thing?” she asked. Her lips were still trembling, but she was beginning to feel less cold than before.

"Yes, Arya” Gendry nodded. "Ask anything you want, and I will do it.”

"Never h-hurt me again” she said. Silence reigned over them for a long moment that seemed to never end, while they floated on the water of the Blackwater Bay as they stared into each other's eyes. Them, slowly, Gendry leaned in closer to Arya. At first she thought that he was going to kiss her, but that didn't happen. Instead, they pressed their foreheads together. Arya moved her legs underwater to keep them both from sinking, and they just enjoyed that closeness, that innocent intimacy between the two of them that had generated so unexpectedly. It made them forget the cold and how soaked they were because of the Blackwater, and Arya felt tickles in her fingertips. She could also see something in Gendry's eyes that she hadn't seen before, but whatever it was, she liked it. She also loved the way in which she could feel his war, breath all over her because of his closeness, which was warming her up. Gendry moved, and he put his strong arms around her. She smiled, feeling protected.

Finally, Gendry spoke.

"I promise.”

Arya smiled even more. That was all she needed.

"We should return to the port” she said then. She thought they had been very lucky that Gendry hadn't drowned yet, and she didn't want to push her luck.

"Yeah, we should” he agreed. Then he asked: "Why did you jump from the ship?"

She frowned, confused. "What do you mean?"

"The ship. Why did you jump? I thought you had stubbornly decided to stay on it and sail away.”

Arya looked at the ship in the distance. It was very far away now, and it was no more than a little spot in the distance. She couldn't see anyone on the deck.

"I was” she confessed, looking back into Gendry's blue eyes. "But..."
"But what?"

"I couldn't let you drown!" she exclaimed. She had been really worried when she saw that Gendry had jumped into the Blackwater. "What kind of idiot jumps into the water when he doesn't know how to swim?!"

Gendry didn't reply right back. He just looked at her keeping a serious face for as long as he could manage it, and then he broke eyes contact, threw his head back, and started laughing. Arya raised an eyebrow and looked at him as if he was crazy.

"What is so funny about it?" she asked, really wanting to know.

Gendry stopped laughing (but he didn't stop smirking) and he moved his head forward until his lips were almost brushing Arya's ear.

"Do you want to know a secret?"

Arya nodded, and then she waited...

"I learned how to swim last year."

It took her a few seconds to process the information and actually understand what it meant. Once she did, she gave Gendry an indignant look. The boy was still smirking.

"Gendry!" she almost yelled. "I hate you!"

She hit him in the shoulder, but he let go of her and started swimming away. She chased after him, pretending to be angry, but soon Gendry's laugh became contagious and Arya found herself swimming after him laughing as well.

Chapter End Notes

GENDRYA!!!!!!!!!!
Arya tried to drown Gendry a few times before they reached the port again. She would catch him, grab his leg and push his head underwater, but he always managed to break free and go back to the surface laughing. Arya wasn't really trying to kill him, obviously; she was just fooling around with him for the fact that he hadn't told her that he could swim. They swam towards the port and once they reached it, a couple of men helped them up and out of the Blackwater. They took deep and long breaths, realizing just then how tired they were of having been swimming without anywhere to put their feet on. It felt good to be on solid ground again, and Arya relaxed her muscles to get rid of the ache in her legs.

Nymeria approached her and sat by her side, licking her face. Arya laughed and looked at her direwolf, and then she threw her arms around the beast's neck.

"Nymeria!" she exclaimed, happy to be reunited with her pet. She had felt so guilty for leaving her behind...

She let go of Nymeria and then she stared into her eyes, which had an intelligent look to them. Arya caressed Nymeria's soft fur with her hand, and smiled gratefully at her.

"Thank you," she whispered. She was sure that it had been Nymeria who had guided Gendry to King's Landing, to her. It was thanks to Nymeria that Arya hadn't made the biggest mistake of her life.

Gendry stopped resting on the floor and stood up. He walked up to where Arya was and he offered her his hand. She looked at it first, and then she took it and Gendry pulled her up to her feet. Arya shook her head, trying to take her wet hair out of her face. Both she and Gendry were soaked wet, and it was very cold outside of the water as well. It was winter after all, and the chill air did not feel good on their skin. The fact that their clothes were dripping didn't help.

"Come," Gendry said, moving his hair in direction of the streets that led to another part of King's Landing. He wasn't letting go of Arya's hand, and she did not try to pull it away. "I know an inn where we can rest and change and get foot to warm our bellies. It'll do good to us."

He started walking, leading Arya behind him. He took his horse with his free hand, and Nymeria followed them, which made the people in the streets of King's Landing walk away from them as far as possible and point fingers at them while they murmured things. They didn't care.

Gendry took them to the inn that he had mentioned before. It was in a part of King's Landing that Arya had never been in before, but it seemed like a good place. Gendry and Arya both had some coin with them, and they paid the innkeeper for food, drinks, and a room where they could change their clothes into dry ones and get some rest. The innkeeper's son and daughter found some clothes fitting for Gendry and gave them to him, and they took some coin and left to find clothes for Arya, because they couldn't find any for her. She and Gendry ate their meals while they waited, and the innkeeper's children returned right after they were done with clothes for Arya.

Before they could leave to go to the room, the innkeeper asked Arya to put Nymeria in the stables, with Gendry's horse. She hesitated, not comfortable about doing that.

"I swear no one will do any harm to the beast, Lady Stark," the innkeeper said. Arya wasn't startled by him knowing who she was. Everybody knew that the Starks had direwolves since the war, when
tales about Robb and Grey Wind were all over the country. Besides, now there was no war, so Arya knew that she didn't have to be afraid of people knowing her identity.

She looked into the man's eyes. He seemed sincere enough.

"If you try to even touch her, she will bite your arm off," she warned him before agreeing to take Nymeria to the stables. Once that was done, she followed Gendry upstairs to the room they had rented for the day. She was truly exhausted, and by that point she was freezing and shaking because she had spent so much time in those wet, cold clothes that were not appropriate for winter. She was lucky that she hadn't fallen sick during the trip going down South.

There was a privy. Arya decided to go change there, and Gendry could change in the room. She took the clothes that she had been given and entered the privy, locking the door behind her. She took off her wet breeches and tunic, (which had been completely ruined during the trip and were now more rags than clothes) and she put her smallclothes on first. Then she looked at the clothes she had been given. It was a dress, but she didn't complain about it. It was simple and warm, of blue wool. It would be enough to keep her comfortable and warm, and then she could find other clothes more of her liking for the trip back home. She put the dress on, and she found that it was tighter than what she had expected and it enhanced her small curves. It was also somewhat tight around the chest, were she had lately become a little bit more voluptuous. Not only was it tight, but also it was lower cut than the dresses that she used to wear whenever she wore a dress. It reminded her of some of Sansa's dresses, which always were too tight for her figure. Arya decided that for one day only she didn't care how tight her dress was, as long as she was wearing something. She could move well with it, so it didn't really matter.

She looked at her hair. It had finally dried, and it hung in loose curls around her. It didn't look bad at all. After she checked that everything was in order and she put on her boots, she turned around and opened the door to go back into the room.

She found that Gendry was still changing. He had discarded his old clothes on the floor, and he had put his new breeches and boots on, but he still hadn't put on his tunic and he was facing Arya. She stood still, gazing at the hard muscles beneath Gendry's skin and the way that they moved as he moved. His arms, his torso... In her eyes, it was perfection. He looked so strong and powerful in his own way.

She stopped staring at him just as he finished putting on his tunic, and he looked at her. He raised his eyebrows, and an approving smile appeared in the corner of his mouth as he ran his eyes all over her.

Arya felt her cheeks burning red all of a sudden.

"You look... good," Gendry said, nodding his head.

"Good?"

"Very good," he added, and took a step towards her. He locked his deep blue eyes into her grey ones, and he raised his hand to caress her cheek softly with his finger. "But again, you always do."

She hit him in the chest, but not very hard. "Stop it!" she protested, though she smiled. Gendry laughed. Arya hadn't realized until then how much she loved it when Gendry laughed. His laugh was warm and happy, and it made her want to laugh too.

She hugged him then, for no apparent reason. She just wanted to do it. She felt like putting her arms around him and resting her head on his chest and never letting go. Gendry was a little
surprised at first and tensed up, but then Arya felt him relax and he out his arms around her. Arya felt protected that way, and she remembered the day when Gendry had arrived in Winterfell and she had fallen asleep with him while they hugged each other. She had felt happy then. So many things had happened after that...

Gendry rested his chin on the top of her head and played with her hair with one of his hands, softly caressing it. He took a deep breath, and Arya felt his chest raising and falling, moving against her cheek. She could hear his heart beating. \textit{Bum-bum, bum-bum, bum-bum...} She closed her eyes, feeling his touch and listening to the beating of his heart, and wondered why would she have ever wanted to stay mad at him.

"Does this mean that you forgive me?" he whispered then very softly.

"For everything that I did? Everything that I... said?"

Arya thought about it for a second. Gendry had left her alone when she went to the Twins. She had been very mad because of that, but Gendry had promised that he would never do that ever again, and she wanted to believe him. She didn't want to be mad at him forever for a mistake. Also, he had told her that he believed that he was the cause that her brother was dead... but even if it was true, though she had already thought that the treason had been planned for a long time, she knew that Robb would have ended up dead one way or another. Either way, the past could not be changed. Robb and her mother were dead, the Red Wedding had happened, and they all had to move on. They couldn't be stuck in the past; it wasn't fair for them.

"Yes," she finally said. "I forgive you."

He had promised that he wouldn't hurt her ever again. She was choosing to believe him this time.

She thought that she could feel Gendry smiling, and his embrace around her became tighter, pulling her closer to him. Then, he pressed his lips against the top of her head, kissing her hair. Arya felt a chill run down her spine. It was a very innocent gesture, but it was the most intimate gesture that Gendry had ever dared to do to her. Arya thought that it was very sweet, and while in other times she had believed those kinds of things to be very stupid, now she liked it and she knew how much those little things meant. Life wasn't all about being fierce and strong. Sometimes, it felt very nice to just be a girl, and being happy with feeling what she did right at that moment. Maybe, some aspects of being a \textit{lady} weren't so bad after all.

"Thank you," Gendry whispered with his lips still pressed against her hair at the top of her head.

"And what happens now?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"What happens after all this? What happens once we go back to Winterfell?" Arya asked again, making her question more specific that time. Gendry hesitated, not sure of how to answer.

"I suppose... we live our lives."

"Yes, but how do we do that?" Arya kept asking.

"I'm not sure I know what you mean, Arya..." Gendry murmured, letting go of her then. She took a step back and looked at his face. It was starting to get dark outside, but there was still enough light in the room so that she could see him clearly. The evening light was strong, and it made Gendry's eyes look bluer. It also made the outline of his hair look golden, like if he had around it, and also his eyes shone the same way.
"Don't make me get mad at you again," she said. Her voice had never sounded more serious in her life. She didn't take her eyes away from Gendry's at any moment, not even for a second. "Let's stop acting like fools. You know what I want. I know you want it too."

She could see it in his face. He had even almost confessed it to her earlier, he had said that she was what was most precious to him in the world. What else could that mean if not...?

He wasn't saying anything, but it looked like he wanted to. He was doing that thing with his face that he did everytime that he was thinking too hard.

"Gendry..."

"Arya, I-"

"Many years ago I told you something," she interrupted him, taking a step towards him again to close the distance that had appeared between them since he let her go from his embrace. "I told you that I could be your family. I wasn't lying, it's what I want. I want to be your family, Gendry."

"I'm a bastard," he said, sounding choked up.

"So?"

"I told you once," he said. He had the same expression that he had had years ago, when he told her the exact same thing that he was about to tell her. It was a sad and pained expression full of regret. "You could never be my family. You'd be m'lady."

Arya was starting to feel furious. She took a deep breath, reminding herself that she must not lose her patience. She gritted her teeth, but finally she came up with an idea. her eyes lit up with a little mischievousness, knowing that she would get what she wanted if she played her cards right.

"And as your lady, you would do anything I commanded?" she wondered, wanting to make sure of it before making her move.

Gendry, obedient as always, nodded.

"Yes, m'lady."

Arya smiled.

"Fine," she said fiercely. "I command you to be my family!"

She had done it. She had adapted to his game, and she had played her cards. Now she only had to wait for the result of the game, and see who had won. There was a heavy silence that fell over them at that moment; only their heavy and slow breathing could be heard. If she listened very carefully, Arya could swear that she could hear her own heart beating anxiously, waiting for Gendry to say something, anything.

Finally, he took a step towards her. There was no space left between them, and Arya could feel Gendry's hot breath on her face when she looked up to stare into his eyes. No one had ever looked at her with such intensity, and devotion, and...

"As m'lady commands," the bull-headed boy murmured, his voice full of tenderness.

It took a moment for Arya to realize what his words meant; that she had won. Gendry could no longer deny what they both felt and what they both wanted, and he could no longer mention
obstacles between them. She smiled, feeling an explosion of happiness inside of her chest.

She had never felt that way, but she could not deny that it felt wonderful. She felt a thousand times better than she had ever felt before.

Gendry raised his hand and put it on her nape, bringing her face closer to him. Arya put her hands on his shoulder and felt dizzy and short of breath. For the first time, her eyes wandered away from Gendry's and fell on his lips. Slowly, without realizing it, she parted hers...

Gendry kissed her then. He kissed her with all of his love, all of his desire and all of his passion. He kissed her letting all the emotions and feelings that he had stored inside of him until then pour out of his body, giving them to Arya. His other hand was on her waist, and her pulled her to him, bringing their bodies as close together as they could be. Arya then threw her arms around his neck, deepening the kiss.

It was like no other kiss that she had ever had, nothing could compare to it. Not because of the kiss itself, but because of what she was feeling with it. She felt things that she had never felt before, emotions so strong that she thought that no one was capable of feeling them like that. She felt marvelous. She felt happy; she felt free; she felt passion... And she felt love.

And what was best of it, she realized, was that it was reciprocate.

Not only the emotions of the kiss overwhelmed Arya and Gendry, but the actual kiss itself. It started slow, innocent... maybe even a little bit hesitant and shy. Arya mouth pressed against Gendry's just as his lips gently caressed hers. They were still holding unto each other with their hands and arms, unwilling to be separated as they explored each other.

Their tongues met then, dancing around each other, and Arya felt her knees trembling like she was about to fall to the floor. She pressed herself even more to Gendry, and as a result, the kiss deepened. Gendry took his hand away from her waist and instead surrounded her entirely with it, locking her in an embrace of which she did not protest. His tongue explored Arya's mouth, curious and tempting. There was a deep noise in the back of Arya's throat, and Gendry smiled as he kissed her. As a response, she kissed him harder.

She pressed her mouth against his more passionately and bit his lower lip, teasingly pulling from it with her front teeth. She let go of it, having a second to catch her breath, and immediatly after Gendry was kissing her again. He took his hand away from her nape and cupped her face. Then he parted from her, and Arya gasped when she felt the loss of contact from him.

She opened her eyes and saw Gendry staring at her. The young man was breathless, and in his face it was obvious that he could not believe what had just happened. But Arya had never seen him so happy. It looked like he was glowing, and she herself could not tame the roaring beast that had awakened inside of her chest. She no longer felt butterflies in her stomach, this was much stronger, much more powerful.

"Will you...?" Gendry tried to ask something, but the words were stuck in his throat and he could not find his voice. He took two deep breaths before trying again, the whole time looking into Arya's eyes, into her very soul. "Will you be m'lady, then?"

She moved her arms from around his neck so that she could cup his face with her hands.

"Only if you'll be m'lord," she answered, half teasing him and half being completely serious.

"You know I want to," he retorted. "You know I do, I want to be with you, more than anything. But
I can't. Your family will never allow it."

"Jon married a wilding, and he's the Prince," Arya shot back at him, not willing to take a 'no' for an answer. "Sansa had the Hound's bastard son, and she even married him later. And he was not a knight and not a lord, while she was a Princess in the North. I pretty much doubt that my family will have anything to say against me marrying the former King's bastard son, or even dare to say anything. And if all the nightmares that I have lived in my life have served some purpose, it has been to show me that what matters in this life is love. And family. And I want that with you and no one else."

Gendry looked hesitant at first, but then he looked impressed, and he smiled lovingly.

"You have changed a lot from the little girl that I once knew..."

"Oh, I still have enough of her inside me to give you a good kick in the arse if you need it."

They locked their lips together once again as soon as Arya finished speaking. She smiled against Gendry's mouth and lowered her arms to put them around his body. She could feel his hard muscles with her arms and hands, and she liked the feeling. She wanted to touch more, explore his body... She didn't know where those thoughts came from, but she didn't mind them.

Gendry's lips separated from her mouth and he started kissing Her jawline until he reached her throat. Arya threw her head back, exposing her neck more, and moaned when Gendry passionately kissed her sensitive skin. Gendry pulled her closer to him and kept kissing her neck a little harder. His very short beard scratched her skin but she liked the feeling, and she moaned even louder when he bit her neck in the same spot that he had been kissing. She felt Gendry hesitating, unsure of whether he was hurting her by doing that, but he soon realized that her moan was a pleasurable one. So Gendry kept biting, and then he sucked on that same spot. It hurt a bit, but that kind of hurting was a bliss!

When he stopped biting and sucking he didn't stay away from Arya for long. He kissed the other side of her neck for a little bit longer and then we went further down. The dress that Arya was wearing was so low cut that it gave him full access to the upper part of her breast, and though they were small, the tightness of the dress made them bigger. Arya moaned softly again when she felt Gendry kissing the top of her breasts, and she brought her hands to her hair and buried them in it. She closed her fists around small locks of his black hair and pulled from it; Gendry groaned in the back if his throat, making Arya smile again. Gendry left her chest alone and raised his head again until his face was at the same level as the girl's, which allowed him to kiss her again.

"Arya..." he whispered in his mouth when they parted their lips, but Arya silenced him with her tongue.

She grabbed his clothes, pulling from them, and she took a few steps back. Gendry let her guide him without protest.

"If we are going to do this..." he gasped in between kisses"... we are going to do it right. I'm not going to put a bastard in you, Arya. We will wait..."

"Yes, whatever you want..." she gasped as well, busy between walking, talking and kissing him. The truth was that he was very fine with the idea of waiting. She needed to be ready, and she wasn't yet.

"But that doesn't mean that we have to stop doing this," Gendry finished saying, capturing her lips again.
Arya hit the bed with the back of her legs and fell on it, making Gendry fall over her as well. He crashed against her, pressing her body between his and the bed; Arya was unable to move under his weight, so Gendry put his arms at her sides and pushed his upper body upward, so that he would not crush her. They became a tangled mass of limbs; their legs intercrossed, and their arms and hands exploring every little inch of each other that they could find without getting to a point where there was no going back. Both Gendry and Arya knew that, unless they had certain limits, they wouldn't be able to stop. Arya felt her heart about to burst out of her chest, and waves of desire going through her veins, warming her blood up and making her feel like she was boiling. It made her want Gendry even more. She tugged at his clothes, still unwilling to let him move even an inch away from her.

Gendry was feeling exactly the same way. He never wanted to stop kissing Arya, he had wanted that for such a long time... And he had been so afraid to lose her. He knew that, had he arrived just a few minutes later, by then Arya would have been gone forever and only the gods knew when he would have seen her again... if he would have ever seen her again. But now there they were. Something, maybe fate, had not wanted them to be apart, had not wanted them to keep being hostile at each other. They had been able to forgive and forget everything, and now there they were, on the bed of the room of that inn in King's Landing, feverishly kissing ad if their lives depended on it. For Gendry ,at least, that was the case. He knew right from that moment that he could never be away from Arya for long. And if she wanted him to be with her for the rest of his life, he would be more than happy to do so. There wasn't anything that he wanted more in the world.

He couldn't stop himself from asking a question out loud, again between kisses.

"Why did this take so long...?"

"Huh?" Arya asked under him. Her hands were caressing his back over his tunic, but it felt just as good as if she were touching his skin directly.

"This, I mean," he said. He didn't mean what they were doing right then, to their kisses and touches, but rather to the fact that they hadn't been able to admit what they felt until that moment. "You and me. Us."

"Well..." Arya took a pause to think. She wasn't kissing his lips, she was kissing his neck teasingly and his jaw. "I thought we ha already figured that it was because you were stubborn and stupid... You still are."

Gendry laughed and then he tickled Arya's tummy, making her squirm.

"You are just as stubborn as I am!" he protested while he laughed watching Arya squirm under him. He didn't know she was that ticklish. Arya had tears in her eyes, and her belly ached from laughing because of the tickles.

"S-stop!" she tried to say. "Gendry! That's an order! I'll hit you, I swear I will!"

He didn't listen to her, so she hit him. She punched her with her small fist in the ribs with enough strength to make him stop torturing her and move away from her.

"Oi!" he exclaimed, more indignant than hurt. He moved from over her and fell to the bed at Arya's side. She used that moment to take it to her advantage and quickly sat herself on top of him. Gendry gasped when she dis that, and then Arya leaned on him and kissed him again.

That kiss was slower than the others they had been sharing. It was more delicate and tender, just
their lips brushing together and nothing more.

When they parted, they got lost in each other's eyes.

"Arya..." Gendry murmured. He took her hand in his and kissed it. Even after all the kisses, all the touches they had just shared, that small gesture sent chills down her spine. "Tomorrow we leave this place, and we'll go back to the North. I'll take you back home. Alright?"

She took a deep breath, and nodded. She leaned on him even more and let her chin rest on his chest. Her head raised and fell with the movement of his lungs, and she felt very peaceful.

"Will we be together then?" she asked, suddenly afraid that all of that had just been a dream, an illusion. She wasn't sure that she would be able to face another disappointment. "Will you be my family then?"

Gendry kept his silence for a few seconds. After long moments in which the only thing he did was stare into her eyes, making her feel like he was stripping her with his eyes, he cupped her face with his strong hands and brought their foreheads together, just like back in the Blackwater.

"Always... m'lady."

It was a good enough answer for her, and what was most important, she believed him.
Chapter 15

Arya awoke when the light of dawn came through the small window and hit her full in the face. She wrinkled her nose, not liking that sudden luminosity that had disturbed her sleep. She had been having the most beautiful dream, and she did not want to be disturbed from her sleep.

She had dreamt that she hadn't gone to Braavos. Instead, Gendry had found her, and he had brought Nymeria with him. He had confessed his feelings for her, and she had confessed her own, and they had kissed!

With her eyes still closed, she smiled. She felt movement, even though she was still, so she figured that it must be the ship's movement because of the waves of the Narrow Sea. Her smile dissapeared then.

I wanted that dream to be real..., she thought with great pity and dissapointment.

But suddenly she realized something. She had thought that she had been resting her head on a pillow, and that the movement that she felt was that of the ship. But what she rested her head on was too hard to be a pillow, didn't feel like one, and it was the only thing that was moving around her. That wasn't the movement of a ship.

She heard the sound of deep breathing, and she opened her eyes. The first thing she saw was a hand resting on her shoulder, and her body resting besides a larger, masculine one; their legs were tangled with each other's, and they were fully clothed. Arya saw then that she was resting her head on a man's chest, and the movement was his breathing. She moved her head to look at the man's face, and found Gendry deeply asleep.

It had been real. Gendry, his confession, their kiss... Everything had been real!

Arya smiled, feeling overwhelmed by joy. She didn't say a word, she just rested her head on Gendry's shoulder this time, and entertained herself by watching him sleep. She hadn't seen such a relaxed face on anyone before. Gendry looked peaceful and happy, even in his sleep. The way in which the corner of his mouth curved up in a faint smile told Arya that he was having pleasant dreams as well.

Is he dreaming about yesterday as well?, she wondered.

She felt like hours passed, and she also felt like she would never get tired of watching Gendry sleep. She put her hand over his chest, feeling the beating of his heart underneath his clothes and skin. Arya had realized that she loved feeling or hearing his heart beating. When they had fallen asleep last night after a very long day, she had laid down next to Gendry and she had put her head over his chest while he surrounded her with his arms, and Arya was dozed off while listening to his heart beating. She found it to be the most calming thing in the world.

After a long staring at him, and when the light in the room was stronger and illuminated everything, Arya decided to wake Gendry up. In other circumstances, she would wake people up by shaking them and yelling at them to make them rise up up the bed. This time, however, she wanted to do it gently. She raised her hand and started tickling him in the tip of his nose with her finger. After a few seconds, Gendry stirred from his sleep, wrinkling his nose as Arya had done before, and looked around confused, blinking his eyes multiple times. Then he saw Arya, and though at first there was a shocked look in his face (he probably had thought too that everything had been just a dream) he smiled happily at her.
"Good morning," Arya whispered, putting her hand on his chest again.

"Good morning." He lowered his head and placed a kiss on her hair. Then he rubbed her shoulder with his hand with tenderness. "Have you slept well?"

"Better than ever," she smiled. She moved to be able to reach him better, and kissed him full in the mouth. Gendry gladly accepted the kiss and smiled against her mouth. It was a chaste kiss, but it was the best morning that Arya had ever had. When they pulled away from each other, Gendry caressed her cheek with his rough smith hands, that to her seemed to soft. She liked his hands.

Then all of a sudden, her stomach twisted and growled, and both she and Gendry laughed.

"We better get you something to eat, m'lady!" Gendry laughed, amused. Arya hit him in the chest with her fist.

"Do not call me m'lady! I'm not a lady!" she protested, more out of custom than because she really wanted to protest. Gendry knew that.

"I disagree, m'lady."

They stood up from the bed and put their boots on, and they placed their old clothes inside a sack that they had been given before leaving the room. The went down the stairs of the inn to get some food, and they sat in one of the tables available. Because the innkeeper knew that she was lady Stark thanks to her direwolf Nymeria, he paid special attention to them immediatly.

"M'lady. Ser," he doubted at the moment of addressing Gendry, not sure of the young man's status.

"My lord," Arya corrected him. Both Gendry and the innkeeper looked at her with surprise. Gendry didn't say anything, but the innkeeper bowed his head to him.

"Yes, of course. Forgive me, m'lord. What can I bring for you?"

Arya ordered some breakfast; they had enough coin for it, and she was starving. She supossed that Gendry was starving too. When the innkeeper left, Gendry looked at her with raised eyebrows.

"My lord?", he asked, not sure where that had come from. Arya shrugged.

"You are going to be that soon enough. People should start getting used to it," she explained with a mischievous smile on her face. After a few seconds, Gendry smiled too.

"I very much doubt that I'll become a lord. I'm a bastard, they won't allow me."

Arya did not want to worry about those things at that moment, they would just ruin her good mood.

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it," she said, holding Gendry's hand. "But we can be sure of one thing, and it is that I'm going to marry you."

"That's all I need," Gendry said, truly happy.

Arya would have kissed him then and there, if it hadn't been for the innkeeper bringing their food and drink at that precise moment. They ate all that they could, filling their bellies for the log journey home. It would take them a month to reach Winterfell without exhausting themselves or killing their horses, and they would have to eat less to save coin for the entire journey. If they wasted it all quickly, they would have trouble and they would starve and freeze sleeping in the cold.
Maybe we will be treated as special guests? Arya hoped. Since the war had ended, life had become much easier for highborns again. Maybe she wouldn't suffer as much travelling North as she had when she was younger. Besides, she wasn't hiding from anyone now.

When they finished their food they stood up from the table and paid the innkeeper. The man thanked them for staying there, wished them good luck, and told his son to fetch their horse and Nymeria from the stables. As soon as she saw Arya, Nymeria ran to lick her face, scaring the innkeeper's son.

"Everyone's staring," Gendry told Arya. It was true, all the people in the street where staring at her and her giant direwolf. Some looked with fear, others with curiosity, others with realization, knowing who she was. Arya shrugged.

"Let them stare. What harm can they do?"

She wished she hadn't said those words.

Five goldcloaks appeared in the street and approached them when they saw Nymeria.

At first Arya thought that they were only going to ask what was a direwolf doing there in King's Landing, or tell her to be careful with the beast. Instead, they walked up to where Fendry and Arya were standing with Nymeria, and looked at the young girl.

"Are you lady Arya Stark?" one of the goldcloaks asked.

She didn't know how to react at first. Why were they looking for her? Years ago, she would have denied her identity, but at that moment it was of no use. Nymeria was proof enough that she was indeed a Stark, and the people inside the inn knew it too. Slowly and hesitating, she nodded her head.

"Yes, I am," she said, wanting to know why they were asking for her. "Why?"

"The Queen has commanded us to escort you to her," the same goldcloaks that had spoken before explained.

Arya frowned. The Queen had sent the goldcloaks to fetch her? Why?! How did Daenerys Stormborn even know that she was there? Why did she want to see her? Arya wasn't worried, the Queen was a friend of the Stark family. She didn't forget that Jon, Sansa and Arya had helped her to ride her dragons into battle when she took back the Seven Kingdoms.

At that moment, another one of the guards noticed Gendry. He seemed to be studying his face, as if trying to figure out something.

"Are you Gendry Waters?," the goldcloak asked.

Gendry did look alarmed. He had ne'er met the Queen, and he had had bad past experiences with the goldcloaks. He took a step back, and Arya variously put herself in front of him, with Nymeria in front of her snarling at the guards, showing off her fangs.

"What do you want with him?," Arya asked.

"The Queen has ordered that he be taken to her immediately as well," the goldcloaks answered to her. "She told us that you might be found together."

"He has done nothing, I am the one that ran away!" she exclaimed, worrying that the Queen might
think that Gendry had kidnapped her. Maybe news of her disappearance from Winterfell had reached her already, and that had been the most obvious conclusion for her. "Don't do anything to him!"

The guards got closer to them.

"Don't hurt him!"

"Don't worry, my lady. We won't hurt any if you; those are not or orders."

"Then what does the Queen want?!

"She just asked to see you. Both of you."

Arya and Gendry looked at each other, not sure what to do. Arya could order Nymeria to attack the guards and run away from there, but that wouldn't help them; in the end they would not be able to outrun all the goldcloaks in King's Landing. Besides, that wasn't the reign of King Joffrey, they really didn't have to fear nothing from the Dragon Queen... Did they?

*But why does she want Gendry?*, Arya wondered.

She supposed they would have to find out. She gave a reassuring nod to Gendry, indicating him that everything would be alright. He sighed, trusting her, and she extended her arm to offer him her hand as comfort. Gendry looked hesitantly at her hand and then at the guards, who were a bit stunned by that gesture of a highborns lady towards a lowborn bastard, but then he smiled a bit and took her hand.

Arya looked at the guards again with defiant eyes.

"Alright then. Take us to the Queen."

The goldcloaks escorted both of them and Nymeria to the Red Keep. Arya heard people whispering and murmuring behind their backs as they passed through the stinky streets of King's Landing. She couldn't stop wondering why Daenerys Targaryen had sent the goldcloaks after them and Gendry, but she hoped that it wasn't because of anything bad. She was more nervous for Gendry than for her, and she looked at him constantly through the corner of her eyes as she walked.

*I won't let them do anything to him*, she promised herself. *I'll kill anyone who tries to harm him, just as I know now that he would do it for me.*

She hadn't been at the Red Keep since the day if the reconquest of the Dragon Queen of King's Landing. She couldn't forget the feeling that it was, riding on the green dragon Rhaegal and seeing the enemies burn below them. It had been incredible, and so liberating... The Starks and Targaryens had won the war that night.

Gendry had never been inside the Red Keep, and he looked around with a bit of interest even though his insides were twisting with nerves and he had already seen enough castles in his life: Dragonstone, Harrenhal, Winterfell...

*But this was his father's home*, Arya realized then, understanding Gendry's interest and remembering the truth that he had revealed to her in Winterfell. *His father was King Robert.*

Hiw different things would have been if Jiffrey had been the bastard (which indeed he was) and Gendey the heir to the throne! Her father would have never questioned his claim on the throne and he would not have been executed. The war would not have happened, nor the Red Wedding, or a
lot of other things...

We can't change the past, Arya reminded herself then. Everything would have been different if things had been like that. Sansa would have been betrothed to Gendry. She would not be with Sandor and I would not be with the stupid bull.

Perhaps all the bad things that had happened in the past had a good purpose, after all.

They arrived at the Throne Room. Gendry opened his eyes wide when he saw it; it was really impressive, with the huge columns and the Iron Throne made of the swords of Aegon's enemies. Daenerys Targaryen was sitting on the throne. She was wearing her silver hair loose, and her purple eyes were piercing. She didn't speak a word when she saw them approaching her escorted by the goldcloaks, she just looked to one side.

Arya followed her gaze and was deeply surprised by what she found there.

"Arya!"

Sansa, Jon and Sandor were there, next to the Iron Throne. It looked like Sansa had been pacing from one side of the other to the room, making the men nervous with all that movement, but she ran to hug her sister ad soon as she saw her. Arya couldn't stop herself and ran to hug her as well.

"There you are, you idiot!" Sansa exclaimed. She rarely cursed or insulted anyone, except when she was desperate. Her sister's absence had really upset her. "I thought I would never see you again! How dare you run away from Winterfell like that, you could have been killed! Something terrible could have happened to you!"

"Don't worry, Sansa, I'm fine!" Arya reassured her. She knew that her older sister could be a little paranoid after all the things that had happened to her. "Really, Sansa. Nothing has happened to me."

"You were such a fool, leaving like that!" Sansa kept scolding her.

"I must agree with your sister here; you were a bloody fool!" Sandor barked, pointing at her with a menacing finger, like an older brother angry at a younger sister. That was what the man and Arya had become lately; brothers. And Sandor had been just as worried sick as the rest of her family looking for her all over Westeros.

"Oh, shut up!" she protested, sticking his to give out to him in the most unladylike way possible. Then she hugged Jon with all her strength. "Jon!"

"Arya, don't ever do this to us again," her cousin told her while he hugged her back with brotherly love and full of relief that she was fine and unharmed.

"I won't."

"Promise me. Please."

"I promise," she said, and she meant it. Then she let go of him, and Jon chuckled amused once he took a better look at her.

"Arya, what are you wearing?"

Her cheeks reddened furiously. Before she could yell anything rude to her cousin, her older sister, the real lady of the family, intervened.
"Jon, she's wearing a dress! Don't discourage her!" she scolded him.

"Right, sorry."

"I'm only wearing this because I don't have anything else to wear, my clothes were all dirty and broken," she defended herself. Then she realized that she had not properly addressed the Queen yet. She might not feel or act like a lady, but she held a great amount of respect for the Dragon Queen. She never courtsied, but she did bow her head to the Queen in the most respectful way. "Your Grace."

Daenerys smiled. She looked so beautiful and full of life when she did that. She was a great woman, and a great Queen.

"It's good to see you again, lady Arya. You have kept your family very worried. They were most distressed when they came to me for help."

"I'm sorry, your Grace," Arya apologized, feeling real bad for having made her family suffer and leave the North to look for her so far away from home.

"I hope the guards did not scare you?" Daenerys asked, referring to the goldcloaks.

Arya shook her head. She turned her head to look at Gendry then, and everyone seemed to notice him for the first time. He looked at all of them a bit insecure, with a mixture of shame and shyness in his eyes. Arya recognize it as submission.

"He's surrounded by highborns everywhere now, in the Red Keep, in front of the Queen. Well, of course he must have been feeling insecure! He has been taught his entire life to bow his head to highborns, and he was now in front of the Queen of Westeros!

Arya saw that Sansa looked at Gendry with a sisterly smile in her face, while the expression on Sandor's and Jon's faces were more... severe. The Queen only looked at him with curiosity, and his face turned a deep shade of red. No one spoke a word until Sandor broke the silence.

"I thought I had told you to stay in Winterfell," he rasped, sounding deadly.

Gendry gulped, but then he raised his head, standing with a bit more dignity and pride. He must have realized that if he wanted to have courage for what was coming with him and Arya, he should start now.

"Aye, you did," he nodded. "But disobeying you proved to be a thousand times wiser. I found her just in time."

"You little shit! It was your fault that Arya ran away in the first place!" Sandor barked. Sansa walked up to him and cupped his face with her hands.

"My love, I know you want to defend my sister as if she was your own blood, but do not torment the poor Gendry," she begged him, and then she smiled in that way that Sandor could never resist. He always did whatever Sansa asked him when she smiled in that way, so he stopped talking harshly to the young man. He did not, however, stop glaring at him an shooting daggers through his eyes. Sansa smiled at the young smith again. "Thank you so much for finding my sister. How can we repay you?"

Gendry quickly shook his head, acting modest as always. It exhasperated Arya. "No, my lady, you don't need to give me anything..." he quickly said, almost alarmed that a highborn was offering something to him, though he was used to it from the Starks.
Arya intervened. She was not about to let Gendry waste the perfect opportunity to get what they both wanted. She raised her head in an authoritarian way and crossed her arms over her chest while a smile spread across her face.

"Actually, there is something that you can repay him with," she said, contradicting Gendry's words. They all looked at her, and she was about to explain when Sandor interrupted her—always. She could have smacked him in the face at that moment if it weren't because she knew that her sister would stop her.

"Where in Seven Hells is Jaqen H'ghar?" he asked, looking around as if he expected the Faceless Man to be hiding in the shadows, but there wasn't anybody there.

"He's gone," Arya said. The man was far away into the Narrow Sea by then, and she doubted that she would ever see him again.

"Left you, did he?" Sandor asked, jumping into conclusions. "Damn him, first he kidnaps you and then he runs off!"

"No, he didn't leave me, I did,\textsuperscript{1} Arya corrected him. "And he didn't kidnap me! I left!"

"Why did you do that?" Jon asked. He looked hurt, and Arya felt guilty when she saw that expression in his face. She knew what he was going to tell her, and she felt bad all of a sudden. "Gendry told us what happened, but... Arya, you left us. You turned your back on us. Your family..."

"I know," she said, lowering her gaze and feeling ashamed. "I should not have done that."

Gendry took a step forward to stand by her side, hoping to comfort her like that. He did not want Arya's family scolding her for something that he had caused.

"It was my fault," he said, standing bravely in front of the Starks and Targaryens. It was curious, the way in which he changed in a few seconds. He looked a thousand times braver when he had to speak up for Arya that when he had to speak up for himself. "I should have done things differently, I should have... approached the matter in a more delicate way," he said, remembering how furious he was and how cloudy his mind was and how fueled his emotions were the night when he and Arya had that fight.

"And I should have been less hot-headed," Arya quickly added, wanting to take some of the responsibility off Gendry's back. But apparently, he wasn't going to allow that.

"I should have been less stupid," he finished. Sandor snorted.

"Aye, you were bloody stupid indeed," he rasped. He looked down to his wife when he noticed the harsh look that she was giving him. "What?!"

"Sandor, remember that everybody acts stupid from time to time!" she told him. He responded to her by rolling his eyes. "And don't you dare deny that."

Jon was the first one that noticed that a big quarrel was going to start there if he didn't do something to stop it then and there. Sandor and Sansa often argued over petty things such as that, and it could get... loud. Arya thanked Jon mentally for reacting quickly, and looked at him when he faced the Queen.

"Aunt Daenerys, I understand that it was you who summoned Gendry here?"
Daenerys nodded, still sitting proudly on the Iron Throne. Arya looked at her wondering what were
the reasons why the Dragon Queen had ordered the goldcloaks to look for Gendry. He was no one
of importance! And most importantly, he hadn't done anything wrong, so he couldn't be there to be
punished for any crimes…

"I did," the Queen answered to her nephew's question. Then she looked straight into Gendry's eyes.
Arya expected Gendry to bow his head to the Queen again, behaving in that submissive way in
which lowborns and he always did… but he didn't. He kept standing proudly at her side, with his
head held high and staring straight into the Queen's violet eyes. It made Arya feel proud, somehow,
and she smiled. "Gendry, I've been told that you are a smith?"

"Aye, your Grace."

"And that you are a very good friend of lady Arya?"

"Aye, your Grace," he nodded, not sure where that conversation was going.

"How did you become friend?"

"When we were on the run from King's Landing… Escaping the goldcloaks and the Lannisters," he
answered, remembering how they had met when they marched from the city with Yoren and Hot
Pie and Lommy, starting their journey to the Wall to join the night's Watch.

"You were escaping as well?" Daenerys kept questioning, and Gendry nodded once again.
Everybody else in the room was confused, not sure why Daenerys was asking those questions.

I hope she doesn't think that he was on the run because he had done something bad! Arya thought,
ready to jump in at any moment to defend Gendry if need be.

"Your Grace, why are you asking these questions?" Sansa asked, voicing the question in everyone's
mind. It didn't make much sense that Daenerys wanted to know those things from Gendry, a boy
whom she had never met before.

"I needed to make sure that he was the right person that I was looking for. I see that it is," the
Queen replied, making them all frown even more. They hadn't seen until then that she was holding
a rolled paper in her hand. Se looked at it for a moment before she sighed and stood up from her
Throne. She looked glorious in front of the Iron Throne, like a true Queen. Slowly, she descended
the steps until she was standing at the same floor level as them. She was taller than Arya but
shorter than Sansa, and even more beautiful up close, exotic and striking. However, none of the
men present in the Throne Room looked at her with even a pinch of desire or lust. Sandor only had
eyes for Sansa (who was believed to be the second most beautiful woman in Westeros), Jon only
had eyes for his wife Ygritte, and Gendry only had eyes for Arya.

The Queen walked up to Gendry. Now she was the one that had to look up to his eyes.

"You are a bastard. Am I mistaken?"

Gendry shook his head, letting her know that she was not mistaken. Then the Queen smiled, and
she handed him the paper.

"Not anymore," she said.

Arya opened her eyes wide when she heard that. Gendry frowned, completely confused. He took
the paper that the Queen handed him with unsure hands, and he unrolled it. He read in silence what
it said. Arya couldn't see what was written in the paper, but she could see Gendry's expression
changing as he read it. By the time he was finished, he was gaping and he was as pale as a ghost. He looked at the piece of paper awestruck, practically not believing it.

"What…?" he mumbled.

The Queen smiled even more with his reaction and returned to the steps, climbing them again to the Iron Throne.

"I have lived my whole life hating your family; that was what I was taught from my brother. He said that we should exterminate all of you when we took back the Seven Kingdoms. But my brother was stupid and intolerant, and he would not have been a good king. I understand that people are not guilty for what their families did in the past," she declared, and she sat on the throne. "I know the burden that it is to be the last surviving member of a family, I once was alone before I found my nephew. I hope you carry that responsibility with honor, and might the Houses of Targaryen and Baratheon be friends again, as the once were in the past."

Sansa and Jon gasped loudly, and the sound echoed in the Throne Room. Sandor was just as shocked as them, or maybe even more.

"WHAT?!"

They all stared at Gendry in awe. He was still holding the paper that legitimized him as Gendry Baratheon, son of King Robert Baratheon, first of his name. Arya thought that he looked like someone had hit him on the head with a hammer.

"Him?! A Baratheon?!" Sandor Clegane could still not believe it. And he had thought that he had seen enough with Jon Snow being legitimized as a Targaryen!

"But-but why?" Gendry mumbled, unable to speak correctly. He was still too much in shock. At his side, Arya was smiling widely, happy for him.

"I received a raven from your uncle Stannis a few days ago. He was the last Baratheon, his daughter Shireen had succumbed to illness a few months ago," the Queen exclaimed. "Stannis was ill as well, and he did not want the Baratheon name to be lost. He explained to me your origin and story, and revealed that it was his wish for you to be legitimized and become his heir. I didn't find any reason to deny him his last wish. You are now Lord Gendry Baratheon."

"Lord...?"

"I received a raven from last night informing me of Lord Stannis' death. Therefore, as his heir, you are now Lord Gendry Baratheon of Strom's End. All the lords and ladies of the Stormlands are your bannermen."

Gendry felt like he was getting dizzy. That was too much information in a very small amount of time, he had to take a lot in. He wasn't a bastard anymore, he wasn't a nobody... He was the Lord of one of the most powerful Houses of Westeros.

He chuckled, not sure of what to do or what to say. He didn't even know what to think. Because of his silence, Arya started to be worried. What if Gendry wasn't happy with those news? He had gone in a second from being a simple smith to being Lord Baratheon, it was a very big responsibility. It also mean a lot of pressure over him, as he had to learn how to be a highborn, he had to learn of politics and how to rule over his bannermen and the people of the Stormlands, and many other things... Things were going to be expected of him. Never in his life had anyone expected anything from him.
Arya would understand him better than anyone if he decided to reject that... gift... that he had been given by Stannis Baratheon and the Queen. Not long ago, she had hated the idea of becoming a lady, and she always repeated that she wanted to be wild and free. For her, that meant to be as far away from castles and lords as possible. However, over the last years and during the war she had finally realized how lucky she had been, and how hard life was for lowborn people. Gendry had now a chance to get rid of that hard life that had always treated him badly.

She saw hesitation in his blue eyes. He was looking at the paper in which his name, Gendry Baratheon, was written. He was probably thinking that it was a dream, and he would wake from it at any moment to find the harsh reality. But when that didn't happen, Gendry raised his head and looked at everyone in the eyes. He looked at Sansa, who was very happy for him. Then he looked at Sandor, who was still impressed, incredibly surprised, and still gaping in disbelief. Then he looked at Jon, who looked proud. Jon Targaryen knew better than anyone what it felt like to be nobody one day and suddenly become an important lord the next day, as he was one a Snow. He nodded his head in an encouraging way.

Finally, Gendry looked at Arya. With only one look at him, she knew that he was completely confused and had no idea of what to do, what to respond to all that. He wanted her to help him take the right decision, he needed her.

Actually, he wanted to make his decision based on what she wanted. He knew that Arya didn't like lords. How could he possibly be with her if he became the last Baratheon in Westeros? Years ago, Arya would have probably not liked the idea of Gendry being a lord. But now, after all that had happened, she knew that it didn't matter. She would love Gendry no matter what he was: bastard, smith, lord...

No matter what, he would always be her bull-headed idiot.

She dedicated him a warm smile, letting him now that he was free to choose what he wanted. After all, Gendry had been taking the right decisions lately. Arya trusted him to make the right decision this time too.

And so Gendry decided.

He turned to face the Queen sitting on the Iron Throne, and he kneeled in front of her. He bowed his head, but not with submission; with respect, instead.

"Your Grace, thank you for this gift," he said. His voice shook a little, and it wasn't surprising. He was still processing everything. "It will be an honor to be the Lord of Storm's End, though I'm not worthy of the title. I haven't been prepared for this."

The Queen smiled, not giving importance to that little fact. "I learned to be a Queen. Ad if Jon and Sandor learned how to be lords, so will you, I'm sure of it. Now rise, Lord Gendry. I hope this new life will make you very happy."

"It will, your Grace... I will just request one thing which I was going to ask to Lord Bran and all the members of House STark before I was summoned here" he said as he stood back on his feet as well.

"What is that request?"

Gendry looked at Arya with a playful glint in his eyes. He reached out and took her hand in his own in a gentle and tender way.
"The hand of Arya Stark in marriage."

Sansa Stark squealed then, unable to control herself. Her husband was staring at her in alarm, he had never thought that she would do such an unladylike thing in public, and even less in front of the Queen. They were all looking at Sansa with amusement, and the girl covered her mouth with her hand. Her face turned to a deep shade of red because of the embarrassment.

"I'm sorry," she excused herself. She was very excited. "I just thought that I would never live to see this moment!"

That was true, neither she nor anyone had ever expected Arya's hand to be asked for marriage. They thought that, even if it did happen, she would kill the poor fool who dared ask for her hand. Instead, they were all amazed to see the way in which Arya was blushing, and she was doing it in a good way.

"Seven bloody buggering hells," Sandor Clegane cursed. Too many things were happening that day that he did not see coming.

They all looked at Arya then, and she blushed even more when she saw the looks in their faces. They were all waiting for her to say something!

"I consent to this marriage," the Queen announced. She was happy, because she loved to see people happy. Her own marriage had ended tragically, but there was still hope for other people. She could see in Gendry's face that he cared deeply for Arya, but she was not going to force the fierce young wolf-girl to do anything she didn't want to do. "Lady Arya, what do you say? Do you agree to marry Lord Gendry Baratheon?"

For a brief second, everyone feared that she would say no. They had grown up hearing Arya repeat over and over again that she would not marry, that she would not be a lady, that she was going to be a knight! Big was their surprise when, not even a second later, Arya screamed her answer, and it echoed all over the Throne Room.

"Yes!"
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Cheesy chapter. Forgive me, but it had to be this way ^^ And sorry for the delay in updating. I'm so tired lately and I have writer's block most of the days.

There is dialogue from the show at the end of this chapter. I do not own it, I'm just borrowing it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Arya!"

"No!"

"Arya, open the door!"

"No!"

Sansa cursed under his breath in a rather unladylike way that she had picked up from her husband's coarse language. She hit the heavy wooden door again with her hand in frustration, and again her sister ignored her. Arya had locked herself inside the bedchamber as soon as she saw the opportunity, when everyone left her alone, and she was stubbornly refusing to step out of it or let anyone in. Sansa was getting irritated with her, though she knew that what was happening with her sister was that she was extremely nervous, and she was having a panic attack. After all, Arya was used to dealing with men's problems, and froze when the time came to face other kind of problems that had nothing to do with violence or battles or fights. She just wasn't used to it, and then she became afraid even though she had nothing to be afraid of!

It was, after all, her wedding day.

Sansa understood that, because such an event was far different from everything else that Arya had experienced before in her life, she was nervous, and scared. She was happy, yes, and she wasn't doubting her feelings for her soon-to-be husband, but a lot of things were happening in a very short period of time. If she would just allow Sansa to come inside the room and talk to her!

"Arya, please!" she begged, trying again in vain.

"Go away!"

Sansa heard steps approaching from the hallway and she turned her head in that direction, and she was extremely relieved that it was her husband, Sandor, already dressed up in fine clothes to attend his goodsister's wedding. He frowned when he saw his little wife trying desperately to open the damn door.

"What's the matter, little bird?" he asked, looking at the door in confusion.

"It's Arya! She's just as damn stubborn as you on our wedding day, she won't...fucking door!" she exclaimed and cursed again, surprising even herself. She hit the door with her hand, angry. Sandor looked at her for a second before breaking into a fit of amused laugher when he heard her cursing.
He always laughed whenever he heard her cursing and saw the bad influence that he had had on his wife's manners.

Sansa did not like it.

"Sandor! It's not funny!" she exclaimed, getting angry at him too. "The ceremony is in half an hour, we can't keep the guests waiting! And the groom!"

Sandor stopped laughing, knowing that Sansa would hit him if she got any angrier with him. He approached the door trying to keep a more serious face, and barked:

"Wolf-girl! If you don't come out, I'll make sure to take to out myself!"

"Go to hell, Sandor!" Arya's voice came from inside the room.

"I'll give you five seconds!" he barked at the door, ignoring her protests. His wife looked at him a little bit alarmed.

"Darling, what are you going to do...?"

"Step aside, little bird."

That did not make her feel any better. Maybe calling her husband for help had been a terrible idea. She took a step back...

"Sandor...?"

"One!" he barked at the wooden door behind which Arya was hiding stubbornly.

Arya did not open the door.

"Two! I swear, wolf-girl, I'll kick the door down and kick you out!"

"Sandor, maybe if you are more delicate about it..." Sansa suggested, putting special emphasis on the word 'delicate'.

"That doesn't work on your sister, little bird. She has a head as hard as a rock. Three!"

Still, no reply.

"Four!"

"Go away!" Arya protested from inside the room, but she still didn't the door. SHe was exasperating her sister and trying her goodbrother's patience. Sandor wasn't a man who didn't act on his threats. He would really kick the door down and make her come out of the room.

"Five!" he roared, and prepared to kick the door down as he had promised. He took a step back, but Arya's voice stopped him.

"Wait!" And finally, there was a 'click' and the youngest Stark girl opened the door. She did not look happy, and she shot daggers at Sandor through her grey eyes. Sansa stepped into the room quickly before her sister could close it again. She took Arya's hand and guided her towards the boudoir and sat her in front of the mirror. Arya did not protest this time.

"Arya, you stubborn girl! Why did you lock me out?!" she asked. "You seemed so happy before!"
"I am happy!" Arya exclaimed, speaking the truth. "But I am scared!"

She looked ashamed to be afraid at a moment like that, and Sansa looked at her with loving and sisterly understanding. She held her sister's face between her hands and made Arya look at her straight in the eyes.

"Arya, everyone gets scared on their wedding day. Even I was scared!"

Arya raised an eyebrow skeptically. "What could you possibly have been afraid of? Sandor and you had already gone through a lot of things that are supposed to happen after marriage!"

Sansa chuckled. "Is that what you are afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid of that!" Arya said, blushing furiously and ignoring the Hound's amused expression at her left. "I'm afraid of... the future. And everything that it holds. I'm afraid of what might happen years from now after this day."

"Arya, everyone has those fears," Sansa assured her. "Sandor and I have those fears. Jon and Ygritte have those fears. I'm sure that Mother and Father, and Robb and Talisa, had them too. Everyone has them. but you know the best way to not be afraid?"

"What?"

"Just live everyday step by step, and enjoy it," Sansa smiled. "You have suffered enough already. Life has put many obstacles in your way, and you passed them all. Now it is your turn to be happy."

"You have suffered more than I have," Arya whispered, looking guilty all of a sudden. "Are you happy?"

Sansa didn't hesitate to say: "Yes. I am happy. Much was taken away from me. My parents, my brother, my son... But I still have a wonderful family that loves me and that I love. I have a husband that is my entire life and that loves me more than anything. I have a life, and a reason to want to live it. And you have it too."

Upon hearing her sister say those things, Arya managed to smile a little, but it was a true smile.

"I know that this was never the thing that you really liked, all this... lady stuff," Sansa laughed, feeling tears stinging in the back of her eyes because of all the emotion that she was feeling, and upon seeing her sister on her wedding day and because she was talking of those things. "Weddings and husbands and children and love... You always wanted to be a knight and fight with swords."

"I still want to fight with swords. I just don't want to be a knight. And I want to get married," Arya quickly stated.

"And I believe that Gendry loves that about you, your wild spirit. And you will have children that are just as wild and stubborn as you. You have nothing to be afraid of, Arya, because you are surrounded by people who love you."

Arya knew that, she did. And she knew that she had been stupid before, refusing to come out of the door to attend the wedding. She was going to get married to the man she loved, everything would be alright, she would have a happy life, and she was going to still be able to be who she really was. No one or nothing was going to stop her.

When Sansa saw that Arya was more calm than she had been before, she turned her head to look at
Sandor. "Could you leave us alone for a bit while we finish making her ready? Tell everyone will be there in a few."

Sandor nodded, and he gave Arya a supporting look with his eyes. She smiled at him, thanking him silently, and then Sandor left the room. Once the two Stark sisters were alone in the room, Sansa started helping Arya to finish getting ready for the wedding. Before she was locked out of the room, she had already managed to make Arya put on the dress. Arya had stubbornly tried during those past months (during which she had turned five and ten) to get everyone to allow her to wear breeches and a tunic to a wedding. She said that she was already acting too much of a lady by getting married, and that wearing an actual dress would go against her values. Sansa had not tolerated that.

"Over my dead body!" she had cried scandalized. Anyone would think that Arya had admitted that she was killing newborn puppies, judging by the horrified expression on Sansa's face. "I've lived my entire life thinking that you would never get married! Now that a man has finally achieved the impossible, I'm not going to let you ruin it for me!"

Sansa had been dead set on her decision to make her sister wear a beautiful dress on her wedding, and even though Arya had protested and even turned to Gendry for help, it had been of no use. The man had just shrugged.

"You actually look perfect in a dress..." had been his excuse for not supporting her against Sansa. If looks could kill. Gendry would have died a hundred times already.

"You traitor... If you continue to be so 'supportive', I will reconsider if I want to marry you!" Arya had threatened him, making him laugh.

But now, she was actually wearing a dress. And she had to admit, much to her despair, that she looked absolutely stunning in it.

She looked at her reflection in the mirror. It returned her the image of a thin girl with small but enough curves. The bodice of the dress was tight, marking her figure, and it was white with silver embroidery, in the colors of House Stark. She had a diamond and silver tiara on her head, and her dark and shiny curls fell perfectly over her shoulders and well past her chest, almost reaching her waist. She was a beautiful young woman.

"I look so much like a... girl," she said. Sansa chuckled.

"Well, you are a girl."

Arya rolled her eyes. "You know what I mean! I look like a lady."

"Is that bad?" Sansa asked as she fixed the tiara on the top of Arya's head and made sure that the dress was perfectly neat.

"I guess... not."

"You are going to be a Lady now. And even more important lady than me!" Sansa laughed, amused by the turns and twists of life. "Lady of Storm's End."

"It sounds so strange," Arya said, biting on her lip. "I don't know if I'm ready. I never prepared for this, unlike you. What is a wife supposed to do? What is lady supposed to do? And how can I stay true to myself while being both without messing up?"

Arya was afraid that people might find her worries stupid and childish, or that they might think that
she was not fitting for the role of lady and wife. She had never cared about it, not even one bit. But now, being those two things meant being able to stay at Gendry's side, which was suddenly what she wanted more than anything.

Sansa did not find Arya's worries stupid. She understood her sister perfectly, and wanted to cheer her up and calm her nerves down. She wanted her to be happy.

"Arya, you will always stay true to yourself. You are getting married because you want to, remember; no one forced you to do it, and that means a world of difference. You love Gendry, which means that you will be a great wife, better than many others. And as for being a lady... well, at least you have more knowledge on that than poor Lord Baratheon!"

That was true, and it made Arya laugh along with Sansa. Gendry had spent the past few months learning how to be a Lord with the help of Bran and Jon. Sandor had tried to help a little, but he had little patience to teach and even less patience to be a lord (he thanked the gods that he had his little bird to help him, or he would be doomed), so he wasn't of much help. Bran and Jon had done the best job that they could transforming Gendry from a mere bastard to a worthy Lord of the Stormlands, and though they knew that he would grow to become a great and just lord, the lad was still too nervous. He had a lot of responsibility all of a sudden, but he was putting great effort into being worthy of his new title... and of his new wife.

Arya would have married him even if he had stayed a bastard, a simple armorer. She didn't care about titles and lands and castles and lords, though she recognized now that life in a castle was easier that facing the dangers outside. Having lived those dangers themselves, and hunger and fear and cold and hopelessness, Gendry and Arya were sure to make great rulers over their people, for they understood their needs and their suffering. Maybe that was the main reason why Gendry had accepted his new identity.

Sansa tried to put a little bit of kohl in Ara's eyes, and though the bride refused and protested at first, she later sat still in front of the mirror watching her reflection while Sansa put the thrice-damned thing on her eyes. When she was done, Arya blinked several times and stood to get closer to the mirror. She had to admit that it hadn't been a bad idea. Sansa had just put a tiny bit of it, and it made her storm-grey eyes look smokey and deep and hypnotizing.

She turned around to stare at Sansa and smiled, grateful.

"Thank you."

Sansa didn't say nothing. She just stared at her little sister in her white and silver wedding dress, looking proud and beautiful, and tears appeared in her eyes again. Arya frowned.

"What's wrong?"

"I just... I'm so happy that this day has arrived," Sansa said, being able to contain her tears. She was a very strong woman after all, and nowadays it took a lot to make her cry. She hadn't cried often in years. "Not just because you are getting married... It's because we all finally get to be completely happy! At last..."

Arya didn't think twice about it and hugged her sister. She had never been good at expressing her emotions, and she didn't use to have a good relationship with Sansa even though she had always known that deep down she loved her older sister. Sansa was a little surprised by Arya's sudden demonstration of affection, but she hugged her sister as well after two seconds. Arya sighed, but she didn't say anything. After a few moments of just standing there hugging each other, they let go and Sansa looked at her little sister with a bright smile on her face. Her smile was contagious, and
Arya ended up smiling too.

"Well!" Sansa exclaimed, making sure that her hair was still in order and that so was Arya's and her dress and her face. When she saw that everything was perfect, she held her sister's hand. "It's time!"

The Sept in Winterfell was small, but big enough to celebrate the wedding there. It had been built by Eddard Stark for his lady wife Catelyn when she came to Winterfell, leaving her home in the South behind. Now, that sept was going to witness a second wedding that year, the first having been the wedding between Sansa Stark and Sandor Clegane, and the second one the wedding between Arya Stark and Gendry Baratheon.

Gendry was shaking at the front of the Sept, waiting impatiently for the moment when the wedding would start and his beloved wife would come into the Sept and walk towards him to say the vows and marry him in front of the gods and their people. He had never been so nervous in his life, and he could feel his hands shaking and his whole body trembling. It amazed him, the effect that Arya Stark had on him. He had never felt so uneasy in his entire life, not once. Neither had he ever felt so happy, except when the girl told him that she loved him and that she did want to marry him. He had not expected her to want to marry him, or anyone! It had been the greatest gift that he could have had.

Everyone in Winterfell had been happy with their betrothal and had congratulated them as soon as they heard the news. Lord Bran Stark was greatly surprised, but he had been happy for his sister and his future goodbrother, and had patted him in the back saying that he was glad to have such a good man as an addition to the family. Bran had always trusted him and had had faith that things between Gendry and Arya would get better, and he had been right. Young Rickon had been delighted. He saw Gendry as his older brother now, and cherished him as much as he did Sandor. Jon's wife, Ygritte, had laughed with surprise when she heard the news. She had congratulated Arya, and she had shot a warning look at Gendry and she had told him that he better be careful, because if he wanted an easy wife he was making a big mistake. Arya was just as wild as she was. Gendry knew that, and he also knew that he had to be careful with Arya. He still remembered that time when she had punched him in the face when she got angry with him, and if he focused enough he could still remember the pain. He did not want to experience that again.

he clutched the Baratheon cloak that he was supposed to give Arya tightly with his hands and fingers. He couldn't stop looking at the door, waiting for Arya to come...

Sandor approached him them, slowly. He took Gendry's attention away from the door, and the young man smiled a bit when he saw his soon-to-be goodbrother.

"Nervous?" Sandor asked, rasping as always. Gendry found it very intimidating, the way in which the huge man's voice sounded like steel on stone... though for some reason it sounded softer than other days. Different. But still cold and deadly and menacing.

He nodded.

"Aye," he admitted.

"Don't worry, lad," Sandor said, imitating Gendry and looking at the door. "She loved you, and you love her. Your marriage will be happy... As long as you don't try to tame her into being a normal lady like all the others."

"That was never my intention."
"I know. But if you ever dare to hurt her again in any way... If you ever fail her again..." Sandor rasped in the most threatening and deadly voice that Gendry had ever heard or been addressed with in his life, "you won't have to worry about her killing you, because I will have already done it first."

Gendry knew Sandor well enough already to know that the man always meant it when he threatened someone, and he knew that if he wanted to keep living, he better make sure that Arya never had any complaints about him. Sandor loved Arya like a little sister, and he would never allow anyone to harm her ever again and live long enough to tell it. Gendry swallowed past a gulp in his throat and dared to look up to Sandor's grey eyes.

"Don't worry," he said. "I will devote my life to her in very sense."

That seemed a good enough answer to for Sandor, who nodded.

"Good," he said, and then he walked away.

Sandor got lost in the crowd that awaited for the arrival of the bride, and Gendry turned his attention back to the door. Someone walked in at that moment, and Gendry opened his eyes wide when he saw that that person making an entrance to the Sept was none other than Sandor.

He turned around to look all over the place. He could swear that he had just seen Sandor leave his side and go in a complete different direction, and now he was walking through the door! he looked at the man again, and Sandor saw his pale expression as if he had seen a ghost, and frowned before approaching him.

"Are you alright?" he asked Gendry when he reached his side. Gendry didn't say anything at first, just stared at him dumbstruck, unable to comprehend what had just happened. His expression and silence annoyed Sandor. "Lad! Are you alright? Looks like you saw a ghost!"

Finally, Gendry found words.

"How did you do that?" he asked, and Sandor frowned even more than before.

"How did I do what?"

"That! You were here... a second ago. And now you walk into the room from outside?"

From Sandor's expression, anyone would think that the man believed that Gendry was an idiot.

"I have never been inside the Sept, lad. I was with your bride and my wife; the little wolf is as stubborn as a mule, but she is finally coming."

"You were right here seconds ago," Gendry insisted, pointing to the spot right next to him where he was standing. "I was talking with you."

"Boy, how many skins of wine have you drank already?" Sandor asked, now a bit worried about the young man and clearly thinking that he was terribly drunk. However, Gendry hadn't drank a single drop of wine, not even of ale, and the comment annoyed him.

"Listen to me! You were right here! It was you!"

And then it hit him. It felt like a slap to the face, but it made complete sense all of a sudden. Hadn't this already happened before months ago, but with him? Hadn't Arya, Sandor and Jon believed that they were traveling to the Twins with Gendry, and later it turned out that it wasn't him...?
He started laughing once he figured it all out. He couldn't believe it, but he supposed that that had to happen sooner or later. Before Sandor started believing that he had lost his mind, Gendry proceeded to explain.

"Jaqen H'ghar." he said, and a dark expression shadowed Sandor's expression. "he came to tell me to never hurt Arya, or he would kill me."

"Huh. Did he? Well, good, because I was going to tell you the same thing."

"Where you?"

"Yes. You hurt the little bird's sister, and I'll shove my sword so far up your arse that you will choke on it."

Gendry was highly alarmed by that statement, but he didn't allow it to show on his facial expression. He was still too surprised by the braavosi's appearance in Winterfell, right before his wedding. He stared at all the people that were in the small Spet, trying to find the man. Obviously, Jaqen H'ghar was no longer wearing Sandor's face, and Gendry was not able to locate him in the crowd. Many would say that he should be alarmed by the man's presence there. He was, after all, the man that had almost taken Arya away from him forever... But he had let her go, and he had disappeared until now. The fact that Jaqen H'ghar was there, hidden in between Winterfell's guests to warn Gendry that he would not let any type of harm come to Arya, was good news for the Lord of Storm's End. It let him know that there would always be someone in the shadows taking care of Arya, and no matter what happened, she would be protected.

it was then announced that the bride was about to enter the Sept, and he felt a tight knot forming in the pit of his stomach. He swallowed hard, and Sandor patted him in the back.

"Breathe," the huge man rasped before going to his place, leaving Gendry standing there alone in front of the Septon.

Then he saw Arya, and he could swear that something inside of him had caught fire.

"I'm going to call Jon," Sansa said. It had been decided that Jon should be the one to give Arya away to her husband, as her father was dead, Bran would have difficulties due to his paralysis, and Rickon was too small. Jon was her cousin and had been raised as her brother for almost their entire lives, so he was the perfect person to give her away.

Arya stopped Sansa grabbing her wrist. "Wait! Will you... will you come with me too?"

Sansa had been Arya's pillar of hope since they day in which they found each other again by accident in Braavos. Arya had helped her sister when she needed help, and then Sansa had helped her when the tables turned. Arya wanted her sister there with her, giving her away to her husband alongside Jon. Sansa smiled tenderly, and nodded accepting her sister's request.

"I'll be right back," she said, disappearing into the Sept.

She came back with Jon, who was stunned upon seeing Arya and took a step back, not believing that that was the same girl that used to be so little and dress like a boy and be all dirty and have her hair all messy, and her knees full of scratches. What was left of that little girl in the young woman that Arya had turned into was that same wild spirit that she had always had reflected in her grey eyes. She would always be Arya, but now she was beautiful.

"Gods, Arya," Jon said with a smile, approaching her to hug her. "You are beautiful!"
"Really? You mean it?"

"With all my heart. Now come. Everyone is waiting for you."

She was much calmer than she had been before. She was still nervous, yes, but she wasn't shaking. She held her head high, and took Jon's arm with a smile on her face. Then, with her free hand, she took Sansa's arm, and all three of them together walked inside the Spet where everyone was waiting for the ceremony to begin.

Arya couldn't see anyone face. It's like no one existed around her, except Gendry, who waited for her standing in front of the Septon. Arya smiled when he saw his eyes as soon as she saw her. Gendry took all of her in through his eyes, not leaving a single inch of her without carefully observing and admiring it. Then Arya started walking, guided by Jon and Sansa, and they delivered her to Gendry. Her eyes never left his blue ones, and when Jon and Sansa placed her hand in Gendry's hand she felt a shock running from the tips of her finger through her whole arm. She had to admit that it was wonderful to feel that way. No hate, no pain, no darkness... there was just happiness and love for them now.

*Yes, this is the life I want,* she thought, still looking into her son-to-be husband's deep blue eyes.

She didn't even feel Sansa and Jon leaving her side to go and join the other guests. She was just as lost looking into Gendry's eyes as he was looking into hers. Only the voice of the Septon brought them back to reality.

"You may now cloak the bride and bring her under your protection," he said in a deep voice.

Arya looked down to Gendry's hands. He was carrying her wedding cloak. He unfolded it and moved to cover her back and shoulders with it, moving her hair gently out of the way and brushing her neck with his fingers in a way that made chills run down her spine. The cloak was yellow, with a black stag sewn in it. A Baratheon cloak.

It was happening. The moment had finally come, and Arya was ready to take the next step.

Gendry moved again to stand this time by her side, and she placed her hand over his and both of them moved their hands forward to the Septon, who tied a white bow around their hands as a symbol of union.

"In the sight of the Seven, I hereby seal these two souls, binding them as one for eternity," he finished saying those words as he finished tying the white bow around their hands, and then he proceeded. "Look upon each other and say the words."

It was time for their vows, which would unity them forever in marriage. They turned to face each other, and they took a deep breath together. Arya wasn't sure if she was going to be able to speak, but when she opened her mouth, her voice came out firm and strong. She said the words at the same time as Gendry:

"*Father, Smith, Warrior. Mother, Maiden, Crone. Stranger.*"

"I am his, and he is mine."

"I am hers, and she is mine."

"*From this day...*"

"...*Until the end of my days.*"
Ok, so this chapter was going to be waaaaaayyy longer, but it was going to end up being extremely long and I did not like it that much. So I was satisfied ending it here, and I hope you guys are happy with the cheesy wedding chapter. Now there must be a bedding! And many more chapters to come!

I promise that I will try to update much faster this time to be able to put what would have been the entire original chapter up as soon as possible :) Not sure if I will cut it in two or three parts.
Happy New Year, people! ^.^

As you can see, I had a major case of writer's block. But I had help in tumblr from Littlefeather, who told me that I should listen to songs, and I did! I got all my inspiration for this chapter on the scene from the Tudors where Henry Tudor and Anne Boleyn dance a Volta and then... Well, watch the scene if you want lol.

Sorry for the long wait, enjoy!

When they finished saying their vows, Gendry cupped Arya's face with the hand that was not tied to hers, and she placed her free hand on his chest, and they sealed their marriage with a kiss. As soon as their lips touched, the whole Sept exploded with thunderous applause for the newlyweds. Arya and Gendry just ignored them, lost in each other. The kiss was pure and chaste, but it made them feel as one, connected. Only they mattered, as if they were alone in the Sept…

And then, slowly, they broke off the kiss, they opened their eyes, and they stared at each other. Arya was at a loss of words and felt that she could even hardly breathe, but Gendry immediately broke into a radiant smile. His happiness was contagious, and in less than two seconds, Arya found herself smiling as well.

They turned to the side to face all the people that were inside the Sept to celebrate their wedding with them. Applauding at a wedding wasn't a common thing in Westeros, but the Stark family was already well known all over the Realm for their habit of doing things as they wanted to do them. Arya smiled brightly at her family; Sansa, Bran, Rickon, Jon, Sandor and Ygritte. Gendry also smiled at his new family, and they all bowed their heads with a bright smile on their faces, welcoming him into the family as a new member, as they had done not so long ago with Ygritte and Sandor.

The Septon took the white ribbon away from their hands. However, Gendry didn't let go of Arya's hand, and she didn't seem to mind. They weren't going to let go of each other in a very long time…

They took a few steps forward, and the Starks, Cleganes and Targaryens came forth to greet them. The first person that Arya hugged was Sansa, while Gendry accepted friendly pats in the back from the males in the family. Then, all the boys just stared at the two sisters who were still hugging each other. It didn't look like Sansa had any intention of letting go of Sansa, so Sandor approached her slowly from the aide and put a hand on his wife's shoulder.

"Come on, little bird, let your sister breathe! I'm sure her husband wants her now."

Sansa gasped and immediately released Arya from her death grip and then she smiled nervously.

"Sure! Oh, sorry," he said, still smiling, and she wiped a happy tear away from her eye. Arya smiled too and looked at her sister tenderly. Then she gave a quick hug to her good - brother. Sandor looked stunned and surprised, and froze for a second, but then he relaxed and awkwardly put his arms around the small girl. Then Arya let go of him and went on to hug her brothers.
Jon was the closest one to her, so he got the first hug, then followed Bran and Rickon. Then she returned to her new husband's side, and they made it outside the crowded Sept. They walked to the main hall of Winterfell, where the feast was going to be served in their honor, and they were followed by their family and the lords and ladies and knights and all the other people who had been waiting outside the Sept during their wedding. The main hall was crowded, and filled with people, music and laughter, just as it had been during Sansa's and Sandor's wedding. Bran, as Lord of Winterfell, sat in the center of the highest table, but this time it was Arya who sat at his right, and Gendry at hers.

They were served course after course after course of food, each one more delicious than the previous. Even though it was winter in Westeros, the Stark family did not lack wealth after the war. They had become one of the richest families in the Realm because of their association with the Queen and the fact that it was the Stark girls that helped the Queen win the battle at King's Landing. The music never stopped, the wine and ale always filled their cups and goblets, and everything was perfect. After some time, when many people where happy and a bit drunk already, they started dancing in the center if the hall, and more and more people kept joining them. At some point, Sansa managed to make her husband dance with her. Arya couldn't stop laughing from her seat because she had never seen such an image as that one before. Sansa, all gracious and elegant and perfect in all of her moves, and Sandor... he didn't know the first thing about dancing, even after spending all that time with his wife! He was so awkward and scared; he kept crashing against people and stepping on feet! Many people were about to complain, until they turned around and saw that it was the Hound, and the color left their faces and they kept their mouths shut.

Gendry was highly amused seeing Arya laughing with that spectacle.

"You do enjoy watching people suffer," he commented with a grin.

"Me? I don't see anyone suffering!"

"I beg to differ. Poor Clegane is having an awful time."

"At least he has Sansa!"

"Aye... And I have you," Gendry whispered in Arya's ear, making her shiver. She blushed furiously and she didn't know why, but then Gendry whispered again in her ear: "I can't wait for the feast to be over..."

Arya felt her cheeks burning. She was sure that if anyone looked at her face at that moment they would think that she looked like a giant tomato. She felt so embarrassed, but at the same time she felt an excitement in the pit of her stomach that she had never felt before. Gendry raised his hand and moved her curls away from her neck, exposing it and softly caressing her skin with his finger. Arya felt a chill going down her spine again, and she shivered.

"Gendry..." she whispered.

"Arya..." she could practically feel his lips touching her earlobe, his hot breath against her skin...

"Gendry, the whole hall is watching..."

"So? Let them look! You are my wife!" Gendry said, still with a happy grin on his face.

His wife. It was such a strange thing to hear! Never in her life had Arya thought that she would become anyone's wife, and now there she was, attending her wedding feast, sitting beside her husband, the man she loved. She was Gendry's wife, and he was her husband, and it felt... Strange.
But it also felt so good. So right! It felt as right as holding Needle had felt when she was younger! Above all, it felt natural, and she really liked that.

They heard someone coughing at their side, and Gendry put some distance between his face and Arya's before they both turned their heads and saw that Bran had been the one coughing. He was staring at them from his high chair and he was also smiling, happy to see his older sister and his good -brother so happy.

"Lord Baratheon," he said, aware of how uncomfortable hearing his title made Gendry, "perhaps you should dance with my sister?"

Arya's jaw dropped, indignant. How dare her own brother make her dance?! However, she didn't complain much when her husband smiled and stood up from his chair, offering his hand to her to help her up. Arya never accepted any courtesies, but Gendry was different, so she took his hand and stood up and followed him to the center of the great hall, where everyone else was dancing. Arya remembered the night of her sister's wedding, when Jon had made her dance with him and afterwards Gendry had appeared in the castle. It had been in that exact same place, that same hall, on a rainy night many months ago. So much had happened since then! It seemed that it all had happened ages ago, and it was hard to believe that so many things were different. But different was good. It was a kind of different that made them happy.

Gendry pulled Arya close to his body and lead her in the dance. Neither of them were very gracious dancers; in fact, Gendry had only started dancing not long ago, and Arya had never cared much about it because it was a lady's thing, but they had their fun dancing together on their wedding day so they didn't mind their clumsiness and awkwardness, and neither did the people that they crashed against.

Never minding their clumsiness, they were having a great time with each other, dancing and laughing. Soon they lost track of time, and multiple songs had played and suddenly all stopped. They did notice that the people had stopped dancing and that the music had ceased, so they stopped as well. Bran had raised his hand in the air, claiming everyone's attention to make an announcement. At first Arya and Gendry were confused, but then they recognized the smirk in the young Lord's face, and both of them paled immediately.

"Oh no," Arya muttered, horrified.

"Damn," Gendry swore under his breath, looking at his good -brother with his eyes wide open.

Bran raised his cup.

"Time for the bedding!"

Arya was having a flashback from her sister's wedding. It was the second bedding ceremony that she had ever seen, but she hadn't minded it much. Now, on the other hand, she was about to experience it herself, and her face was burning with embarrassment. It was certainly a moment that she had not been looking forward to. She looked at the happily roaring Northmen around her that were approaching her to proceed with the ceremony, and the giggling ladies were almost jumping over Gendry. Arya couldn't see him cause she was too distracted trying to find a way to get rid of the men; she wasn't too enthusiastic about the bedding ceremony. She didn't want to do it. One of the men grabbed her arm, not in an ungentle or harsh way, but she wanted to punch them all in the face. She didn't want any bloody North men carrying her to her marriage bed and stripping her of her dress in that barbaric and ridiculous ceremony! Furious, she made a mental note to herself to beat Bran in to a bloody pulp in the morning. She could still see her younger brother's smirk, and she wanted to run up to him and strangle him.
Suddenly, someone put a hand on her shoulder and the lord that had been holding her arm let her go. Arya turned her head around and saw with great satisfaction that the owner of the hand was her husband, who had managed to get rid of the giggling ladies (Arya was so glad that Sansa wasn't one of them... And that Sandor wasn't one of the lords!). Gendry stared at all the Northmen with deep, serious eyes, and pulled his wife closer to him.

"My lords, I think there is no need for a bedding ceremony. I'm pretty sure I can carry my wife to our chambers by myself just fine."

Arya was impressed with the improvement that Gendry was making in the way that he behaved around highborn folks lately. He was taking his education seriously, and though he still had much to learn and he could be a stubborn bull sometimes, he was quite charming and his voice was firm. He almost didn't talk like a commoner anymore. Once he spoke, the lords nodded their heads, quite disappointed that there wasn't going to be a bedding ceremony, but unwilling to argue with Lord Baratheon. Arya saw her brother Bran rolling his eyes, but smirking still, accepting that they had won, and she smiled as well. Then she locked her eyes on her husband's and without further notice, Gendry took her in his arms and carried her away, leaving the great hall and walking through the hallways towards their chambers...

Arya's heart started beating very fast, but she was still smiling.

"I'm surprised you didn't want a bedding ceremony. It's quite a common tradition here in the North," she commented, almost in a whisper. It was dark in the hallway, it was almost the hour of the wolf and few torches illuminated the stone hallways, but she could see Gendry's face perfectly fine. He was smiling sweetly. Arya put her arms around her neck to have a better hold of him while he carried her, and to be closer to him.

"Well, I don't care if it's a tradition. Neither you nor I follow them much, m'lady," he said then, using his former commoner accent to address her, as always.

"Do not call me-!" Arya had started to protest, but Gendry interrupted her before she could finish.

"And I did not want to share your beauty with any one else," he declared. "I would have started throwing punches as soon as they started taking your clothes off, and that's not a proper thing to do on our wedding night!"

Arya chuckled. She rarely laughed, but she couldn't help it at that moment.

"I've heard that my father said something similar the day he was wed to my mother," she said, and suddenly her voice was a bit raw. She would have liked it if her parents had been there with her on that day...

Gendry detected the sadness in her voice and face and pressed his lips against her forehead. As soon as he did that, a happy smile on Arya's face once again, and he walked the rest of the way in silence, still carrying his beloved wife in his strong arms.

The chamber that they had chosen was the one Gendry had stayed in when he had first arrived at Winterfell, where Arya had stayed with him and slept by his side. Gendry had been extremely happy that day, unable to believe that after all these years he was finally reunited with Arya. He had travelled through the whole country for her, and now she was his wife...

Gendry put Arya down on the floor, on her feet, and they just stood still for a few moments of silence, staring deeply into each other's eyes. If Arya's heart had been beating fast before, it must be trying to burst from her chest now. This was the moment that they had been waiting for... And
she couldn't stop feeling the strangest sensation in the pit of her stomach. She blushed, her face turning a deep scarlet color. Gendry's face did the same, and he smiled shyly. Neither one of them said a single word for a moment. They both knew what was going to happen, and they desired it.

Then, Gendry took a step forward. Arya held her breath as her husband raised his hand and softly caressed her face, tracing his fingers lightly over her cheek. He lowered his hand, barely touching her neck and then her shoulder... He took a second step forward, closing the distance almost completely. He caressed Arya's waist and hip slowly (it was torture and made Arya take deep shuddering breaths) and then he moved that hand to her back and gently took the laces of the dress with his fingers. With his other hand he took her chin and carefully raised her head so that she was looking directly at his eyes. Their faces were very close, almost touching. Arya could feel Gendry's hot breath falling down on her, smelling slightly of wine. It was intoxicating...

"I believe..." Gendry whispered while he slowly pulled the laces, unpacking the back of the dress, "that you won't be needing this anymore..."

As soon as the dress was completely unlaced, Gendry leaned in to kiss Arya, and she reached out with her arms, not-so-gently grabbing the black hair of the ba ck of his head, and pulled him down to meet his lips with a passionate kiss. It felt as if an explosion of wildfire. They felt flames burning their skin as their lips moved and their tongues danced together passionately. Gendry caressed the bare skin of Arya's back and she moved her fing ers through his hair, provoking a deep groan in the back of each other's throats. Arya was starting to feel that same burning inside of her, lu st and desire growing stronger within her as each second passed by. She separated all of a sudden from Gendry, breaking their kiss, and she used the moment to take a good look at him. Both their lips were red and swollen, and Arya was delighted when she saw Gendry's eyes dilated and filled with the same desperate hunger that she was feeling. He was hungry as a starving mad beast... for her.

She felt bold inside. It was a different kind of bold than ever before. While in the past she only wanted to pick up a sword and fight, and that made her feel fierce, she felt another kind of fierceness there, with her husband, near their marriage bed... And she wasn't going to hold back.

Without a second thought, she pushed Gendry towards the wall. The man gasped, surprised, but he didn't say anything. He watched in excitement as his bride pushed the sleeves of the dress off her shoulders, and the wedding gown slid down her body towards the floor. Arya stepped out of the dress, clothed in only her small clothes and shoes. She grinned with pleasure when Gendry's eyes became even wider and explored Arya's partial nudity. Although he had already seen her naked before, under more... displeasing... circumstances, this was completely different. This was all for him. She was his, and he was he rs. Arya felt her heart beating faster when she saw Gendry's eyes darken ing up with heightened desire. Still grinning, she approached him and pressed her almost entirely naked body against his warm, hard clo th ed body. Gendry recognized the silent command in his bride's grey eyes, and he took off his doublet, throwing it carelessly to the floor. He was only wearing a thin, white tunic underneath. Arya playfully pawed at it.

"And I think we can dispose of this as well," she said before tearing it apart and exposing Gendry's powerful ly muscular chest. Instead of being mad about his ruined tunic, Gendry smiled.

"I've been told it's uncommon to come across a bride so fierce on her bedding," he said.

Arya shrugged. "I'm not like other women."

Gendry laughed, pleased, and he shook his head from side to side. His eyes never left Arya's.
No... That you are not.

He kissed her again then. She explored his powerful chest, caressing his skin and he got rid of the torn clothes. As soon as his upper body was completely bared, he moved his hands to his breeches. Gendry was so excited and so nervous that he clumsily got his fingers tangled, but he managed to unlaced his breeches and then he took them off, standing only in his small clothes, just like Arya.

They were still kissing when all of a sudden Gendry picked Arya up, putting her legs around his waist and his arms around her own, and then he turned around and it was Arya's back slammed against the wall. A sound that was a mixture of pain and pleasure escaped her, making her mouth part from Gendry's and she pulled her head back, exposing her neck and arching her back. Gendry kissed her neck passionately, biting a little bit, and then he sucked hard on her skin. Arya moaned, and when Gendry pulled away from her neck there was a dark red mark on her skin. Gendry looked pretty satisfied with it, viewing it as his personal mark on Arya, claiming her as his, only his...

Then he kissed and did the same thing to the other side of her neck, and one of his hands covered one of her breasts and squeezed it. Arya moaned when Gendry did that and she pressed her legs harder around his body. That was when she could feel it through their small clothes, his rock-hard manhood. She felt a jolt of pleasure shaking her body, and another moan escaped her throat. She felt her woman's place wet and pulsing, and she started having the most inappropriate thoughts wandering through her mind... She just wanted Gendry, all of him, and she wanted him now...

"Gendry," she tried to say in a normal voice, but his name came out of her mouth in the form of a moan... That only incited Gendry to keep torturing her even more.

His lips abandoned her neck, and right when she thought that he was going to kiss her lips again, his mouth found her right nipple (he was still squeezing her right breast with his hand) and licked it with his tongue. The sensation that it provoked her was so intense that she almost screamed out in pleasure. Seven hells! Marriage was better than she had ever imagined!

Once again she tangled her fingers in Gendry's hair, pulling at his black locks, desperate to get a hold of something. She felt like she was melting. Gendry bit her nipple, at first gently, and then a bit harder in a way that was almost painful but not quite, and this time it did make Arya scream. Gendry kept biting and licking her nipple, and his rock-hard manhood (which was ach ing terribly inside his small clothes) kept rubbing against her woman's place, and it was driving her crazy!

She wanted him. Now.

"Gendry..." she moaned again, pulling harder from his hair. "Gendry!"

"Uh-huh?" he mumbled, the sound muffled against her breast.

"Take me to the bed..." she begged, feeling desperate and wanton.

"Just one second..." Gendry murmured, parting his mouth from her breast for a brief moment before going back to his task...

However, Arya was not one to wait. She had waited long enough already, and all the sensations that she was now feeling were driving her completely crazy. She felt like she was going to explode at any moment.

Gendry wasn't listening to her, so, in the midst of her passion, she dug her sharp nails into his skin
at the top of his back and dragged them down all the way to his bottom, scratching his back. Gendry pulled his head back, grunting in pain and pleasure. His eyes were wide and Arya's eyes were smoldering like burning flames.

"Now," she hissed. This time, Gendry grinned and obeyed.

He took Arya away from the cold stone wall, approached the bed, and threw Arya on top of it. It took the breath out of her, and before she recovered and could move again, Gendry crawled on top of her, hooked his fingers inside her smallclothes and took them off in one single, quick movement. He threw them to the floor with the rest of their clothes and then he could finally see Arya completely naked, sprawled over the bed with her legs open for him. It was just then when Arya felt a little nervous, and her belly twisted. She blushed; she did not do that often, but at that moment she was as red as a tomato. It wasn't the first time that a man saw her completely naked, but this... this was different. This was Gendry.

Gendry blushed as well when he saw his bride completely nude in front of him. He, too, was becoming a bit shy, but nothing could extinguish the flame of passion, lust, and joy that burned hot inside his chest.

He took off his smallclothes then, and he threw them away with all the rest of the clothes. It was Arya's turn for her eyes to grow wide. She had seen naked men before, and she knew what their manhoods looked like... But Gendry's was so much better, big and thick and erect. She wanted it inside her, filling her. Gendry's eyes were still fixed solely on Arya, and he felt as if his heart was about to come popping out of his mouth. Slowly, very slowly, he laid himself on top of her, taking care not to crush her... Arya could also sense his nervousness, and that somehow calmed her a bit.

"What?" She asked him when he gulped. "Are you nervous?"

"I..." He hesitated, then he laughed under his breath. "This is all new to me."

Arya raised an eyebrow, skeptically. Did he seriously expect her to believe that? She didn't have precisely a short memory...

"Liar," she said, though not angry nor bitterly. "You've already done this before!"

Gendry rolled his eyes and laughed again, more nervously that time.

"Well, being technically raped by a witch that wanted to distract me before feeding me to leeches isn't exactly a glorious first time, you know," he said sarcastically, making Arya laugh too.

Arya wanted to mock him and call him stupid, like she always used to, but she didn't because at that moment Gendry locked his lips with hers. The kiss was gentler and sweeter than the ones before, and it served to take their shyness away. A few moments later, the boldness that had been in both of them moment ago came back to them.

Arya gasped when she felt the tip of Gendry's leaking manhood at her entrance. She felt butterflies in her stomach, and she kept kissing Gendry. When he started pushing and penetrating her she felt a little bit of discomfort, but just a little bit. There wasn't pain or ache, unless what she had been told that she would feel the first time. There was just a slight resistance of her tight walls against Gendry's big member, but nothing else. When it reached her maidenhead and tore through it, it felt like the prick of a needle. Even though she did not cry out in pain nor whimpered nor gasped, Gendry did feel that he had just torn through her maidenhead, and he looked surprised for some reason. Arya did not understand his surprise, but suddenly Gendry's expression was full of delight...
and the next moment he was kissing Arya passionately and feverishly, parting her lips with his
tongue and twirling it with her own.

"Let me know if I hurt you" he whispered when he parted from her to catch his breath. She
nodded, and she threw her arms around his neck, pulling him closer.

Then Gendry started moving in and out of Arya, making her moan. There was still a bit of
discomfort the first two or three times, but then it was gone, and it was replaced entirely by
pleasure. Arya moaned against Gendry's mouth and moved her hips closer to his, urging him to go
faster. He did as she wanted, and started moving his hips at a faster pace. She kept urging him to go
faster until it got to the point when they couldn't kiss anymore because they were completely out of
breath.

The bed was hitting the stone wall behind it, making loud noises. That noise was accompanied by
the groans and moans of pleasure that kept escaping Arya's and Gendry's mouths. They were sure
that they could be heard down the entire hall, but they didn't care.

Arya grabbed Gendry's shoulders then, and she forced him to move to the side and lie on his back.
By doing so, his scratched (and probably bleeding) back came in contact with the sheets and he
hissted in pain. Arya didn't mind him. She was feeling fierce and bold again, and she felt that she
knew what she had to do. She aligned her womanhood on top of Gendry's manhood and then she
slid down on it, filling herself with it. She cried out in pleasure and then she started rocking her
hips, faster, and faster... She could hear Gendry moan in pleasure and pain too, and that sounds was
the most exciting thing that she had ever heard in her life.

At some point, Gendry tried to make her lie down on her back again, but she slapped his hands
away when he tried to hold her. He tried a second time but she grabbed his arms and pinned them
down to the bed, and she didn't allow him to move as she rode him like a wild horse. Soon they
were not moaning anymore; they were screaming. They screamed each other's name over and over
again, their voices filling the room around then and echoing den the hall of Winterfell, much to the
horror of any poor unfortunate souls who could be listening.

Arya was so lost in her pleasure that she didn't realize it when she loosened her hold on Gendry's
arms, allowing him to break free and sit up on the bed. The new position made it difficult for her to
move as fast as she had before, and that made her realize what Gendry had done. Gendry had a
victorious smile on his face, and in one quick movement he surrounded Arya's tiny waist with one
of his arms, pressing her body completely against his, and he put his other hand behind her neck,
holding her. She tried to slap his hand away and push him back to the bed again, but he was
stronger than her. It was all an intense, passionate game that was making them feel pleasure like
never before.

Gendry kissed Arya again, and she, like a good wolf, bit down on his lip and pulled it. Gendry
hissted with pleasure, and then he tightened his hold on Arya, pressing her hard down on his erect
member, which was basically trapped inside of her. He kept pressing her against h is body while
she tried to move up and down his manhood, which result ed in him sliding inside of her without
ever leaving her warm tight walls. Gendry was the first one to resume the screaming, shouting out
Arya's name every t ime she moved, and Arya screamed every time that her body crashed loudly
against Gendry's.

They w ould n't able to last much longer. Arya could feel it inside her, building up... until she
finally exploded, and she saw a flash of white in front of her eyes and she felt like the whole world
had been turning upside down. She screamed as she peaked, holding on to Gendry's shoulders and
digging her fingernails in his skin. Gendry kept moving inside of her just a bit more until he
screamed his release. Arya could feel his warm seed filling her all of a sudden, and she felt shivers up and down her spine...

Gendry fell down on his back over the bed again. He grimaced when his scratched back touched the bed sheets again, but he didn't make a sound. He was breathing heavily and sweating, and his eyes were wide open and fixed on the void...

Arya fell on top of him, exhausted. She, too, was breathing hard, and she felt like her brain had shut down for a moment.

That had been... amazing...

She looked at Gendry, unsure of what to say. What was one supposed to say after a moment like that? She had no idea... She wasn't even sure if she could even talk after what had just happened. She felt completely worn out, but she had never felt so good in her entire life.

She didn't need to speak, though. Gendry did it for her. And he only said one sentence, three words, barely whispering them...

"I love you."

Arya smiled when she heard him say that. She moved to be closer to his face, and she cupped it with one of her hands. She looked at his blue eyes for several longs, quiet moments, until she whispered:

"I love you too."

The same smile that she had appeared on Gendry's face. They were both breathing more easily now, and once they had the strength for it, they kissed again.

When they parted, Gendry was grinning mischievously.

"Seems like you got your vengeance on your sister," he commented, softly tracing her back with the tips of his fingers.

Arya laughed, knowing what he meant.

"Yes, bloody sure that I did!"

Gendry was still grinning. "How about we make sure that you really got your revenge? As I recall, that was a very long night..." he murmured as he rolled over Arya, pinning her down to the bed under him. She squealed with joy, and they kissed yet again. It wasn't going to be the last time that night.
Chapter 18

3 Years Later.

It was a nice day in the Stormlands, which could not usually be said about the weather in that region of Westeros. Storm's End. The sky was usually grey and full of black clouds, and thunder struck more often than not. However, that morning the sun had risen, the sky was clear and blue, and the clouds didn't seem to be going to appear anytime soon, offering the inhabitants of those lands a peaceful morning. The sound of some thunder was heard once or twice, but it came from afar, so no one feared that the storms would be coming back at least for a few hours.

Arya loved Storm's End. She loved how wild and powerful and mysterious and strong it was. She loved its thick rock walls, the sound of thunder falling from the sky, the powerful waves crashing against the cliff below the ancient castle. It might seem a dangerous place to anyone else, but she felt safe there. It was a wild place just like she was wild, and the weather never stopped her from doing whatever it was that she wanted to do. She enjoyed riding outside the lands of the castle with the sound of the distant thunder and the flash of lightning illuminating the sky above her. She had made the Stormlands her home, just like the North was her home before she started a new family; a pack of her own. A pack that, instead of running through the woods and snow while howling to the moon, ran through the storms and the fierce weather fearing nothing. Always strong, always unstoppable.

The reason why she loved storms so much was probably because of her husband. Other lords and ladies, the household, the knights and the smallfolk called her the Queen of Storms. Because wherever Arya Stark went, Gendry followed. And wherever Gendry went, storm followed.

That morning, both of them decided to go out for a ride as soon as they awoke and saw from their window the lovely weather that the Stormlands were offering them. It was an opportunity that had to be taken, or so Arya thought. Gendry had tried to make her stay in bed a little longer, but when he saw that his wife would go out for a ride with or without him, he had no choice but to go after her with a small smile on his face.

Almost three years had passed since their wedding day, since they left the North behind and came to their new home. In that place, in those new lands, beyond the thick walls of that castle, they had grown much more than they could have possibly thought they would ever grow. They had grown with the war, true enough. It had polished them and made them leave childhood to become adults. But the wonders that that new life that they were living in Storm's End made them grow in a new way. It had made them discover peace.

Arya wasn't a lady, not in the proper sense. She had never been, and she would never be. Having just passed her eight and ten nameday, she still liked to wear men's clothing and do the kind of activities that she had loved when she was younger. She rode horses like a man did, not like a lady would ride them. She still carried Needle in her belt from time to time, though she never actually had to use it; the only sword fighting that was required in Storm's End was in training sessions, for violence had not been able to reach them at any time since they were there. Arya went to the training sessions in the inner yard of the castle with her husband and their knights, and she managed to defeat them in several occasions. She had become as good a soldier as any, and she felt proud of it. Everyone in Storm's End and in the entire Stormlands loved her for who she was. They loved that their lady was such a strong and independent and unique young woman who could stand up for herself and who didn't give a damn about what was proper and what was not. She had, however, toned down her stubbornness just a little bit when she felt that it was needed. Even
though she had already agreed to wear gowns in some occasions when she was still in Winterfell, in Storm's End she would dress up as a lady from time to time in special occasions. And there were many other things that she did that she thought that she would never ever do…

Gendry had changed a great deal as well. He had polished himself since he was given the title. True, he was still Gendry, just as stubborn as his wife, and sometimes he just acted as a young, normal man, but he was now a true lord. At twenty and three, he had grown a bit more, becoming an imposing man of great height, broad strong shoulders and covered in muscles. His deep blue eyes shone with the fierce intensity of a true warrior when he spoke with his men or when he was acting as the liege lord that he was meant to be, but they also melted with gentleness and love when he looked at his wife. He had become a much wiser man than his father, just as good a warrior, but a better person, a just lord, a caring and loving husband… and a protective and proud father.

When they rode that morning, Arya urged her horse to go faster, as usual. She enjoyed leaving Gendry behind and make him chase after her. She put several feet of distance between her horse and his, and she laughed. Gendry laughed as well, enjoying spending time with his wife in any way he could. He loved to ride with her, and, even if he never admitted it out loud, he loved chasing after her. He was used to it, after all.

"Arya, wait!" he exclaimed when he saw that he was falling very behind, and he kicked his horse to urge him to go faster.

Arya took a peek over her shoulder and laughed. "It's not my fault that you are so slow!"

Gendry only grinned as a response, and his silver horse managed to pick up the pace and close the distance with Arya's black horse, until they were riding side to side.

They slowed down when they reached a small creek not too far from Storm's End, they could still see the castle from where they were. They made the horses stop so that they could drink some water from the creek and rest a little after the race. It was a nice and quiet until the peace was broken suddenly. Gendry was distracted contemplating the nature around them when all of a sudden he heard Arya gagging and he turned his head in time to see her jump off her horse and run to hide behind a big rock. Then she started vomiting all the contents of her stomach.

"Arya!" Gendry exclaimed, worried. He jumped off his horse as well and ran towards the rock behind which Arya was hiding, but before he got there her hand shot up in the air, appearing behind the big rock, and it stopped him.

"No!" she cried. Her voice was bitter and disgusted, and it sounded like she was choking on something. "You don't have to see this!"

Gendry rolled his eyes and resumed his walk to get to the rock and his wife.

"Arya, I've seen you throwing up dozen of times, remember? Besides, I'm your husband."

Behind the rock, Arya snorted.

"Oh, so because you are my husband you can do whatever you-" she didn't get to finish complaining, because she started throwing up all over again. Gendry rushed and jumped behind the rock, finding his wife kneeling behind it and holding her stomach as she spilled all the half-digested food all over the ground. Gendry sighed and gently grabbed her long braided hair to pull it away from her face.
"No, because I'm your husband I get to help you," he said, patting her gently in the back in a comforting way.

Arya wanted to say something, but she couldn't because she threw up again. After her stomach was emptied, she grimaced and shook her head.

"Ugh. I hate this. Don't look."

Gendry rolled his eyes again, not getting why Arya felt so uncomfortable with him seeing her sick. It was a perfectly normal thing, getting sick from time to time, it happened to everyone. Plus, he had seen much worse and gross things in his life, and as he had stated before, it wasn't the first time that he had seen her sick. In fact, he doubted that anyone had seen his wife getting sick so much as he had seen Arya.

While he still held her braid with one hand, he put his other arm around her and helped her up.

"Come, let's get you cleaned up," he murmured with a comforting ring in his voice. He led her to the creek without her complaining anymore, though she kept grimacing because of the foul aftertaste in her mouth. They both knelt next to the creek and she washed her mouth with the fresh and cold water. She spit in the ground as far away as she could, and then Gendry put his hands in the water, and washed Arya's face with never-ending tenderness. Arya didn't protest and she let Gendry help her. Then she sighed.

"I told you. Those eggs weren't well cooked!" she exclaimed.

She had mentioned at breakfast that the scrambled eggs tasted odd. They had seemed perfectly fine to Gendry, so he hadn't paid Arya a lot of attention. He thought about it for a second, but he still didn't remember that there was anything bad with the eggs that they had eaten. In fact, there's was another completely different idea quickly raising in the back of his mind…

At first he wanted to dismiss it. But then it came back again, and he took a good look at Arya. She seemed different lately, but she looked different in an already familiar way.

Gendry raised his eyebrow and looked at her in the eyes again while a small smile started spreading all over his face.

"I don't think it was the eggs, Arya…"

She stared at him blankly at first. Then she narrowed her eyes and glared at him with an intensity that would have made any seasoned warrior cower before her.

"No," she muttered, clenching her jaw.

It was a pretty clear 'no', but Gendry insisted, feeling excited. His wife did not share his mood, however.

"Why not, Arya?! It's obvious, isn't it?"

"No, it's not."

"Arya, please, just…" Gendry stumbled with his own words, so he held Arya's hands between his and paused before begging: "Go see the maester, alright? He will be able to tell us!"

"I'm telling you already! The breakfast did not get along well with my belly!" Arya exclaimed, annoyed.
"Arya, I ate exactly the same thing as you did, and I feel fine. There was nothing wrong with the eggs. I'm telling you, go see the maester."

"I'm not going to do it, I'm not going to go!"

"Please!"

"I'm telling you, it was the eggs!" she insisted, and Gendry felt exasperated.

"IT could be something else!" he insisted.

"I'm not pregnant!"

There, she had said it. Now it felt more real, and the weight of the word fell down on Arya, making her stop and take a deep breath. She looked away from Gendry for a second, trying to get her thoughts in order and calm down, but when she looked back up to Gendry, the look in his eyes was victorious. She glared at him again for that, but he didn't care.

"You could be, Arya, and we both know it very well. Or do I need to remind you how I…" he started saying with a cocky smirk on his face, but Arya raised her arms and pressed her hand against his mouth.

"No, you don't need to!"

Gendry moved his head to pull free from Arya. He observed her wide eyes, her tense shoulders and her fast breathing before commenting:

"You are afraid."

She snorted and then she rolled her eyes, imitating him.

"Of course not! I'm just not an idiot like you are!"

"I was right last time!" he retorted.

"That was luck," Arya muttered, not wanting to admit that her husband could be right about everything. Gendry laughed at that reply, and then his face adopted a begging expression.

"Why are you so stubborn?! Arya, my love, please… Why don't you want to give me this little joy?" he asked, caressing her cheek and moved a few stray hairs away from her face. She loved it when he touched her, but at that moment she was very mad at him, so she slapped his hand away, and she went into a shouting rampage.

"Because you are not the one who has to carry a baby inside for nine moons!" she protested, indignant. "It's tiring and uncomfortable, and I'll have to wear dresses and stay in bed! And you-!" she punched Gendry in the chest with both her hands curled into fists, just like she had done many years ago when he accused her of being a girl, "-are not the one that's going to have to push a giant baby out of you!"

She punched him again, pushing him back, but Gendry only laughed even more.

"That's it! You are behaving just like the last time!"

She made a noise that sounded like an angry wolf, and for a second, Gendry was scared that Arya might rip his head off. She was angry because, even though she hated to admit it, Gendry was right. She was behaving just like the last time, and the last time he had been right.
"I hate you sometimes…"

"I know," Gendry sighed, and then he leaned forward and cupped his wife's face tenderly between his warm, big and calloused hands, and he looked her straight in the eyes. "My love… My lady," he said, smiling, "please… Go and see the maester. Please. I swear to you, if you are right, and it's just a false alarm, I'll do anything you want me to. Anything."

There was a moment of silence in which Arya looked skeptically at him with a raised eyebrow, trying to make up her mind. Gendry silently prayed to all the gods, old and new and foreign, that she would finally agree with his request instead of deciding to keep beating him. Finally, he saw the shadow of a smile in the corner of her mouth.

"But you already do whatever I want you to do…"

Gendry chuckled, knowing that he had won the argument.

"Yes," he admitted, nodding at her statement. He put an arm around Arya's waist and pulled her closer to him, making her gasp, "but I won't complain about it."

He kissed her then. It was a pure, sweet and chaste kiss, of only lips to lips. It was a kiss meaning to relax her, to show her that he was at her side and he would always be. It worked, for Arya relaxed in his arms and let out a long sigh before their lips parted and she pressed her head against his chest.

"And if you are right?" she asked. "What then? What do you get?"

"If I'm right, we will have a baby on the way. I don't see what else I could possibly want more than that," he answered with complete honesty.

"I can't believe that you convinced me…" Arya murmured as she stood up. She made him a gesture to tell him to stand up. "Come! If we are going to do this, I want to do it now. Why wait? If you are right, I rather know as soon as possible. And if I'm right, I can't wait to laugh at your stupidity!"

"Oh! You'll laugh at me?!" he exclaimed, raising his eyebrow with amusement as he stood up as well. Arya's expression betrayed that she was up to no good. Of course she wasn't…

"Yes," she nodded with mischievousness. Before Gendry could wonder why there was such an expression on her face, she pushed him again in the chest, harder than before. "In fact, I'll do it now!"

Her push threw him off balance and made him fall backwards… which resulted in him falling on his arse in the creek, soaking himself and splashing water all around. He couldn't help the initial shocked expression from twisting his features, and he glared at his wife when he heard her laughing. She entertained herself for about two seconds looking at him in the water before she turned around and ran towards her horse, which was drinking water from the creek next to Gendry's horse.

"My lady, always oh so very charming…" he murmured between gritted teeth as sarcastically as he could manage. However, he couldn't hide the amusement from his voice.

Arya turned her head to look at him again and smirked.

"I'm not a lady! You knew that before you married me!"

"Aye, I did…"
Arya mounted her horse and rode off. Just as she did that, Gendry stood up and walked out from the creek, completely soaked and dripping and feeling cold, but he didn't mind and he ran for his horse, mounting it and riding off behind his wife. They rode back to the castle, having to cut short their morning outing. Arya wasn't happy about having to go back so soon because of her sudden illness, but she didn't really feel very well, and she did want to prove Gendry that he was wrong as soon as possible so that he wouldn't keep bothering her for the rest of the day.

She truly believed that Gendry was mistaken, and that she wasn't with child. How could he possibly now?! He was a man, and not a maester, he knew nothing of those things! She wasn't much more knowledgeable than him in that particular matter, she had the same exact amount of experience as him… though he wasn't the one supposed to carry the child, she was! Were she with child, she would know… She wasn't new to pregnancies anymore, she should know better.

The arrived at the massive castle of Storm's End. They rode to the thinnest part of the massive wall that surrounded it, where the gate was placed. When they saw their Lord and Lady approaching, the guards opened the gates for them, allowing them to enter the courtyard. Their squires ran towards them to take the reigns while Arya and Gendry dismounted their horses. Arya felt a bit dizzy, but she was sure it was due to how suddenly she had stopped riding and how fast she had gotten off her horse. She blinked a few times and her head to clear it, and then she smiled at her husband in the articular way that she always smiled at him when they argued about something. Gendry saw her smile and smirked, and Arya just rolled her eyes as a response before she started walking towards the colossal drum tower that was Storm's End. Gendry followed her and entered the drum tower behind her.

Storm's End was calm and silent that day, except for the servants that went from here to there attending their chores and the knights seeking their Lord and Lady to ask them anything of importance. Some knight entertained Gendry with some urgent matter while Arya continued walking, not minding them. She wanted to get to her chambers, where she could rest a little and get rid of her dizziness, which didn't seem to want to leave her. She was also feeling a bit sick, and it was making her even more convinced by the second that what she had was food poisoning. She would lie on her featherbed, sleep a few hours and when she woke up she would feel better, hopefully.

She had almost reached the staircase. She had closed her eyes one second when she started hearing tiny footsteps that were approaching quickly, and she opened her eyes at once and smiled full of joy, recognizing who it was immediately.

"Mama!" a little boy dressed in the yellow and black Baratheon colors exclaimed happily, pronouncing the word with a childish accent that was still developing. He was closely followed by a wetnurse that took care of the little lord in his parents' occasional absence.

"Robb!" Arya exclaimed, forgetting about her dizziness and her sickness, kneeling down to be able to catch her son in her arms. As soon as she hugged his little body, she once again felt the overwhelming joy that she had found with motherhood.

She hadn't expected Robb to come into her life. She hadn't really thought about children, or cared to have none when she got married. When she was younger, she despised the idea as much as she had despised the idea of marriage to a Lord. But, just as she had found love and being a lady pleasant in its own ways when it surprisingly came into her life, so she had discovered motherly love.

Robb Baratheon had been a complete surprise. He was born exactly nine moons after Arya and Gendry's wedding, and it had been quite a shock for Arya when she heard the news about her
pregnancy from the maester. Gendry had been the first to notice that there was something off with Arya and started suspecting it, and he had turned out to be right. At first, Arya had been incredibly angry with the idea of becoming a mother, and she didn't talk to Gendry for weeks, believing it all to be his fault and not wanting to recognize that it was hers as well. But soon she got used to the idea; she could be a mother and still do all the things that she wanted. Gendry had promised her that she would have the life she wanted even though she was married to him, and he had kept his promise; it didn't have to be any different with motherhood. And when Robb arrived, Arya finally understood what her sister had told her about having a child. It felt like a miracle, a wonderful miracle. She had stared at his tiny hands and feet and fingers and toes and nose and eyes and she had not been able to believe that such a perfect little being was hers.

He had the Baratheon black hair, and he was a very big boy. Someday he would be tall and strong and broad like his father. But he had the Stark eyes, grey like Arya's. She was very happy when she saw that, the babe was a perfect combination of her and Gendry. He was also proving to be as stubborn as she was, but she was easy with smiles like his father.

Arya stood back up carrying her son in her arms, and planted a kiss on his round and rosy cheek, making the little boy laugh with joy. He clapped his hands, happy, and Arya brushed his black locks with her fingers, not being able to hide her big smile.

"I missed you so much this morning!" she told him. "I wanted to take you outside with me on the horse, but you were deeply asleep! You know how I hate to wake you up when you sleep like that..."

She almost couldn't recognize herself when she was around her son. She was like a totally different person than the unruly girl that she used to be, but she didn't mind. She had other moments to be that girl again, and she enjoyed her time as a mother with her son.

Robb closed his tiny fist around Arya's long brown braid and pulled from it. Far from protesting, Arya laughed again. She heard then Gendry's voice behind her and she turned to look at him, still carrying Robb in her arms. Gendry was approaching them from down the hall, still soaked wet.

"Robb! Look what your wild mother did to me!" he exclaimed, showing his soaked self and pretending to be offended.

"Papa!" Robb said, extending his little arms towards his father. Gendry was going to pick him up but Arya pulled her son away from him.

"No! You are soaked! Go change first," she demanded. She didn't need her son to get sick with a cold because he got soaked with his father's clothes.

Gendry narrowed his eyes at her.

"And whose fault is it, Arya?" he hissed. She merely shrugged.

"Fine, I'll go change," he said. "But then you know where we are going."

Ugh! She had hoped he had forgotten while on the way back to the castle, but it appeared that she wasn't going to be so lucky. Now it was her turn to glare at him, and his to wink at her. She gaped, but she didn't protest, and she didn't glare at him either.

"Fine. Now go and change. And maybe get a bath, you smell funny," she said, wrinkling her nose. "Here, Robb, give papa a kiss. He'll come back later."

She raised her son in her arms so that he would be near Gendry's face, and Gendry planted a kiss on
Robb's cheek just like Arya had done moments ago. Arya loved to see them both together; her stubborn bull and her little wolf pup… or fawn, depending on the way of looking at it. Gendry was always mesmerized with Robb. Everyone in Storm's End and in the whole Stormlands, in the North and in all of Westeros knew that Robb was Gendry Baratheon's biggest pride and treasure, next to his wife.

Yes, Arya had more than enough reasons to be proud of her pack.

Gendry passed a hand through Robb's hair, messing it up a bit, and then he smiled at his wife. He gave her another brief and tender kiss, like the one in the creek, before he walked away towards his and Arya's chambers to change and maybe take that recommended warm bath.

Arya could have followed him, but she preferred to spend some time with Robb before Gendry came back looking for her to drag her to the maester. She was not looking forwards to it.

She dismissed the wetnurse and then she hugged her son tightly.

"Come, Robb." she whispered. "Let's see if we can find a good hiding place from your father, before he comes back with the full intention of torturing me."

And she disappeared with Robb into the halls of Storm's End.
Arya’s efforts to try to hide were useless, because in the end her husband ended up finding her when he went to fetch her to take her to the maester. She glared at him, wishing that she could shoot daggers through her eyes, but Gendry wasn't going to be intimidated by the deathly threat in his wife's eyes. Arya wanted to hate him when she saw that pleading look in his eyes, but she knew by now that no matter what, it was impossible for her to hate Gendry.

"Please?" he begged, raising his eyebrows. "Remember, I will be your slave if you are only sick"

She sighed defeated. Lately Gendry was managing to get the better of her, convincing her to do whatever he wanted. He always knew how to ask. Arya had to put an end to that, or he would be the end of her!

She had been holding Robb in her arms the whole time, but she passed him to Gendry because the toddler was starting to feel very heavy. Arya had very strong arms, and she usually had no trouble carrying or holding anything that was heavy, but that day she felt tired. She supposed that it was because she was, in fact, sick.

She just wanted to go to her bedchambers, lay down on her bed and sleep all through the day and night; she felt more fatigued than in the morning, when she had felt fine, but now she just wanted to rest and she definitely did not want to go see the stupid old maester. However, she had promised Gendry.

She walked beside her husband through the hallways of the castle, trying not to complain as they approached the maester's chambers. When they arrived the door was closed, so Gendry held Robb with one arm and knocked with his free hand.

A few seconds later, the door opened and they were greeted by maester Lambin, a wise old man that was mostly bald, with the exception of a few white hairs left on his head, a wrinkled face, friendly smile, and gentle hazel eyes.

"Lord Gendry! Lady Arya!" he greeted them, happy to see his lord and lady at his door. "What brings you here today? Is little Robb ill?"

"No, but..." Arya started explaining everything. That her belly had been sick during that morning's ride, and that she thought she had food poisoning while her stubborn husband insisted that she was pregnant.
Mester Lambin listened with interest to everything that Arya said, and a serious expression appeared in his face. After she finished explaining everything, a smile appeared again on his face.

"Well, my lady, come inside. I will tell you in no time whether you or your lord husband are right."

They followed the old maester inside his chambers and he made Arya lay down. Gendry entertained their son Robb in a corner while he waited for the maester to finish examining Arya. Maester Lambin asked her some questions, to which she replied with the truth. Then he proceeded to do some small examinations to be sure whether his verdict was right or not, though by the expression on the old man's face, Arya could tell that he was already pretty convinced of the answer. Finally, maester Lambin nodded to himself, and he smiled to Arya. She wasn't sure what that smile meant, but before she could ask, the man had already turned around to look at Gendry.

"Lord Gendry, I already know what is the source of your wife's discomfort."

Gendry picked up Robb again in his arms and approached the bed where Arya was laying. Both of them were anxious, wanting to know what the maester had to say. Maester Lambin stared at both of them for a couple of seconds before he smiled at Gendry. Then he stared at Arya and said:

"Lady Arya, your husband is right. You are with child."

"What?" was the first thing that came out of her mouth. She was too stunned to pronounce any other word.

She could see from the corner of her eyes how her husband's face was suddenly lit up with the most overwhelming happiness. Arya wanted to get up from the bed and punch him as hard as she could and tell him that he was an idiot (which she used to do many times, so it wouldn't be a surprise) but when she turned her face to the side to stare right at him and she saw his smile, she couldn't bring herself to be mad at him. His happiness was almost contagious.

Her kept her eyes on her husband, piercing her with her gray glare and trying to stay as severe as she could even though the expression on Gendry's face made it almost impossible not to want to smile as well. She couldn't deny that deep down she felt happy as well, but she could not express that joy that she felt underneath layers and layers of dark worry. And besides, she did not want to smile because she did not want to give Gendry that satisfaction. She knew she would make his day if he managed to make her express any kind of joy over the news they had just received.

Gendry kept smiling, showing all of his teeth with pure glee, and then he lowered his gaze and his eyes met Arya's. He could instantly see that his wife was somewhat upset, given her annoyed expression. He didn't think much into it, as he believed that it was just another one of his wife's upset tantrums over losing a wager with him.

He handed Robb over to maester Lambin, and then kneeled beside the bed at the same time that Arya sat up on it, never taking his eyes off her. Arya felt that deep blue stare boring into her soul, and her expression immediately softened and she relaxed after a long sigh. Gendry's smile changed from a smile of satisfaction and victory to a sweet, caring and gentle smile. He reached out with his right hand and caressed Arya's cheek with his strong fingers, making her close her eyes for a second and shiver.

"Thank you," Gendry whispered.

"Why?"

"For making me so happy," he said with a smile still illuminating his handsome face. It wasn't the
first time that he said those words to Arya; in fact, he said them rather frequently. In moments like those, Arya often wondered what in seven hells had that man done to her, with what kind of spell or ancient dark magic had he cursed her, to make her feel so soft and unable to be mad at him. It angered her, she wanted to smack him, but she couldn't. Only with her Gendry was she ever a tame wolf. "I know I annoy and bother you sometimes, but-"

Arya raised her eyebrows, skeptic and sarcastic.

"Only sometimes?"

Gendry laughed quietly, and he stroked her cheek softly. The touch of his calloused fingers against her smooth skin was very soothing.

"Almost all the time," he corrected himself. That finally managed to pull a smile into Arya's face, even though it was only a very small one, but it was something.

"You do," she nodded, agreeing with him. "Because you are, and will always be, a stupid bull-headed boy."

Gendry chuckled, amused with the formerly insulting phrase that Arya had been calling him since he was just a boy and she was just a girl, not so long ago but still it felt like an eternity had passed since then. They were not the same people anymore.

He lowered his gaze and looked at her hand, which rested on the mattress. He took it between his hands and kissed it before looking back up at her. His smile had disappeared now from his face, and his overall expression was more serious than before.

"Tell me the truth, Arya. You don't want this baby?"

She felt a heavy something forming inside her chest.

"I do want this baby," she whispered, and her free hand moved to her belly. She used to touch her belly a lot when she was pregnant with Robb, and not it felt strange to her to be with child again.

"Then? Why didn't you want to know if you were with child?" Gendry asked, worried. "Why are you not smiling as much as I thought you would be?"

"Because..." she tried to find out a believable excuse. "You know how bad I am with sharing my feelings."

That was as good a lie as she could muster at that moment, and it wasn't a complete lie at that moment. It wasn't a lie about her, it was just not the truth of the moment.

She wasn't smiling after finding out she was with child again because, truth be told, she was terrified. She was trembling inside, but she didn't want Gendry to know about that. Then she would have to explain and everything would just be much worse, and Arya did not want that. Lying was much better for the time being.

She used to be incredibly straightforward with everything that went through her head, and that often got her in troubled. She had been a wild and fierce child, and she was still a wild and fierce woman. She just didn't feel like arguing at the moment.

Gendry hesitated, but then he seemed to believe her lie well enough. His smile returned to his face, and he leaned in closer to Arya to press his lips against hers and give her a brief and sweet kiss.
"I love you," he said then, and Arya managed to genuinely smile a little.

"And I you."

Gendry kissed Arya one more time, and then he turned his head to the side when he heard how Robb started kicking and complaining in the maester's arms, wanting to be free of them and run around. Gendry chuckled for the second time that day, and he stood on his feet again before approaching the maester and taking Robb from his arms. The little boy was still far too young to understand anything of what was happening, but still, Gendry wanted to share with his son his enthusiasm.

"Mama is gonna have a baby, Robb! You are going to be a big brother!" he smiled, holding the boy in his strong arms. It was a very tender and heart-warming image.

Robb looked at his father with his Stark-grey eyes with a blank expression. Then he got bored and started kicking again. He wanted to go to play, and Arya knew that her stubborn son would start crying soon of he dying get what he wanted. She loved her child, but whenever he cried she wanted to be as far as possible; he sounded like a cat ensuring torture or having someone stepping on his tail. It was an awful, awful sound, though not as bad as when he was born.

"Be still!" Gendry exclaimed, frowning. He was admired by how much of Arya Robb had in him when it became to impatience. Despite how annoying Robb was at that moment, Gendry couldn't stop smiling for anything in the world.

"Gendry, could you take Robb outside and maybe go and play with him?" Arya asked, seizing that opportunity to have a private conversation with the maester Landim alone. "I have some... questions. For the pregnancy. I'm still not very... experienced," she sighed, trying to sound as convincing as possible.

Gendry nodded, understanding her request. He smiled encouragingly to her, and then he took Robb's hand and made him wave good bye. Gendry was such a good father, a much better one than either he or Arya had ever though that he would be, and he always proved it in moments like those, with little details that made the people around him smile. Robb giggled and started waving to his mother on his own, and then Gendry walked out of the room with him.

As soon as Gendry closed the door again, the small smile in Arya's face disappeared completely, leaving her expression worried and sorrowful and nervous and a complete mess. He took a deep breath, feeling distressed, but she tried to keep herself calm. She knew it did her no good to be upset in her current condition.

She saw maester Lambin's face from the corner of her eye, though her eye was teary and burned and thus the image of the old man was blurry. She could see that he was now serious, much more serious than before. There was a deep compassion in his wise old eyes.

"He doesn't know yet," maester Lambin said. It wasn't a question.

Arya shook her head.

"No... He doesn't. And it's better that it stays that way."

"But if he knew, then maybe-"

"If he knew, he would make me drink moontea immediately," Arya retorted severely. She got up from the bed and walked towards the window. She stared out of it into the sea, which was nice and calm that day, unlike how it usually was. It was definitely much calmer than how she felt inside. "I
know Gendry. If I told him, he would become even more worried than I am, and... I don't know."

Again, her hands covered her belly, and she lowered her head to look at it. She was with child
again... that moment that she had dreaded during two years and that, now that it had happened, she
feared even more... But she couldn't help but feel happy deep inside of her. Maybe Gendry's joy
was contagious after all. His happiness wasn't tainted by any kind of fear or worry.

"Lady Arya, you can speak with the truth to me," maester Lambin said. "Do you not want this
child?"

She felt a sharp pain in her chest upon hearing those words, and a great anxiety. She wanted to
scream in frustration, but at the same time she felt like there was an invisible gag in her mouth,
preventing her from making any noise.

"I do want this child, that is the problem," she muttered, defeated. "If I didn't want it, I would have
you give me a cup of moontea right this instant. But that's not what I want! When I was a child I
never wanted a husband, I never wanted children, all of Westeros knows it. But now I have
Gendry, and Robb, and... this child. I have a family. A pack."

She turned away from the window and looked into the warm and wise eyes of the old maester.
Lambin was looking at her with understanding, not like other people who thought that she was
crazy whenever she mentioned her "pack". Lambin knew and understood Arya, he was the best
maester that she had ever known, next to maester Ludwin. He knew exactly what was going
through Arya's head, and knew of the fear that consumed her.

"You are afraid," he said out loud, expressing his thoughts, and Arya nodded.

"I am. Very. You know why."

"I do, my lady. Remember that I was there for the birth of Robb."

"You saved my life," she suddenly said.

Gendry had been away from Storm's End when Robb was born. The Queen had summoned all the
High Lords to accompany her on a diplomatic affair to Essos, and Lord Baratheon was of course
one of them. Arya had wanted to go too, but her pregnancy was very advanced and Gendry didn't
want her to get out of the castle for her own safety and their unborn babe's. For once, Arya had
agreed with him without dispute, and so she had stayed in Storm's End, waiting for the birth of the
child and the return of her husband.

When the day of Robb's birth finally arrived, things did not exactly go as planned. Maester Lambin
had said himself that it had been one of the hardest childbirth's that he had ever attended to, and
that they never ended well. It lasted for two days and two nights. Arya had never experienced such
agonizing physical pain in her life, she felt like she was ripping apart. Her screams could be heard
everywhere in Storm's End, and even though she was one of the strongest people that the
household of that castle had ever met, no one believed that she would survive it. After Robb was
born, maester Lambin and Arya's maids stayed at her side for three days and three nights, trying to
cool her fever down and keep the Stranger away from her.

Arya didn't remember much from those days, only certain blurry images and distant voices. And
then there was nothing. The maids and maester Lambin had stepped away from her bedchambers
for a few minutes to attend to the newborn Robb and fetch some water and clothes, and they had
been alerted by another maid that had gone to take a look at Arya that she had her eyes closed and
was still as a rock. When thee maester and the maids ran back to the bedchambers they had found
one of the sellswords at the service of the Baratheons coming out of Arya’s chambers, saying that she was breathing and conscious, but a bit confused.

That following night her fever cooled down, and a bit of color returned to her face, making her stop looking like a corpse. She had even had the strength to take a short bath and eat a small meal to get her strength back. She had slept long hours, and when she woke up her fever was completely gone, and she was finally able to hold her baby in her arms. All the pain and the fear of dying had been worth it after she had her strong and healthy babe in her arms.

Maester Lambin kept saying that it was a miracle that Arya was alive, and that she had been in the Stranger’s arms right before going back to health. Gendry never heard a word nor did he know anything about what had happened to his wife while he was gone. Arya had forbidden everyone to send any ravens to him, and she had also forbidden everyone to tell him anything while she was back. She wanted to tell him herself, but she never did. She had figured that it was pointless, because it had already happened and it had little importance after the baby was born and she had survived.

Now, the memories of those terrible days came back to her mind.

"I didn’t save your life, lady Arya," the maester said with a small comforting smile. "You did that yourself. I have never seen such a strong woman as yourself, with a will of steel. I am sure that it will take a lot more to take you down."

"Will it happen again?" she asked then, a bit roughly and demanding.

That was what she really wanted to know, if she was going to be at risk again. If she was going to die giving birth to her second son, like she had almost done with her first one. It terrified her to think of the possibility that it would all be too much for her body to resist. She believed that maybe she could not make it this time.

**But I have to be brave, like my mother was, like my sister was...**

Maester Lambin seemed to read her thoughts.

"As I understand, your lady mother gave birth to five strong and healthy babes. A King, two High Lords, and two ladies that helped the Dragon Queen take back the Seven Kingdoms on top of enormous flying and fire-breathing dragons... Believe me when I tell you, Lady Arya, that in my honest opinion I think that the daughter of that woman should have no problem birthing with the same ease."

"And Robb?" she retorted, not trusting the maester's words. How could he say that she had the same ease that her mother had, when two years ago she had proved exactly the opposite?

"Complications can appear from time to time. You were younger and smaller."

"My sister was younger than me when she gave birth, and she had no problems."

"Yes, but Lady Sansa had the height and body of a fully-grown woman. That came a bit later for you, but now look at you, my lady... A full woman, healthy and strong and beautiful. Believe this old man, lady Arya... I would not dare lie to you, I swear."

Arya believed him. Maester Lambin was a man that always spoke to the truth, no matter how hard or painful if could be, and he was now telling her that she shan't worry too much. She wanted to believe him and be calm, she wanted those horrible fears and worries gone...
It was all so much easier before, when I was a stubborn girl that wished for a different kind of life, she thought, though she immediately regretted. When she was a young child she dreamt of the independent life of a soldier, and of the glory of battle and the adventure of war. Well, she had been alone and independent, and she had more than often craved for her family. She had tasted the glory of battle, there was none, there was only death and blood. She had lived the adventures of war, it was filled with horrors, pain and sorrow.

She had the life that she really wanted now, and she had to understand that sometimes there were prices to pay. She hoped that it wouldn't be too big this time.

"I believe you," she finally decided. "In these past years, not even once have you ever been wrong."

"My lady, I only want what is best for you," the old and kind man said. The corners of his warm hazel eyes were all wrinkled up because of his big smile. "Now I recommend you to rest. Rest very much, it will do you and the babe much good. The last time you were restless, going from one place to the other like a wild horse. Not this time!"

She gaped, indignant. Rest?! She did not want to rest, she would get bored! What was she supposed to do then, lie down the whole day doing nothing?!

"But-!"

"No 'buts', my lady!" maester Lambin exclaimed, raising a finger I front of him to silence Arya. "I repeat, rest. I do not want you in the training yard sparring with the knights or the sellswords or your husband. And do n"

"And what am I supposed to do then?! I can't lie down the whole day during nine moons!" Arya protested, feeling a little bit angry. She had refused to stop doing her normal life the last time she was pregnant (and maybe that was part of the problem after all) because she couldn't stand the idea of doing nothing during such a long time!

"Read a book," the maester suggested, slightly amused with Arya's annoyance. "You can go on walks, the fresh air will do you good... But not in excess!"

"Alright, maester Lambin..." She sighted, not really feeling in the mood to argue over her restrictions for the next several months. She knew that the maester was probably right, but she did not like that. The sole thought of lying around doing nothing bored her even before starting to so it.

This is all Gendry's fault, a voice muttered in the back of her head. Yes, it was all Gendry's fault, definitely. She would have to come up with a good vengeance... Maybe she would put a couple of beetles inside his shirt when he slept. That was bound to wake him up in not a very good way...

She smiled a little devilishly, satisfied with her plans for revenge on Gendry. Mage wouldn't be in that situation if it wasn't for his...! For his...! For his twice-damned fabulous love making!

She walked towards the door of them maester's chambers, wanting to walk out of the place and go search for her family.

"Remember what I have told you, lady Arya!" Maester Lambin told her before she crossed the dorstep to the hallway.

"I will, maester Lambin. Thank you for everything."

She walked alone through the empty hallways and went straight to the bedchambers that she shared
with Gendry, the biggest ones in the entire castle of Storm's End. When she arrived she found the
door open, and Gendry seated on the floor, playing with Robb, who couldn't stop giggling. Arya
wished that she had some kind of way to capture that image forever, because she knew that few
people would believe her if she told them how mighty lord Baratheon acted around their young
child.

She leaned against the door frame with her arms crossed over her chest, looking at her husband
with one eyebrow raised and one corner of her mouth slightly curled up as well. It wasn't long
before Gendry noticed her. He looked up and found her standing there in that position, and the
smile slowly faded from his mouth, but not from his eyes.

He seemed to read her mind.

"Am I in trouble?"

She nodded. Gendry grinned.

"In how much?" he wanted to know, starting to act a bit cocky.

"In a lot!"
Arya was on the bed underneath the covers, with her eyes wide open and staring at the wall bathed in morning sunlight. She had tried to fall asleep but she hadn't been able to; her mind had kept her awake the entire night even though she felt very tired.

Gendry was behind her, and her back was pressed against him. She envied her husband because he had been able to fall asleep quickly after getting into the bed, and he had spent the entire night snoring while in a deep, deep, deep sleep. He was still asleep and he had one of his arms around Arya's waist and his face was buried in the peace between her neck and shoulders. Arya felt his breath on her skin and the heat of his naked torso through the thin nightgown that she was wearing. She always found Gendry's deep breathing and his warmth comforting, and it was what had kept her from tossing around restlessly through the night. She wished she could be as peaceful and unworried as him at that moment.

She felt his hand covering her belly. Gendry had fallen asleep like that, touching her still flat stomach and smiling at the thought of their unborn son. He couldn't be more happy with the news of Arya's pregnancy. He was thrilled! Arya was happy that he was so full of joy, and she shared it deep within herself, but her worry was still strong. She knew that she had to be strong and overcome her fear. Everything would be alright, and in a few moons she and Gendry would have in their arms a beautiful baby. Apart from her worries, what had kept Arya awake the entire night was also the thoughts of what her new child would be like. When she was younger she didn't care about babies and she didn't wish to have any children of her own, but now that she already had one, a little boy that she loved and that in her eyes couldn't be more perfect, she wondered how would her second child turn out like. Would it be another baby boy, or would this time the gods send her and Gendry a baby girl? It didn't really matter to Arya, and she knew that it wouldn't matter to Gendry either. Arya tried to imagine him with a baby girl and smiled.

She sighed. She hoped that at least, no matter what the child was, he or she would have Gendry's eyes. Robb already had her eyes...

Gendry's breathing changed then, and Arya knew that he had woken up. She turned her head to the side to look at him over her shoulder and found him blinking, trying to get his deep blue eyes used to the intense morning light that filled their bedchambers. Gendry yawned and then he locked eyes with Arya and smiled.

"Good morning..." he murmured, sounding very happy.

"Good morning," Arya said as well, turning around so that her body was facing him and she could look at him more easily. Gendry in the morning was an interesting thing to see. His face was peaceful like that of a babe, his eyes were half closed and playful, his black hair was a mess, and his naked totes was the same glorious sight as it always was. Arya loved her husband in the morning. "Someone got a good night's sleep," she commented, raising her eyebrows a bit teasingly.

"Aye, I did that... But you look tired," Gendry said then, suddenly frowning. "Are you alright?"

Arya shrugged. "I couldn't sleep."

"Oh. Is it the babe?" Gendry asked, placing his hand again on Arya's belly in the most protective and loving way.

She shook her head. "No, I can't feel him yet... But I was thinking about him. Or her. I was thinking
about the babe," she admitted.

"Don't worry," Gendry said then, seeing the preoccupation on her eyes. He had become much better at the time of reading Arya than he was years ago, when he was clueless. Now Arya actually had trouble hiding things from him. "You were worried before Robb was born too, remember? But you've seen you have nothing to worry about, you have proved to be a fantastic mother. And this time..." he took Arya's hand in his own and stared at her in the eyes. His expression had turned serious all of a sudden, "I'll be there for you. I won't go away again when it's close to your time to give birth."

Arya smiled a little bit, feeling a little bit relieved. Having Gendry there would definitely take away a great part of the fear that she would feel when that moment came.

"Are you angry with me?" he asked then, remembering how unamused Arya had been the previous day.

"No, I'm not angry. I was just not expecting this!" she said, and it was true. Having another child so soon wasn't something that she had expected, but she hadn't planned having Robb right after getting married either, so it wasn't really that surprising... She should have seen it coming, actually. "I still want to punch you, though!"

Gendry laughed, and Arya laughed too, amused by her husband's own amusement. They were both still laughing when suddenly Gendry grabbed Arya, surrounding her body with his strong arms, and he rolled on his back putting Arya on top of him. She gasped due to the sudden movement, but before she could said anything Gendry trapped her lips in a kiss.

Arya yielded to the kiss and kissed her husband back. She could feel Gendry smiling against her mouth. Then he playfully bit her lower lip, making her part her lips, and Gendry used that moment to deepen the kiss. Arya happily kissed him back, thinking that they should have more moments like that before she got as fat as a barrel and before a newborn babe kept them from sleeping at night.

Their sweet little moment was cut short when someone suddenly knocked on the closed door of their chambers, startling them. Arya returned to her original position laying down at Gendry's side, and both of them stared at the door.

"Who is it?" asked Gendry, clearly annoyed by the interruption. He didn't want to talk to or see anybody, he just wanted to stay in bed and kiss his wife... And Arya only wanted him to stay in bed and kiss her.

"It's me, my lord," maester Lambin announced. Both Arya and Gendry frowned, sensing that the maester's voice had a disturbed and nervous ring to it. "A raven just arrived with news. It's important, my lord."

"Let him in, it might be my siblings," Arya whispered to Gendry, and suddenly she felt worried sick. Over the years of her life she had learned that ravens did seldom bring good news.

Gendry got out of bed and put on a robe before opening the door and letting the old maester in. The man entered the bedchambers and greeted both his Lord and his Lady, and then he handed the message that the raven had brought to Storm's End over to Gendry. Gendry unrolled the paper and read the words written in it. Arya waited, still sitting on the bed, and wondered what those news could be. Had something happened to her sister, to her brothers? Were Sansa, Bran, Rickon and Jon alright?
A few moments later, Gendry cursed under his breath.

"Call the bannermen," he ordered to maester Lambin, returning the paper to him. "We must leave as soon as possible."

"What's wrong?" Arya asked.

"The Stormlands are under attack. Fawnton, Blackhaven, Felwood, Stinehelm, Gallowsgrey and Harvest Hall are under siege," Gendry told her. His voice was full of fury, and Arya could see the anger in his eyes. Gendry had just been a lord for three years, but he had learned to love his lands and his people and the Houses he ruled over as liege lord, and he was a fine warrior; he was not going to sit around and let what was now his home be attacked like that.

"Why?" Arya asked. It didn't make sense! Westeros had peace now, the war had been over for years and everything had returned to normality! They didn't even have quarrels with Essos anymore! Who was attacking cities all over the Stormlands, and for what purpose? "Who is it? Is it a House from the Stormlands?"

"They don't know, the attackers have no banners," Gendry muttered. He turned to face the maester again. "Has the Queen been informed of this?"

"I doubt it my lord. The Queen is traveling to Slaver's Bay, and she took one of her dragons with her. If only we could ask for assistance with the other two dragons, but Lady Sansa went with Jon Targaryen to Qarth on that diplomatic mission and they took the green dragon with them, and the Night's Watch has the third dragon now to fight the White Walkers that are near the Wall..."

"We are left to fight only with men and steel. Very well. Then we will fight with men and steel," Gendry declared. He was a true warrior, and he wasn't going to back down in the fight only because he didn't count with the help of dragons and their fire. "Call the banners. I want soldiers marching to all those towns immediately."

"Of course, my lord."

"But when the Queen returns, she must know of this."

"I'll send ravens to my brothers to Winterfell and the Vale, they can help," Arya said, getting out of the bed. Even though she felt exhausted she couldn't stay underneath the covers anymore while Gendry was talking about preparing to fight and her people were under attack by unknown enemies. She put a robe on and approached her husband and the maester. "Bran and Rickon have men to spare. So do Ygritte and Sandor, they can all send men, and you are going to need them. If whoever is attacking is laying siege on all those towns and castles it's because they have a large army that can be divided many times and still be threatening."

"You are right," Gendry murmured, nodding his head. "Each bannerman will be assigned a certain town and castle to go and fight there. An army for every siege. I'll divide my men and send them to command the attacks."

"What about you, my lord?"

"I'll go with one group of my men to Harvest Hall."

"No!" Arya exclaimed and she grabbed his arm, as if she was trying to keep him there even though Gendry wasn't going anywhere at that moment. "Don't go!"

"Arya, I have to. Those are my people, our people. I have to be there for them, I'm their liege lord!"
"Then I'll go with you!"

"You can't, you are with child!"

"It doesn't matter, I can still fight!"

"My lady, that would not be prudent," maester Lambin intervened, alarmed by her determination to go an fight in the war in the Stormlands despite her condition. "Something had could happen to you and the babe."

"I won't let that happen," Gendry muttered, glaring at his wife with a severe expression. He always let Arya do anything that she wanted to do, he had never stopped her whenever she said that she wished to do something or go somewhere. However, Arya knew just by looking at his eyes that it wasn't going to be like that at that moment, and that Gendry would not change his mind. "Arya, I know you can fight just as well as any soldier. Seven hells, I know you can fight better than many soldiers, and that you are strong! I know that I promised you that I would never stop you from doing anything that you please, but I can't let you do it this time. It's not only you that would be in danger."

Arya gulped and covered her belly with her hand, and she looked at it. Gendry was right, she wasn't alone now. She hated to stay in Storm's End while Gendry and the soldiers and the bannermen went away to fight, but she couldn't risk the life of her unborn child. She wasn't that cruel or stupid...

"Fine," she murmured. "I will stay... and I will take care of Robb."

It would be also cruel to leave Robb alone at such a young age. Arya remembered her brother Rickon, who had been that same age when both his mother and father left to go South, and they never came back. The thought of it pained Arya.

"Come home safe," she whispered to Gendry. She felt suddenly weak; she never felt weak, but those news had come in the worse possible time and she didn't know how to take them.

Gendry sensed her distress and took her chin gently with his hand and raised her head so that she would look at him in the eyes. His blue eyes were comforting, full of determination. Determination to go and fight, determination to win, determination to come back home to his wife and children...

"You know I would never fail you," he murmured.

"I know," she whispered.

Gendry kissed her forehead and sighed, and then he told the maester to leave them alone. Maester Lambin did as he was ordered and left the bedchambers, leaving Arya and Gendry some privacy. Arya helped Gendry get ready in silence; there was no time to lose, and after he was dressed she helped him put on his heavy armor in silence as quickly as possible. She was feeling a knot in the pit of her stomach that was terribly uncomfortable, and she didn't know how to interpret it. Was she nervous? Well, of course she was, but she had lived through worse things in her life and she knew that Gendry was a very good warrior, just like his father had been when he was young. She shouldn't have anything to worry about, but she couldn't help it. The uncomfortable sensation didn't leave her, and it left her unable to speak for a while. She sensed that Gendry wanted to say something and break the silence, but something was also stopping him from doing so.

When Arya finally finished putting Gendry's armor on he sighed again and put his arms around her, bringing her closer to him in a protective and loving embrace. She didn't resist it; she rested her
head on his cold and heavy breastplate and took a deep breath.

"It will be over soon," Gendry promised.

"I hope so," she murmured. "When you find out who is doing this... Destroy them. We don't need more enemies."

"Don't worry, Arya, I'll take care of everything," Gendry assured her.

They kissed and then they left and walked towards their son's chambers. They opened the door and stepped inside the room together, hand in hand, and they approached the bed. Robb was still asleep underneath the warm covers of his bed, and he looked peaceful and quiet in his sleep. He was the most beautiful thing that Arya had ever seen.

He looks an awful lot like his father when he is sleeping, she thought, watching her son's face and the black hair that was all messy after a good night of sleep and happy dreams.

Gendry didn't want to wake Robb up, and he still didn't have to leave. The ravens had to be sent to his bannermen and his army from Storm's End had to get ready to leave with him to Harvest Hall. Gendry sat with Arya on the edge of Robb's bed and just waited there, expending the little time that he had left in his home with his family by watching his son peacefully sleeping free of any kind of worries. When Arya looked at Gendry's face she saw that he was much calmer than before, and he was even more determined to go to the war that had just erupted in the Stormlands and come back home as soon as possible. Robb had that effect on him, he made Gendry want to keep his promise more than ever.

An hour passed like that. Before the maester came back to tell Gendry that the ravens were sent and his men were ready, Robb opened his eyes. He blinked and yawned, feeling sleepy still, as rubbed his eyes with his little fists. He noticed his mother and father sitting on his bed, watching him, and he smiled and sat up on the bed.

"Papa!" he exclaimed happily, and Gendry chuckled and hugged him. Robb didn't mind that his father had armor on, he was used to him wearing it, and even his mother.

"M'boy..." Gendry murmured, with a bit of his former commoner accent. "Ah, I'm going to miss you, Robb. I promise to come back soon, aye?"

Robb just looked at him with his huge grey eyes and then he smiled. Gendry took it as a "yes" and smiled as well.

"Take care or your mother and your little brother for me while I'm gone," he said then. He kissed his son's hair and then he stood up from the bed and made his way towards the door.

Robb frowned and looked at his father confused. He raised his arms into the air, trying to reach his father, but of course he couldn't.

"Papa!" he called after his father. Gendry didn't look back, if he did he wouldn't have the strength to leave Storm's End.

"Sshh, papa will be back soon," Arya assured her son. She kissed his head in the same spot where Gendry had kissed him and then he left the room to go after her husband.

He said goodbye to her in the main entrance of Storm's End. He promised her once again that he would be back soon safe and sound, and he sealed his promise with a kiss. For the first time ever Arya watched her husband ride off to battle with his men, leaving her behind in the castle. She
stood there outside the doors, watching as Gendry and his men galloped away from the castle to meet the people who had invaded their lands, their home, and being justice to their people. Arya still felt fear but she also felt calmer than before; she truly believed Gendry would return to her soon.

When Gendry and his men were far away from the castle but still in sight, not having yet disappeared in the horizon, Arya returned inside the castle. It was a cold winter morning outside, and she wasn't properly dressed for that weather. She just hoped it wouldn't snow; snow would make fighting more difficult, and she didn't want Gendry and the soldiers having to endure that weather in such harsh conditions.

"It's a dark day today," a voice said in front of her all of a sudden while she was walking alone in a hallway, and she gasped.

She looked up and found one of Storm's End's men in front of her; one of the sellswords at her service. He was actually the sellsword that had discovered her recovering after having been so sick after Robb's birth and told everyone about it. He was one of the best fighters and killers in the service of the Lord and Lady of Storm's End; he had lost no battle or fight. He was also kind of handsome, with long dark brown hair, tan skin, and brown eyes. He was mysterious and dangerous, and a long and thick scar ran from the left side of his forehead down to his chin, which only added to the mystery about him. He seemed like a very tough man, not one to mess around with. His name was Addam.

"My lady," the sellsword bowed his head with respect when Arya set her eyes on him.

"Addam!" she exclaimed, surprised. "How is it that you are still here, and not marching with my husband to war?"

"Your lord husband have me orders, my lady. He told me to stay by your side and guard you in his absence," the man explained with a soft smile in his lips. He appeared to be almost a little bit cocky whenever he did that, or so Arya thought.

Addam looked at her in silence for a long moment, a moment much longer than any of the men ever dared to look at her. Then he frowned.

"May I ask the same question, my lady?"

"Pardon me?"

"I mean to ask why you are not with lord Gendry. Ever since I've been in your advice you have marched with him everywhere, no matter how dangerous. Why is this time different?" Addam asked, and then he raised his hand in an apologetic gesture. "I'm sorry if my curiosity offends you, my lady."

Arya sighed and shook her head.

"Don't worry, Addam, it does not offend me at all. I wanted to go, but Gendry and maester Lambin actually forbade me to do such a thing."

Addam frowned.

"Forbade you? Why? My lady is as good with a sword as any of the men here and in all of Westeros."

"I know, but..." Arya put her hands on her belly then. It was strange to think of herself as pregnant
again, but she was, and she had to get used to saying the words again. After all, even though she found it hard to say it, she would be showing soon anyways, so she should get used to it. She smiled then and looked at her belly, then back at the sellsword.

The man wasn't looking at her eyes anymore. He was staring at the hands covering her belly, and Arya could see his eyes becoming wide with surprise and a little bit of shock. It surprised her to see such a curious reaction in the sellsword; she could swear that she could even see him pale a little bit. However, after roaming her body with his eyes, the sellsword returned his gaze to hers and smiled a soft half smile. It wasn't cocky anymore.

"I see," he commented. "In that case, my lady, you must rest. Take care of yourself."

"I will, Addam, don't worry about that."

"Is there anything that you require, anything that you need? Anything that I can do for you?"

Arya was surprised by the sudden urgency in his voice, like he was ready to do absolutely anything that she commanded as soon as the words left her mouth. She had seldom come across such a loyal and devoted sellsword, and though she had to admit that he had always been like that around her, it still surprised her very much.

"No, Addam, thank you very much... Though, there is something that you could do for me."

"Anything, my lady."

"I want you to take the fastest horse that is left in the stables, and gallop as fast as you can until you catch up with my husband and his party of men. Join them, stay by Gendry's side and protect him," she solicited as she took a few steps closer to the sellsword, who was staring at her with a frowning face at that moment. "Please."

"But, lady Arya, your lord husband already ordered me to stay in the castle and watch after you while he's away," he protested. "I can't go after your husband's wishes."

"But you'll go after mine?" she retorted, raising her eyebrows. "I want you to be by my husband's side. You are of no use to me here in Storm's End, and my husband will need as many hands as he can. You are our best sword, Addam. I can assure you I will sleep better at night knowing that's husband had you by his side watching after him I'm the field of battle."

"But who will watch out after you, lady Arya?"

"I can take care of myself very well, I can assure you that too."

She saw the man hesitating, and she watched him closely and studied his expression and his face while he took a decision. It was almost like she could witness the internal battle that was unfolding inside his mind to chose wether to follow Gendry's commands or Arya's.

"You want to protect me, you say?" she added, knowing exactly how to convince him. "Well. You can protect me by preventing me from going after my husband into battle. And you can prevent that from happening by going in my stead."

"If I do as you say, my lady, I will get in trouble with your husband," Addam pointed out.

Arya crossed her arms over her chest, not willing to give up.

"If you don't do as I say, you will get in trouble with me. Choose."
The sellsword threw his head back and laughed merrily. A small smile also appeared in Arya's lips.

"Well... A man would not want to get Lady Arya Stark angry with him."

Indeed, he should know better than to do that. She did have a temper and it was known among all those who were at her service in the castle, and she had a temper specially when she felt protective over someone. That someone right now was her husband, who she knew could be a fool at times and led himself into dangerous situations without thinking about the consequences. Having Addam at his side would maybe prevent Gendry from doing anything foolish, the sellsword had proved to be wise during his years in Storm's End.

Arya felt relieved and grateful that Addam had accepted to go after Gendry and his men to fight at his side. It did take a weight off her shoulders. She trusted the man.

"Thank you," she whispered, and the sellsword smirked.

"Don't thank me, Lady Arya, I'm just doing my duty... to you."

Arya frowned, confused by those words. Furthermore, she was confused by the way in which the man had pronounced them. She opened her mouth to say something, but in the blink of an eye the sellsword was gone. It was like he had just vanished in the darkness of the hallway, and no matter where Arya looked she couldn't find him.

Even though that had been a little strange she decided to forget about it. She had gotten what she wanted after all, more security for Gendry. Arya had more than enough soldiers and guards left in Storm's End to protect her if need be, Addam was of no use in the castle.

She sighed. She already felt lonely, but she was not going to spend her time waiting for Gendry doing nothing. She was no going to just sit in front of a window and look into the horizon waiting for his return like a helpless maid. Whenever she was alone she always sparred with the men, or went of for a ride with her horse. Now that she was with child she couldn't do much of both things, but she had other duties to attend to around the castle, and she had a son to care after.

She walked down the hallway towards the staircase that led to the boy's chambers. Arya felt sad for the poor boy, he was going to miss his father while he was gone, and he couldn't understand what was happening.

The second morning after Gendry and the men left to Harvest Hall, Arya was awakened by her son Robb. She had allowed him to sleep in her bed with her on those nights since Gendry left.

She woke up when she heard that Robb was already awake and calling for her.

"Mama," the little boy said. "Mama!"

"Ummm, why can't you sleep as long as your father does...?" Arya groaned, pressing her face against the pillow. She hadn't slept very well and she felt tired. She had had nightmares.

"Mama!" Robb insisted, making Arya raise her head from the pillow and sit up on the bed.

"I'm awake, I'm awake!" she exclaimed, yawning and rubbing her eyes with her hands.

Robb giggled. Arya looked down at his little chubby face and his bright grey eyes which smiled at her, and it immediately made her smile.
"You woke Mama up," she said, in a tone of voice which was supposed to sound reprimanding, but it only made Robb giggle more. "Aye, of course you find that funny..."

She got out of bed and took her son in her arms. She walked outside her chambers carrying her son and clef for the maids; she handed Robb over to his own maids, and ordered her maids to prepare her a bath. An hour later, when she was bathed and dressed and so was her son they both went don't to the great hall to break their fast.

"What shall we do today, Robb?" Arya asked her son, even though she knew that she would obtain no answer. "Do you want to play? Do you want to watch Mama practice with the men?"

Robb looked pretty bored, and Arya pouted while she thought of ways of entertaining her son that day. She herself wanted to do something new and interesting.

"M'lady, there's a mummer's fair not far from here," one of her maids said then, and Arya looked at her. "They came some days ago, they travel from town to town."

"How far away are they?" Arya asked.

"Half an hour away on horseback, m'lady. I went there three days ago with my sister and her children. All the little boys go there," the maid told her.

"A mummer's fair, you said?"

"Aye, m'lady."

Arya thought about it. A mummer's fair would be a good place to take her child for a bit of amusement. She did not want to stay stuck in Storm's End while everyone was away, and Robb needed to get out too. She was sure that the maester would try to convince her not to go, but she was with child, not crippled. She still could walk and enjoy a bit of amusement. She would have to take soldiers and guards, of course, given the current situation in the Stormlands, but there hadn't been any attacks or enemies seen near the castle.

"Go and tell the master of arms that Robb and I will be going out. We will need a few men to escort us. It will be only for a few hours."

"Yes, m'lady."

As she had expected, the master at arms protested about it, but nonetheless he have Arya the men she requested after he realized that there was no way of stopping his Lady from doing whatever she wanted. He wanted to go with her himself, but she commanded to stay in the castle in case he was needed there, which she really hoped wouldn't happen while she was away or even after she returned. She mounted in a horse and Robb sat in front of her. She had good care of holding him tightly and not let him fall as she set her horse on a steady trot. Her men followed; she had a group of five in total.

Just as the maid had said, half an hour away from Storm's End was the mummer's fair. Arya hadn't been to one in years, and she smiled upon seeing all the tents and the people and the mummers and the games that were going on in there.

One of the mummers looked in their direction as they dismounted their horses and quickly made his way towards them. He was recognized them because of the Baratheon stag embroidered in their clothes and cloaks, and the Stark direwolf in Arya's.

"M'lady!" my he mummer exclaimed. He was very ugly, with a very long and very thin face, and a
Arya smiled and greeted the mummer politely. She had never been a lady, never had. However she had learned a few things from her sister in the past few years, and she new that a bit of courtesy now and then was good. She should act at least a tiny bit like a lady sometimes, and smile like her sister did. It wasn't so hard, after all, and Arya liked being nice to people. It had been harder after the war, but she had always been nice to people that were nice to her. The mummer didn't seem to be bad.

"Come come!" the mummer said. "Bring the little lord! We'll show him our humble wonders!"

"Wait!" Arya exclaimed, going after her son who had started happily following the mummer towards the fair. "Don't go too far!"

She followed her son's fast and clumsy steps around the fair, smiled when she heard him laugh, and she also looked around while she walked behind him. She saw men spitting fire, men swallowing swords, men playing with knives throwing them in the air and catching them without cutting themselves. She saw women in impossible body postures, and storytellers that told stories while representing the scenes with puppets on a small stage; the commoners's kids were laughing and watching in awe.

Arya smiled, enjoying seeing all that around her. Seeing the children's happy faces and even the adults' happy faces made her think that perhaps things were not that bad in the Stormlands. Maybe Gendry would deal with whatever problems there were easily and quickly and he would return even before she knew it. She hoped for that, or else she would have to pick up her armor and her sword and go fetch him herself and kick the invaders from her lands herself as well.

Time passed quickly in that place, and she stayed by her son's side the whole time, though she was getting annoyed because she had to be follows by her guards the whole time. True, she had asked for them, but she didn't need them on her heels the entire time. She got distracted a few seconds while watching a man playing tricks with fire, and then she felt Robb walking away from her. When she took her eye away from the fire spectacle and searched for her son, she did it just in time to see Robb disappearing behind a tent. She sighed.

"Robb," she called while walking towards the tent. "Robb, come back here! I told you not to walk away!"

I should carry him in my arms if he's going to keep wandering off, she thought.

She reached the tent and turned around the corner behind it, hoping to find Robb there. But that place was empty, and there wasn't anyone there. She stopped and frowned.

"Robb?" she called him again, more wary this time. She looked around, searching for the little black haired boy. "Robb?!"

She listened carefully, but she didn't hear his laugher and giggles. She started to panic.

"Robb!" she called again, now shouting. "Robb, where are you?!"

"My lady?" one of the guards appeared at her side, alarmed by her voice.

"Find my son!" she cried.

"Aye, my lady!" the man exclaimed, and ran away to search the place and tell the others to do the same.
Robb, where are you? Arya asked in her mind.

"Robb!"

He was here seconds ago!

How could he have disappeared like that?! She had let him out of sight for only a second.

I should have stayed in Storm's End...

"ROBB!"

"M'lady?" one of the mummer's appeared and asked, concerned. It was the same mummer as before, the one with the long face and the ugly nose. He was very short, even more so than Arya.

"Where is my son?" she asked, gasping for air. She didn't recall the last time she had felt like that, she was literally lacking air in her lungs. She felt like a hand was closing around her neck and it would only go away after her son was safely in her arms again. "He was here mere moments ago, and now he's not!"

"M'lady..."

"Where is he?!"

"Don't worry, Stark, your son is in good hands," a voice hissed behind her.

She turned around and found a man sniggering there while looking at her. He was small black eyes, similar to those of a rat, and teeth just as ugly as the rodent's. He has taller than her, but his posture was strange. He was carrying a sword in his belt, though, and his hand was on the hilt, ready to unsheathe it.

Three more men appeared from behind a tent with their swords already unsheathed. They wore blue and grey colors, and Arya paled with recognition. She knew those colors very well, more than she would like to know them. She thought that she would be already rid of that House...

They have taken Robb, she realized.

Horror invaded her, then terror. Then rage. How dared they touch her family again? With what right?

Mine of the men laughed lowly and approached her while pointing at her with his sword.

"Don't worry, little wolf, we'll take good care of you too..."

That would not happen. She had Needle well hidden beneath her cloak, and when she suddenly unsheathed it while yelling full of rage, they did not expect it. Quick as a snake, she buried Needle's pointy end in the man's throat. A river of blood came pouring out of his mouth, and when Arya pulled Needle out of him he fell facedown to the ground. The other men attacked as well, but the did not expect Arya to be so quick and agile. She killed a second man by making lots of holes in his belly, causing him to bleed out, and she kicked another one between the legs. She ran away from the last one that was left standing. She ran and ran, returning to the fair to seek the aid of her men, but she found a complete different scenario than the one she had left behind merely five minutes ago.

Some tents were on fire. People were screaming and crying and running in all directions, terrified.
Men on horses, dressed in blue and grey colors, were attacking everyone and setting the place on fire. They had come out of nowhere, or so it seemed. Perhaps they had been hiding inside the tents, waiting for her...

She found one of her men amongst all the chaos, but before she could run to him, his throat was cut by one of the men in blue and grey that attacked him from behind.

"No!" Arya screamed, and the man saw her. He pointed at her with the bloodied knife with which he had just killed Arya's guard.

"There she is! There's the Stark bitch!"

Lots of eyes belonging to the attackers turned towards her, and they looked at her with hatred and sadistic pleasure. It sickened her.

The smoke from the fire was making her dizzy and it also made her cough. It stung in her eyes.

Robb... I have to find Robb. I have to get him out of here...

She turned around and started running towards a tent that wasn't burning, and that wasn't surrounded by the enemy.

Maybe they are keeping him there... I need to find Robb, I need to take him to Storm's End. I have to tell Gendry... This is all my fault, they are coming for me... This is my fault.

"ROBB!"

It was the last thing she said. She was still running, searching for her son, when something hard hit her in the back of the head and everything became dark.
"Lord Baratheon, you can't be here!" the young guard said, trying his best to stop Gendry while he followed him. Gendry paid him no attention, and the guard desperately tried to be heard. "The Hand of the Queen hasn't given his permission-!"

"I couldn't care less what the Hand says!" Gendry muttered angrily, making the guard gasp. The poor fellow gulped and continued following Lord Baratheon nervously, not knowing how to handle the situation. He was very young and he had just recently become a guard in the Red Keep, and he wished there was an older and more experienced guard in his place to help him.

"My lord, I must insist! The Hand of the Queen has to give authorization in the Queen's place!" the guard exclaimed. "My lord, I must ask you to leave!"

"Then ask, but the answer will be the same," Gendry said as he walked through the dark tunnels. He didn't know the way because he had never been there before, but one of his men did know the way and was guiding him.

"I will have to report you to the Queensguard!"

"Then do it! I don't care, all I want is to find my wife!"

"She isn't here, my lord!"

"But the person that can take me to her is here," Gendry hissed, and he continued ignoring the guard. The man, realizing that he wasn't going to accomplish anything, left. He was surely going to tell the Queensguard of his presence there but Gendry didn't care that he did, as long as he had time to find the answers that he needed.

He followed the man that was guiding him, Addam, through the dungeons of the Red Keep towards the third level of cells. According to the sellsword, those cells were for the worst criminals of Westeros, while the second level was for hightborns and the first level was for common criminals. The person they were looking for was in the third level for sure: even though she wasn't exactly a criminal like the ones that frequented that place, she had committed serious crimes against the people of Westeros. She had burned alive both innocent commoners and hightborns, and the murder of innocents was something that Queen Daenerys Targaryen did not tolerate.

The raven had arrived to them days ago. Gendry was only hours away from Harvest Hall when one of his men told him the news: Arya and his son had left the castle to go to a fair, and they had not returned. The fair had been burned, the people slaughtered, and his own men had been killed. Arya and Robb had been nowhere to be found, and there had been no clues of who the people that had done that might have been. Arya and Robb had simply... vanished without trace.
Gendry had rode immediately to King's Landing accompanied only by a few of his men. The ones that he took to Harvest Hall had stayed there because he had promised aid, and the castle was still under siege. He couldn't call back the rest of his army from the other castles because they too were still fighting. He had no other option but to go to King's Landing and see what he could do once he got the answers that he needed.

The Queen wasn't in Westeros: she had travelled to Essos a fortnight ago, and she wasn't coming back yet. In her place was her Hand of the Queen, Jorah Mormont. Gendry had gone to the Red Keep and requested to see him, but after waiting for the man to arrive and growing impatient he had decided to deal with the matter by himself, and that was the reason why he was now in the black cells of the dungeons of the Red Keep.

He had never felt such fury inside in his entire life. Someone had dared to take away from him the two things he loved most on the world: his wife and his son. Whoever had taken Arya and Robb was going to pay, Gendry was going to make sure of that... And if any harm had been done to his family, the people responsible for it were going to understand the true meaning to the Baratheon words. Ours is the Fury.

"Are you sure it's this way?" he asked Addam, and the sellsword nodded. "How do you know?"

"I was here once," the man replied, making Gendry frown.

"Here? I thought you said the black cells were reserved for the worst criminals in Westeros."

"They are."

Gendry didn't like something about the man's voice, and he wondered what in seven hells had the man done in the past to deserve being locked in that place. It had probably not been a wise choice to hire a sellsword into his service without knowing much about the man's life, and Gendry wondered if he had put his family in danger by having such a dangerous man near his family. He sent those thoughts away; Addam was being useful at the moment, just as he had always been, and that was all that really mattered.

"It's here," Addam said thence stopping in front of a heavy wooden door that had no bars. Everything was on complete darkness, except for the little light that their torches provided. Addam took out the key from his pocket that he had masterfully stolen from the guard, and he unlocked the door of the cells. Gendry stepped inside the cell with a torch in hand, and he followed by his men.

The place stank of shit and sweat and sickness and humidity. The walls were made of dark stone and were dirty and covered in moss. There was some hay in the stone floor, but not enough to make it even close to comfortable. There was a bucket on a corner, and no windows. The fire of the torch illuminated the place, and Gendry found what he was looking for.

There, sitting quietly on a corner, was Melissandre.

Her stay in the dungeon had not diminished her beauty, but it was definitely decaying. She wasn't dressed in a luxurious red dress anymore, but in dirty rags instead. Her hair was still red, but it was dry, and her face was pale and extremely thin. The red ruby that used to be around her neck had been taken away from her. Her eyes remained dangerous, though, and they shone with excitement when they saw the flames on the torches.
"Fire," she whispered. Gendry and the rest of the men just stared at her on silence while she reached out with her hands like spiders to the flames, trying to touch them. "The Lord of Light has come to me again... It's been so long. So long... The night is dark and full of terrors, and these cell are as dark as the longest night..."

"Your red god hasn't come to save you, witch," Gendry said. He remembered the last time that he had seen that woman. She fooled him and took his blood, then threw it to the fire as she said the names of doomed men. He had hated her for it ever since, and he hated that he needed her now. She was the woman that had convinced his own uncle that he needed to sacrifice him. She was the reason he had been separated from Arya, and the reason that he had had to run.

The woman looked at him with focused eyes. She studied his face, his blue eyes, his dark hair... Her expression changed to that of recognition and surprise, and she stood up from the cold hard floor and approached him with slow steps, but with her head held high. No matter how much time she had spent in that place or the conditions she loved in now, she still conserved some of her powerful dignity. Melissandre kept staring at Gendry and studying him. The surprise in her face transformed into something that surprised Gendry: melancholy.

"Lord Baratheon..." Melissandre whispered. Her voice was still strong like it was before. "It has been a long time."

"Since you fooled me and tried to kill me? Aye, it had been a long time," Gendry said, not bothering to keep the harshness of his feelings away from his voice.

Melissandre smiled.

"I did what I had to do to serve the Lord of Light," she said.

"You did what you had to do for power, and you failed. You were wrong all along, Stannis wasn't the man chosen for some great destiny," Gendry retorted. "But that is not why I'm here today."

"No? Then why are you here?" the woman asked with genuine curiosity, and a mocking half-smile.

Gendry didn't respond right away. He stared at the woman, debating in his mind whether if he was doing the right thing or not by coming to this woman for help. He had to leave his pride behind to do what needed to be done, and that was not something that he liked. The fact that he had to be in that place in that moment made disgusted him, but he had no other choice. He was going his for Arya and his son, for his family. No one could tell him where they were, and he needed to know if he was to save them before it was too late. But he couldn't save them if he didn't know what enemy he was fighting against, and he knew of no one else in Westeros with the power to tell him where he must go and look for his family. Melissandre had magic, and maybe that was what he really needed.

"My wife, Arya, and my son..." he finally murmured, hoping that he wouldn't have to leave that cell disappointed. He was trusting his gut. "They were taken days ago. No one saw who did it, no one saw what happened. The ones that witnessed it are dead, and I have no idea where to find them."

"Your wife? Arya Stark?"

"Aye."

"I saw a deep darkness in that girl's eyes... I saw murder in them."

"I don't care what you saw in them!" Gendry hissed. "She is my wife, and she is missing! Our son
is missing too! His second nameday was little more than a moon ago! His name is Robb... He was named after his uncle. You do remember him, right? Do you remember Robb Stark?"

"I never met Robb Stark."

"No. But you do remember how you took my blood by force. You took it with leeches and you cast them into the fire while my uncle said his name... Over the years many people have tried to convince me that the Red Wedding happened because it had to happen, that it was men that decided that fate, not magic. But I will always remember... how you did your magic using my blood with the purpose of murdering the brother of the woman I love..."

"It was the Lord of Light's will," Melissandre said, raising her head.

"Was it? I don't think so. But even if it was, what you did was wrong, and now you are going to help me."

"Help you? You seek the help of the woman you blame for your misery?" Melissandre asked, again with a mocking tone.

"You used magic to provoke death, now you are going to use it to redeem yourself. Years ago you wanted the downfall of a Stark, but now you are going to help save one."

"How? I don't have the means or the power to change the fate of your wife and child."

"I only need you to tell me who took her," Gendry explained. "Only that. Give me a name, and our debt will be paid."

"I don own you anything."

"You do, Melissandre. You took my blood. Now I want some magic in return."

"No," the woman said, though her voice had weakened considerably since she first started talking to Gendry. It seemed that she was hesitating.

Gendry took a step forward, ready to threaten her or extort some magic from her. But she tried to explain that it only took that he would get the name that he needed to go and save his family. A name, a name was all he needed. Then he would know where to start looking and he would go to save them no matter what it took. He was about to start speaking again when suddenly he was interrupted by Addam. The sellsword wasn't talking to him, though, he was talking to Melissandre. He was doing it in Valyrian, and Gendry frowned as he listened to the man talking to the Red Woman in the foreign language. Melissandre looked surprised once again, and she stared at Addam with wide eyes. Her eyes widened even more eventually, so she was clearly shocked by what the man was saying to her. Gendry wished he could understand what was being said, but he had never studied Valyrian, so he had no other option than sanding there listening cluelessly while the sellsword and the witch spoke. They appeared to be bargaining. At some point Melissandre took a step back and shook her head, and Addam took a step forward and kept talking. He mentioned Arya's name and Robb's name, that was all that Gendry managed to pick up from the conversation. Addam pointed towards him with his head for a second, and Melissandre locked her eyes on Gendry again. Once Addam was done speaking, Melissandre remained in silence for a few very long and very tense moments, until she finally spoke again in the Common Tongue.

"Just a name?" she asked. "And the debt will be paid?"

"Just a name, and it will be paid," Gendry nodded. He wasn't lying; if the Red Woman managed to tell him who had taken his family away from him he would forever forget about her. The
resentment that he felt towards her for what he believed had been dirty trickery that led to much suffering for him and Arya later on would disappear, and he would be free. He wouldn't hate her anymore, and he would forgive her for lying to him and using him like she did years ago.

Melissandre made her decision, and she nodded her head once. Then she looked at the torch that Gendry carried.

"I will need to take a closer look at the fire," she said, and Gendry took a step forward and put the torch in front of her.

She stared into the flames for a long time, so long that Gendry had to move his gaze away from the fire because his eyes were dry and itching, but Melissandre didn't even blink. She remained staring into the dancing flames all that time, and the tense silence and the waiting was making Gendry nervous and irritated. Was the woman trying to fool him? Was she mocking him? What took so long? Gendry had a short temper and little patience, but he made his best effort to remain listen and he tried to wait. He didn't want to break Melissandre's concentration of it was true that she was really seeing something in the flames. She sensed his uneasiness.

"Give time to the Lord of Light to show me what he wants me to see," she said softly. "I haven't seen fire in a long time, the visions aren't as familiar to me as they were before."

"But will they come?" Gendry asked. He didn't care how long it took as long as he ended up getting answers.

"Yes, my lord. They will..."

Melissandre frowned then, and she took a step closer to the fire. Gendry did the same, curious and impatient.

"What is it?"

"I see colors."

"Colors? Of a House?"

"Maybe. I see grey. I see blue."

As soon as he heard those two colors, Gendry knew immediately which House Melissandre was talking about. He felt as if a black veil covered his hard and turned it into the deepest darkness. He should have guessed, he should have known... It was obvious! Arya had had her revenge on them, and now they had their revenge on her when she was weaker than ever. Gendry swore to himself that if any harm came to her or their son, he would lay waste to that House once and for all...

Before he could say anything out loud, Melissandre spoke again.

"I see a castle. Two castles, they are identical. A river, a bridge..."

"House Frey," Gendry muttered enraged.

He turned around and left the black cell, but not before ordering his men to take Melissandre with them. He was probably going to need her later on. This time he knew the way out of the dungeons of the Red Keep and he didn't have to follow anyone's lead. He emerged into one of the keep's big rooms, and right before turning the corner on the way out he almost crashed against the Hand of the King, Ser Jorah Mormont, who was on his way to the dungeons and was escorted by the young guard that had unsuccessfully tried to stop Gendry from reaching the black cells.
"Lord Hand," Gendry greeted the man, and Ser Jorah did the same with a nod of his head before his expression became severe.

"My men tell me you entered the dungeons by force," the man said. Although he expression was severe, his voice was calm, but threatening at the same time. It was a voice that warned you to watch your step and be careful with what you did or said, but Gendry was not afraid. "Why?"

"My wife and son disappeared," Gendry explained. "They were taken by force and all the witnesses were slaughtered. All my bannermen are being attacked and I sent my men to war against an unknown force. I needed to know who this faceless enemy was before going to kill them and get my family back."

"And you came to the dungeons for answers?"

"The witch can see visions in the flames, and I believe in her magic. It was my only choice."

"And what was her answer?"

"House Frey," Gendry muttered between gritted teeth, full of spite. He had always hated that family for the pain that they had caused Arya, but now he had personal reasons to hate them, and the feeling had doubled its strength.

"House Frey? They don't have enough men to attack the Stormlands."

"But they have the coin to hire armies of sellswords to do it for them," Gendry retorted. "It wouldn't be the first time that it had happened."

"What are you going to do?" Ser Jorah asked.

"I don't have my men, and I can't attack the Twins with a little more than two dozen men. If I could get help from the Queen..."

"The Queen is in Essos," Jorah interrupted him. "If you want her dragons, she took Drogon with her. Lady Sansa and Prince Jon went on a diplomatic mission to Qarth and they took Rhaegal with them, and Viseryon is beyond the Wall helping the Night's Watch fight against White Walkers and wights. I'm afraid, Lord Baratheon, that you are out of luck."

Gendry cursed under his breath, unable to believe that that was happening to him. He had nothing; no army to attack with, and no dragons to help him. And he was completely sure that the Crown wasn't going to order House Frey to stop that madness; the only proof that Gendry had that they were responsible for what was happening in the Stormlands and the kidnapping of his wife and son was the word of a crazy Red Witch that had seen it in the fire. Truth be told, the only reason why he was trusting her was because what she said made sense, of course it would be the Freys that would attack Arya; they must have found out that it was her that killed Walder Frey in the Twins years ago.

The Freys were going to have their revenge on his family, and he had no way of saving them... He couldn't ride to the Riverlands and attack the Twins on his own! The men he had weren't enough to lay siege to the castles!

"Won't the other Houses help?" he dared to ask.

"They might. All of Westeros despises House Frey since the war ended, but you don't have the time to send them a raven and wait for their reply. Even if they say yes, it would take them weeks to ride to the Twins," Ser Jorah pointed out.
Gendry felt a deep weight inside of him that crushed his hopes of ever winning that battle against the Freys. Ser Jorah was right, he didn't have enough time to wait for other Houses to help him. Even if he wanted to call back his own men from the places he had sent them to all over the Stormlands, he wouldn't have enough time to wait for them.

"What am I going to do?" he whispered, beginning to sound desperate. "Can't you spare any of your men? Please?"

"I can give send goldcloaks with you to aid you of a fight were to happen," Ser Jorah said. "I know you don't like them, but times have changed and the goldcloaks are now decent soldiers, our Queen made sure of that. I can also send with you as many Unsullied as I can spare."

"Thank you," Gendry said with genuine gratitude and relief. It was true that he still didn't like the goldcloaks, but any help that he got was well-received, and the Unsullied were brave and fierce and incredibly skilled warriors. They would all greatly increase his chances of emerging from that situation victorious. "I am taking the prisoner Melissandre with me. I need her. As soon as I am done with this I will return her to the dungeons, you have my word."

"Very well," Ser Jorah agreed. "When will you ride for the Twins?"

"I should have been there days ago," Gendry said as he resumed walking and made his way down the halls of the Red Keep. "I'm not losing any more time."

Gendry rode away from King's Landing with the men that had been promised to him by the Hand of the King, which were enough to actually stand a chance if there was to be a fight. He sent ravens to his men in the Stormlands, asking for help if any men could be spared. He hoped that some could be able to answer his cry for help; his bannermen were loyal men that knew that he was a good Lord, and they all loved Arya and their son. Gendry was sure that, should any soldiers be able to leave the Stormlands to answer Gendry's call, they would ride day and night to meet him at the gates of the Twins.

It took him and his men days to reach the Twins in the Riverlands. They rode as fast as the could for as long as they could without killing the horses and exhausting themselves, and they made it to the Twins during the sunrise one morning.

Gendry had learned enough during his years as Lord to know that it wasn't wise to start an open conflict with the Freys right away, with only the Red Woman's word as proof that his accusations were valid. He approached the first tower holding a white flag to avoid a fight at first.

The Freys had been alerted that he was coming, and they were waiting for him at the gates when he arrived. He stopped his horse and halted the men that accompanied him, and he glared at the current Lord Frey. The man didn't want to meet him inside the castle, but he also knew that he wouldn't be able to avoid Gendry, this he had come out of the castle to meet with him. Gendry glared at him before getting off his horse and stepping forward to meet the man: lord Edwyn Frey, grandson of Walder Frey.

"Welcome, Lord Gendry," lord Edwyn said with a mocking smile. "To what do we owe the pleasure of your visit?"

"My wife, Arya Stark, and my son Robb were abducted from our lands," he said, trying to keep the accusatory tone away from his voice. He didn't want to seem too menacing, but at the same time he didn't want to appear weak. However, lord Edwyn took his words in the offensive way.
"Are you accusing us, lord Gendry?"

"You can't deny that there are good reasons to suspect that House Frey might have something to do with any harm that comes to House Stark," Gendry pointed out.

"The Red Wedding happened years ago. The war is over. Go back to where tumor come from and stop insulting my famiky."

"I'm just saying the truth! And I'm not leaving here until I make sure that my wife and my son are not here. If you don't have them you have nothing to fear, lord Frey. If my family is not here I will leave, and I will go search for them somewhere else."

"They are not here," lord Edwyn insisted. "Besides, why would I trust your word?"

"Why would I trust your word, lord Edwyn? House Frey lost it's credibility long ago," Gendry shot back. He could see that Edwyn Frey wasn't grinning anymore, and instead he was gritting his teeth and making him look even uglier than he already was. "Let my men come inside the Twins. I promise, if they find nothing we will leave a never come back. And if you don't agree, fine," Gendry held up the paper that he had been carrying all the way from the capital so that everyone could see it. "This is from the Hand of the Queen. In name of Queen Daenerys, he orders you to let my men search your castle. There will be severe consequences if you refuse."

"You dare threaten me in my own door!" lord Edwyn exclaimed, his face red and swollen with rage.

"I don't threaten you, my lord," Gendry said, his voice calm and cold and his eyes fierce and clear like the sky after a deadly storm... Only that the storm hadn't yet started, and Gendry wouldn't stop himself from releasing his wrath going House Frey and anyone who dared stand in his way to get his family back safe and as soon as possible. "I'm just warning you."

Edwyn Frey had to give up in the end, and he allowed Gendry's men to search the Twins. Gendry selected his five most loyal men to go inside the Twins and search every single room, every single corner and under ever single stone to look for his wife and son. They went in, and hours passed until they came back out again empty handed. Edwyn Frey grinned victorious upon Gendry's shock when his men told him that Arya and Robb were nowhere to be found there. They had searched everywhere, as ordered, and Gendry believed them.

He had to stay true to his promise and leave the Twins behind. They were already riding away when Addam approached Gendry on his horse to talk to him.

"The Freys lied to you," the sellsword said.

"You heard what the men said, Addam, they weren't there," Gendry murmured, feeling beaten. If his wife and son weren't there, then where in seven Hells where they?! Where was he supposed to go looking for them?!

*What if I never find them?* he thought, horrified and panicked. *What if it's too late? What if I have lost them forever?*

"There is a secret dungeon, inside the river," Addam insisted. "Very few people know of that place. The water doesn't flood it, and it's very difficult to find. Your men didn't find place, but I can. If Arya and Robb are there, I can save them."

"If what you are saying is true, then it's almost impossible to achieve! If the dungeons are underwater, how are you going to get to them?"
"I have my ways, Lord Baratheon," the sellsword assured him. "It isn't the first time I have sneaked inside the Frey unseen. Besides... I will do whatever I have to do to save Arya and her son, just like you are willing to do anything that it takes to find and save them."

Upon hearing those words, Gendry halted his horse. Addam did the same, and Gendry looking at him, slightly frowning and confused. It was most unusual to hear a common sellsword speaking like that of his Lady and her family.

"Why?" Gendry wanted to know.

He got no spoken answer. Instead, he saw Addam face change its features to that of a familiar man, one he hadn't seen in years, with red and white hair.

Far away from there, locked inside a dark and strange place, Arya opened her eyes.
"They have at least two thousand men," Jaqen H'ghar said after he returned from the Twins. He had been sent by Gendry along with some men to investigate how many men the Freys had, in case there was a fight at some point.

Gendry frowned upon hearing that number.

"Two thousand? That's half their army, where is the other half?" he wondered. The Freys had no quarrels or alliances with any other House in Westeros, so they had no need to divide their army.

"A man does not know, but the other half is nowhere to be found," Jaqen told him. "Perhaps they are in the Stormlands, laying siege to your bannermen."

"Two thousand men can not lay siege to that many castles," Gendry said, shaking his head in disagreement. "We have thirty thousand men in the Stormlands, all fighting against the invaders. It can't be the Freys. Or at least it's not them directly fighting, they are just commanding the attacks. I am sure of it."

"Then where are those two thousand men?" Jaqen asked, his voice cold and serious.

"I don't know," Gendry sighed, feeling defeated.

It had been a day since he had arrived at the Twins and his men had told him that Arya and Robb were not inside the castle, and since he found out the truth about Addam- Jaqen. He had been up all night, discussing plans with the Faceless Man. Gendry was going to follow Jaqen's plan and send the assassin inside the Twins without the Freys noticing, so that he could search and find that underwater cell that he had told Gendry about. Gendry had asked how the man knew about that cell, and Jaqen told him that he had wanted to know all of the Twins' secrets after he went there with Arya; Gendry thanked the gods that Jaqen had decided to do that, because that information was immensely valuable. It could mean that he would find Arya and Robb if everything went according to the plan. Gendry had never heard of that secret cell in the Twins, and neither had the other men, so it made sense that the Freys hid their prisoners in a place that no one knew about...

Gendry also knew that if Jaqen did find Arya and Robb in that cell, there would be war. Gendry would not even hesitate. He had promised Lord Edwyn Frey that he would be merciful if his family was returned to him, but he had also promised to unleash his wrath should he discover that the Freys were lying. He had been told that his family wasn't there, and he would accept it if Jaqen came out of the Twins empty handed. He would leave, and he would keep searching somewhere else. But if he found them there he would burn House Frey to the ground and scatter its ashes to the wind.

But of course, he had to be careful. He had to plan every single detail of every single move that he made, because the army that he had at the moment was inferior to that of the Freys. It had a little over a thousand men provided by the Hand of the King, and though they could fight against an army of two thousand, the situation was difficult.

And even if the Freys turned out to be guilty and Gendry did defeat them, he still had the problem of the invasion of the Stormlands. Thinking about all that have him such an awful headache that he felt like his head was about to burst open.

"You said before that the Freys could have hired sellswords. They certainly have the coin to hire
the services of several companies, and all those forces combined could lay siege to the
Stormlands," Jaqen H'ghar commented. He sounded tired, and he did not look much better than
Gendry did. The worry was just as imminent in Jaqen's expression as it was on Gendry's, and
anyone that took a look at the Faceless Man could swear that the two people missing were of his
own blood.

Gendry had been shocked when Jaqen revealed his identity to him, but them again, not really. He
should have known before, ever since Addam set foot on Storm's End wanting to enter the service
of House Baratheon right after they moved to the castle. He had been dangerous, fiercely loyal, and
he was always there, like a shadow... Gendry should have noticed, more than anything else, the
way in which the sellsword Addam looked at Arya, like she was the most valuable and precious
 treasure on the world. Gendry should have known that Jaqen H'ghar wasn't going to go away, not
really. He had sworn to protect Arya, and he was still there, watching after her...

"You should have stayed with her, like I told you to do," Gendry suddenly muttered, remembering
when the man had joined him on the road after he had left Storm's End and Arya and Robb behind.
"You should have been there protecting her..."

He wasn't mad at the man, he couldn't be. Gendry was mad at himself, because he had failed Arya
again, and now he had failed Robb also. He should have been the one with them, protecting them,
they were his family! But he could not help but lash out at the Faceless Man to ease some of his
pain and guilt.

"Why weren't you there with her?!" he almost shouted. If he expected the Faceless Man to get
angry at him for yelling and accusing him, he was disappointed. Jaqen's expression remained calm
and composed as he looked at Gendry.

"Arya begged me to go after you," he said, speaking calmly so that Gendry would listen to him. "A
man could not go against her wishes. A man could not stay there and watch her suffer every day
with worry, getting sick and panicked at the thought of her husband not returning to her alive. She
is strong, but you are a fool, Gendry Baratheon. A wise Lord, but still a foolish boy in many
senses. A man had to make sure that you didn't recklessly get yourself killed."

Had anyone else said those words to him, Gendry would have become angered like a beast and
ordered that man out of his sight. But it wasn't any man, it was Jaqen H'ghar, and deep down
Gendry knew that he was right. He was a fool. He was a fool...

He felt like he was breaking to pieces.

"What if she is dead?" he asked then, voicing his worst fear that had been tormenting him for many
nights already. His voice sounded weak, broken, desperate. "What if both of them are dead...?"

He did not want to think about that, but it was a possibility and he could not ignore it. For his
relief, Jaqen shook his head.

"We would already know," was all he said, and then one of the soldiers reached them running. He
was carrying three messages in his hand.

"My lord!" he exclaimed when he stopped in front of Gendry. "The Freys are readying their army
for a possible attack. They know that we are still here, my lord, and they are uneasy. They are
afraid we will attack at any second."

"They are right," Gendry muttered, and then he looked at the messages in the soldier's hand. "What
are those?"
"One is from Lord Edmure Tully, my lord. He is heading here with one thousand men. He couldn't stay behind and gather more of his forces, but he says they are coming, my lord. They will probably arrive later tonight. Same news from Lord Sandor Clegane, he is marching down from the North with his full army. And the fleet from Dragonstone is sailing towards the Stormlands. Lady Ygritte sent them there, she is commanding the army now that her lord husband is gone."

Good, those were good news! Gendry almost smiled when he heard them, and he patted the soldier on the back, thanking him for bringing them to him. The soldiers of Dragonstone would make a great difference in the fight in the Stormlands, and the men that Lord Edmure Tully was heading there with would also make a great difference. If there ended up being a battle against the Freys, then Edmure's soldiers could mean that Gendry outnumbered his enemies.

Jaqen H'ghar seemed also pleased with the news. Gendry couldn't remember if he had ever seen the man smile in the past, but the shadow of a soft smile appeared on the corner of his mouth.

"We can make it," Gendry murmured, and Jaqen nodded.

"For now," he said.

"But first things first. You must get Arya and Robb out of the Twins."

"It's not even certain that they are in the Twins," Jaqen reminded him, but Gendry did not want to lose hope. Not yet.

"You have to try."

"A man will try. A man will always try to save the lovely girl, even if he has to slay a dragon to do so."

Gendry was impressed by the fierceness in Jaqen's voice when he said those words; it's almost as if they were part of a sacred vow that he had made to all the gods. Gendry knew that he probably should know the answer to his question by then, but he kept wondering how was it that Jaqen was so unstoppably loyal to Arya. Gendry had seen how he treated her years ago, how the man had helped her do everything that she needed to do in order to be in peace.

Gendry had hated Jaqen years ago, when he still hadn't confessed his feelings to Arya. He had wanted to take the man's eyes out with a red hot poker, smash his face in with a hammer and then slam with head against the anvil. But then he had stopped hating him after the man let Arya go after Gendry, and now... now he needed Jaqen H'ghar. For Arya, and for Robb.

"Why her?" he asked then, and he could see that for the first time the Faceless Man's expression became puzzled. "Why Arya? Why are you doing all this for her? Why would you willingly put yourself through so many risks for her and our son?"

Jaqen remained silent for a few seconds in which his expression was cold as ice. He looked at Gendry with a calm expression; maybe too calm... He looked lost in his own thoughts, until he replied with his quiet but dangerous voice:

"Arya Stark is unique. One of a kind. Her heart is dark, but it is gentle and good at the same time. She is a killer, but she understands and cherishes life. He knows a world full of hate, but she is able to feel love more strongly than most people do. She has only known lies, but she still believes and has faith," Jaqen H'ghar explained to Gendry, saying every single thing about Arya that had made him become bewitch by her. Gendry could see it in the man's eyes. Perhaps the Faceless Man were no one and couldn't feel normal emotions, but Jaqen was no normal Faceless Man, and Arya had
made it impossible for him to ever be no one again.

"You understand her better than most," Gendry pointed out. "Perhaps even better than me."

"She is a difficult woman to understand," Jaqen said, slightly nodding his head. "And as for Robb, he is her son, and because of that, a man will protect that child with his life if he must."

Gendry was moved, but he did not let it show in his expression. He kept his expression hard and strong, his eyes threatening like a coming storm. But inside he felt so relieved that he had such an ally, and he was glad that there was someone willing to fight for his family as much as him.

"You may die if you go inside the Twins," he informed the Faceless Man. The man's expression did not alter in the least bit.

"A man knows."

"And a man is willing to take the risk?"

"Has the young lord not been listening? A man will die for a girl and her son if he must... But there are few things in this world that can kill a man."

Excellent, then, Gendry thought, and he looked towards the Twins. He could see movement in the towers and around the two castles, and he could see archers getting easy in the battlements. He could hear the shouts of men giving orders and the sound of the steel of weapons. He could feel the battle that was surely coming if Jaqen found inside the Twins that he went there to find...

"After Lord Tully arrived with his men, I will send you to the Twins," he said then. Jaqen nodded his head in agreement. "Please, bring them back to me."

He saw the flicker of a promise in Jaqen's eyes, a glimmer of determination, the shadow of a silent vow that could not be broken.

"I will."

Arya blinked several times before she was able to fully open her eyes, though her gaze found only darkness. She tried to roll over her side, but that movement caused her great pain and made her groan when she felt a burning in her ankles and wrists, and her back was so sore that she could not move anymore and she was forced to lay still on the hard and cold ground.

She had been slipping in and out of consciousness for the whole time that she had been there, so she wasn’t sure of what it was that surrounded her. She did notice sometimes, in her brief times of consciousness, that someone came to her side and gave her food, though it was only hard bread, and water. Arya was sure that there was something in the water that they were giving her ever since they took her from the Stormlands, because it tasted bitter, and it made her feel weak. She was too tired to ask any questions or try to fight back and escape, and she always fell asleep before she was able to notice what was going on around her. She wanted to not drink the water and stay awake, find out who had done that to her and what they wanted, and more importantly, find a way out. But she couldn’t; if she didn’t drink the water she would dehydrate and die.

That time was the first time that Arya was alone when she woke up. She could feel the tiredness leaving her body with each minute that passed, and soon she was more awake than she had been in about two weeks. It was only then that she was able to fully notice her surroundings, and not only the overwhelming darkness that seemed to consume her. She realized that the cold hard ground belonged to some kind of cave or tunnel; the little stones and the irregularities of the rock
underneath her hurt her back and left scratches all over her body. The air around her was humid and
cold and uncomfortable, and she thought that the cave or tunnel must be several feet underground.
That made her feel fear for the first time since she was fully conscious. Where in seven hells had
they taken her?

Arya tried to move again, but the burning feeling in her ankles and wrists made her whimper that
time, and she looked down and realized that they were tied tightly with ropes that buried into her
skin and left it sore and bloody.

Who had done that to her?

Robb, she thought then. She had been looking for Robb, and suddenly someone had hit her on the
back of her head and knocked her out. She turned her head to all sides, looking in all directions,
trying to find her son sleeping somewhere nearby, but he was nowhere to be found. Arya felt a dark
hole appearing inside her chest, a hole that was quickly been filled with the worst kind of panic and
dread that she had ever felt in her life. She felt tears stinging in her eyes. Where was her son?!

The remembered the fair, and the screams and the fire, and the men that she had fought and killed.
She remembered the man with the banner… A blue and grey banner…

The Freys. The had come for her. They had come to take their revenge… And now they had taken
her and her son, who was what she loved most in the entire world…

"No," she whimpered in a quiet and weak voice. Her throat felt sore as the product of having been
silent ever since she was taken. She did not know how much time had passed, but she could feel
that it was a lot. Her fingernails had grown and buried themselves in the flesh on her hand when
she clenched them into angry fists.

"Robb," she called, her voice sounding a little bit stronger than it had before. "Robb. Robb!"

She heard voices then, coming from one of the tunnels. They belonged to men, and Arya fell silent
and tried to listen to what they said.

"The bitch is awake," one of the men said. "Shut her up before she starts giving me a headache."

"I can't, I don't have any more of that sleeping potion," a second man said, and the first man
grunted. The first man's voice made Arya shiver with fear.

She heard steps approaching. The two men were walking towards her, and Arya gasped. She tried
to crawl away in the floor and find a way to hide, but once again she couldn't move. She was
twisting in the ground, unable to get rid of the ropes that bound her, when the two men appeared in
the tunnel were they had left her.

They carried a torch, and it's fire illuminated the place and made Arya hiss. Her eyes were
unaccustomed to light, and the flame made them itch and shed a few tears. She looked away for a
second, but then she forced herself to look at the two men who observed her from a few feet away
from her. They were tall and thin, with small eyes, long noses and crooked teeth. One of them was
a bit more muscular and taller than the other; his hair was black and his eyes were dark brown,
while the other man had dirty blond hair and hazel eyes. The dark haired man was the one carrying
the torch, and his expression was cruel; his lips were curled up with a smile if sadistic pleasure
when he saw Arya on the floor, trying to move away and defenseless. Arya knew that he was the
first man that had spoken, the one that had made her feel afraid.

"You are awake," he commented, as if that wasn't obvious. "Are you enjoying your stay here, lady
"Where is my son?" she asked, her voice a low hiss of anger that was quickly building up inside of her. "Where is Robb?"

"Your brat isn't here," the man said. "He is far, far away... But he is alive, if that is what you were wondering."

Robb wasn't there. The information hit Arya like a bucket of cold water. If Robb wasn't there then how was she supposed to find him?!

"Where did you take him...?"

"Somewhere safe," the man said, smirking. The other one was silent and serious, but he didn't have the same sadistic look in his eyes as the dark-haired one did. "And he's going to stay there for a long time."

"Let him go," Arya hissed. "Let him go, you have me already... I know why you took me, you want revenge. Take it, it's yours, but please let my son go."

She realized then that she was crying. She never cried in front of her enemies, she was strong and fierce like a wolf. But never before had she found herself in a situation like that one, where it was her own son that she was trying to save from those monsters. She had lost many people in her life; she had lost her parents and her brother and her friends, but she hadn't cried in front of the people that had taken them away from her. But now, the mere thought of losing her son too made her eyes transform into flooding pools of hate and pain and sorrow. Arya wondered if that was how her own mother had felt years ago, when they were at the Twins during the Red Wedding and her son was about to be murdered in front of her. Arya knew that her mother had pleaded for Robb's life to the Twins too, but Walder Frey hadn't listened to her pleas.

Why must the mothers in our family always plead to the Freys for the lives of our sons?

"Please... He is just a baby," she sobbed.

She hadn't expected to move or convince the two men with her pleas and her tears, so she wasn't surprised when the dark-haired man smirked even more than before.

"Cry all you want, Arya Stark. You won't see your son again," he said. "They say that the North remembers, but the Freys remember also."

The blond man gasped, but the other one scoffed.

"It doesn't matter, Malwyn, she already knows who we are thanks to that idiot that carried our banner in the Stormlands," he muttered. Then he approached Arya and knelt in front of her. His eyes roamed her, and she felt sick. "We don't want revenge, not really. Walder Frey was too bloody old, he had to die at some point, and Edwyn was kind of glad when we found the old man dead. We knew it was you, but we couldn't do anything about it because we couldn't reveal that lord Walder had been hiding in the Twins. But you, Arya Stark, dared to defy House Frey by breaking in in the dead of the night and kill a member of our family."

After saying those words he reached out with his hand and grabbed Arya's chin, forcing her face closer to his and making her look at him directly in the eyes. The torch was so close that it's heat bothered Arya, burning her skin and hurting her eyes, but she didn't look away. She stared into the man's dark eyes, smelling his foul breath. She memorized every single one of his features, and swore to add him to her list, that list of doomed men that she had abandoned so long ago for a life
of peace and happiness. She did not know the man's name, but she didn't care. She would always remember his face. One day, when she got out of there, she would kill him.

"The Freys don't want to just kill you and be even, that would only lead to more revenge on part of your family, and so the story would go on and on and on with no end," the man said, still smirking. Arya hated that mocking smirk. "We want to take out House to glory. The Stormlands will be ours."

"That will never happen," Arya said. "The other Houses won't allow it. The Queen won't allow it."

"The Queen and the other Houses won't do shit to stop us," the man declared full of confidence, "because your lord husband won't allow it. We know how much he loves you and your little brat. As long as we have both of you he can't risk doing anything against us, or we will kill you. All the Starks that are scattered around the country won't raise their armies as well, they have lost too many family members already. And now we have three of you in our power."

"Three?" Arya repeated, confused for a second. Had they captured anyone else? Did they have one of her brothers, Bran or Rickon? Did they have Sansa?

The man's smirk became wider, and then his eyes moved away from her face. Arya saw what he was looking at; he was looking at her stomach.

She remembered then. She had completely forgotten because of everything that had happened. She was with child... And the Freys were planning to use also her unborn son for their wicked plans.

She couldn't stop herself. She spat at the man's face, and he let her go. Arya fell back in the hard ground with a groan of pain escaping her mouth. The man wiped his face clean with his gloved free hand, and then he glared at Arya. Without previous notice he slapped her with all his strength, and Arya fell back into the dark world of unconsciousness.

Lord Tully arrived with his small number of men (though many more men were coming from every corner of the Riverlands, which would provide Gendry with a proper army to replace the men he had had to leave behind in the Stormlands,) a couple hours after the hour of the wolf, and it was then when Gendry gave Jaqen the order to enter the Twins in search for Arya and Robb.

The Freys had seen the Tully men arriving, and everyone could notice that they were getting nervous. Gendry knew that the Freys did not really expect him to attack, because he was a man of his word and he had promised to leave the Twins alone if he didn't find his family there. He hadn't found anything, so the Freys believed that he was getting a small army ready before departing from the Crossing and leave for somewhere else. But of course, the Freys did not expect Gendry to continue looking...

It was very easy for Jaqen to slip into the Twins. Frey soldiers continuously patrolled around the two castles, guarding it in case a conflict started. Jaqen masked himself with the shadows of the night and silently killed one of the guards, and then he took the man to a safe place and put the man's clothes on himself. Once he was disguised as a Frey guard, he changed his face to that of the man's and he came out from the shadows.

He didn't go immediately inside the Twins, that would be suspicious. He waited at least half an hour, and when he thought that the time was right he entered the Twins. Everyone who looked at him saw the guard, not Jaqen H'ghar, so no one suspected anything. The first part of the plan had gone on as planned.
Now he had to find the cell. Years ago, when he helped Arya get into the Twins to have her revenge on Walder Frey, he had known that one day the Freys might rise against Arya in one way or another. Jaqen was a cautious man, and he had wanted to know all the secrets that the Freys had in case that knowledge was needed some day. He had memorized maps of the Twins as part of the process of learning those secrets, and upon memorizing every corner of the Twins he had come upon the information that almost no one had; the secret cell. The Freys used that cell for their most valuable prisoners, the ones that were supposed to never come out of the Twins again. If they didn't want anyone to find Arya and Robb then it was just natural to lock them up in there.

Finding the dungeons, which was where the entrance to the cell was, was easy. He crossed almost no one on his way there, and the few people he did see did not even look at him, nor did they question where he was heading to.

Jaqen found the stairs that led to the dungeons and he went down to that dark place. The dungeons were underground, and their proximity to the river made them have an awful smell of humidity. Jaqen took a torch from the wall and walked down the dark and narrow corridors of the dungeons. The walls were wet and covered in moss, and there was an eerie feeling to the place.

Suddenly he heard steps approaching, and an angry voice spoke behind him.

"What are you doing here?!" a Frey that had found him there exclaimed. "You can't be here, you are supposed to go outside and check that those fuckers don't-!"

With one swift move Jaqen took a dagger out from under his sleeve and pressed it against the man's throat before he could continue speaking. The man almost screamed, but Jaqen covered his mouth, dropping the torch to the floor before doing so.

"One more word and a man will cut your throat," Jaqen said. There wasn't anger in his voice, or fury. He wasn't Gendry, who displayed his emotions in his voice and embodied the fury that he felt in his heart. Instead, Jaqen's voice was a cold threat that you could feel in your bones. He was the dagger in the dark, ready to attack at any moment and any place without previous notice. His eyes, however, did reflect the anger that he felt inside, and glimmered with a warning of death. "Where is the cell?"

He removed his hand from the man's mouth so that he could speak. The man was scared; his fat forehead started sweating, and he eyes the dagger nervously.

"Wha-what cell...?"

"The secret cell that is in the river. A man know that the entrance is here. Where is it?"

"I-I don't know what cell you are talking abou-!"

Jaqen buried the tip of the blade a little bit in the flesh of the man's neck, and the man whimpered.

"The cell, the cell!" he exclaimed. "I know what cell. It's at the end of the corridor."

"Take me there," Jaqen ordered, and made the man to start walking.

The Frey man lead him to where the entrance of the cell was. The humidity was worse there, and the darkness was deeper. They arrived in front of a plain wall made of dark wet stone, and apparently that was as far as the dungeons went. Jaqen knew that it was a secret door.

"Open it," he ordered the man.
The man did as Jaqen commanded and reached out to a small lever that was in a corner, almost invisible. There were actually two levers in there, but he pulled the one in the left. Right after the man did that, the wall shook. Dust fell from the ceiling above their heads as the two halves of the wall separated and opened the way to another corridor, narrower and darker than the rest of the dungeons.

"This is it?" Jaqen asked.

The man nodded. Then Jaqen slit his throat with the dagger. The man fell dead to the floor, and Jaqen stepped over him and entered the new corridor. That corridor was definitely under the river, for there was water dripping in between the stones of the ceiling and morning pools on the floor. There was a wooden door at the end of the corridor, and another lever. Jaqen pulled the lever, and the wooden door raised, revealing the cell. As soon as the door was raised, Jaqen's ears were hit by the sound of the crying of a small child. He rushed inside the cell.

He found Robb in the cave, surrounded by darkness, with his ankles chained to the floor. The boy was crying his lungs out, terrified of the cold and the darkness of that unknown place. As soon as Jaqen saw the little boy like that, chained like an animal or a dangerous criminal, he felt his fury exploding inside of him like a wildfire. He had never felt such anger. As a Faceless Man he had learned to control such emotions, but he couldn't control them anymore at that moment.

"Robb," he murmured, kneeling in front of the boy. He changed his face back to the one he was wearing when he was Addam, and when the little boy recognized him he stopped crying a little bit. "I'm here, Robb, I will get you out."

He used his dagger to break open the locks of the chains around Robb's ankles, and then he put the dagger away and picked the boy up in his arms. Robb was still crying a little bit, but not as much as before. He was so scared...

"Mama!" the boy cried, looking around the cell desperately looking for his mother. Jaqen wiped the tears off Robb's plump cheeks.

"Where is your mother, Robb?" he asked the boy as he looked around the cell. It was small, and it was empty. It was also the only cell of that kind that there was in the castle, so Arya couldn't be anywhere else. "Where is she...?"

He noticed a some kind of circular trapdoor on the floor; it was made of iron, and it seemed impossible to open. Jaqen decided to ignore it.

"Robb, listen to me," he said to the little boy with a soothing and friendly voice. "I am going to get you out of here, with your father. And I man is going to find your mother."

Robb was very young, but he was smart, and he seemed to understand. Little by little his cries got lower than before, until he was just sobbing, still scared.

"You are going to be safe, but a man needs you to be quiet."

Robb looked at him, and Jaqen found himself staring at Arya's stormy grey eyes. They were identical, and that made him feel that no matter what happened then, he couldn't fail.

The little boy's sobs ceased. Jaqen held him right in his arms and then he walked out of the cell. He was determined to get Robb out of that place, no matter what. Nothing could go wrong, he could not allow that to happen. However, he had just stepped out of the corridor that led to the cell when suddenly he heard shouts and voices heading towards the dungeons. Jaqen cursed under his breath.
In other circumstances he could fight his way out of that place, but he had no way of doing that with a child in his arms...

He saw the other lever then, the lever that was on the right side of the lever that had opened the secret door to the corridor that led to the cell. He did not know what that lever did, but he could only pray to the many-faced god that it helped him find a way out. He decided to pull the lever, for what could go wrong?

Right after he pulled that lever, a loud noise came from the cell. Jaqen heard also the sounds of steps and voices getting louder and closer, and he ran down the narrow corridor and into the cell again. Once he was inside the cell he discovered the source of the noise; the iron circular trapdoor in the middle of the floor of the cell had opened into the river, letting water inside the cell. It was a means to escape used sometimes by the Freys, and in that moment it felt like a gift from the gods. Jaqen stared at it, and then he made his decision: it was the only way out. He left Robb on the floor and got rid of his cloak and the armor that he was wearing, and then he sat on the floor. He held Robb in his arms again.


The child understood him and held his breath. Then Jaqen jumped with him inside the hole, diving into the cold waters of the Trident river.

Gendry was standing in open ground, in plain sight of everyone in the Twins. He knew that they were watching him and his every move, and he knew that they knew that he only had to give the order and the men that he was leading would attack immediately. But he didn't have a motive to give the order to attack. Not yet, anyways...

He had been waiting for about an hour since he sent Jaqen H'ghar into the Twins to search for him family. As time passed Gendry for more and more nervous. What if Jaqen never for out? What if he had failed? What if Gendry waited for hours and days, and he didn't get Arya and Robb back?

He couldn't let his fears control him. He maintained himself strong and threatening in front of the Twins. He was watching the tower in that side of the river when he realized that there was someone watching him from one of the windows of the castle... He had a good eyesight, and he could tell that it was Lord Edwyn Frey and his brother, Black Walder Frey. Gendry glared at them, sending then a silent warning though his furious eyes of what was to come if Jaqen came back with Arya and Robb.

"Ours is the fury..." Gendry muttered, remembering the words of his House. His fury was indeed stored inside of him, but would he have a reason to unleash it?

Suddenly someone emerged on the surface of the river not far from there, startling both him and the men that were standing not far from where he was. The men rushed to help the man out of the water, just as Gendry did, and he could see as he was approaching the river that it was Addam; well, that it was Jaqen H'ghar.

At first Gendry thought that the man was alone, and his heart sank. But then he heard the cries of a frightened young child, and he gasped. He ran as fast as he could towards the river.

"Robb!" he shouted.

Jaqen stood on his feet and handed the crying boy over to his father. Gendry hugged his son tightly against his chest and kissed his wet face, crying with joy after being reunited with him.
"Robb..." he sobbed. He felt the most wonderful relief wash over him. His son was alive, Robb had been returned to him...

"Where is lady Arya?" he heard one of the men asking, and Gendry turned to face Jaqen.

The Faceless Man was coughing and spitting out water. He had changed his face back to that of Jaqen H'ghar's, with his grey-blue eyes and his red and white hair. Gendry stared at him, asking the same question that the man had asked through pleading eyes. Jaqen shook his head. Gendry felt his brief joy and relief turned back into grief and pain and fear again.

He gave Robb to one of his soldiers. "Take him away. Keep him safe."

The man did as he was told and walked away, and Gendry turned around to glare at the Twins again. Lord Edwyn Frey and Black Walder Frey had seen what had happened from the window and they were shouting angry commands to the Freys soldiers. They knew now for sure that a war was coming, and there was no way of stopping it now. Whatever their plans had been, they had gone wrong.

Distant thunder could be heard from a storm that was fast approaching. The distant lightning illuminated the Twins and accentuated the fury in Gendry's eyes.

"My lord?" one of the men said. "What are your orders?"

The response came immediately for. Gendry's mouth, sharp and cold and strong like the blade of a sword.

"Attack."
As soon as the order left Gendry's mouth, all the men that were at his command immediately obeyed. With a loud and powerful cry of war they moved forward, ready to attack the Twins. The Frey army, who until a few hours ago had been nervous but still confident, had lost their confidence since the arrival of Lord Tully and his small army, which combined to the men that Gendry had brought to the Twins was enough to outnumber Lord Frey's army, half of which was missing. The Frey soldiers got ready to defend the castle from the attackers, but the fear was evident in their eyes. How could they not be afraid? Everyone could see Gendry, and even the most blind of men would have been able to see the intense fury in his eyes. His whole being was burning with rage. He burned with the fury of an erupting volcano, with the fury of a hurricane capable of shattering an army of a thousand ships, with a fury as powerful as the cruel sun of the desert and the merciless ice of the Lands of Always Winter. His fury was like that of all the elements of nature combined, capable of transforming a beautiful world into a barren wasteland full of death. That was what he intended to do with his fury. He wanted to make it his strength and turn the powerful castles of the Twins into terrible ruins that would remind generations upon generations of people not to provoke the wrath of his House.

He had been lied to. He knew that already, but a little part of him wanted to hope that the Freys were innocent, that they really didn't have anything to do with what was happening. The innocent people of their household should not have to suffer the consequences of the actions of their lord. But Gendry had warned them of what would happen if he discovered that they had been the ones that kidnapped his wife and his children, and he would not go back on his word. The Freys had
brought it upon themselves.

He stayed behind for a little bit, watching as his and Lord Tully's men attacked the scared after army with fierce determination. He didn't feel delight upon watching that bloody spectacle happening before him. War was a terrible thing, and the deaths of men because of it was a waste. However, at times like these, it was a necessary waste, sadly. And so Gendry watched as his men slew hundreds of Freys, and he watched them all fall, one by one, until he finally moved forward and joined the battle. That was his war, after all. It was his family that had been taken. His.

He would never forgive that.

He walked into the slaughter with a battle cry, the same as the soldier had done a few moments before. The attack had happened so suddenly that the Avery's hadn't had time to properly prepare. Yes, they had been preparing to fight since Gendry arrived, but they hadn't thought that he would find a valid excuse to attack. As a result, men had been going in and out from the Twins all day, and the gates weren't locked, so Gendry's men were quickly killing everyone on their path and breaking into the castle. The agrees resisted, but they weren't ready to withstand an attack delivered with so much fury, even though the soldier's fury was a simple child's tantrum compared to what Gendry was feeling. They could actually feel his wrath and hate radiating from him like angry waves that hit them and pushed them back with a force impossible to withstand. Every single man in there was realizing that The Lord Frey should have given it a second thought before deciding to go on with his ridiculous plan to obtain power.

"Storm the castles!" Gendry ordered, watching his men killing their way through the Frey army and entering the castle on that side of the Trident. Sword in hand, he cut down every single Frey soldier that crossed his path. None of them stood a chance. Soon the Trident's waters would be red.

"Spare the women and the children, but kill every single man that you see with a weapon in his hand! Leave lord Frey to me!"

The men obeyed. The sound of men dying and screaming filled the night in that part of Westeros, until suddenly the sky turned white for a second, and deafening thunder sounded and covered the shouts. The storm had finally arrived. It started raining, and it poured in such a way that each drop of rain was almost painful when it hit the bare skin. Visibility became very limited, making chaos reign. All that could be seen was the faint glow of the bloodied blades and men attacking each other like hungry wild animals, fighting to the bitter end. Many tripped over dead bodies lying on the ground and fell to the soft mud that covered the ground because of the rain. It was all blood, mud, steel and water, there was nothing else in that place. All that chaos was a little bit cleared each time that lighting struck, illuminating the skies with its eerie white light and letting the soldiers see the faces of those that they were fighting and killing.

Gendry took some time to reach the gates of the Twins because he had become distracted by Frey soldiers that ran towards him in an attempt to stop him and kill him with no success. Gendry killed them all, and by the time that he finally reached the gates of the Twins he was soaked to the bone, half his body was covered in mud, and his handsome face was splattered with blood. Not a single drop of it was his. His usually handsome features were twisted into an expression that would make even the mightiest of dragons tremble with uncontrollable fear.

At last, Gendry entered the castle, leaving both armies outside, still fighting each other. He firmly held his bloodstained sword with his hand as he made his way through the first castle. He knew that lord Frey and his brother had been there before the attack started, but he could guess that they had fled to the other castle as fast as they could. Gendry crossed the first castle with quick and firm steps while listening to the havoc around him. He could hear men shouting and women and children crying, but not long after only the latter sound was still heard while the men fell to the
silence of death.

"Lord Baratheon!" one of his soldiers called for him after finding him in the corridor. He was a young man, barely a lad, but he had been fighting courageously. He had a long gash on his cheek from which blood poured and stained his face, neck, and armor, but it seemed that he didn't even notice. "Lord Frey fled that way! Just now! I have seen him, he is in the bridge!"

Gendry didn't even have time to thank the man for the information, because a Frey soldier appeared behind him in an attempt to attack and kill him. For a brief moment Gendry was afraid for the man and he tried to warn him, but before any words left his mouth the soldier had turned around and stabbed his attacked trough and trough, killing him. While the after soldier fell to the floor dead the young man turned to look at Gendry again.

"Go, my lord! He will escape!"

Gendry wasn't about to let that happen. He ran down the dark and long corridor and crossed to the other side of the castles reaching the gate. He found five men guarding the exit to the bridge. They had been commanded by their lord to stop anyone who tried to get to the bridge, and as soon as they saw Gendry two of them ran towards him while the other three stood in front of the gate, blocking the way. Gendry glared at them, promising them a quick death if they didn't stand out of his way, but first he had to focus on the two men that were attacking him at the moment. He raised his sword and blocked the attack that one of them was throwing at him to his head, and he moved the man's sword away with a powerful movement in time to turn and block the attack that the second man was attempting to his ribs. He jumped out of the way of the blade of the first man and immediately hit him in the head with the edge of his sword, killing him and splattering blood all over the place. Before the second man had time to do anything Gendry had killed him as well, and the three men that remained standing in front of the gate blocking the exit reacted. They got ready to fight, and Gendry was ready to kill them. He would let no one stand in his way to get lord Frey. He would find that pathetic man and make him scream for mercy while finding out the whereabouts of Arya. Years ago Gendry would never had thought that he was capable of fighting so fiercely and killing so mercilessly, but that night he was realizing that there was nothing that he wouldn't do for her and to get back at those that had dared harm his family. He had already gotten Robb back, and now he would stop at nothing to have Arya back in his arms safe and sound. Even if he had to burn the world down to find her, he would.

The first man died quickly, just like the other two had died. The last two men were taller and broader and fiercer-looking, but Gendry wasn't afraid even if her knew that they were trouble and that he was at a disadvantage. He was getting ready to fight them when two daggers flew right by both his sides and buried themselves in the chest of both men, piercing through their breastplates and killing them instantly. Gendry immediately turned around, wanting to know who had thrown those daggers, and he wasn't surprised to find Jaqen there.

"Go!" Jaqen exclaimed before Gendry could thank him. Gendry nodded and crossed the gate, leaving the castle and arriving at the bridge that crossed the Trident.

In the few minutes that he had spend inside the castle, the storm had become stronger than before and more aggressive. The wind threatened to knock everybody off their feet, and the rain flooded the bridge and raised the level of the river, creating angry waves on its surface. Lighting kept striking again and again, constantly illuminating the sky and making it look like almost as if they were in broad daylight. It wasn't often that the Twins experienced a storm like that one, even though it rained a lot in that region of Westeros, but storms like that reminded Gendry of the Stormlands; they reminded him of home. He looked ahead and he saw Edwyn Frey running alone on the bridge. He was halfway through it; he might have reached the other castle before Gendry
arrived had it not been because the water had made him slip and fall and it had taken him quite a few painful seconds to get back on his feet. Gendry reached him in a heartbeat, and lord Frey turned around in time to dodge his attack. The swords of both men clashed in the air between them at the same time that another lighting struck... this time hitting the tower of the second castle, the one that was behind lord Frey. The sound it made was like that of a giant wildfire explosion, and the outcome was similar as well, because second later the tower that had been hit by the lighting bolt was engulfed in fierce flames that liked the stone and destroyed was was inside the castle. The flames quickly grew, even thought it was still falling, but the fire was too big and too wild and strong to be extinguished so easily. Soon the night was illuminated by the flames, and their heat reached all of them. The fire spread inside the castle, destroying everything in its path.

Lord Frey looked horrified at the view. He couldn't believe that his beloved and most precious castle was burning. Soon there would be nothing left, and there wasn't a way out through which he could escape from Gendry. It was too late.

In a fit of rage he tried to attack Gendry once again, but Gendry was faster. With one quick movement he sliced the man's leg, who howled in pain and fell on his knee to the floor in front of Gendry. Gendry kicked the sword out of the man's hand and put the tip of his own sword on the man's neck. All it would take was one little movement, one slight push, and the blade would pierce his throat. Edwyn Frey's life was in Gendry's hands now. It was time for justice.

"You can't kill me!" Frey cried. Panic made his voice sound high-pitch, and he sounded like a pathetic wee lad, not like a lord of a House that had dared defy two of the most powerful Houses in all of Westeros.

"You lied to me," Gendry muttered full of hate. His voice was perfectly heard over the sound of the rain and the castle burning and the screams and shouts and the wind and the thunder. "You said you didn't have them, but you lied. I offered you a good deal, Frey, my family in exchange for peace. You should have known better. You should have taken it."

"You can't kill me..." was all that Edwyn Frey could say.

"Where is my wife?!" Gendry bellowed, still holding his sword against Edwyn's throat. A little bit of blood fell down his neck. "What do you want with her?! Why did you take her?! Why did you take my son?!"

"You can't kill me..."

"Answer me! WHERE IS SHE?!!"

"If you kill me you will never find her!" Edwyn Frey yelled. Gendry stiffened. "She isn't here! She is far away, and you will never find her!"

"I found my son. I can find her," Gendry said. "But tell me where she is... Or watch your House burn until there is nothing more than ashes left..." It wasn't an empty threat. It was a real warning.

"I won't say anything unless you give me what I want!"

"And what is it that you want?" Gendry asked with a dangerous edge in his voice.

"I want the Stormlands," lord Edwyn said, and there wasn't any panic left in his voice, only sheer madness. "I want Storm's End! I will take this House to glory, and you will give it to me if you want to see your wife alive ever again!"

For a moment Gendry hesitated, he really did. Lord Edwyn Frey could feel how the sword
trembled in Gendry's hand for a brief moment, and a sly smirk appeared on his face. He thought that he had won, that he had managed to defeat Gendry's spirit by offering what he really wanted: his wife, his family, in exchange for everything else. He could see Gendry's thoughts in his eyes as if he were looking at them through a window. He knew that there wasn't anything that Gendry Baratheon wouldn't sacrifice for Arya Stark.

"Will I have Arya back then? Alive and well?" Gendry asked, and his voice almost broke. He was suffering. His work was working faster than it had ever done, tormented and conflicted by a choice that he must make. He knew that any lord, a real Westerosi lord, would never agree to such filthy blackmail. A real lord would slit Frey's throat and send him to burn in the seven hells and keep the Stormlands rather than sacrifice them for his wife. But Gendry wasn't a real lord; he was just a legitimized bastard, and for him family was more important than power, riches, and pride.

He might have given it all to lord Frey. He might have forgotten all about his burning fury and he might have sacrificed anything to have Arya back in his arms, had he been given the right answer. Unfortunately for Edwyn Frey, his greed got the better of him.

"Not so fast… I want the North too."

Gendry's gaze hardened again, and there was a hint of desperation in them.

"I can't give you the North."

"But your goodbrother can! The Stark cripple will give it all to me unless he wants his sister's head delivered to him in a silver platter!"

Greed… That was all that was inside Edwyn's mind and heart. His eyes shone with the madness of a man that wants it all and will stop at nothing to get it, not even if he had to commit the most inhuman acts to do so. It was something that was in the blood of House Frey. He could see it, right in front of him, the vision of the future that he wanted for himself… House Stark destroyed, and the banner of House Frey in every single corner of Westeros. Gendry could see that vision in the man's eyes, and he felt sickened by it.

"I want everything! All that the Starks have, I want it for myself… You can't deny it to me! I have Arya Stark!"

"Give her back to me! Tell me where she is!"

"You will never see her again! I need her as leverage, you see? A hostage to make sure that you and her brothers behave correctly… And I will keep the thing that she carries inside her as well. You need not worry, it will be taken care of well. But you should be happy, lord Baratheon… At least you have your precious little brat back, that was more than I was willing to offer you!" Frey spat.

He had been too lost in his own greed and madness to realize that with those words he had just signed his death sentence. For the hundredth time lighting struck, illuminating Gendry's deep blue eyes as they were filled with wrath once again. Whatever agreement he might have been willing to do before was not going to happen. He pressed his sword harder against Frey's throat, making more blood flow through the small wound in his neck.

"You should have told me where she was from the beginning, lord Frey…" Gendry hissed as the deafening sound of thunder echoed in the sky above them. It was as it the sound of thunder was coming from within Gendry himself, as if the storm was inside of him, linked to his rage. "Winter has come for all of you. It has been coming for House Frey for a long time, and it has finally
arrived to lead you to your fate. You could have fixed it, but you chose to lead your House's to its downfall… The North remembers, but so do I. And this is my fury," he said right before lifting his sword in the air. Lighting struck for the last time right before he brought the blade down again in a quick movement.

A second later, Edwyn's head rolled on the stone floor, his headless body collapsed, and House Frey cried in agony as the Twins burned to ashes, defeated.

Chapter End Notes

Frey is an idiot, I KNOW! =P
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

You won't even believe all that has been going on in my life... The time to update went out the window. But it came back! I decided to update even if I didn't get to sleep because of it! Which I didn't by the way, it's 6:30 am and I have a flight to catch in the afternoon and I am gonna look like a freaking zombie in the plane... Which is good, because then I will fall asleep and not suffer through the flight. I HATE planes!

I was going to try to post a reaaaallllllly long chapter... But if I did that I would ave to update in a few days, or maybe a week. And I didn't want that, so I cut the chapter in half. I will try to write the next chapter during my flight if I don't fall asleep, because I am very inspired! Yay!

Enjoy it, and please please please comment! I love to know what you think of it! And the next chapter is gonna be FULL of surprises. Ye be warned.

“Are there any news?” Gendry asked when Jaqen H’ghar entered the tent.

The Faceless Man shook his head, and Gendry sighed heavily. The battle had been over hours ago, the Freys had been defeated, their army was destroyed and so were the Twins. The bridge between them still stood unharmed and it was safe to cross from one side to the other, but the two castles that used to stand at each side of it had been reduced to charred piles of broken stone and black, smoking ashes. The survivors, the women and children that Gendry had commanded his men to spare, were being sent to the capital escorted by a group of soldiers. The Queen should decide their fate when she came back from her travels. Gendry guessed that most of the older boys would be sent to join the Night’s Watch so that they would forget about avenging their House and reclaiming what used to be theirs. The youngest boys and babes would remain with their mothers, just as the girls, and Gendry had no idea of what would become of them, but he knew that whatever Daenerys decided to do would be the right choice. At least those women and children still had their lives, which was more than could be said of their husbands and brothers and fathers and oldest sons. They had all perished because of the poor decision that their House had made, because of the stupidity of their Lord. Gendry had been fair. He had given them a chance, and they had thrown it away.

He had gotten back his son Robb thanks to Jaquen’s ability to disguise himself and enter the castle, but they still hadn’t found Arya. Despite Lord Edwyn’s insistence that Arya was very far away, Gendry wasn’t sure if he should believe that man’s words. He was afraid that Arya had been trapped in some other secret cell of the castle and that she had died during the attack, but after a long search it was confirmed that Arya wasn’t there, dead or alive, so Lord Edwyn had been telling the truth. Robb could be a witness, but he had been taken away to safety, and he was too young to remember exactly what happened or to give them a clue that could help them. Gendry didn’t want to give up, he was sure that his wife had to be somewhere… but where?!

“We interrogated the survivors before they were taken away,” Sandor Clegane said. He hadn’t been able to arrive to the battle in time before it began, because he had had to travel a very long way in very short notice. However, he did come with several thousand men, and they would be
needed if the time came to fight the Freys again. Only half their army had been at the Twins, and
the other half was nowhere to be found. Gendry sensed that they would have to fight to get Arya
back, and Sandor and his men would help him.; Gendry appreciated his support. He knew that,
even though Sandor and Arya’s relationship hadn’t started on good terms year ago, both of them
had grown to care very much for each other. Besides, Sandor loved his wife Sansa more than
anything, and Arya was Sansa’s beloved sister, so damn him if he wasn’t going to do everything in
his power to get the youngest Stark sister back home! “None of them know shit.”

“We must send ravens to every lord and lady in Westeros,” Gendry said then. They had gathered
around a small table that they had put in the tent they were in. The storm outside wasn’t so strong
as before, but it was still raining. On the table there was a map of the Seven Kingdoms, and they
were all examining it. It had gotten a bit wet because of the rain and their soaked clothes and hair,
but it wasn’t ruined. “If any of them have seen the Frey army then that would be a clue as to where
they are keeping her…”

“Maybe they have friends that are protecting them, we can’t trust anyone to tell us the truth if they
have in fact seen the Freys.”

“Who would want to hide them and risk suffering the Queen’s wrath?”

“Anyone who is as stupid as Lord Frey was,” Sandor grunted. Gendry had told him was Lord
Edwyn had asked of him in return for giving Arya back, and the man had been shocked and
disgusted. “Asking for the Stormlands and the North… Seven buggering hells, he was a fucking
idiot.”

“He was an idiot, but he has my wife and I want her back,” Gendry muttered between his teeth. He
had to stop himself from punching the map on the table out of frustration. He had looked at the
map about a hundred times, trying to find where the Freys could be hiding with Arya, but he had
no clue of where to start. “You don’t think the Lannisters…”

“No. In the past I would have thought so too, but now? No,” Sandor shook his head, and Gendry
believed him.

“Then who?!”

“I don’t know! Maybe no one is helping them!”

“No one is helping them,” Jaqen said then, and both Gendry and Sandor looked at him. They had
detected a lot of confidence in the Faceless Man’s voice. Sandor hadn’t reacted very well when he
had seen the man there at his arrival; he hadn’t particularly liked him in the past. Gendry knew that
the only reason why Clegane hadn’t tried punching the man in the face was more because he was
thankful that he had rescued Robb than because of common sense. Still, he knew that Sandor
didn’t fully trust Jaqen.

“How could you possibly know?” Sandor asked in a rather harsh tone. Gendry was wondering the
same thing, but he waited for Jaqen to answer.

"They wouldn't have hired sellswords and split their own army in two. If they had formed an
alliance with another House to kidnap Arya, one of the most powerful women in the Seven
Kingdoms, it must have been an alliance made with a very powerful House. No one else would
dare facing the wrath of House Baratheon, House Stark, House Targaryen, House Tully and House
Clegane together if not. House Stark has seats in the North and in the Vale, have you any idea how
big of an army there would be once they join forces between them? Not to mention once they join
the armies of the other Houses... You can be sure that no puny lord is going to dare going to war
against that, and if House Frey was allied to someone very powerful they would have had their entire army here to defend them."

"But maybe some lords do dare to face us all together," Gendry said after listening to the man. "Lord Frey thought that we would agree to his blackmailing, that we would give him all of our lands in exchange for Arya. Maybe those other lords believed it too and agreed to help him and they have her!"

"No, but he is right," Sandor said then, agreeing with Jaqen, much to the surprise of everyone, even the Faceless Man himself. "The Freys wouldn't have split their own army in two if they had help. That was only going to give them away, and it made them weaker. Why do it if they had help?"

"Well, either way, it doesn't matter now does it?" Gendry asked bitterly, clutching the sides of the small table in front of him and burying his fingernails so deep in the wood that he was hurting himself. He didn't care. He could feel his entire body trembling with anger. He wanted to let it all out but he couldn't, not right there and not right then. "With an alliance or without it, they still have Arya, and we still don't know where she is. They thought we would give them the Stormlands and the North in exchange for her, but I didn't agree to that and now what? She could be anywhere and we have no fucking clue where to even start looking!"

He wanted to scream. He wanted to bring back to life all the Freys that he had killed so that he could kill them once again, and then kill them some more. He wanted to beat something, anything, to let out that anger that was burning him, consuming him. He wanted to find Arya and hold her and tell her that everything would be all right. But he couldn't, and he felt so fucking helpless!

Sandor and Jaqen remained calm, and they eyed him warily, aware that he might explore in a fit of rage at any moment. Sandor understood that feeling better than anyone else. He had felt the same once, when he was separated from Sansa years ago and sent far away from her, when he didn't know where she was or how she was. He had felt like that, of maybe even worse, when he had mistakenly thought that Sansa had died in a fire. And he felt like that when he tried searching for his son but couldn't find him anywhere. That was why he understood better than anyone how Gendry was feeling when he couldn't find his wife.

Jaqen also understood him, in a slightly different way. He had never been in the situation that Gendry was at the moment before, but he also wanted to find Arya more than anything else in the world, and he wouldn't stop until he succeeded. That was why it was him who spoke, instead of Sandor.

"I know who might be able to help."

"Who?"

"The Red Woman."

There was complete silence inside the tent after those words left the Faceless Man’s mouth. Both Gendry and Sandor stared at him dumbfounded. He stared back at them with a blank expression, as if he didn’t know why they were so shocked. He shrugged and broke the silence.

“What? She helped us before, when we asked her to discover who took Arya. She led us here,” he explained.

Gendry knew that. He had hated having to go to that woman for help. Of all the people in the world, he had precisely needed her, the woman that he hadn’t wanted to lay eye on ever again…
He had taken her with him to the Twins in case they needed her again, in case her visions in the fire were wrong and the Freys proved to be innocent. But Melissandre had been right in the end, and the Freys were guilty for the kidnapping of his wife and child. He had wished that he wouldn’t have to speak to the Red Witch again after that, that he could sent her back to the capital and lock her in the black cells beneath the Red keep forever, but luck wasn’t on his side. They had found Robb, but not Arya, and they didn’t have the slightest idea where to start looking for her.

“She won’t help us,” Sandor grunted.

“She will,” Jaqen assured him. There was so much confidence in his voice and in his expression… He was always like that. The man’s confidence used to irritate Gendry, but in moments like those he welcomed that attitude. He needed it, if he was to believe that everything would be all right in the end.

Gendry wasn’t happy about that new turn of events, but he couldn’t lose the best chance that he had at finding his wife as quickly as possible just because he hated the woman whose help he needed badly. Though he didn’t want to, he agreed, and Jaqen left the tent to give the order to the soldiers to take Melissadre to the tent. A few minutes later she arrived there, escorted by three soldiers. She looked much better than she had when they saw her in the black cells beneath the Red Keep. Gone were the rags and the dirt. She wasn’t dressed in the red dress that she always wore when she was by Stannis Baratheon’s side during the War of the Five Kings, but she was dressed in decent and clean clothing, and her hair was no longer dry and broken. It wasn’t soft and silky like a lady’s, but it looked healthier than it did before. Her days outside of the black cells had returned some color to her face, and it favored her. But Gendry didn’t focus on those details. He focused instead on the fire that shone bright in the woman’s dangerous eyes. He needed that fire. That fire could find Arya.

“Yes, my lord?” she asked when she was standing before him. Gendry gave a sign to the soldiers to let them know that they could leave. Once they were gone he started speaking.

“I need your help,” he told her. His distaste was obvious in his expression, but he held back his pride, just like he had done the last time. “Once more.”

Melissandre arched an eyebrow. She looked amused. “Again?” her tone was mocking, as it had been in the black cells. “I thought the debt was paid. I don’t owe you my help anymore.”

“I need your help,” he insisted. For a lord it was humiliating to beg for help. For a humble bastard blacksmith it was humiliating as well, but when one was poor he had to beg for help quite a few times, and Gendry ad been very poor before he was a Baratheon. He had been a very proud bastard, yes, but even proud bastards knew when to bite their tongue and bend the knee. He wasn’t that poor bastard anymore, but Arya was very much worth every humiliation that he had to go through. “We found Robb, but we couldn’t find Arya. They have her, I know they do, but they don’t have her here. Where is she?”

“I don’t owe you my help,” the Red Witch insisted, and Gendry’s blood boiled in his veins. He only had so much patience. So did Sandor Clegane, who put his hand on the handle of his sword.

“And I don’t owe you my mercy, witch,” the Hound spat, quite menacingly. However, Melissandre showed no fear. Being outside the black cells hadn’t only returned some life to her appearance, but some fire to her spirit as well.

“Stop,” Gendry hissed. “As much as I would love to put a sword through her myself, I still need her alive… What do you want, Melissandre?”
“I want to serve the lord of Light, nothing more,” she said, quite calmly.

“How? You did so years ago by counseling Staniss, but now he is dead.”

“The lord of Light will show me the way. He will let me know what I must do in the future. I have been away from his flame for so long that the path is still not clear, but soon it will appear before me, I know it.”

“The path won’t be very clear once you are back in the black cells.”

“Then set me free.”

“I can’t do that, I am not the Queen,” that was true, Gendry had no authority to free Melissandre. He had just been authorized by the Hand of the Queen to take her with him for as long as it took to find his family, and then he was to return her to the place she belonged to.

Melissandre was about to speak again, but Jaqen interrupted her. Just like he had done back in the black cells, he spoke to the woman in Valyrian. Neither Sandor nor Gendry could figure out what he was saying, but they were aware of how Melissandre listened to the man and slowly her expression changed. Was he convincing her? Was he threatening her? Was he bargaining with her? Gendry didn’t care, as long as it made the woman agree to use her magic for their benefit. Melissandre didn’t stay silent, she replied to the man in Valyrian as well. She wasn’t calm like she had been back in King’s Landing. She was arguing with Jaqen, and he replied to her, and by the sound of it it was being a heated argument. Gendry could not help but being very curious about that exchange of words. Jaqen looked… angry, and he sounded angry too. He was usually calm, or serious, or mocking, but it was rare to see him displaying strong emotions, let them be positive or negative. Now that he thought of it, Gendry realized that he had only seen Jaqen happy or very angry when he was with Arya or whenever the situation concerned her. It was… strange. He had always heard that when people became Faceless Men to serve the god of Death they shed their personality and became No One, they left all traces of their humanity behind. But in Jaqen’s case it seemed as if somehow Arya had reminded him of what being alive used to be, and she had returned his humanity to him. Could that be even possible?

Finally, Jaqen and Melissandre ceased their argument after the Faceless Man spoke rather harshly. Melissandre even took a step back, surprising both Gendry and Sandor, who had no idea of what was going on. Now it was Jaqen the one that seemed to have fire in his gaze, not Melissandre. She looked down to her feet for a second, and when she raised her gaze again to look at Gendry she looked rather unnerved. Before he could question what was going on she spoke to him.

“I will need blood,” she said. Gendry was surprised by her sudden agreement to cooperate, so he didn’t react immediately. She glared at him, annoyed. “I will have to perform blood magic to track her, I will need her blood.”

“You can track her?” Sandor asked, surprised. Then he looked irritated. “Then why didn’t you bloody well say so before?!” Melissandre paid him no attention.

“I will need the blood of a family member, are any of her brothers here? Her sister? Lord Clegane doesn’t count, he isn’t her brother by blood.”

“No, only her uncle Edmure is here, but he was gravely injured during battle, he is resting…”

“Fine, then, her son will do.”

Gendry wasn’t going to let that woman anywhere near his son, and much less let her take his
blood. But as soon as she mentioned Robb, he had an idea. “Take my blood. Arya is carrying my child, you can track him using my blood. It runs through his veins…” Or her, he reminded himself. He did not know what the baby would be, a boy or a girl. He wanted to find Arya safe and sound, and he wanted her to have that baby, their baby, and then he could find out what it was and live a happy long life with them….

“Very well. Let’s go to the fire.” They all approached the torches that had been lit before, when they put up the tent after the battle. The flames burned gently on top of it, and Gendry held his open hand over them. Melissandre took a knife that Jaqen was handing over to him and she sliced Gendry’s hand open without any warning or care. Gendry hissed in pain when the woman cut him, but he didn’t take his hand away. The blood flowed from the wound and fell on the flames, which hissed and crackled. He took his hand away from the flames when Melissandre told him to, and he covered the wound with some cloth. He would take better care of it later, he didn’t want it to get infected and keep him from being able to fight wherever they were heading. Melissandre started a soft chant in a language they did not know. If certainly wasn’t the Common Tongue, and it didn’t sound like Valyrian. It was probably some old tongue from the far ends of Essos, used for dark and dangerous spells unknown to the rest of the world. Gendry, Jaqen and Sandor stood beside her looking at the flames while Melissandre continued chanting, and the flames grew bigger and wilder, burning furiously all of a sudden. All three of them took a step back -Sandor took two steps away from the fire, fearful of it as he ever was- but Melissandre stayed put, looking at the flames with her eyes wide open while they spoke to her and gave her the answers that they desperately needed.

“I see a cave,” she finally said after a while. “I see mountains. I see sand.”

They were confused, until she said the following words. “I see a snake.”

“Dorne,” all three men said at once. They looked at each other with troubled expressions. They had taken Arya to Dorne? Were the Martells somehow involved in this? It was known that for a long time they had profoundly disliked House Stark, due to the events that led to Robert’s Rebellion. They had never forgotten that prince Rhaegar Targaryen had humiliated his wife, princess Elia Martell, and chosen Lyanna Stark. Arya was the spitting image of Lyanna… Could it be? Could the Martells really be involved in that attack to House Baratheon and House Stark because of events that had happened decades ago, and that had nothing to do with either Arya or Gendry? Gendry wouldn’t put it past them. The Houses of Westeros had the bad habit of keeping grudges for a long time. House Frey had just been an example of it, and so had House Baratheon and House Stark.

“Did you say she is in a cave?” Sandor then asked Melissandre. “As in a cell?” Maybe the Martells had a secret cell in Sunspear just like they Freys did in the Twins. Melissandre shook her head.

“No, it is a cave. I see mountains. I see the entrance of the cave. It is small, very small, hidden between the rocks.”

“Then maybe the Martells aren’t in on this, maybe the Freys have her somewhere else,” Gendry said, hoping he was right. If the Martells were their enemy, then that situation was much worse than he had imagined in the beginning.

“They wouldn’t risk losing the Queen’s favor,” Sandor grunted.

“They hate Jon,” Gendry said then. It was true, the Martells had not taken kindly the news that Rhaegar had had a child with Lyanna after he left Elia for the Stark beauty. All of Westeros knew that. Arya was Jon’s favorite sister.
“I still doubt they are involved… Why would the Freys have split their army then?”

That was true. It was what they had been speaking about earlier that night, before Melissandre was summoned to the tent. Gendry still had his doubts, but he decided not to speak more of them. They still needed more information. “Can you find out anything else?”

“I can try. My powers aren’t what they used to be, but the lord of Light still listens to me. Bring me a map and give me more blood, my lord, and I might be able to deliver you straight to your beloved wife.”

Gendry didn’t waste a single second. They moved to the table, where they had left the map that they had been examining before, and when Melissandre told him to do it he dropped his blood on the map, staining it with the thick red liquid. Melissandre resumed her chant, louder than before, and she took the torch and touched the blood with its flame. The blood caught fire, something that Gendry had never seen happening before. The map didn’t burn, though, and as the chant continued all the blood gathered in one single spot, and it slowly moved through the map all the way to Dorne and stopped over the Red Mountains. The fire suddenly extinguished itself and the blood disappeared, and all that was left on the map was a dark red spot where the blood had been before, marking the place they were looking for.

“They have her there,” Melissandre said, pointing to the dark red spot, and they all fixed their eyes on it. The Red Mountains formed part of the boundary between the Stormlands and Dorne, but the red spot was placed in the part of the mountains that was near the Tourentine river.

“I’ve heard about those caves…” Sandor muttered while he stared at the dark red spot. “They are as hard to find as a needle in a haystack, and as deep beneath the ground as Hell’s gates themselves. They are like labyrinths, many men have been lost forever inside them.”

Gendry wasn’t going to let that stop him. “I will find Arya, even if I have to tear Dorne apart with my own bare hands to do so.”

Outside the tent, lightning struck. The storm had started again.
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Hello there! I updated as quickly as I could! I spent the whole flight writing so that I could update as soon as I landed, but my Internet wasn’t working... It’s raining outside but I walked to the library to connect to use their computers and update.

I have been dying to write this chapter. I carefully thought about everything that I wanted to happen in the story, and what happens in this chapter is something that I knew from the beginning that was going to happen, it wasn’t a decision that I took recently just because. The story is near its end, but there are still a few chapters left

Enjoy!

Arya felt as if she was at the bottom of a very deep well that reached well into the core of the world, where the light could not reach her. She had been there a long time. She could not see, she could not hear… Only darkness surrounded her. She couldn’t feel anything; no pain, no warmth, no cold.

But slowly, a small dot of light appeared in the distance, clearing the path in front of her. She could hear something, like an echo that came from far away… Arya followed that small dot of light and that distant echo that was no more than a whisper, and slowly she managed to crawl her way out of that darkness.

She woke up.

She could see again, but all she saw were rock walls around her that imprisoned her. She could hear again, but all she could hear was silence. She could feel again, but all she could feel was cold and the ache of her sore body. She was in misery.

Arya had no idea how long she had been locked inside that place, but she knew that it had been many weeks. Could a month have passed already? It was difficult to know when an entire day had passed, for she could only see darkness in there but never the light of day. She knew that she had spent a lot of time asleep because of the drug that they were giving her after she was kidnapped, but the Freys that were holding her captive had run out of that drug and she spent some time awake. She guessed that they were feeding her twice a day, though she didn't know how much time passed between each disgusting meal, but guessing by the number of meals that she had been able to count then she had already been there over two weeks since the sleeping drug had run out. All she did was lay there, chained to the rock wall, feeling constantly afraid that they might harm her or her unborn child, but the Freys never did anything to her. They only fed her, and mocked her sometimes. She never listened to them. The maddening silence was much better than the sound of their stupid and hateful voices.

She had stopped demanding them to free her a long time ago, because she knew that it was useless. They wouldn't let her go, not until they got what they wanted. Arya knew that they would never get what they wanted. The Stormlands, the North… It was too much. The Queen would never consent to that, it didn't matter that her life and her children's were at stake. However, that didn't stop worrying Arya. Bran and Gendry might still consent to giving up their titles to the Freys to save her
and Robb. Maybe Bran didn't, because he had been raised to do his duty and his duty was to be the lord of Winterfell, even though he had already given it up to protect his people when the iron men had invaded during the war... But times had changed, and Bran was different now. The war had hardened him and he would not give up so easily. The North was safe with him.

But was about Gendry? Gendry hadn't been born heir to the Stormlands, and as easily as he had accepted his title he might as well give it up to rescue his family, the one thing that he had always wanted in his life. Arya didn't want him to give in to the Freys, he didn't want him to lose everything. But if he didn't then Arya was terrified for the fate of her son Robb. She was also terrified for the fate of the child growing inside of her. She wouldn't have been as afraid as she was if she hadn't been pregnant. She had to worry about much more than her own life now...

_There might be a war_, she realized then. She was thinking about it while she laid on her back on the cold and hard rock floor, looking at the rock ceiling above her. The rock hurt her back, but she had gotten used to it after all that time. The worst pain was the one in her wrists. They were sore and bleeding from the chains that bound them. Arya wished that she could get free of them, if just for a second. She had to stay still so that she wouldn't move her arms, because if she did the pain in her wrists was unbearable.

_When I get out of here I will make them pay for this_, she vowed in her mind. She was confident that she was getting out of there one way or another. She just didn't _when_. But she _would_ get out. She wouldn't let the Freys defeat her, never. The Others take her if she allowed such a thing!

She was patient and waited. She didn't know what she was waiting for. For Gendry to suddenly appear and save the day and take her away like a maiden in distress? The single thought of it made Arya feel sick. She was in distress, yes, and she loved Gendry and she knew that he would do anything for her, but the mere thought that she was helpless and needed someone else to save her was unbearable to her. She had always been so free and independent that being a prisoner that could do nothing for herself was killing her. And what if Gendry never found her? Was she going to wait for eternity?

Of course not, she would not wait that long. But she did wait some time. She didn't have a plan or any means to escape, so for once she would have to swallow her own pride and let someone else rescue her...

But waiting was hard, especially with the hunger. She was starving. The Freys fed her enough to keep her and her unborn baby alive, but hard bread and hard cheeses wasn't near enough to chase the hunger away. The silence of her prison was interrupted regularly by the angry growls of her belly, and pain always accompanied them. Arya felt weak, and she didn't know how long she could continue like that.

_I have waited too long_, she realized once day. _I can't wait anymore._

She had to escape, but how? She didn't even know where she was.

It was colder that day than it usually was. The air around her used to be dry, but she noticed that it was very damp that day. She was shivering from the cold. It was a get coldness that was making her sleepy. It reminded her of when it rained in the Stormlands. The rain always brought cold days with it, and it made most people want to sleep though everybody was used to the rain there. Could it be raining outside, was that it?

She chose to ignore that cold that was making her shiver lightly, and she closed her eyes to rest a little. All she ever did all day was rest, as there was nothing else she could do in there, but her pregnancy was making her sleep more than usual. She had never complained about it, it was better
to sleep and let time pass than to stay awake and suffer through the torment of feeling time pass slowly. But she didn't get to sleep that time, because someone suddenly arrived. She opened her eyes again, knowing that it would be one of the Freys. It was the tall one with the dark hair and dark eyes whose voice inspired her fear. His eyes were always cruel, just as he words, and Arya was thankful that the other Frey, Maldwin, was always there to keep an eye on him. He disgusted Arya, and she wanted nothing more than to kick him in the face and knock his teeth out, but that was a wish that she could not have… yet. She still didn't know his name, so she called him Rat-face in her mind. All the Freys looked like rodents.

Rat-face had brought with him a small bowl with food to feed Arya. Her stomach growled and the Frey heard it. He smirked rather mockingly and held the bowl with food in front of him so that Arya could see it. Even though the food was disgusting she was starving, and she wanted to eat. The sight and smell of food only made her hungrier, and her stomach growled louder than before, like an angry beast. The hunger was painful, but Arya fought to keep her expression blank. Rat-face wanted her to beg him to give her the food, but she wouldn't give in. She wasn't going to give him that satisfaction. She knew that he would have to feed her sooner or later because they needed her alive, so she wasn't worried. Still, feeling so hungry wasn't pleasant, but it wasn't the first time that she had been hungry. She had starved during the war as well.

The minutes passed. The heavy silence was only broken by the growls of Arya's belly, but neither she nor Frey spoke a word. Rat-face leaned against the wall while he waited for Arya to say something, and she glared at him. She then saw her sword, Needle, hanging from his belt.

"Why do people keep stealing my Needle?" She complained in her mind, feeling irritated about that.

She noticed the way in which Rat-face was looking at her. He wasn't looking at her in the eyes anymore. His gaze was full of lust as it went over each part of Arya's body. It was disgusting. It wasn't the first time that Arya had noticed that the cruel Frey wanted her, but she always looked away or glared at him furiously while he watched her. Sometimes he just looked at her with interest, and other times his lust was almost palpable in the air around them. Arya had been afraid that he would try something someday and she wouldn't be able to defend herself. She supposed that the only reason why Rat-face hadn't laid a hand on her yet was because Maldwin reminded him of what their orders were, and that included not harming her or the baby that she was carrying.

"He can't touch me, but the temptation is there," a voice said in the back of her mind. It almost made her cringe. That man had inspired fear in her since the first moment that she heard him speak, and his lustful eyes didn't help to ease that fear. Maldwin wasn't there today to stop him if he tried anything, and Rat-face didn't look like the kind of man who cared about controlling his urges when there wasn't someone there to control them for him.

"You are fucking stubborn, aren't you?" he spoke then, admiring her own silence and her ability to resist her hunger. "Go ahead, starve. I won't do you any good."

"You can't kill me," she murmured. "Your lord gave you orders."

"Fucking Edwyn hasn't sent a raven in weeks. He might have changed his mind, for all Maldwin and I know. And if we don't get any orders we are to do with you as we think fit..." he let his gaze wander all over Arya's body after he said that.

"No, you can't," she insisted. If what Rat-face wanted was to scare her, she wouldn't let him win.

Rat-face didn't say anything; he just stared back at her defiant glare. It was like an invisible pulse between them, and Arya was determined not to lose. A cold breeze hit her all of a sudden and she shivered. Rat-face raised his eyebrows.
"Are you cold?" he asked, but Arya didn't reply. It was more than obvious that she was cold. Rat-face moved away from the wall then, and he left the bowl of food on the floor. "You know, it's a pity that lord Edwyn told us not to touch you..." he murmured then while he looked at her again. "I would fuck you real hard, lady Arya. That would make you warm real quick..."

Arya got tense when she heard him say that. Most women would have been terrified to hear their captor say that to them, and she was indeed afraid that it got to the point where Rat-face would be unable to control his own animalistic urges anymore... But perhaps, just perhaps, she would use that to her advantage. An idea started forming in her mind, and she tried to come up with a quick way to execute a plan...

Don't do it, the voice of reason said in the back of her mind. It's too risky!

Yes, it was very risky, but Arya didn't care anymore. She would make her new plan work, even if it could go terribly wrong. After all she had already decided that she would not stay in that place a second longer than necessary, and she had to use her only chance.

"Edwyn would never know," she murmured then.

She moved in a way that allowed Frey to get a better look at her. The chains grazed her hurt wrists and almost made her hiss in pain, but she bit her tongue and didn't make a sound. Rat-face kept looking at her, and seemed more than curious about the change in Arya's attitude. Arya didn't say a word. She just kept looking at him with an unreadable expression. There was nothing in it, making her seem mysterious and desirable. That was what she wanted. She wanted Frey to want her. She needed him to want her so much that he would finally give in to his sick desires.

She saw Rat-face hesitating. He had been following orders since he first abducted Arya, but now he was thinking that probably going against those orders was very well worth the risk. Arya knew when the debate in his mind was over as soon as he took his belt off and placed it on the rock floor along with his sword and Needle. Arya's heart beat faster.

Rat-face took a step forward. "I see it's true when they say pregnant women are just like horny bitches. Don't worry, lady Arya, I will warm you up."

She felt the bile rise in her throat while he watched him take off his tunic before he knelt by her side. He hid her disgust perfectly behind a daring look that only made the man's lust grow stronger when he looked at her. That wild lust mixed with the cold cruelty of his dark eyes was making every nerve in Arya's body scream, but she remained calm. She needed to do this.

I know what I'm doing, she reminded herself. Or at least she thought that she knew. She hoped that she was right. She forced herself not to look at Rat-face with hate. The only thing that will make me warm will be your blood.

Rat-face kneeled by her side. He placed one of his hands on Arya's side and caressed her down her body until he reached her leg. She had gotten skinnier since she was taken from the Stormlands, but that didn't seem to bother the man. "Being a prisoner agrees with you, lady Stark," Rat-face murmured while he admired her body with his eyes and his hands. "I think I like you like this better than I do when you are free."

With each second that passed Arya hated him more and more. She had to wait, and wait she did until the man lowered his body on top of hers and buried his face in her neck. She felt his lips kissing her skin and felt sick to her stomach. The only lips that she ever enjoyed on any part of her were her husband's, Gendry. Once, years ago, she had enjoyed another man's lips on her own, but that man was long gone from her life. She could only think of Gendry now, and of how much she
missed him. If she endured this one small and brief torture then perhaps she would get to see him soon.

Rat-faces hands roamed her body and tried to sneak underneath her clothes. Before he could succeed Arya wrapped her legs around him and used all her strength to push him to the side until he rolled over and was on his back on the floor with her on top of him. The movement made the chains hurt her wrists and she cried. Rat-face took her cry the wrong way and smirked.

"You are mine, bitch," he said, and in that moment Arya dropped her act. That was the worst thing that the man could have said, and she was done waiting.

Quickly and without giving him a chance to react and realize what was happening, Arya wrapped the chains around Rat-face's neck. He had underestimated Arya, and that had been his great mistake. She wouldn't let him have a chance to make it right.

She punched rat-face right in the face. Arya could hear and feel his nose chattering under her closed fist, and blood started running down his face. Arya pulled from her chains then to choke him. The chains had not allowed her to walk around the place, but they were long enough to put around Frey's neck. Rat-face was too shocked and in pain to react immediately, and that was Arya's advantage. She pulled and pulled from her chains, until Rat-face was so purple in the face that he couldn't even scream. Arya had to bit her lip to stop herself from screaming from the pain of the shackles around her wrists, but the satisfaction of seeing Rat-face choke and suffocate underneath her was better than anything she had experienced in a long time.

"You forgot that I am a Stark of Winterfell, you son of a bitch, and winter makes us stronger," she hissed in his face moments before he died. "Winter came a long time ago."

She kept pulling from the chains some time after Rat-face died, just in case he was just unconscious. When Arya was completely sure that she had killed him she finally let go of the chains and started looking inside his pockets to find the keys to free herself from the shackles. She started feeling a little panic attack when she couldn't find them anywhere. What would she do if the other Frey was the one that had the keys?! She wouldn't let him have a chance to make it right.

It was when she looked at Needle that relief washed over her, because she saw that the man had kept all his keys in his belt. Arya couldn't reach them with her hand but she could reach them with her foot with a little patience. Once she had the belt in her possession she saw that there was only one key that unlocked her shackles, and a few seconds later she was free. She was so nervous and excited and her hands were sacking so much that it took her longer than it should have, but she was finally free.

_Free! I am free!_

She wanted to shout and jump and sing and dance from the happiness that she felt in that moment. She had done it, she had tricked Rat-face, killed him, and now she could at least escape. She had no idea of where the other Frey was, but she didn't care. She could walk, she could run, she could fight and punch and kick and she had Needle in her hand. She was invincible.

"Let's go home," she told herself before she disappeared into the dark tunnels from which Frey had come before.

_It had been raining the whole time since they left the Twins and rode for Dorne. Everywhere they_
went on their journey across the country, people complaining about the raging storms and heavy rain that flooded fields and even castles and the lightning that struck and set trees on fire. Storms like those were easily seen very often in the Stormlands, but never had they been seen in the rest of Westeros. Storms like those could be enough to stop any army and make any soldier tuck tail and run, but not Gendry. He continued riding day and night, accompanied by Jaqen and Sandor and thousands of soldiers. He had the Gold Cloaks given to him by Jorah Mormont in Kings Landing, half of Edmure Tully's army, Sandor Clegane's army, and recently Rickon Stark's army from the Vale had joined them. The young lord remained at the Eyrie, but he had sent his most trusted men to command his army and help rescue his sister. Bran Stark was going to send his army from the North, but as soon as Gendry sent him a raven telling him that the Freys had intended to take the Stormlands and the North the young Stark had thought it wiser to stay in the North and keep his armies with him, lest they suffer a surprise attack like the one in the Stormlands.

Neither the rain nor thunder could stop Gendry. He crossed half the country riding as fast as he could, dead set on arriving at the Red Mountains in Dorne near the Tourentine river. He had faith that he would find Arya. They would be together soon. He had left Robb behind in the Riverlands for his own safety instead of taking the child along with him to Dorne or sending him back to the Stormlands. Because Edmure Tully had to return to Riverrun because of his injuries he took the child along with him and placed him under the care of his most trusted men. The child was safe and nothing bad would happen to him anymore. Gendry believed that he would never live long enough to thank Jaqen enough for saving his son. It was something that he would never forget.

When they finally arrived at Dorne they found the region in a sorry state. The storms had also reached that dry region of Westeros, and as a result the land had been flooded. Water cascaded down the mountainside, and in some places the water flowed with enough strength to knock down anyone trying to climb the mountains. The flooded water reached up almost to the horses' knees. The worst storms were already over, and at the moment it was simply raining very lightly. However, there was thunder in the distance, and black clouds hung over them in the sky, making the day dark even though it was the middle of the day.

Gendry paid no attention to the water and the rain. He only had eyes for the Red Mountains, where he knew that the entrance to the caves was. Arya was somewhere in there, so close to him but so far at the same time… He felt his heart beating faster. Finally. Finally he was so close to getting her back. He could almost feel her in the air near him, and his skin burned with desire to touch her, his eyes longed to see her. He died to put his arms around her and hold her close. But first he needed to find that cave, which wasn't easy.

_I am going to find you Arya, just wait a little bit longer…_ he thought, having no idea that his wife was done waiting.

"How the fuck are we going to find those damn caves?" Sandor Clegane asked then. He was looking at the mountains with his grey eyes narrowed. He was looking for the entrance of the caves, but he couldn't find them. "I don't see anything."

"If there were any dornishmen around we could ask, they probably know where to find those caves," Gendry murmured. But the problem was that there weren't any dornishmen around, and they couldn't waste more time riding to the nearest town to look for a guide. They would have to find the entrance to those caves by themselves, and once they were inside they would have to be careful not to get lost in them. "Where shall we start? I can take us days to find that entrance…" The mountains weren't precisely small, and with the less than agreeable weather it would be harder than usual to walk on them, and even more so to ride with the horses. The animals were exhausted, and the flood was making them uneasy.
"At the bottom," Jaqen H'ghar said. "If we can't find it then we will go up."

"If the storm grows stronger later we won't be able to go up there," Sandor rasped, pointing first at the mountain peaks and then at the black clouds above them. "And that shit isn't looking pretty."

"If we climb the mountain and then the storm comes, we will be trapped," Jaqen said, and he looked at Gendry to see who the young man agreed with. "And even now the flood is strong enough to knock the horses down, it's dangerous."

"Perhaps we should split up," Gendry proposed then. "Half the men can climb the mountains, the other half can—"

He didn't get a chance to finish his sentence. Someone somewhere in the mountains had just shot an arrow that hit one of the soldiers behind them right in the shoulder. The man fell of his horses with a scream and splashed water everywhere when he hit the flooded ground. Everyone else immediately raised their weapons, ready to defend themselves and attack the enemy.

Gendry unsheathed his sword and looked in the direction that the arrow had come from. He couldn't see anything there. Suddenly another arrow was shot from another spot in the mountains and it went straight towards Jaqen. The Faceless Man blocked the arrow with the blade of his sword with a swift movement that looked almost effortless. A second soldier wasn't that lucky, though, and the arrow pierced his chest.

"There are the fuckers!" Sandor barked, pointing at the mountains. They could finally see the attackers. The archers were far away, shooting arrows at their enemies from the distance. But they weren't the only ones that had been hiding in the Red Mountains waiting for Gendry and the army to arrive. The second half of the Frey army, what was left of that House, and the large sellsword army that they had hired had been hiding in the mountains, camouflaged in the rocky terrain. They were climbing down the mountain now, some on foot and some on horses. The flood water that streamed down the mountainside splashed everywhere as they descended towards the bottom, and it was knocking down several horses and men, but enough remained on their feet. The large army surrounded Gendry, Jaqen, Sandor, and their men; however, the large army formed by the goldcloaks, the Clegane army, Tully army, and Stark army outnumbered the Freys and their sellswords. They had a very good chance of winning that battle.

"Attack!" Gendry bellowed as the first Frey soldiers and sellswords reached them, and his whole fury fell on them. He killed the enemies that were near him with strong but fast movements of his sword.

It happened just like in the Twins. More and more enemies fell on them which each second that passed, but Gendry cut them down mercilessly, leaving a sea of dead Freys and sellswords behind him. Sandor, Jaqen, and the armies that they commanded were fighting fiercely as well, but the enemies kept attacking instead of turning around and running. Their leader was Black Walder, who had escaped the Twins before they were burned down and his House was destroyed. He had nothing left, and so he was leading his remaining men in a desperate attack to try to get revenge for the previous defeat. Black Walder tried to finish what they had started in the Stormlands, but it was all in vain. Just like in the Twins, Gendry Baratheon was going to win that battle, and so Black Walder turned around and ran, leaving his men behind to die.

Gendry kept killing every man that crossed his path and belonged to the enemy army. He looked around for a second to see how his men and companions were doing. Sandor Clegane was unleashing the wrath that had made him a famous warrior all around the Seven Kingdoms when he was the Hound at the service of the Lannisters, and Jaqen H'ghar was moving as quickly and effortlessly as a shadow, killing five men all at once every time he attacked. Soon the enemies
learned to avoid him as much as they were trying to avoid Gendry, and that gave both of them the change to move forward.

And arrow hit Gendry's horse then, making the poor animal fall to the flooded ground neighing in pain. Gendry was thrown in the air and fell as well. He dropped his sword when he feel to the flooded ground, and in that moment one of the sellswords that were attacking them ran towards him, ready to kill Gendry. His heart stopped racing for a second; he really thought that his end had come. But before the sellsword could lower his sword and execute Gendry, Nymeria appeared and jumped on the man, closing her powerful jaw full of fangs around the man's neck and throwing him back. The sellsword dropped his sword and screamed while the giant direwolf mauled him. When the man's screams ceased to be heard the water around him was red.

"Well done, Nymeria!" Gendry exclaimed, thanking his wife's direwolf for saving his life. He found his sword underneath the flood water and rose on his feet again, rezdy to fight again. That had been a close one; he couldn't let that happen again. Nymeria looked at him and suddenly started running away. At first Gendry thought that she was returning to the battle, but he frowned when he saw her running towards the Red Mountains. Nymeria stopped running and turned around to looked at him. Gendry was confused, but when Nymeria howled at him and resumed running he realized that she wanted him to follow her.

He went after the direwolf, who took him away from the battle and towards the mountainside. She started climbing the Red Mountains and Gendry went after her. They had to fight against the flowing water, which threatened to make them slide back to the bottom if they didn't watch where they were going. Gendry wondered where was Nymeria taking him, but he didn't question the direwolf. Nymeria headed towards a large group of rocks. When Gendry arrived there his face lit up with joy when he saw that Nymeria had led him straight towards the entrance of the cave!

"You found it!" he exclaimed, unable to believe it. He was definitely going to find Arya now. He rubbed the direwolf's head and turned around to look at the battle at the bottom of the mountains. It wouldn't last much longer; the Freys and their sellswords were being crushed. They had put so much effort into their mad plan to crush House Baratheon and House Stark, and they were the ones being crushed. Most of the sellswords had realized that the battle was lost and they were running. Gold was the only thing that had led them to aid House Frey, they didn't follow duty or loyalty, and their lives mattered more to them than fighting. He looked at Nymeria again and then at the entrance of the caves. "Let's go find Arya."

Arya was lost. She had realized that she was in some sort of underground tunnels, but it took her several minutes to realize that she was walking in circles. The endless darkness made it so much easier to get lost. She had no idea where she was or where she was going, and in one occasion she ended up again exactly where she had started, in the placed where she had been chained during weeks and where Rat-face's corpse now laid. She tried not to panic and to stay calm while she found her way out of that strange labyrinth. She made some marking in the walls with her sword, to know where she had been before in case she started walking in circles again. In several occasions she found those markings again, meaning that she was walking in circles, but after a while she started walking in places that didn't have the markings.

She tried to be aware of her surroundings, preparing herself in case that Maldwin Frey appeared where she was in any moment. She would have to kill him quickly, though if she managed to defeat him and make him lead her to the outside before she killed him that would be better. She would take no risks, though. If it was dangerous to keep the man alive she would kill him without a little bit of hesitation.
As she arrived in a tunnel that she hadn't been in before, she started to hear something other than the silence that constantly surrounded her. The new noise was distant, echoing in between the walls of those tunnels. She tried to listen closely to find out what that noise was. It came from the outside, and it reminded her of the times of the War of the Five Kings, and of the battles that she had witnessed and participated in… Arya walked forward, and the more she walked the stronger that noise was. She could hear it more clearly now. It was the sound of men shouting and yelling and of steel crashing against steel and horses neighing. It was the sound of war.

*They have found me!* She realized, and she had to fight the urge to laugh with joy. *They have come for me!

It was the only thing that made sense and explained why there was a battle being fought outside those tunnels. She stopped worrying about making markings on the walls around her and she started running though the tunnels, following the noise that was louder and louder with every step that she took.

"You fucking bitch!" she heard Maldwin Frey sneaking up behind her. Her joy and the noise had distracted her enough for him to find her without her noticing, and she turned around and found the man standing there, looking angered. He had already found the other Frey's body before and knew that she had escaped by herself. "Come back here!"

Maldwin was weaker that Rat-face, and not at all scary, but he did have a sword and he knew how to use it. He attacked Arya, but she dodged the blade. She thought that she no longer needed him to escape, and so she made a quick movement and stabbed him right in the belly before he could keep attacking her. Maldwin Frey gasped in shock and pain when Needle's thin blade pierced him deeply, fatally injuring him. He dropped his sword and Arya took Needle out of the man's body, making blood spurt from the wound. Maldwin fell, dead just like Rat-face, and Arya continued running following the noise from outside as if nothing had happened.

She noticed that the ground was wet then, and the more she ran the more she noticed it. Soon she entered a tunnel that was flooded. There wasn't a lot of water, but it was enough to cover her feet. She happened upon another tunnel whose floor was steep, and she had to hold onto the walls and use Needle to be able to climb it. Water came down that steep floor, but the tunnel was lighter than the other ones had been. She had approaching the exit.

When Arya finally made it to the top of that steep tunnel, she found herself on another tunnel, but that one wasn't steep. There was light at the end of the tunnel. She had finally found the exit! But light wasn't the only thing that she found at the end of that tunnel. There was someone there, a man that was running towards her. She couldn't see him very well, but then he called her name…

"ARYA!"

"Gendry…" his name caught in her throat. She couldn't believe it. He was there, he had found her, after all that time… He really was there. She could see him now. She could see his black hair and the blue eyes that she loved so much, and she felt she was going to explode. "GENDRY!"

She ran towards him while he ran towards her. They met in the middle of the tunnel, and in a second they had their arms around each other. For a moment it was as if both of them were afraid that the other one was simply an illusion, a trick of the mind. It was as f they were afraid that they were going to disappear like smoke and slip through each other's arms. But that didn't happen. They were real, and they weren't going anywhere.

"Arya. Arya…" Gendry said her name many times, enjoying the sweet sound of it. That name had tormented him during a month, because he thought that he would never see Arya again. But now
she was in his arms, alive and well, and he wouldn't let anyone take her away from him again. "Oh, Arya, thank the gods… I looked everywhere for you, I am so sorry."

"Where is Robb?"

"He is all right, he is in Riverrun with your uncle. Jaqen found him. He saved our little boy."

"Jaqen?" Arya repeated, astonished. Gendry nodded and smiled.

"Yes, he is here, he is outside. He was always there taking care of you…” he explained while he caressed his wife’s face. He was too happy to notice how thin and how tired she was, but once he did notice he felt angered at the treatment that she had received. But the Freys had already paid for that. "Come, we have to go outside."

They left the cave then. Nymeria was waiting outside, making sure that no enemies went in. Arya was happy to see her, and she was happy to see that the battle was as good as over. All the sellswords had run, and what little Freys were left alive had surrendered and were in the process of being unarmed. Gendry, Arya and Nymeria climbed down the mountain, careful not to slip and fall. When they reached the bottom they stood next to some dead Frey archers who had been shot and killed by either Sandor's or Rickon's army.

Arya looked around, enjoying the fresh air and the light of day. There wasn't much light, but to her it seemed like the brightest day of all of her life after living in darkness for weeks. She smiled and laughed, and Gendry enjoyed looking at her. He felt as if his heart was going to burst out of his chest. He pulled Arya close to him then, and he kissed her. To them is was as if the world had stopped spinning and time had stopped running, and they were the only people left in the world. Arya had never felt happier or safer in all of her life…

They broke their kissed then, and Gendry looked at her as if he was trying to memorize all of her features all over again. He had the biggest smile of the entire world in his face.

"I thought I had lost you," he murmured.

"You will never lose me," Arya assured him. She intended to keep that promise.

Gendry was going to kiss her again, but something stopped him. He saw something behind Arya; she didn't know what it was, all she knew is that it wasn't good. Gendry's smile disappeared from his face and it was replaced by horror. Before Arya could ask what was wrong, Gendry grabbed her and he switched places with him. Arya gasped, confused by what was happening. She was about to ask him what was going on when suddenly she saw that Gendry's face was twisted with pain. His body shook all of a sudden and he gasped with pain.

"Gendry?" Arya was confused. Gendry's body shook again; it was more like a violent spasm, and he cried in pain. His body fell forward, but Arya managed to catch him and keep him on his feet. She was panicking now. "Gendry! Gendry, what is happening?! Gendry!"

She looked behind him, and saw what he had seen before. Black Walder was there, many feet away, with a bow in his hand and a look of satisfaction in his face. He didn't have any more arrows, but the three he had fired were buried deep in Gendry's back.

"No… No! Gendry!"

Arya reacted automatically, without even thinking. Her body moved as if guided by the explosion of wrath that was running through her veins. She placed Gendry on the ground, which wasn't very flooded in that part of the Red Mountains, and she picked up one of the bows and an arrow from
one of the dead Frey archers that were next to her. She didn't even aim, she just fired the arrow, and it buried itself if Black Walder's forehead. He dropped dead right away, and Arya dropped the bow and arrow just as quickly and knelt beside Gendry, picking him up with her arms and carefully placing him on her lap.

"Gendry!" he was still breathing, but he was weak. Arya could feel the life slipping through the wounds that the arrows had made. This can't be happening... They had just found their way back to each other. They couldn't take Gendry away from her now, not so soon. Not so cruelly. "Gendry! Gendry, look at me! Gendry, please, stay with me… Stay with me! Gendry, please! GENDRY!"

But Gendry couldn't stay. He raised a hand, slowly, using all the strength that was left in him, and he gently caressed her cheek. His fingers felt cold to the touch. There was a pool of blood forming beneath Gendry; it stained Arya's clothes and dyed the ground and the water of a deep red color.

"No, Gendry, please don't do this to me!" Arya begged. She was unable to hold her sobs and cries back. "You can't do this to me! Gendry… Somebody! Please! Help!" she screamed desperately. She looked up for one second and saw Sandor running towards them, and someone else too… Jaqen. So he really did come... But that wasn't important now. All that mattered was that Gendry was dying in her arms, and she didn't know how to stop it from happening. Her tears stung in her eyes and clouded her vision. The gods were cruel. They had given her a brief moment of true happiness before taking it away and ripping her heart apart. "Please, help…"

Gendry's hand was still on her cheek. Arya returned her gaze to Gendry, whose bright blue eyes were only half open. He was looking at her. The pain was gone from his expression. He looked very calm, as if he was at peace.

"Gendry, no… No!" Arya cried when his hand fell from her face. "Please, stay with me. Look at me, look at me! Please, don't do this to me, please..."

"Arya…" Gendry murmured before he closed his eyes. With her name still on his lips he exhaled his last breath.
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

I'M BACK! Sorry for the delay, lots of stuff happened in life and things got crazy. Very very crazy. Anyways, here's an update!

If you have decided to stick with me and keep reading the story even though I was a butch at the end of the last chapter, THANK YOU!

Now, I'm begging you all to trust me. Also, remember that this is Gendrya story where Jaqen is a very important (even main) character, but please I don't want both Gendrya and Jaqen/Arya fans getting angry with me for reasons that I know.

Also, I have to announce that thanks to some readers whose comments made me think about it, I decided to write a Jaqen/Arya story. I have the main idea already but not the entire plot. I am currently trying to decide if it should be set in the world from the books/show or if it should be a Modern AU. What do you think?

Anyways, THANK FOR READING!

Enjoy!! And remember, comments always help! ^.^

“Arya.”

Arya didn’t respond. Sandor had been calling her name a couple of times already, but she hadn’t even batted an eye. There was no sign that she had even heard him. Her eyes were fixed on Gendry’s face. He looked very peaceful, as if he was in a deep sleep, immersed in a world of dreams. But he wasn’t dreaming. His eyes would never open again. His sleep would be eternal.

It took Sandor a lot of effort to pull her away from Gendry’s body after he reached her in the battlefield in the Red Mountains. The battle was over and won when Gendry and Arya had emerged from the caves, but Black Walder had managed to steal the complete victory from them. Arya had screamed and lashed out at Sandor like a wild animal when he put his arms around her and lifted her from the ground. She wrestled and punched him and scratched him so fiercely that he had let her go for just a second, but he had managed to catch her again and take her away from the horrible sight that was her husband’s fallen body. Arya hadn’t stopped fighting for a single second, and Sandor had deep and long scratches that had bled a lot. He had even needed to sew a few of them shut because of how deep and long they were. His hands and part of his arms made him look like he had been attacked by a wild wolf. While he took Arya away from there, Jaqen had run to Gendry’s side to see if there was any chance of saving him, but Gendry was already dead. There was nothing that could be done for him.

The soldiers had made camp, and they took Gendry to one of the tents. When a lord died away from home his body was usually either taken to his castle, where he was given proper burial, or it was burned and his ashes were taken to the castle. Arya was the one that had to make the decision of what to do, but she hadn’t said a word. After she calmed down she had installed herself in the same tent where they had taken Gendry’s body, and she hadn’t moved from his side. She refused to leave him. The day ended, and night came and passed, and after it came another day. The night
would come in a few hours, and she still refused to move from his side. She didn’t sleep, she didn’t eat… She didn’t even cry. She was just there, sitting by his side, holding his hand in hers and looking at him. It was as if she believed that he would wake up at any moment, but he was not going to wake up…

“Arya, please,” Sandor insisted. He had come into the tent with a bowl full of food. She hadn’t eaten anything, and he worried for her. He worried that, in her grief, she would forget to live and eventually fade away. He was afraid that they would lose her too. The old gods and the new and all the other god everyone else in Westeros and Essos and even Sothoryos knew that Arya Stark was one of the strongest people that the world had seen in a long time. She had endured in her childhood what few people could endure, she had survived when she was merely a child what not even the strongest and fiercest warriors could survive. She had bent many times, but she had never broken. But Sandor feared that maybe this time it was just too much. How many times could someone bend before they snapped and never got back up again?

“Arya, you need to eat,” he insisted. He needed her to eat something, even if it was just one bite! Just enough to keep her alive. Sandor had grown to love Arya like a little sister, the little sister that he had once had and lost to his brother’s viciousness and anger. Arya was his Little Bird’s sister, he couldn’t let her die! Besides, she was with child. Sandor might be a man, and a brute one at that, but he wasn’t stupid and he knew that Arya needed to keep herself healthy to avoid complications. Seven hells, even those Frey bastards had been feeding her for the sake of the babe! “Just a little bit.”

“I don’t want it,” Arya spoke at last. Her voice was low and harsh, barely audible. It was a broken sound, like that of a small and dying animal. “Go away.”

It was all she wanted, for them all to go away. She wanted everyone, the whole world to disappear. Sandor wanted to insist some more, but he knew that it was in vain. He just stood there for a couple more seconds, staring at Arya with the tiny hope that maybe she would change her mind, but she didn’t. She completely ignored him and didn’t take her eyes off Gendry’s dead body in front of her.

Sandor sighed, feeling defeated. He turned to leave, but before he exited the tent he shot Arya one last look full of pity, and then he looked at Gendry lifeless body. In the dim light he might look like he was indeed sleeping, but once you got near enough the was no dout: Death was in that tent.

*You took her with you when you left,* Sandor thought, wishing he could say those words to Gendry’s spirit, if just a thing existed and was present in that tent.

He left the tent and walked a few steps away from it, only to stop in his tracks when Jaqen H’ghar approached him. The Faceless Man had dark circles underneath his eyes; ever since they had found Arya and Gendry had died he hadn’t been able to sleep, not even a second. He was always awake, worrying about Arya and watching over her, even though she had ignored him just like she had ignored everyone else. In those years Arya had missed Jaqen very much, and had she realized that he was there with her in the past, before any of this happened, she would have been ecstatic. But, as things were, she couldn’t even feel the joy of being reunited with her dearest friend whom she had thought she would never see again.

"How is she?" Jaqen asked Sandor as soon as he saw him. Sandor sighed heavily and shook his head.

"Same as yesterday," he told the man the truth, and he could see the worry growing in the Faceless
Man's grayish blue eyes. Sandor had never liked the man much in the past, he hadn't even trusted him, but right now he couldn't help but feel extremely surprised. He has heard countless stories about the Faceless Men, about people whose souls were so hard and cold that they weren't even human. Many said that they weren't even real people, that they were Death itself, disguised in the form of many men with many faces, mysterious as only Death could be. But how could Sandor actually believe in all those stories when he was seeing so much emotion in the eyes of the man currently standing before him? There was pain in those eyes, pain that the man felt because he was unable to protect the girl that he cared about so much. He had saved her, yes, but he hadn't been able to shield her from all harm and in the end she got hurt. Sandor showed Jaqen the bowl full of untouched food and saw the worry growing in the man's eyes. "She won't even take a bite. She is just there, sitting next to him, watching... What is she waiting for, he isn't going to wake up!"

Sandor felt so frustrated that he wanted to kick something, or maybe punch someone. Truth was that he understood perfectly fine the grief that Arya was feeling. Hadn't he felt it too when they told him that Sansa was dead? She wasn't, but for many months he believed that the flames that killed his brother had consumed her too and taken her away from him forever. He could still remember the pain, a pain a strong that made him blind and feel as if even single bone in his body was breaking, even single muscle was tearing. It was a pain that tore him apart. He had felt it again, when he went in search of his son but couldn't find him. After those two experiences yes, he understood Arya and what she was feeling, but it didn't stop him from worrying. In fact, it made him worry even more, because he knew how badly you could break, how low you could fall, how hard it was to put yourself back together. It was almost impossible, he would dare say, unless a miracle happened.

"I don't know what to do,” he admitted. "I give up. I don't know what to do to make her listen, to make her see, make her realize that she is not alone! Fucking hells, she is with child, she needs to take care of herself! She will lose the babe if she goes on like this, I know it, I know! And what then? Then she will feel even worse!"

"Calm down, Clegane," Jaqen told him. "She is grieving, not deaf. Hearing you talk like that won't help her."

“I just don’t know what to do,” Sandor admitted. He felt helpless, an emotion which he wasn’t accustomed to feel, even though he had found himself in many helpless situations before. He always found a way to deal with them, but he honestly didn’t know what to do now. How could he make Arya react? How could you fix one of the strongest and most stubborn women in the world after she had been broken?

Arya was broken. Jaqen knew it just as well as Sandor.

“She has suffered too much,” the Faceless Man murmured, not looking at Sandor anymore but at the tent where Arya was. “She suffered the loss of her father, and then I am witness of the things she had to do to survive. She was always strong. But the separation from her siblings, the death of her mother and brother, her need to flee the country, the war... It gets to a point where it is just too much. She has been locked up in a cave, chained to the wall all alone in complete darkness with no other company than her enemies, fearing for her son’s life. She is stronger than iron and steel, she survived everything and she will survive her husband’s death too.”
“I don’t think she will, not if she continues like this,” Sandor disagreed.

“She will,” Jaqen insisted, and the confidence in his voice made Sandor hesitate and think that maybe the Faceless Man was right. “I know her, I know that she just needs time. She will get better, she will survive this and continue to be strong. That is what she does best, survive and endure, it is in her bones.”

Sandor nodded slightly. The Faceless Man was right, Arya was incredibly strong, she could move on, she could get better. However, the expression in Jaqen H’ghar’s eyes darkened then.

“But she will never be the same.”

No one was ever the same after losing someone they loved. Arya wasn’t the exception. Every single death that she had suffered had changed her, little by little, until she became the person she now was. Gendry’s death would only change her more.

“During the war she built up walls,” Jaqen continued saying, and Sandor continued listening. The camp around them was very noisy, but somehow Jaqen’s voice carried itself above all the noise with such clarity that it seemed to mute everything else. “Strong, thick walls to protect herself, like a stronghold. She kept those walls up after the war, afraid to fall victim of an attack if she ever dared to bring them down. Gendry managed to bring them down.”

“So that is why she is suffering so much?” Sandor asked. “Because she didn’t have her walls up to protect herself?”

“No, she would have suffered the same. She feels very strongly. What I mean is that she will build her walls up again, but she will make them taller and thicker. No one will be able to bring them down ever again. I don’t want that for her, not after everything she went through to be able to be happy again. She doesn’t deserve this fate.”

It was then that Sandor noticed something. He had always been irritated by the man’s manner of speech. It used to always be “a man this, a man that”, “a girl this, a girl that”, “a boy this, a boy that”. Jaqen H’ghar didn’t speak like that anymore. Gradually over the past month he had grown out of his custom to refer to himself and everyone else in the third person. Sandor couldn’t help but wonder about it.

“I thought Faceless Men didn’t refer to yourselves in the first person. That none of you were “I”, but No One,” it wasn’t a question, it was a statement, but Jaqen caught the meaning behind it nonetheless.

“I am not No One anymore,” he said.

“Because of her,” again, it wasn’t a question.

Jaqen didn’t respond immediately. He simply stared at Sandor for a few seconds in silence before he slowly nodded. “Thanks to her,” he corrected. It was just a word, but the meaning changed completely. Sandor narrowed his eyes. Would the assassin ever cease to be a mystery?

“You should go talk to her,” he said then. “She might listen to you more than she listens to any of us. We need to get her out of there… before he starts rotting.”

Jaqen nodded and left, heading towards the tent that Arya wouldn’t leave. He hadn’t had a chance to speak to her yet; the only time that he had been able to see her was after she and Gendry emerged from the caves and Gendry was killed. Since then he had just been able to see her from afar, and after she went into the tent he hadn’t even gotten a glimpse from her.
He entered the tent quietly, trying not to startle Arya with his sudden presence, but it was as if she never even noticed him. She had her back turned to the entrance of the tent, so Jaqen couldn’t see her face. All he could see was how she was sitting on a small wood stool next to the table over which Gendry’s body was laid. Jaqen had seen many dead people. Hundreds, thousands! He had killed countless people during his many years of service to the Red god, he had seen people die in battlefields and in the streets and in their homes and he had never been bothered by it. But seeing Gendry was very different. When he saw Gendry’s lifeless body lying there he felt pity, and sadness and anger. They had both fought hard for the same cause, and it wasn’t fair that Gendry had to die in the end.

What really made Jaqen feel something that seemed like a hole in his chest was seeing Arya. He slowly approached her and sat on the stool next to her, the one where Sandor had sat before during his failed attempt to make her eat. He could finally see her face, and the hole in his chest grew larger. He was unaccustomed to having feelings, and he found that new sensation extremely bizarre. He had always been able to feel sympathy, it was what made him become friends with Arya in the first place so many years ago during the war, but any feeling other than that had been unknown to him before. After he met Arya and time passed he started feeling other things. He became able to feel worry, and thus he went to find her and accompanied her on her quest to kill Walder Frey at the Twins. He had been able to feel attraction, and even lust, and thus he had kissed her. He had been able to feel love, and thus he had let her go, he had stayed near her to protect her while in disguise, and he had gone to war for her alongside her husband. And feeling love had unlocked all the other aspects of his humanity that had been cast away the moment he became No One many years ago.

Those feelings had been locked away for so long that now that they were all coming back to him he felt like he was being punched in the face by a gigantic rock fist. What he was feeling at the moment was a sense of helplessness that he had no idea how to deal with, just like what had happened to Sandor. He hated seeing Arya like that. Things shouldn’t have happened like that. They should be celebrating the fact that they had won, that the Freys were gone and Arya and Robb were safe. They shouldn’t be grieving a death. Jaqen didn’t know what to do. He was used to always having the answer, to being invincible. But he was just human, and humans weren’t invincible and all-powerful, even if he had once believed that he was.

He didn’t know what to say. He didn’t know what he should say, or what he must say. There was a difference; one was what Arya wanted to hear, and the other what she needed to hear. She wanted to hear that everything would be fine, that Gendry would come back to her. What she needed to hear was that he was gone forever and she must accept it and let go.

For some reason he couldn’t bring himself to say it. He couldn’t tell Arya that she had lost Gendry forever and cause her more misery. His gaze fell on Arya’s hand tightly holding on to Gendry’s hand. Gendry’s skin had turned pale and cold, but the expression on his face was peaceful. It looked almost as if he was sleeping. One could even say that he was having a pleasant dream.

“It is my fault,” Arya suddenly murmured, and Jaqen’s eyes quickly found hers, even though she wasn’t looking at him. “He would be alive if it wasn’t for me.”

“He was happy when he died,” Jaqen said. “All he wanted was to get you back safe and sound, he wanted nothing more. He died with his wish granted.”

“He shouldn’t have been there to save me,” Arya murmured more angrily than before. She didn’t look weak, she looked furious, and by looking at her Jaqen knew that he was right. Arya would build her walls up and never let them down again. She finally tore her gaze away from Gendry and stared at Jaqen with anger in her eyes. That anger wasn’t directed towards him, but towards herself.
“This is all because of me. I should have never gone back when I left Winterfell. I should have never married him! He never wanted to be a lord, he just accepted the title because of me, because he didn’t want me to be with a bastard blacksmith. If I hadn’t gone back to him he would have remained a stupid bastard, a nobody, and he would be alive because no one would have gone after him!”

“That isn’t true, Arya, you can’t know what would have happened,” Jaqen said. “It is not your fault, none of it is.”

“Don’t lie to me, it won’t make me feel better!” Arya hissed. A single tear streamed down her cheek and she angrily wiped it away with her sleeve. Even now she was stubborn like that, not wanting anyone to see her crying. “Maybe if I had tried to escape earlier…”

“Half the Frey army was hidden in the mountains, you would have never gotten away,” Jaqen assured her. He was impressed that she had managed to defeat the two men that had been keeping watch over her inside the caves, but she couldn’t have defeated an entire army. Even if she had managed to sneak past them she wouldn’t have made it far from the Red Mountains before being recaptured. “Gendry would have come looking for you and died in vain if you were dead.”

“Then I am right. He would have been better off if I had left and never come back,” Arya said, her voice softening again, though it was still tainted with endless bitterness and pain. She looked at Gendry for a brief moment in silence before returning her sad gray gaze to Jaqen. “That day when we boarded the ship to Braavos… You let me go, and I jumped. I never should have jumped overboard to join Gendry in the water, you shouldn’t have let me go.”

“It was what you wanted,” Jaqen murmuring. He remembered that day perfectly, as if it had happened just yesterday. He remembered each and every word he spoke to Arya. He made her realize that she was in love with Gendry. He had realized something that day as well. He had realized that the attraction that he felt towards the lovely girl with the fire in her soul and the storm in her eyes was turning into something deeper and more intense, something that he didn’t fully understand at that moment and definitely didn’t now how to handle yet. He realized that he felt inappropriate; that he could never give to Arya what Gendry could give to her, peace. And so he had let her go, but he had never been strong enough to stay away.

“I wanted to go with you too,” Arya admitted. She shrugged slightly. “I just… wanted him… more.”

Jaqen nodded, understanding. There was silence yet again, and both of them looked at Gendry. Arya put her other hand on Gendry’s chest. She looked like she would want nothing more than to lean forward and kiss him. There were stories in Westeros and also in Essos of princesses who fell victim of death-like sleep only to be awakened by their lover’s kiss. Arya had always hated songs and stories, unlike her sister and many other girls, but she couldn’t think of what she wouldn’t give to make that one story be real.

“I could have loved you,” she confessed then, so softly that her voice was almost audible. But Jaqen heard her and, even though she wasn’t looking at him, she knew she was talking to him. “I think I already did, in some way. Maybe I always did, but not enough,” she looked like she regretted that.

“The lovely girl must not regret the past, nor regret the life she has led,” Jaqen told her, slipping back into her former and peculiar manner of speech. Maybe Arya could take some comfort in seeing that some things never changed, not completely, even if they were just small things. “Lovely Arya. Brave Arya. A girl chose the life she wanted for herself, and she made the right choice. She must never think otherwise.”
“How can this be the right choice?” Arya wondered, staring at her husband’s corpse with wide eyes full of horror. “How can any of this be right?!”

The answer was simple. “You have Robb,” Jaqen reminded her, and for a moment Arya froze. It was as if, in her grief, she had been so blinded that she had forgotten her son. “You have another babe on the way. Gendry left you with two blessings. You have to be strong for them, Arya, you must.”

“You are right,” Arya agreed. There were tears in her eyes that she still refused to shed. Little by little the despair disappeared from her expression, and was replaced by a cold and hard mask. That was proof that Jaqen had been right all along. Arya would pull herself back together, she would move on. But she would change. What would happen to the brave and lovely girl that wanted to have daring adventures and who could laugh and run and jump all around the place an never grow tired? Her pack had been broken yet again, and she hated being a lone wolf. “You are right, I have to be strong… I will be, I promise.”

“He has to be taken back home, to Storm’s End. His body has to be put to rest.”

“Yes, he does… Oh Jaqen,” Arya cried softly, devastated, “how am I supposed to say goodbye?”

“I don’t know,” he replied with complete honesty. He had never said goodbye before… Not forever, at least. Whenever he had bid her farewell he had always come back to her.

“I don’t think I can ever do it,” she murmured, slightly shaking her head. “I am not ready. Not yet, it is too soon.”

She winced in pain suddenly, and took her hand to her belly. Startled, Jaqen quickly stood up from the stool and knelt by her side, placing his hands on her shoulders.

“Arya!”

“It’s nothing,” she said, though her expression was twisted in a painful grimace. Jaqen’s eyes found her hand placed on he belly, which wasn’t round yet, but would soon start to swell.

“You should rest, the baby-”

“I’m fine,” Arya insisted. There was still discomfort present in her expression and in her voice, but the sharp pain that had so suddenly attacked her didn’t make another appearance.

“Go to sleep, lovely girl. We have a long journey ahead.”

“I will sleep here tonight,” Arya said, not moving from where she was. In fact, she moved closer to the table on which Gendry’s body was. “Please.”

Jaqen didn’t protest. He understood that Arya needed some more time to get adjusted to the idea of what she had lost so cruelly after it was just returned to her, and she needed to at least try to say goodbye, even if she had admitted that didn’t consider herself capable of doing it.

Jaqen abandoned the tent, having managed at least make Arya realize that they couldn’t stay there, that they needed to leave and return to Storm’s End, where the sellswords had once and for all been finally defeated and purged from those lands. The short war was over, there could finally be peace.

However, after he exited the tent he realized there was one more thing he had to do, one thing that he hadn’t thought he would do, but that he now considered necessary to do. Without hesitating, he walked towards the tent that was his destination.
“Bring him back.”

Melissandre had protested when Gendry had given the order to take her along with the army to Dorne. She insisted that her debt was paid, but if she didn’t go with the army to Dorne then she would be taken to King’s Landing, straight to the black cells beneath the Red Keep. That was a place that no person ever wanted to visit, nor return to.

If the Red Woman was surprised to see the Faceless Man irrupting into her tent with such a demand, she didn’t show it.

“No,” she simply responded.

“A man wasn’t asking,” Jaquen said in a menacing tone, sliping back once again into his usual speech. He switched from the Common Tongue to Valyrian, like he almost always did when he was talking to the woman.

“I know you weren’t,” Melissandre said calmly. “Still, the answer is still no.”

There were lit candles all around the tent, and flames burned in torched that illuminated the room. Melissandre calmly paced around the inside of the tent, keeping her eyes on the dancing flames, as if she was reading a message from R’hllor in them.

“I know what you are thinking,” she said all of a sudden. “I had nothing to do with lord Baratheon’s death.”

“You had his blood. You could have done blood magic with it, just like you did in the past,” Jaqen hissed.

“I am not strong enough to do that yet. The lord of Light is slowly giving me back the powers that were taken from me years ago while in the darkness of the black cells. Those powers were a blessing granted by the lord of Light, and what he grants he can take away.”

“A man doesn’t have enough time to wait for you to get your powers back.”

“Then there is no reason for you to stay here,” Melissandre said coldly, clearly expecting Jaqen to turn around and leave.

He didn’t.

“A man doesn’t take kindly to being lied to.”

At last Melissandre looked away from the flames. “Lying? No one is lying here.”

“A man disagrees,” Jaqen said while approaching her. “You aren’t as strong as before, too. But what a man is asking of you is not impossible.”

“It is… if you want it done without a sacrifice.”

“A sacrifice?” Jaqen frowned. “This has never required sacrifices. What are you talking about?”

“As I already said, R’hllor has yet to grant me some powers. Even when I was his loyal follower and servant every second of every day he still refused to make me handle some of his powers as expertly as I would have liked,” Melissandre said. The flames cast shadows on her and all around
her, creating sinister shapes in movement that seemed to have been released from the depths of the seven hells. “But I am not completely useless, and you need me. I know a way to get what you want before it is too late.”

“A way that requires a sacrifice…” Jaqen murmured coldly. His eyes were narrowed and his expression darkened, not precisely because of the shadows that surrounded them. His expression was dangerous enough to make seasoned soldier wet fearful. He already had an idea of what Melissandre was trying to tell him, and it didn’t please him, not at all. “This isn’t the magic of R’hllor. It is dark magic.”

“Darker than the magic of the Faceless Men?” Melissandre inquired, and Jaqen didn’t respond. The woman grinned slightly, almost unnoticeably. But Jaqen noticed…

“It is forbidden.”

“By the Targaryen queen,” Melissandre nodded, fully aware of the law that Daenerys had imposed over all people capable of practicing magic in Westeros. “She made a deal once, the wrong kind of deal, without having full knowledge of the consequences or the price.”

Jaqen knew what had happened with Daenerys Targaryen when her husband, Khal Drogo, was dying. She made a deal with a maegi that betrayed her. She bought her husband’s life, an empty life, in exchange for the life of her son Rhaego…

“You will not harm Robb in any way,” he warned her. He didn’t need to raise his voice to sound deadly and threatening.

Melissandre shook her head. “Not Robb… The creature that grows inside her,” she corrected, making Jaqen freeze. He thought about what had happened just mere minutes before back in the tent with Arya, when she had so suddenly been in pain. The source was her womb. Was her child in any kind of danger? Has Melissandre already done something to them? “That is the sacrifice I will require. Otherwise it can not be done.”

“No,” it was Jaqen turn to deny her her request.

“Are you sure? Think about it. Sacrificing that child will not only bring back Gendry, it will save Arya as well. I have been able to see some things in the flames. The fire has told me much, Jaqen H’ghar, about how Arya Stark touched by death after her first child was born. She won’t survive a second childbirth, of that I am almost sure.”

Jaqen wanted to wrap his hands around the woman’s neck and strangle her for daring to let such foul lies slip through her lips, but he couldn’t hide his own fears. He had been in Storm’s End when Robb was born. He had heard Arya scream, and then for days he had heard maesters and servants talking about nothing more than about the struggle that Arya was having to survive. She had stopped breathing when the all abandoned her chambers, allowing him a moment of distraction to enter her chambers and help her. Faceless Man took life away, they didn’t give it, but some lives could be spared while Death hadn’t yet fully claimed its victim. With a prayer, an ancient spell known to very few people in the world, Jaqen had barely managed to restore Arya’s health. Had he waited a second longer she would have been lost forever.

Could Melissandre be right? Maybe she was. Maybe Arya would finally succumb while bringing her second child into this world. Jaqen was terrified that would happen. If he accepted Melissandre’s offer then the danger would be gone, and Arya would be safe. She would have Gendry back, and they would both be reunited with Robb and be a happy family again. Wasn’t that what he had come looking for? Wasn’t that the answer to all of their problems? With one sacrifice
everything would be solved…

“There must be another way,” he insisted, though he couldn’t bring himself to discard the idea of accepting the sacrifice, not could he bring himself either to accept it.

Melissandre seemed amused.

“This is the only one that will guarantee the safety of both of them. But yes, there is another way. You are No One. You can shed one identity and take over another as easily as one dresses and undresses every day. I have seen it with my own eyes, and I have seen it in the fires while at camp, what feelings you harbor in your dark heart for that girl. She is all alone, grieving a dead man that will start rotting soon, and you want nothing more than to take her pain away. Cast away Jaqen H’ghar’s face, and become Gendry Baratheon. Bring back the love of her life and have her for yourself all at once. Isn’t that a tempting option?”

It was tempting, yes. Jaqen imagined what would happen if he chose the second option and adopted Gendry’s face and identity as his own. He had already done it once, many years ago. He closed his eyes and imagined it. He imagined Arya as his own wife, her children as his own. It was very tempting indeed, and the selfish, human side of him that had reawakened along with his feelings because of the influence that Arya Stark had had on his life urged him to say yes to the point that resisting was almost painful.

Could he do it? Could he live a lie like that? To be a Faceless Man was to live a lie, to be surrounded by a fake reality the entire time. That he could handle. What he wasn’t so sure he could handle was pulling Arya into the lie. She didn’t deserve to live a lie.

But maybe living a lie was better than sacrificing her own unborn child in exchange for Gendry’s life. Or was it really? He remembered the pain Arya had been in just before. Was it a sign that there was something wrong with the baby, that there would be complications? Could Arya indeed die if Jaqen didn’t agree to get rid of that babe in exchange for the father?

He could have screamed. He closed his eyes and covered his face with his hands while he thought and tried to decide. He put both options in a balance in his mind, and he didn’t know which one was worse, but he was running out of time, he had to choose or it would be too late. He tried to think of other options. Were there any? Yes, there were, but none of them came without a price. No matter what choice he made, sacrifices of all kinds had to be made.

Many minutes passed, but it felt like hours or maybe even days of eternal darkness. Finally Melissandre broke the silence that had fallen upon them.

“Well?” she inquired. “Have you made your choice?”

Jaqen removed his hands from his face and he opened his eyes to look at the woman. Slowly, he nodded. Yes, he had made his choice.
I AM BACK!!!!!!!!!!!!

I am such a huge BITCH! I left you all with the worst possible cliffhanger ever!!!!!!!!! *slaps self*

My huge hiatus is over!!!! I greatly apologize and, if you are still here with me reading this story, know that you have all my gratefulness and also my love. I loved starting this story, I loved writing it, and I would love to finish it. I you are still following this story then know that your comments and words of encouragement always put a smile on my face, they inspired me, and therefore I would love to come back as active as always and deliver to you the best possible chapters that I can write to give this little mess of a fanfic the ending that I always wanted to give to it.

I apologize for this not being an actual chapter. I will have Spring Break starting tomorrow, and next week you will actually have a real chapter here! The story continues.

Love you all and thank you!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!